

Sacred Geography

Sacred Maps

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Overview

- **What is a map?**
- **How is space turned into a map?**
- **How do maps become sacred?**
- **A contemporary example.**

Map

... a two-dimensional **tool** for **locating** us in our **environment**.

... a **drawing** that indicated a '**topographical** relationship—the way from one place to another, the layout of fields, the sequence of houses in a street.'



P. D. A. Harvey, 'Local and Regional Cartography in Medieval Europe,' in *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. J. Brian Harley and David Woodward, vol. 1, The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 464-501.

Maps

The background of the slide is a photograph of a hiker's legs and feet. The hiker is wearing grey socks and dark blue hiking shoes with teal accents. They are walking on a rocky, uneven trail. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the trail and some distant hills.

allow us to find our way

assert ownership

record human activity

establish control

encourage settlement

plan military campaigns

show political power

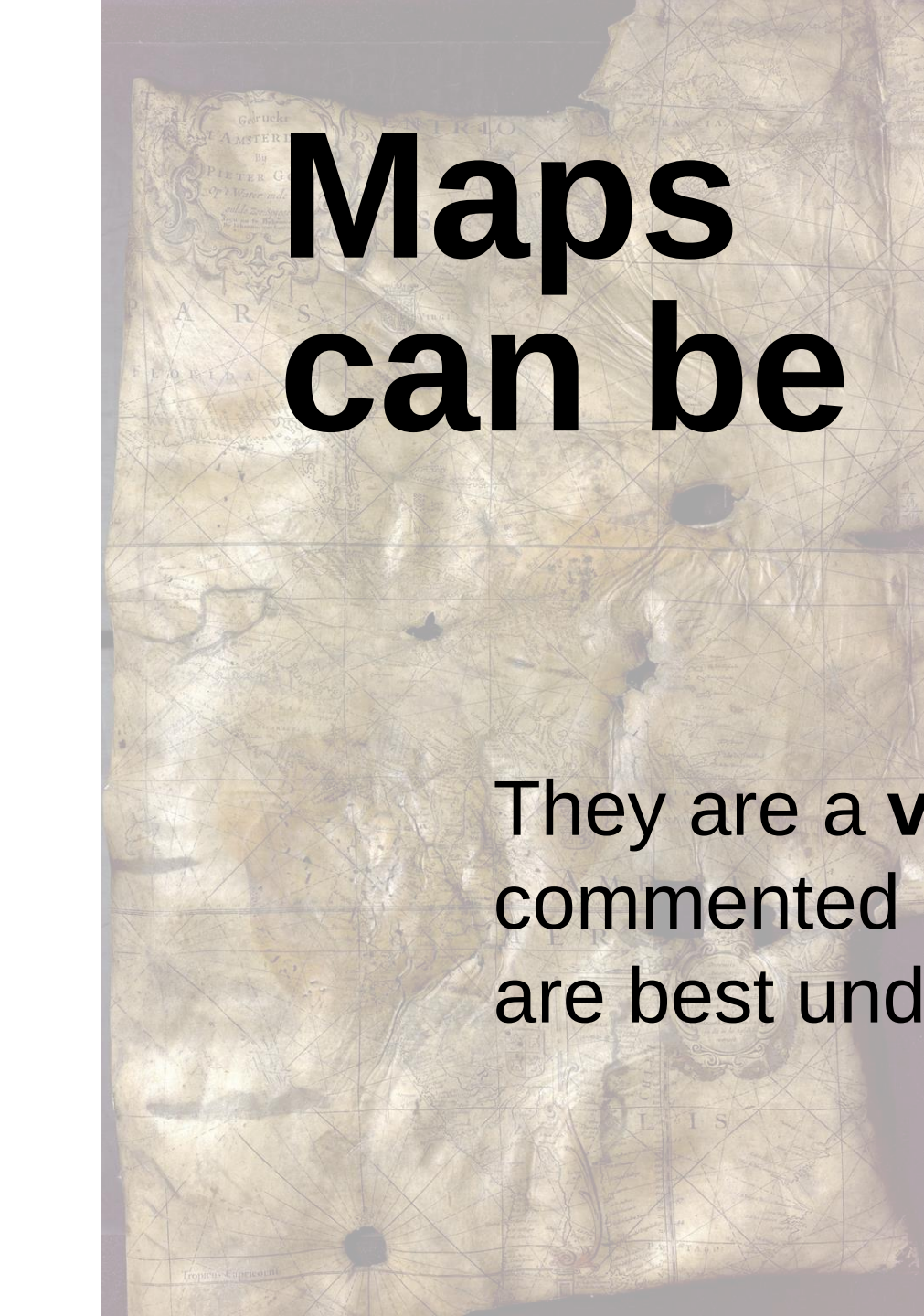
Map

guides, influences, directs a journey

codifies our connecting to our three-dimensional surroundings

reveals spatial logic

Allows us to interpret or world in a discrete and manageable way.



Maps can be

- printed on paper
- chiselled on to stone
- painted on an animal skin
- viewed on a computer screen.

They are a **visual creation**, rather than commented on verbally, and that is how they are best understood: **as a visual image**.

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"It is permitted to few scholars both to extend the boundaries of their field of study and to redefine it as a discipline. Yet that is precisely what *The History* as a whole is doing."—Paul Wheatley, *Imago Mundi*

"A major scholarly publishing achievement.... We will learn much not only about maps, but about how and why and with what consequences civilizations have apprehended, expanded, and utilized the potential of maps."—Josef W. Konvitz, *Isis*

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In 1987, historian of cartography Brian Harley described maps as

‘graphic **representations** that **facilitate a spatial understanding** of things, concepts, conditions, processes or events in the human world.’

Harley, J.B., and David Woodward, eds. *The History of Cartography* Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987 -.

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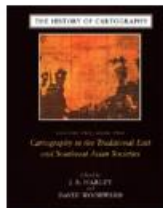
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David Woodward qualified that this was an approach to **maps as material culture** which illuminated the broader issues of human spatial and environmental understanding and communication. Saw 'representations' as ‘**highly conventionalized human constructs.**’

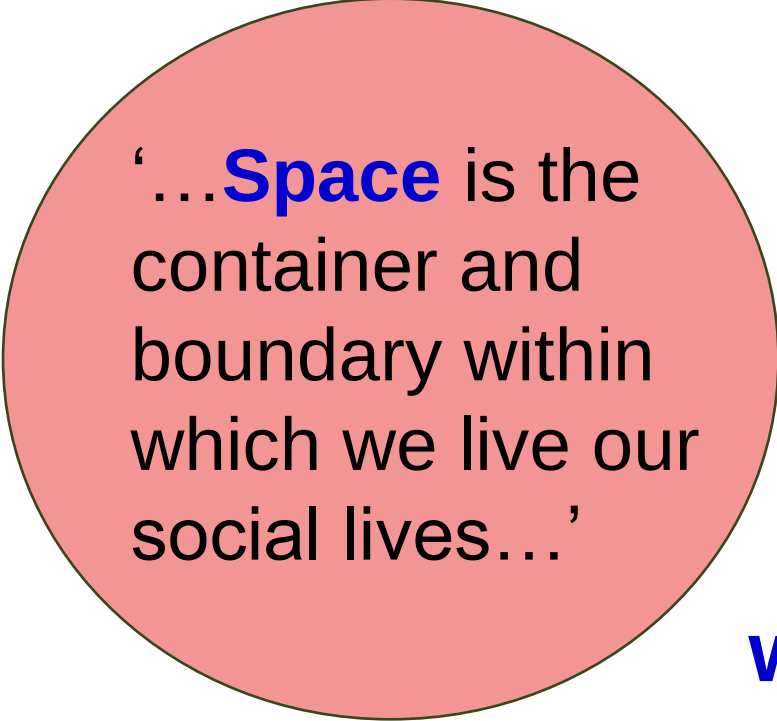
He continued: ‘Our use of the phrase "graphic representations" was thus intended to embrace any visual representation whose spatial structure conformed to that of the **referent**. The second part of the definition - to ‘facilitate a spatial understanding’ - focused on the **function** of these representations in human societies.’

Harley, J.B., and David Woodward, eds. *The History of Cartography* Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987 -.

<https://press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/index.html>

Map

In 2014 John Hessler defined a map as



‘...**Space** is the container and boundary within which we live our social lives...’

‘an **interpretation** of **space** that helps us understand how a particular map-maker sees his or her world, or how they interpret **the human activities that take place within it.**’

Hessler, John and Phaidon Editors, *Map: Exploring the World* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2014), p.6.

Space vs Place

‘For religious man, **space** is not homogenous; he experiences interruption, breaks in it; some part of space are **qualitatively different** from others.’

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1987. p. 20

Place ... 'a location of experience; the container of shapes, powers, feelings, and meanings.'

Eugene Victor Walter, *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 215.

Furthermore, place had a way of acting upon a person through what was **remembered**, the incidents that occurred there or the journeys undertaken through it. **Place became, as it were a receptacle for where events happened.**

Attachment ... Through regular encounter, continued and consistent movement to and from, through and within a place, natural objects or topographical features generated familiarity and became entwined into story, which further embedded those memories and experiences.

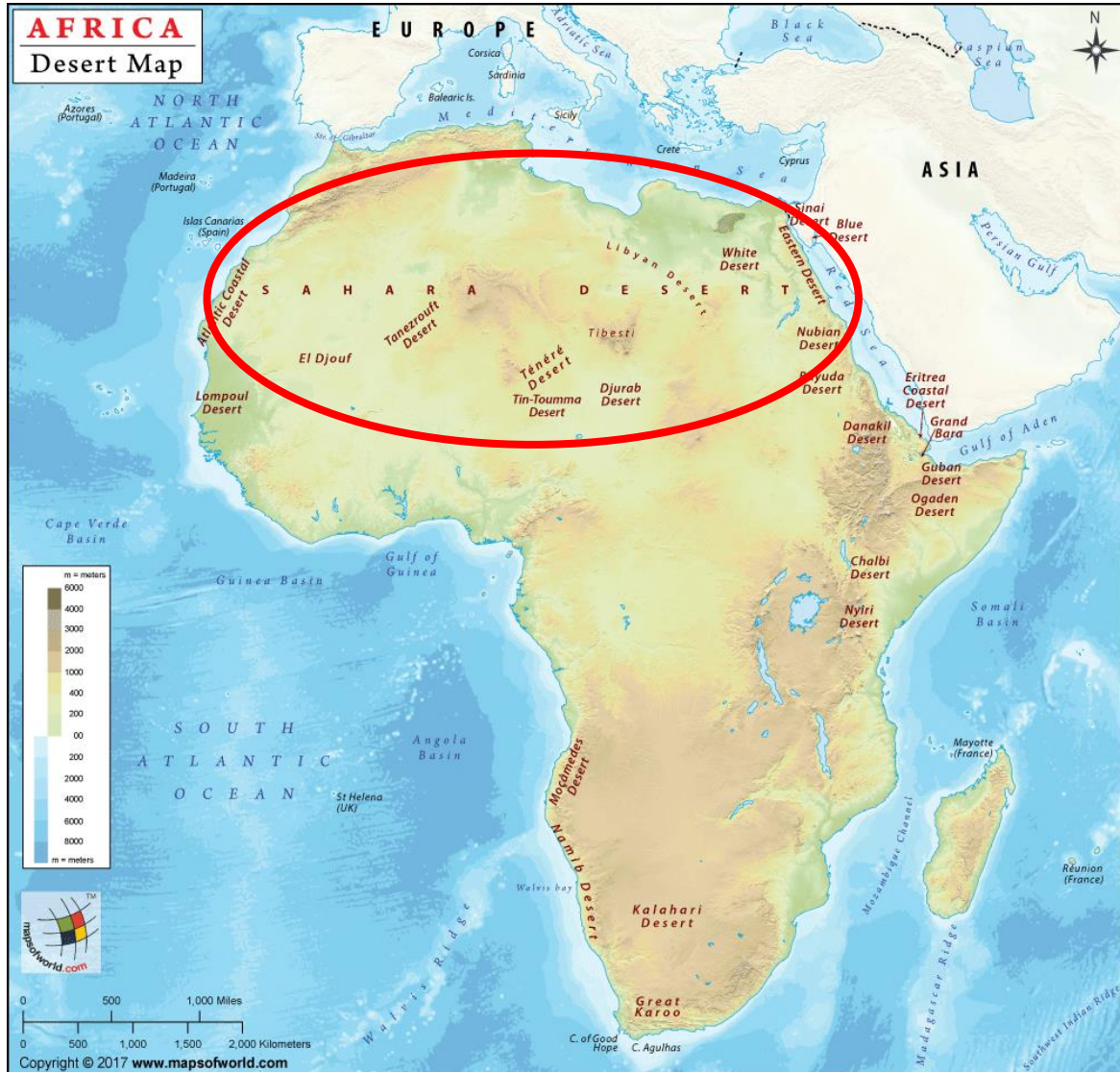
Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), pp.18-19.



Naming also invested a place with meaning.

‘Place names are of such vital significance because they act so as to transform the sheerly physical and geographical into something that is historically and socially experienced’ and thus ‘in a fundamental way **names create landscape.**’

Tilley, Christopher. *A Phenomenology of Landscape*. Oxford: Berg, 1994, pp.18-19.





‘A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness.’

Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, Fifth ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Institute of General Semantics, 1994 [1933]), 58.



‘For medieval men and women, **space** was composed of forests, fields, gardens, seigneuries and cities — **geographical** as well as **imaginary realities**. In each of these **places** work was done and social practices enacted, yet they were also powerful symbols, objects of fear and desire and subjects of dream and legend.’

Le Goff, Jacques. *The Medieval Imagination*.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p.13.



Andriolo de'Santi (c.1320–1375), originally part of the tomb of Ubertino da Carrara c.1350 and placed at the feet of his effigy, Eremitani Padua, formerly chancel of Sant'Agostino.

When it came to maps of towns, even though Roman surveyors from the first to the third century CE knew of and used scale — ‘the observance of a fixed proportion between distances on the map and distances on the ground’ — what survived as medieval ‘maps’ were pictorially drawn details of a town seen in **birds-eye view** and drawn as stylized illustration within city wall with towers and buildings inside.

Harvey, 'Local and Regional Cartography in Medieval Europe,' in *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, p.464.



Giusto de' Menabuoi (c.1320-1391), *View of Padua in the Fourteenth Century*, before 1383, Conti Chapel, Basilica of Il Santo (Sant'Antonio), Padua. Photo: Scala, Florence.



View of Siena with timber belfry over church tower in the Biadaiolo Fioretino codex, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence, 1330s. Detail with timber belfry over church tower. Photo: Marvin Trachtenberg.



Attributed to Francesco Rosselli (1445-1513) and workshop. View of Florence from the South-West. One of the finest oblique pictorial views surviving from the fifteenth century. Buildings are shown in elevation, as on many maps during the medieval period. This cityscape is representative of a new type of topographical painting that flourished towards the end of the 15th century. Florence's major buildings are recognisable, with the Baptistery, Cathedral and Campanile in the centre. *Image: Victoria and Albert Museum.*

T-O Maps *orbis terrarum*



A **T and O map** or **O–T** or **T–O map** (*orbis terrarum*, orb or circle of the lands; with the letter T inside an O), also known as an **Isidoran map**, is a type of early world map that represents the physical world as first described by the 7th-century scholar Isidore of Seville in his *De Natura Rerum* and later his *Etymologiae*.

T and O style *mappa mundi* (map of the known world) from the first printed version of Isidorus' *Etymologiae*. The book was written in 623 and first printed in 1472 at *Augsburg* by *Günther Zainer*. Isidor's sketch thus became the oldest printed map of the occident.



Ebstorf Map, c.1235

***The world
superimposed on
the body of Christ***

Edson, Evelyn. *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World*. The British Library Studies in Map History. London: The British Library, 1977, pp.138-139.

The Psalter world map, c.1265



Unknown author, c.1260. Jerusalem is at the centre of the *Psalter world mappa*; the Red Sea can be seen coloured red at upper right of the globe. Image: British Library Add. MS 28681

The Hereford Mappa Mundi, 1290

Mappa mundi were not utilized as maps for travel or geographical education, but as history lessons taught through a visual means.

Felicitas Schmieder refers to mappa mundi as 'Geographies of Salvation' as they report the narrative of Christ's interaction with our world.

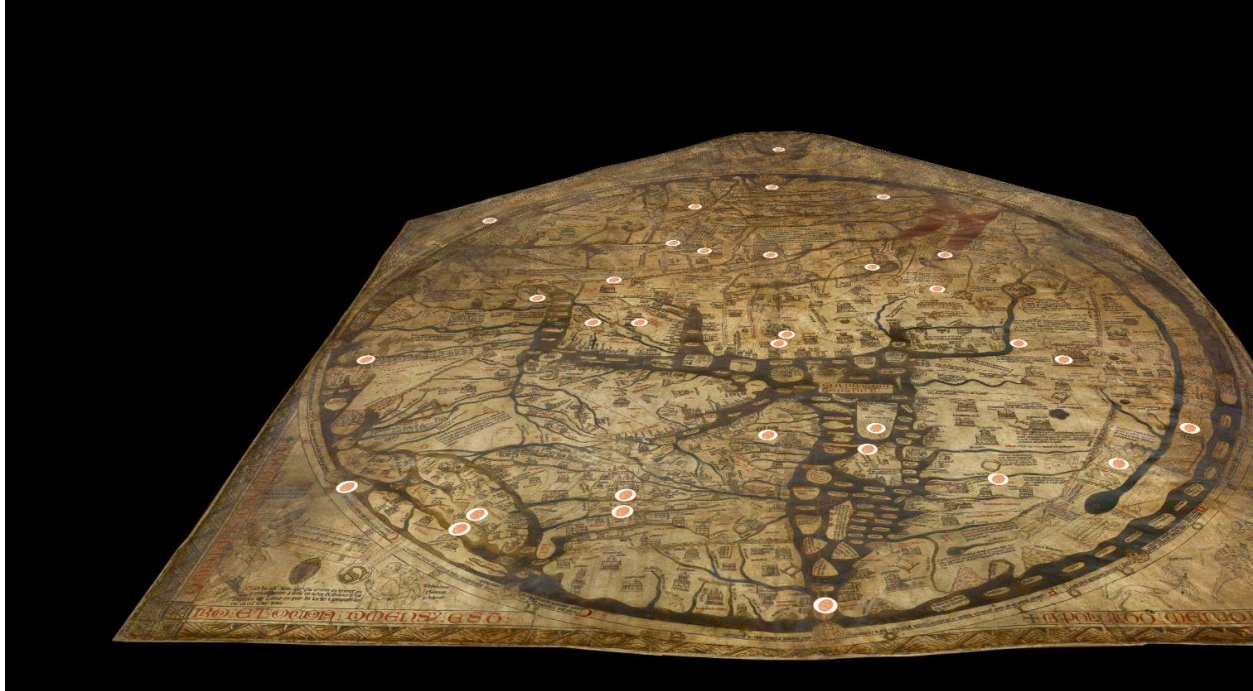
The Hereford mappa mundi, a map of the world with Jerusalem at its centre, displayed at Hereford Cathedral, England.



The Hereford Mappa Mundi, 1290



The Hereford Mappa Mundi – A Medieval Vision of the World



Interactive map:

<https://www.themappamundi.co.uk/mappa-mundi/>

Film presented by Sarah Arrowsmith, Head of Schools and Family Learning at Hereford, offers a guided tour of the work: <https://historywm.com/films/mappa-mundi-a-medieval-vision-of-the-world/>

The Catalan Estense world map, c.1450/1460



This region is the Terrestrial Paradise, an especially lovely place. Paradise is completely surrounded by fire whose flames reach the sky. ... In Paradise lies a source divided in four rivers: One is Euphrates, the second Tigris, the third Gyon, the fourth Phison.... Isidore speaks about this place saying that Paradise is situated in the middle of the Equator.

The Catalan Estense world map, c.1450/1460



Detail of the Catalan Estense World Map with the Red Sea at the bottom centre (c.1450/1460), Modena Biblioteca Estense, library, Italy.

Photo: https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1450_%C2%BF_Carta_Catalana_jpeg_copy.jpg



Songlines

in the landscape of the First Nations people of Australia

Songlines served as a means for navigating the land. By singing certain traditional songs in a specific sequence, people were capable of navigating the land, often travelling across vast distances across all types of terrain and weather, without getting lost.

Numerous features in the landscape are contained in the songlines, thus allowing them to be used as oral maps.

Jen Bailey, *Songlines*, acrylic, 50 cm x 65 cm

Image: <https://artloversaustralia.com.au/product/song-lines/>

How is space turned into a map?

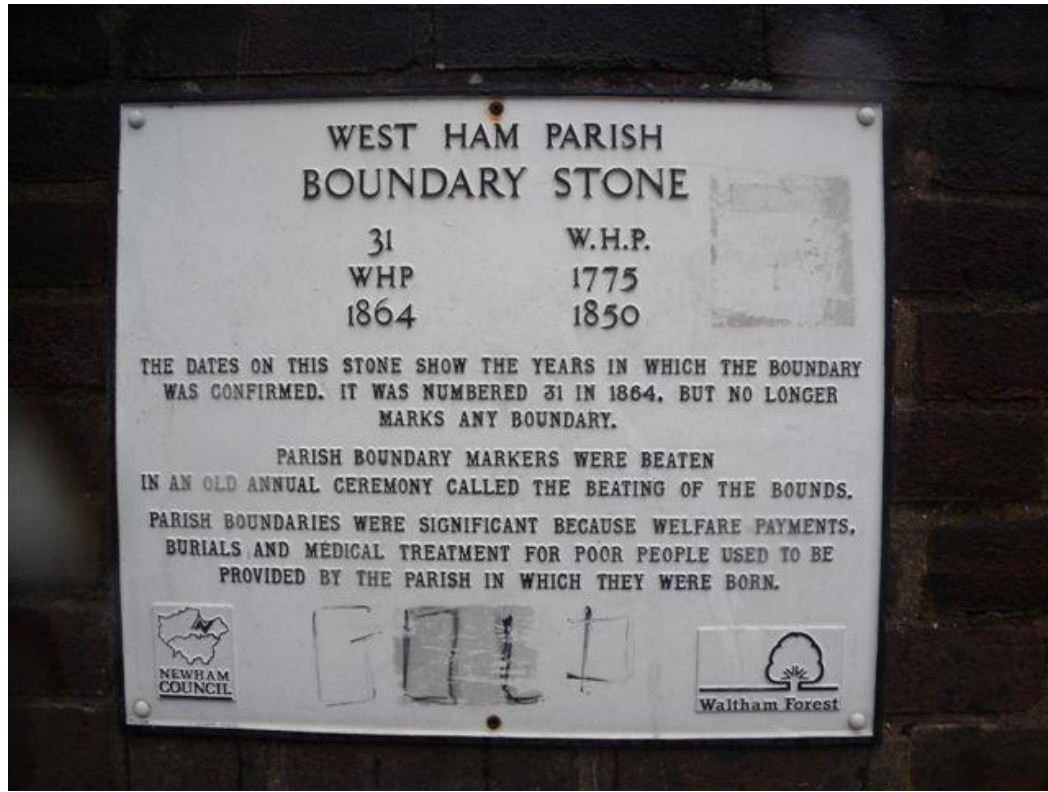
‘Beating the Bounds’



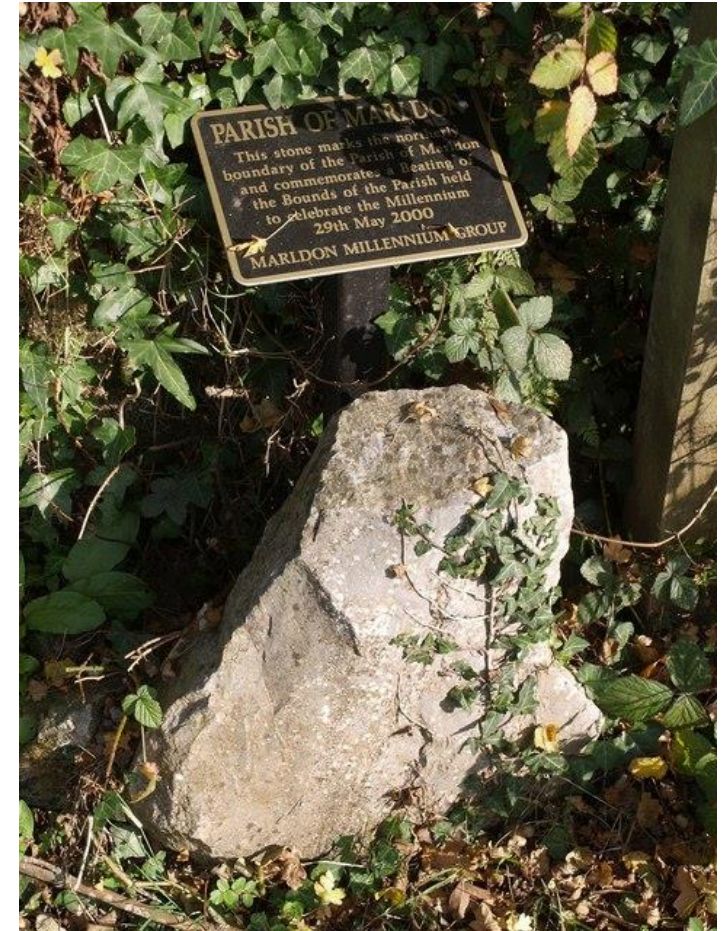
Beating the Bounds in Mill Lane The clergy and people of Little St Mary's Church, Cambridge, annually walk round the boundaries of the parish, singing hymns and psalms and praying for blessings on the residents and their activities. Image: James Yardley/Creative Commons.

How is space turned into a map?

‘Beating the Bounds’



A plaque describing the West Ham parish boundary stone. Image: Ross Corben/Creative Commons.



Millennium stone. The piece of limestone at the bottom of Windmill Lane commemorates a beating of the Marldon parish bounds in May 2000. Image: Derek Harper /Creative Commons.

How is space turned into a map?

‘Beating the Bounds’

The Polish Society of Friends of Children has appealed to farmers in eastern Poland to abolish their traditional practice of smacking young farm boys at boundary mounds of new farms to make sure the youngster don't forget when the lines run.

AP dispatch from Warsaw to Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner*, **July 8, 1968**

Mullally, John. 'Beating the Bounds.' *Western Folklore* 28, no. 1 (1969): 49-50.

Nepalese sacred landscape



Pasang and another Sherpa 'admiring' a mountain in the norther region of Nepal, 2002. Photo: Lionel Obadia.

Mani walls in the mountains of Nepal, 2002. Photo: Lionel Obadia.



Prayer flags on a stupa in Nepal. Image Source: <https://www.maxpixel.net/Travel-Nepal-Prayer-Flags-Temple-3369877>.



Nepalese sacred landscape



Pasang and another Sherpa 'admiring' a mountain in the norther region of Nepal, 2002. Photo: Lionel Obadia.

In order to avoid an attack from an evil or animal spirit dwelling in what they called 'the jungle', I had to learn the routes to follow and the sites not to cross when I walked from one village to another.

When I asked for information regarding the beliefs connected with the surrounding peaks, I was informed by Pasang, a Sherpa and my friend and host in the village, that 'this one, you mustn't go to, the deu-deuta [local gods or spirits] would punish you and you would be in danger', but, when pointing to a peak next to it, 'This one? No, nothing special, this is just a mountain like any other.'

Obadia, Lionel. 'Are Himalayan Peaks Sacred?: The Paradoxical and Polylogical Construction of Mountains.' In *Space, Place, and Religious Landscapes: Living Mountains*, edited by Darrelyn Gunzburg and Bernadette Brady, 213-238. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

Summary



Space is neutral. Place has **quality**.

Sacred maps identify **places** within spaces.

Sacred maps identify **safe places** from unsafe places through their **qualities**.

Sacred maps can be **artefacts** for contemplation and spiritual renewal.

Sacred maps can be **interiorised knowledge of place** handed on through an oral tradition.

Sacred maps contain information acknowledging a **dialogue** between the person or people who compiled them and the user.

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