UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in
Lingue e Letterature Europee e Americane
Classe LM-37

Tesi di Laurea

The Body and the East: Monstrous Encounters in the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville

Relatrice
Prof. Alessandra Petrina

Laureanda
Lucrezia Scarpa
n° matr.1242319 / LMLLA

Anno Accademico 2021 / 2022

A mamma,
che mi ha sempre spinta a inseguire i miei sogni
e oggi non è qui per vedermi realizzarli.

Table of Contents

Appendix

Introduction

The aim of the present dissertation is to analyse the monstrous encounters in the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville in order to understand their meaning in the text and to compare them with the tradition from which they are taken. I became interested in the depiction of Eastern monstrous bodies during the second year of my master's degree, when I attended a course on Old and Middle English Philology. As a prerequisite for the exam, I had to choose a topic to analyse and I had to write a short essay reporting the results of my study. I decided to work on the *Wonders of the East*, an Old English text dealing with the marvellous creatures and plants that were thought to inhabit the Eastern territories, and with *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, a fictitious letter in which Alexander the Great, the supposed narrator, describes to his master Aristotle all the wonders he witnessed in his conquest of India. Part of my essay was focused on the Eastern body as monstrous and on the legitimisation of Alexander's conquest of these populations as a response for their monstrosity. Unlike the Old English texts, the *Travels* present a more complex representation of monstrosity in the East and so the conclusions I reached in the two works, the past essay and the present dissertation, diverge significantly. These differences inspired me to analyse the tradition that precedes the *Travels* and that has its origin in the classical times.

In order to reconstruct the process of creation of these monsters and of their readaptation during the Middle Ages, I used mostly Friedman's *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* which gave me the basis to begin my almost archaeological work of reconstruction of the sources. This book has proved especially useful for its analysis of the Greek texts concerning the East since I had had a scientific education in high school and so I never studied Greek language and culture. The Greek representation of the East is especially important in the understanding of Latin sources, especially Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* which aims to condense in its thirty-seven books all human knowledge. In describing the East and the populations dwelling there, Pliny openly refers to Greek authors like Ctesias, Megasthenes and Herodotus in order to prove the veracity of his statements and narrations. During the Middle Ages, however, the direct knowledge of Greek language and texts was rare, so the mediation of Latin authors was fundamental for the medieval knowledge of the world. Indeed, even though the authors of the classical past were infidels, the veracity of their texts was never doubted and, consequently, their

thought was often integrated in the Christian view and used as a proof of God's universal plan. The most famous example of this process is the recognition of Virgil's *puer* – the figure of a mythical new-born whose destiny is to bring the world to a new golden age described in the IV *Eclogue* – with Jesus Christ. The classical authors were recognised as *auctoritates*, which means that their thought could not be doubted since it was intrinsically true and could not be challenged. Pliny the Elder was one of the most important *auctoritates* during the Middle Ages and the content of the *Naturalis Historia* was known and considered as completely truthful. The presence of monsters in the text, however, is so widespread that the monstrous races are known also as Plinian races. Nonetheless, in order to give equal importance to all the tradition about monstrous races, this expression will be rarely used throughout the dissertation.

Apart from Latin and Old English texts, I analysed some travel accounts written by real travellers who visited the Eastern regions during the Middle Ages. Some of these texts have been originally written in Latin, like the *Historia Mongalorum* by John of Pian di Carpine, the *Itinerarium* by William of Rubruck and the *Relatio* by Odoric from Pordenone. The first time I read these accounts, I used their Italian translations. However, in the writing of my dissertation I searched for some English versions, but the only text I found translated is Carpine's account. The citations I took from the other two texts are reported in Latin and I worked on the translations myself, including them in the footnotes. The reason why I decided to translate the medieval Latin texts, but not Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* is the different degree of difficulty in the language: while medieval Latin may result easier, especially for an Italian speaker, the classical Latin used by great authors is more sophisticated, so I preferred to rely on an authoritative English translation. For this reason, my translation may appear more literal and less literary than the translations realised by experts. Moreover, apart from accounts written by friars as the ones already cited, I analysed Marco Polo's *Il Milione*, a book especially interesting for it provides the point of view of a merchant in the East. Indeed, the unicity of the text lies on the very fact that it is written by a merchant since, even though merchants were among the first explorers of the Eastern lands, they left very little written information about their adventures and journeys on the Eastern territories. The occasion for the writing of his *memoires* was Polo's incarceration, which gave him the time to tell his story to the professional writer with whom he shared the prison cell. Even though the first version of

the text was written in Franco-Italian, the most famous version is the Italian translation, which is also the one I used in my dissertation. The main characteristic of the Rizzoli edition of Polo's text, which is the one I relayed upon, is its lack of language homogeneity: in fact, the edition is the philologically complete version of *Il Milione* and it mixes together parts coming from the original and from different translations in different Italian dialects. The main source is the Tuscan translation of the text, but when this version lacks some parts, it is integrated with pieces coming from other versions or other translation of the work, like the Venetian translation, for instance. Consequently, the citations taken from *Il Milione* which are included in the dissertation are provided in the Italian language, but I added the English translations of the passages in the footnotes. As for some of the Latin texts, I personally worked on the translations, so the stylistic value of the English texts may be of a lower level than the original Italian text. In addition, in order to provide a wider background in the tradition of monsters in the East, I decided to include also some passages and some references taken from the *Wonders of the East* and from *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*. The direct citations are provided in Old English language, while in the footnotes I inserted the modern English translations made by Orchard.

Another fundamental text upon which I largely relied upon in writing the present dissertation is Augustine's *The City of God*, a very influential book throughout the Middle Ages. In chapter XVI, the author analyses both the meaning of monsters and their role in the creation. I chose to include this text in my bibliography because the analysis of monstrous races that *Augustine* provides has some points in common with Mandeville's own representation of the Eastern monsters.

The first chapter of my dissertation has an introductory aim since it presents the *Travels*, which is clearly the main text, but it also deals with the perception and the representation of the world during the Middle Ages, and with the real travellers' accounts of the East, specifying the occasions that led to their writing. The chapter presents a direct confrontation between the *Travels* and medieval *mappaemundi*, especially the Hereford Map, in order to provide a visual – and not only textual – idea of the organisation of the world in medieval times. Indeed, the perception of the physical world was completely submitted to religious and theological rules, which imposed a vision of the physical reality as a mirror of the spiritual order. In other words, reality was considered the reflection of

God's plan and its representation, rather than obey to objectivity, was idealised and theologically bound. Even though one may argue that geographical maps never really represent an objective physical reality since they are always submitted to a precise point of view, nowadays maps tend to be more and more accurate or, at least, the inaccuracies are recognised and given for granted. For instance, when Europeans consult a world map in which Europe is recognised as the perfect centre of the world, they know that the centrality given to their continent is not objective, but it is a simplification useful to facilitate their orientation. On the contrary, for an Australian observer the very same map will appear absurd and even turned upside-down, making their orientation much more complicated. Knowing that the Earth is a globe, everyone agrees on the fact that there is not a central point and that every illusion of centrality is, indeed, an illusion. During the Middle Ages, however, the question of the centrality was not only a geographical matter, but also a theological one. As a consequence, Jerusalem had to be the centre since the Scriptures recognised it as the centre and the Scriptures could not be contradicted. In the first chapter of my dissertation, I analyse more in detail this problem of the shape of the earth and of Jerusalem as the centre of the world. The usage of the Hereford map as physical example is useful not only to give a clear and precise image of medieval division of the world, but also to give an idea of the first travellers' imagination of the regions they were to explore. The Eastern side of maps was often populated with monstrous creatures and threatening beings, whose real existence in the Eastern territory was never in doubt. Moreover, the East was associated with many Biblical events and places: the garden of Eden was located in the East, Noah's ark was supposed to be preserved in the East and even the populations of Gog and Magog were believed to be trapped in the East. In short, the East was the land of both monstrous and sacred encounters.

Another figure located in the East is Prester John, the mythical Christian ruler who managed to create a Christian empire in the East. His legend was very popular and well-known during the Middle Ages, especially because it represented a successful alternative to the European lack of power against the Mongolian invaders. The existence of such a king led Europe to hope for an external help in its resistance against the Mongolian expansion in the European territory, a hope which was eventually frustrated.

Then, the third part of the chapter aims to analyse the works of Pian di Carpine, William of Rubruck, Marco Polo and Odoric from Pordenone, pointing out the

similarities and the differences of their accounts. One of the most interesting aspects of the first relations of the East, which were written mostly by friars who were sent abroad for diplomatic missions, is their spying purpose. Entering the territory controlled by the enemy and living among the enemies gave the friars the possibility to enter an extremely different culture and to observe the habits and the traditions of distant populations, especially of different Mongolian tribes. The attitude of the first two travellers, Pian di Carpine and Rubruck, towards the Mongols is suspicious and reproachful: they often focus on the dirtiness of their eating habits and on the rudeness of their manners. However, the Mongol military power and their endurance in battle are attentively analysed and reported in order to provide European rules some knowledge to prevent or resist a future possible attack. While Pian di Carpine and Rubruck's attitude towards the Mongols is ambiguous, often oscillating between disgust, fear and wonder, in Polo's attitude admiration prevails. Marco Polo's experience is completely different from the other travellers' since he grew up in the court of Kubilai Khan and he managed to make the acquaintance of the higher members of society. He experienced the richness and the luxury of the Mongolian court and cities, and he was amazed by their culture, so amazed that in his account all these aspects of the Eastern territories became the real wonders, rather than the monsters that European believed dwelt in those lands. At last, I analysed friar Odoric's account, which is a text of paramount importance in my dissertation for two main reasons: on one hand it is one of Mandeville's direct sources, on the other hand Odoric's itinerary is really remarkable since he managed to travel across large parts of the Asian continent. His account is chronologically the last one to be written and both the style and the attitude of the friar demonstrate a greater knowledge of the territories and a search for objectivity. Odoric is a confident and disenchanted narrator who does not believe in many of medieval stories about the East and, consequently, he tries to debunk some of these myths.

The second chapter of my dissertation is centred on monstrosity and on the correlation between monstrosity and humanity. The first subchapter aims to give a little historical background to Mandeville's monsters by providing a focus on the birth and development of the idea that the Eastern territory was inhabited by monsters. The origins of the myth are recognised in Greek culture, namely in the works of Ctesias and Megasthenes. While analysing the Greek idea of the monstrous, I examined the

connection between the monstrous, the barbaric and the foreign. Indeed, for the Greeks the idea of the monstrous was closely connected with the uncivilised. Being civilised meant speaking the Greek language, being a citizen in a *polis* and actively taking part in the political life of the city. On the contrary, the monsters dwelling in the East were depicted as lacking all these fundamental characteristics and, as a consequence, as being uncivilised. From this perspective, monstrosity does not depend uniquely on a deformation of the body, but also on the absence of the fundamental concept of civilisation. Indeed, the two aspects may be correlated since the Greeks believed in the principle that what is good and right must necessarily be beautiful too; therefore, a non-normative body was believed to mirror degenerated customs too.

This perception of monstrosity as closely connected to barbarity and to lack of civilisation persisted in Latin perception, whose knowledge of the Eastern monsters derived directly from Greek sources. The most important Latin text dealing with the problem of monstrosity is Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* in which the author provides many descriptions of monstrous races with comments about the questionability of their human status. Namely, many of the Plinian races are openly associated to animals or compared with animals, in order to prove their distance from the normative human condition. Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* was extremely popular in the Middle Ages and it represented the basis for the medieval knowledge of the natural world and, eventually, to the medieval re-elaboration of the classical Eastern monsters. During the Middle Ages, the Plinian races were submitted to a process of multiplication in number and in shape. However, the supposed existence of these creatures represented a great concern for medieval thinkers who had to give them a position in the medieval hierarchical and theologically organised system that regulated the world. Their divergence from the norm was perceived as a disruption of natural laws, which might represent a limit of God's power, so medieval thinkers tried to explain the existence of monsters as coherently necessary for creation itself. In other words, rather than questioning God's omnipotence, monsters were seen as extreme proofs and concrete signs of his power.

Then, the subchapter focuses on *Wonders of the East* and on *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle* in their Old English translations, underlining the similarities between the monsters presented in the two texts and the tradition that precedes them. However, the analysis of fictional texts only is not a sufficient background for the *Travels* since the text

is a fictional travel narrative, but it presents itself as the account of a real travel. For this reason, I decided to analyse the tradition of Eastern monsters in both fictional texts and in the texts of real travellers used also in the first chapter. The analysis demonstrated how the first travellers were more confident in the existence of monsters in the East than people who took their journeys later in time. For instance, John of Pian di Carpine reported the existence of many monstrous races in the Eastern territories, even though he never met them, and all his information came from indirect sources. William of Rubruck is more cautious than his predecessor: he admits that he never met any prodigy in foreign lands and that no one else too seems to have encountered any of them. However, he reports many pagan practises which employ the intercession of a demon for the realisation of the rite, suggesting the existence of supernatural creatures inhabiting the Eastern lands. While Marco Polo's long permanence at the Mongol court and in Mongol territories may suggest a more objective and disenchanted perspective on monsters inhabiting the Eastern territories, still his account is not completely exempt from monstrous encounters. The most interesting aspect of Polo's reports on monstrosity is that these monsters inhabit territories which are not part of the Mongol dominion, demonstrating even better how monstrosity is strictly connected with geographical liminality: the monster, being a disturbing presence, must be relegated at the edges of the world in order to deactivate his disturbing potential. Though Odoric's gaze is often sceptical and objective, monstrous encounters are present also in his account. For instance, his long description of the Cynocephali and of their customs is clearly the basis Mandeville used for the description of his own Cynocephali.

The second subchapter is completely focused on the monstrous creatures that appear in the *Travels*. I divided these creatures into two categories: the monstrous races whose monstrosity depends on the hybridisation between human and animal characteristics and the monstrous races whose monstrosity depends on a deformation of the normative human body. The first category comprehends creatures like the Cynocephali or populations with excessive body hair and horns on their head. Apart from creature with physical animal features, I included also a population which is not physically animal-like, but which presents many animal-like habits. Indeed, the problem represented by hybridisation lies in the blurring of the boundaries that divides the civic from the wild: animals are intrinsically associated with wilderness and, therefore, with

lack of civilisation. A population whose behaviour is more similar to animals than to humans is clearly a hybrid population, even if their physical appearance is not described. This blurring of boundary was perceived as dangerous because it mixed together two worlds that ought to be neatly separated in the medieval perception of creation. The second category comprehended creatures like the Pygmies, the Blemmyes and the Scipods. In this case, their bodies diverge from the norm and these divergences involve some parts of the body or the size of the body. In other words, their bodies are not the precise copy of God, as Adam and all his descendance should be. However, despite the monstrous characteristics that are associated with these creatures, Mandeville is ambiguous in defining some of them as completely monstrous. On the contrary, he recognises some of them as intelligent creatures and he even uses human comparison sometimes, hinting at the possibility of similarities between his European and Christian background and these monsters inhabiting the limits of the world.

The third subchapter aims to understand the position of Mandeville's creatures in the Chain of Being and to understand whether they may be seen as human or not. The problem of monstrous races' humanity was widely discussed during the Middle Ages and many important Christian thinkers tried to solve the contradiction inherited from classical times of the monsters as an accident generated by a momentaneous disruption of the natural order. While from a classical perspective this position could have been sustained, from a medieval perspective admitting the possibility of an error in nature was equal to directly challenging the omnipotence of God. For this reason, monsters were no longer interpreted as something against nature, but as an integral part of God's creation. For instance, Augustine in *The City of God* suggests that the human perception of these creatures as monstrous depends on the inability of human beings to ultimately comprehend God's plan. As a consequence, deformity is not an error of creation, but a part of creation that exists for a reason that human beings are not able to understand. Augustine recognises in mortality and reason the only two characteristics to define a human being and to distinguish it from animals; therefore, every single creature which possesses reason is a descendant of Adam and a human being. From this perspective, many of Mandeville's monstrous beings are unquestionably human, like the Pygmies. However, many medieval texts concerning apocryphal stories about Biblical characters recognise Adam as the progenitor of both human and sub-human beings. In fact, Cain is

the son of Adam, but after the murder of his brother Abel he is exiled from the Eden and he is obliged to wander around the Earth. While the Scripture does not specify what is the mark that God impresses on him in order to make him recognisable, apocryphal and fictitious texts invented a whole tradition and a whole imagery around Cain's figure, describing his state in exile as a degenerate human state and recognising his descendance as predestined to monstrosity. This double nature, both human and monstrous, may be found especially in Mandeville's Cynocephali since they are described as possessing reason, as being highly civilised, but at the same time as practising anthropophagic rituals. The two natures that coexist in this monstrous race find their correspondence in their physical appearance as half-dogs: during the Middle Ages, the dog was perceived as a liminal creature, standing in-between the domesticated and the wild.

The third chapter aims to analyse the paradoxical similarities between the monstrous races and the Europeans, challenging the perception of these monsters as something extremely far – not only geographically – from the centre's reality. The first subchapter examines anthropophagical practices described in the *Travels*, comparing them with examples taken from the tradition of medieval travel literature, namely from the accounts of the same travellers used as comparison in the previous chapters. The paradoxical link to home (to cite the name I gave to the chapter) lies on the fact that the anthropophagic rites described by Mandeville have many aspects in common with the Christian ritual of the Eucharist. The transubstantiation of matter that is believed to happen during the Eucharist implies the real transformation of bread and wine in the body and blood of Jesus Christ, body and blood that are later shared among the members of the community attending the mass. In the same way, most of the anthropophagic rites attributed to Eastern populations have funeral purposes and consist in the consumption of the dead father (or of part of his body) perpetrated by his family members and friends. The parallelism is made explicit also through the comparisons used by Mandeville, who often associates the Eastern pagan priests to Christian priests and who searches for similarities in the rites.

In the last part of the chapter, I tried to understand if it is possible to interpret the monstrous races of the *Travels* as disabled creatures whose destabilising power is taken away from the centre and relegated at the margins of the world. Interpreting the disabled as an in-between state, I associated it to the idea of the monster and of the neighbour as

in-between creatures. Indeed, Mandeville's monstrous races are both monsters for their being not entirely human and not entirely anything else, and neighbours, since the expansion of the Mongol empire at the limits of Europe shortened the distance between the Eastern and the Western world. From this point of view, monsters may be seen as prototypes of the disabled creature and the liminal position they are given in the organisation of the world is the transposition of the liminal position that disabled people had in medieval society. Moreover, the interest for monstrous births even inside European territories, which began during the medieval times, exponentially grew during the Early Modern period. These births were often interpreted as signs of the divine dissatisfaction for the corruption of morals and they were exploited in the dispute between the Protestants and the Catholics. The parallelism between Eastern rites with Christian rituals, the identification of monsters with disabled and marginalised beings and the recognition of the universality of monstrous births, which are demonstrated not to be exclusively typical of the outside, prove the relativeness of the liminal position that Mandeville's monsters cover in his representation of the world. The *Travels* are a complex and articulated text that escapes a linear and simplistic interpretation: while reproposing a consolidate tradition of monstrous encounters in the Eastern territories, the text sometimes blurs the neat separation between human and monsters, East and West, depicting a reality that eventually escapes the easy categorisation of medieval *mappaemundi*.

1. Travel, Travels and the Problem of Otherness

The present chapter aims to introduce the main topics and features of the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville and to stress its key role in the travel literature between the fourteenth and the fifteenth century. After a brief summary of the genesis of the manuscript and its immediate reception, the analysis will focus on the tradition that stands behind the text and on the innovative – and, at the same time, reactionary – value it assumed in the late medieval set of travel narrative. In order to do so, the chapter will present a brief introduction to medieval cartography and to the complex interpretation of *mappamundi*. In addition, some texts of real travellers in the Far East will be submitted to analysis and compared to the *Travels* with the aim of spotting the distinctive features that characterise Mandeville's work.

1.1 The *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville: a Miscellany of Medieval Knowledge

Despite the term *bestseller* being a misnomer if referred to the late medieval period, the enormous success the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville gained in the two centuries after its first appearance made it an ante-litteram bestseller. Composed probably between 1356 and 1366, the text seems to have a continental origin since it was first written in French, but by the beginning of the fifteenth century it was translated in all the major European languages, including Czech, Danish, Dutch and Irish.[1] The popularity of the text can be proved also by the number of manuscripts that have survived: almost three hundred against, for instance, the seventy of Marco Polo's *Le Divisament dou Monde*, better known as *Il Milione*.[2]

The story of the many MSS and all their translations is quite complicated since the various copyists who translated the original work – and its copies or translations – changed parts of it by adding, misreading or removing. This process is not idiosyncratic to the *Travel*'s distinctive experience, but it was the regular procedure in the medieval understanding of *translatio*, which is extremely different from the modern practice of translation. In fact, ignoring completely the principle of authority, the medieval translation was a process of re-elaboration and rewriting of the text. The three early English translations of the *Travels* are commonly known as Cotton, Egerton and

[1] Moseley, C. W. R. D., ed., "Introduction", *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, London: Penguin, 2005, p.9.
[2] Moseley, C. W. R. D., "Behaim's Globe and 'Mandeville's Travels'", *Imago Mundi*, 33 (1981), p.89.

Defective versions and all of them descend roughly directly from the French original, as the Anglo-French(ish) hypotactic style of the prose demonstrates.[3] More precisely, as Higgins outlined in his analysis, the Cotton and the Defective versions come directly from the Insular version of the manuscript, while the Egerton contains a sum of the Defective, the Insular and a lost English version.[4] The so-called Defective version owes its name to the lacuna it presents in the description of Egypt, nevertheless many manuscripts containing this version survive nowadays. On the contrary, the Cotton and the Egerton versions both exist in a single exemplar, respectively British Library MS Cotton Titus c.xvi and British Library MS Egerton 1982.[5] The three versions differ not only for their length, but also in the exposition of the topic. An interesting example of this *variatio* is the year Mandeville indicates as the beginning of his journey: in the Cotton version it is indicated as "yeer of oure lord Ihesu Crist m.ccc. and xxii (1322)"[6] while in the Egerton it becomes: "ȝere of oure Lorde Ihesu Criste m.cccxxxii. (1332)".[7] In the present dissertation all quotations will be taken from the 2010 edition of the Egerton version edited by M. C. Seymour, since it appears to be the most complete and recent version of the text.

In the prologue of the *Travels*, the author introduces himself claiming to be a "Knyȝt" and to be "borne in Ingeland in þe toune of seynt Albones" (p.4), but years of studies and literature proved the untruth of this assertion and the fictitious nature of the first-person narrator. In fact, nowadays it is almost certain that Mandeville never existed and never travelled either to the Holy Land, or to the Far East. Also, the real author behind Mandeville was probably not English and not a knight, but an encyclopaedist and a scholar since the whole narration is a re-elaboration of a number of previous sources the author could have access to.[8] Notably, the *Travels* are a *summa* of all medieval knowledge about the East, from ancient sources such as Plinius or Solinus (through the mediation of Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum Historiae* and *Speculum Naturae*) to contemporary

[3] Moseley, "Introduction", p.36.
[4] Higgins, I. M., *Writing East: the "Travels" of Sir John Mandeville*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, pp.21-22.
[5] Moseley, "Introduction", pp.37-38.
[6] Unknown, *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. M. C. Seymour, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, p.3.
[7] Unknown, *The Egerton Version of Mandeville's Travels*, ed. M. C. Seymour, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p.4.
[8] Howard, Donald R., "The World of Mandeville's Travels", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1 (1971), p.1.

accounts of real travellers like Odoric from Pordenone.[9] Furthermore, the structure of the text itself is an ensemble of two popular late medieval genres: the pilgrim voyage to Jerusalem and the *relatio* of travellers in the Far East.[10] For all these reasons, the text itself can be considered a miscellany of medieval knowledge. Traditionally, the term miscellany stands to indicate a collection of various works written by different authors. Mandeville's *Travels* can be considered a miscellany because it is not an original work, but a compilation created by blending together information coming from a large number of different sources, and also because its structure stands in the middle between a pilgrim account and a travel *relatio*. Even though the materials used by the Mandeville author are not original, speaking of plagiarism would be anachronistic and eventually incorrect in the medieval context. As Higgins brilliantly points out, compilation was quite common during the Middle Ages since the importance of the principle of *auctoritas* was largely recognised and observed. However, the duty of the compiler was to appropriate some of his sources' ideas and reuse them in a creative way, avoiding repetition and providing invention to them.[11] This is precisely the kind of re-elaboration that takes place in the *Travels*. The Mandeville author presents a dialogical response not only to his own sources, but to all the previous and contemporary literature about the Near and the Far East.[12] He manages to handle freely the written works of other travellers-authors, while at the same time filling the blanks left by both *auctoritates* and experience about the Far Eastern territories with fiction. In his narration of monsters, he is careful to satisfy his audience's thirst for strangeness and marvels, but at the same time he sometimes gives voice to scepticism and disbelief as many real travellers were starting to do in their first-hand accounts. For this reason, the Mandeville narrator is perceived as a reliable and plausible character and traveller. As Moseley affirms, subjectivity is crucial in the *Travels* because the attractive *persona* who narrates the events seems created for the audience to make identification possible since "his response to what he sees is meant by the author to be analogous to the reader's".[13]

[9] Moseley, "Introduction", p.19.
[10] Howard, p.1.
[11] Higgins, p.12.
[12] Higgins, pp.10-11.
[13] Moseley, C. W. R. D., "The Metamorphoses of Sir John Mandeville", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 4 (1974), p.5.

As already asserted, the number of sources actively used in the creation of the *Travels* is particularly striking, but ironically the only overtly quoted source seems to be mostly ignored by the author. Indeed, Mandeville does not seem to have a complete version of the Latin Bible, the Vulgata, at hand since many of the passages the author cites in his narration are erroneous.[14] As Moseley notes in his translation, an example of this process can be found in chapter VI, when the narrator says: "as haly writte witnessez sayand *Tres vidit et vnum adorauit*" (p.37).[15] Moseley does not indicate the correct quotation from Genesis which is: "Cumque elevasset oculos, apparuerunt ei tres viri stantes prope eum: quos cum vidisset, cucurrit in occursum eorum de ostio tabernaculi, et adoravit in terram".[16] Again, in chapter VII the citation is: "and said on þis wyse, *Vere locus iste sanctus est, et ego nesciebam*" (p.47)[17], which should have been: "Vere Dominus est in loco isto, et ego nesciebam".[18] Moreover, in chapter VIII the narrator cites a passage affirming that it comes from the Psalms, but actually it is a passage from Exodus. Braude affirms that these discrepancies might be a result of medieval textual inconsistency regarding even the Bible, but actually the author shows little knowledge of biblical chronology, often confusing events that happen before and after the Flood.[19] It is possible to affirm almost certainly that the author did not have a direct and full knowledge of the Scriptures.

As explained before, the *itinerarium* of the *Travels* is dictated by the subgenres that compose the whole work. For this reason, it is important to list the main stopovers of his journey. The first part of the narrative, which goes more or less from the prologue to chapter XII, is more similar to a pilgrim account and is focused on the Holy Land. On his way from England to Jerusalem, Mandeville reaches Constantinople, and this gives him the pretext to discuss the difference of faith between the Christians of Rome and the Greeks, as he calls them. Then, he continues his account describing Cyprus, Egypt, Sicily

[14] Braude, B., "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 54 (1997), p.107.
[15] "as Holy Writ witnesses, saying *tres uidit and unus adorauit*, that is to say, 'He saw three and worshipped one'" (translation by Moseley in Anonymous, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, ed. and translation C. W. R. D. Mosley, London: Penguin, 2005, p.73.)
[16] Genesis 18:2; "And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground" (King James Bible version)
[17] "and he said, Vere locus iste sanctus est, et ego nesciebam, which is to say, Surely, this place is holy, and I knew it not'" (translation by Moseley, p.82).
[18] Genesis 28:16; "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not" (King James Bible version)
[19] Braude, p.107.

and the desert where the miraculous monastery of Saint Katherine is edified. At this point, the narration takes time in the description of the holy places and in the remembrance of the events narrated in the Sacred Scriptures. From chapter XV on, however, Mandeville's account is sustained not by the pious faith of the believer retracing the steps of Jesus Christ, but by what can be easily called *curiositas*. Standing to indicate the desire to enlarge human secularized knowledge, *curiositas* was considered a sin when it was applied to raise the mortal being to the level of God. However, since the beginning of the thirteenth century, gaining new and reliable information about the East was more a necessity than a whim. The Mongol Empire was rapidly expanding and in conquering Hungary they reached the very borders of Europe. Moreover, the Saracen menace was far from being defeated and European rulers started to hope in an alliance with the Eastern population to control the Muslim advance.[20] The East was not an entity to be ignored, nor to be romanticised. Most of the real travellers' accounts of the Eastern territories – the subgenre that inspired the second part of Mandeville's *itinerarium* – had been redacted after diplomatic missions or commercial enterprises. By the time the *Travels* were written, this kind of accounts was largely popular and their concern for enjoyable secular matters caused little scandal. For this reason, Mandeville's claim to have travelled from Jerusalem to Ceylon, to Cathay, to the Land of Prester John seemed reliable as all the other accounts compiled before the creation of the *Travels*. However, Mandeville's catching style assured a larger fame to the work that continued to be considered authoritative until the late fifteenth century. The most incredible example of this enduring success is to be found in the *Letter* of Christopher Columbus who, thinking he had circumnavigated the globe and reached Asia, complained he had not met the human monstrosities Mandeville describes in his *Travels*.[21] Interestingly enough, the set of images and expressions the first explorers – Columbus before everyone else – used to describe America came logically from the same marvellous and monstrous imaginary used to describe the East. Eventually, the association of South America with magic became a typical feature in the discourse

[20] Campbell, M. B., *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988, pp.88-89.
[21] Fleck, A., "Here, There, and In Between: Representing Difference in the 'Travels' of Sir John Mandeville", *Studies in Philology*, 97 (2000), pp.379-380.

concerning Latin-American culture, passing from being a tool of domination to a vehicle of regained identity in the form of the *real maravilloso*.[22]

1.2 The Shape and the Limits of the Medieval World

During the Middle Ages, the perception of the world was understandably very different from the contemporary one. First, geography as we conceive it today did not exist and most of the knowledge about the structure of the earth came from ancient sources. However, every branch of knowledge was subjected to Christian theology that often reshaped the content of ancient erudition to adapt it without contradictions to the Scriptures. For instance, the sphericity of the earth had been proved by Greek astronomers, universally accepted in the times of Aristotle and even taken for granted by Roman intellectuals and naturalists like Pliny the Elder.[23] During the Middle Ages, however, it became an open issue again. In fact, this problem was closely related to the antipodes and their possible inhabitants. In the medieval eschatological interpretation of the world, the potential existence of life on the other side of the globe (or the sphere) was problematic because it raised the question of whether the populations dwelling at the other side were worthy of salvation or not.[24] Indeed, salvation was one of the main concerns for medieval intellectuals and their opinions about the so-called antipodeans varied greatly. For example, Bede considered Plinius an *auctoritas* on many matters, but he categorically refused his idea that human beings are distributed equally on the earth, with the same ground under their feet and the same sky above their head, even if they are at the opposite side of the globe.[25] Plinius' assertion may seem logical, but often in medieval times it was a common belief that people on the other side of the globe should walk upside-down and eventually fall in the firmament. This controversy of the spherical earth and the antipodes is a central concern in the *Travels* as well.

[22] I am grateful to professor Gabriele Bizzarri for suggesting this point during his class about the construction of the Latin American identity and the reshape of colonialist leitmotifs into autochthon elements actualised by the so-called generación del boom.
[23] McCready, William D., "Isidore, the Antipodeans, and the Shape of the Earth", *Isis*, 87 (1996), p.113.
[24] Woodward, David, "The Image of the Spherical Earth", *Perspecta*, 25 (1989), p.9.
[25] McCready, p.110.

> And þat myght right wele be, þof alle it be þat symple men of cunnyng trowe noȝt þat men may ga vnder þe erthe bot if þai falle vnto þe firmament. For as vs think þat þase men er vnder vs, so think þaim þat we er vnder þaim (p.101)[26]

Mandeville believes that "a man may ga all aboute þe erthe", giving credit to the ancient belief of the spherical earth to be true. Again, here the narrator is not inventing anything, he is just taking a stance on a long-lasting discussion about a central topic of his times. In addition, even though Mandeville was not a real traveller, this process of correcting the monolithic knowledge about geography imposed by the *auctoritates* is typical of the accounts of real late medieval travellers in the far East. An example of this tendency can be found in William of Rubruck's account in which he affirms that:

> et non est uerum quod dicit Ysodorus quod sit sinus exiens ab occeano: nusquam enim tangit occeanum, sed undique circumdatur terra.[27]

William of Rubruck is referring to the Caspian Sea that Isidore of Seville describes as linked to the ocean, while Rubruck experienced it to be enclosed by land in all parts.

Another important issue to be discussed in order to completely understand the *Travels* is the physical representation of the world during the Middle Ages. As geography was not a standardised branch of knowledge, so maps – in the modern sense of the word – did not exist. There was not even a specific term, either in Latin or in vernacular languages, to define geographical maps. In fact, the Latin word *mappamundi* (from *mappa* which means "cloth" and *mundi* which means "world") was used together with *descriptio*, *pictura*, *tabula* or *estoire* to indicate both the representation of the world in maps and its description in words.[28] Moreover, many of the extant *mappaemundi* were placed as illuminations in manuscripts or, on the contrary, were made on enormous pieces of cloth and used as decoration inside cathedrals. This suggests that their function was not locational, since they could not be taken as tools of orientation in journeys, but rather didactic. As Woodward points out, they "relied on mystical, symbolic, and allegorical

[26] "That could well be, even if men of limited understanding do not believe that men can travel on the underside of the globe without falling off into the firmament. For just as it seems to us that those men there are under us, so it seems to them that we are under them." (translation by Moseley, C. W. R. D., pp.129-130.)

[27] Guglielmo di Rubruck, *Viaggio in Mongolia*, ed. Paolo Chiesa, Milano: Mondadori, 2011, p.90; "and it is not true when Isidore claims that it is a gulf coming from the ocean: indeed, it never comes into contact with the ocean, but it is surrounded by land in every part." (my translation)

[28] Brotton, Jerry, *La Storia del Mondo in Dodici Mappe*, translation by Virginio B. Bala, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2012, p.107.

imagery to a remarkable extent"[29], therefore their concern was not limited to space, but also concerned with time. In other words, their role was to present locations with their symbolic value, but also to narrate the history of the world from its Creation to the Last Judgment. Again, salvation is a major concern in medieval *mappaemundi* since they constantly remind the observer of the coming of the Apocalypse and the end of the world. In addition, all maps present an encyclopaedic graphical representation of passages and locations of the Bible or other medieval myths. The same close correlation between space and myth, real geography and Christian knowledge might be detected in the *Travels*. Notably, the *Travels* presents a rupture in the tradition of travellers' accounts not only because of their being fake, but also because they presented the matter in an old-fashioned way. While real travel narrative was tending to become more and more empiric, Mandeville creates a mixture between what Moseley calls "a geographical work" and "a 'romance of travel'".[30] However, from a medieval point of view, Mandeville's account was real to the same extent a *mappamundi* was the real representation of the world.

In order to give a more detailed idea of the physical and allegorical world of medieval *mappaemundi*, the chapter will briefly analyse the main features characterising the famous Hereford Map (figure 1). It is a so-called O-T map, since it represents the earth as a circle – the "O" – divided in three parts by three waterways that converge together forming a "T". In this way, the land is divided in three parts corresponding to the three known continents: Europe, Africa and Asia. The three waterways coincide with two rivers, the Don and the Nile, and the Mediterranean Sea. Commonly, the largest continent in the upper side of the map is Asia, while the two continents in the lower part are Europe on the left and Africa on the right. However, the Hereford Map presents an inversion between Europe and Africa.[31] This division in three might be also read as the tripartition of the world into the three sons of Noah: Ham, Shem and Japhet. However, the continental tripartition of the world is a borrowing from antiquity and its medieval usage is symbolic rather than geographical, since the boundaries between the three countries were not fixed. An example in support of this theory is the fact that a large extension of the eastern land was called "India", but the same expression could also be referred to modern Ethiopia,

[29] Woodward, p.515.
[30] Moseley, C. W. R. D., "Behaim's Globe and 'Mandeville's Travels'", p.89.
[31] Brotton, p.108.

which is an African state.[32] In addition, the continental division of the world among the three sons of Noah is not mentioned in the Bible and is the result of a series of interpretations that often reached different conclusions.[33] The assignation of Europe to Japhet, Asia to Shem and Africa to Ham is not universal and it is the result of a long tradition that began in the late Middle Ages and proceeded throughout the early modern age. A large number of extant manuscripts of the *Travels* are interesting witnesses of this process. For instance, the Paris Manuscripts assigns Africa to Shem and Asia to Ham, while the Egerton manuscript seems to adhere to the modern canonical division Africa-Ham, Asia-Shem, Europe-Japhet. However, it has been proved that the original Egerton text had been corrected during the early or mid-fifteenth century by a scribe who adjusted it to the conventional wisdom of his time:[34]

> Þir three sonnes of Noe after þe diluuy parted amanges þam all þe erthe. Seem [Shem], bycause he was þe eldeste broþer chose þe best party and þe grettest, whilk es toward þe este, and it es called Asy. Cham [Ham] tuke Affryk, and Iaphet tuke Europe. (p.119)[35]

Nonetheless, some hints of the old division of the continents among the brothers remain in later clarifications Mandeville gives about the progeny of Ham and Shem. For instance, he declares that he has been told the Saracens are the offspring of Shem and the Tartars are the descendants of Ham. The word Khan, in this interpretation, is just a modification of the name Ham.

> And for he þis Cham was so myghty þat na man myght agaynestand him he gert calle himself Goddes sone and lorde of alle þe werld. And þerfore saise sum men þat þe emperour of Tartare gert calle him Cham for he es halden þe maste excellent emperoure of þe werld and occupies þe same land þat he was lorde of. And of Sem, as þai say, come þe Sarezenes, and of Iaphet þe folk of Israel and we þat dwellez in Europe. (p.119)[36]

At this point, it might be argued that in explaining the division of the world and the lineage of the sons of Noah, Mandeville reports what other people – notably, infidels – told him.

---

[32] Nowell, Charles E., "The Historical Prester John", *Speculum*, 28 (1953), pp.437-438.
[33] Braude, pp.109.
[34] Braude, 118-119.
[35] "These three sons of Noah divided the earth between them after the Flood. Shem, because he was the eldest, chose the best and largest part, which is towards the East, and it is called Asia. Ham took Africa, and Japhet took Europe" (translation by Moseley, C. W. R. D., p.145.)
[36] "And because this Ham was so powerful that no one could withstand him, he had himself called God's son and Lord of the World. And therefore some men say that the Emperor of Tartary has himself called Ham [Khan], for he is considered the most excellent lord of the world and occupies the same land that Ham was lord of. And of Shem, so they say, come the Saracens; and of Japhet the people of Israel and we who live in Europe." (translation by Moseley, C. W. R. D., p.145.)

He seems to disagree with the etymology that links the word Khan to Ham, but still he declares that "Neuerþeles it es sothe þat þe folk of Tartre come of þe kynreden of Cham and alle þase dwellez in Asy þe mare" (p.120).[37]

Furthermore, the division of the land in three is operated by three waterways encountering in the middle and forming a T. This may possess an allegorical value and may symbolise a *crux commissa* in order to recall Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of humanity.[38] In the Hereford Map, this aspect is emphasised by the presence of a crucified Christ at the exact centre of the map, a little above the city of Jerusalem. The allegorical value of the map is suggested also by the Last Judgment depicted in the upper part, outside the borders of the (arguably) geographical map. At the centre of the representation, perfectly in line with the crucified Christ, it is possible to identify Christ in glory with at his right the saved ones and at his left the damned ones. In the lower part of the map there are two other illuminations placed outside the circle representing the earth. The image at the left deserves some attention since it represents the adoptive son of Julius Caesar, Augustus, dressed as a pope inviting three consuls to go and explore all the world.[39] Above the image it is written: "Lucas in Euuangelio: Exiit edictum ab Augusto Cesare ut describeretur huniversus orbis".[40] The illumination is a reference to Roman cartography that is considered the model for the medieval one.[41] For this reason, medieval maps presented a juxtaposition between pagan myths and biblical episodes, between the unholy and the sacred. As discussed above, the monsters located at the borders of the world are not a medieval invention, they come from a long ancient tradition. If their role was to define the unknown, in medieval times they also emphasise the marvels and the differences of Creation. Moreover, new kinds of monstrosity – linked to Christian tradition – started to appear in the maps, such as the populations of Gog and Magog. The Apocalypse describes these populations as the offspring of Cain that will try to conquer Jerusalem during the end of the world.[42] In addition, Christian mythology linked their

[37] "Nevertheless it is true that the people of Tartary and all those who live in Greater Asia come from the race of Ham." (translation by Moseley, C. W. R. D., pp.145-146.)
[38] Woodward, p.515.
[39] Brotton, p.114.
[40] Hereford Map, https://sims2.digitalmappa.org/36; "Luke in the Gospel claims: Julius Caesar promulgate an edict for which all the globe should be described" (my translation)
[41] Brotton, p.114.
[42] Apocalypse 20:7-8; "[7] Et cum consummati fuerint mille anni, solvetur Satanas de carcere suo, et exibit, et seducet gentes, quae sunt super quatuor angulos terrae, Gog, et Magog, et congregabit eos in praelium, quorum numerus est sicut arena maris.[8] Et ascenderunt super latitudinem terrae, et circuierunt castra

destiny to the figure of Alexander the Great, the tamer of the East. Alexander – notably, a pagan ruler – was chosen by God to enclose the tribes of Gog ang Magog in the mountains where they would stay until the day of the Apocalypse and their final defeat. This mixture of reality, mythology, monstrosity and Sacred Scripture was common in medieval representations of the world. Theology – more than geography – had a central role in the organization and interpretation of knowledge. In particular, the *Travels* is a clear example of this tendency since it mirrors the same kind of narration that maps presuppose. The space of the *Travels* is often an allegorical one and it reproduces many of the idiosyncrasies of maps.

Moreover, in many O-T maps Jerusalem is described as the centre of the world. Many maps of the thirteenth and fourteenth century – not just the Hereford, but also the Ebstorf and the Psalter Maps, for instance – present Jerusalem as their centre referring to the following passage from Ezekiel 5:5: "Haec dicit Dominus Deus: Ista est Jerusalem: in medio gentium posui eam, et in circuitu ejus terras".[43] However, the tradition that wants Jerusalem as the centre of the earth is a product of the Crusades. As Woodward points out, the centrality of the Holy Land seems absent from maps created before the thirteenth century. It was only after the recognition of Jerusalem as the spiritual core of Christianity and the straightening of the urge to free the Holy Land from the infidels that the position of Jerusalem became a central concern for cartographers.[44] Indeed, the *Travels* represent an even clearer example of this urge to underline the centrality of Jerusalem since the Mandeville author reiterates the concept for three times. First, in the prologue he affirms that:

> On þe same wyse he þat was kyng of alle the werld wald suffer deed at Ierusalem, *þat es in middes of þe werld*, so þat it might be knawen to men of alle þe parties of þe werld how dere he boght man (p.3, my emphasis)[45]

sanctorum, et civitatem dilectam.", "[7] And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, [8] And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. [9] And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city" (King James Bible version)

[43] Ezekiel 5:5; "Thus saith the Lord God; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her." (King James Bible version)

[44] Woodward, pp.516-517.

[45] "In the same way He that was King of all the world wanted to suffer death at Jerusalem which is in the middle of the world so that it might be known to men of all parts of the world how dearly He bought man" (translation by Moseley, C.W. R. D., p.43.)

The same concept, even if indirectly, appears again in chapter VI together with a citation from the Psalms:

> And þare whare oure lord was done on þe crosse es writen […] þus, *Hic deus, rex noster, ante saecula operatus est salutem in medio terre*, þat es to say, Here Godd, our kyng, before werldes has wroȝt hele in myddes of þe erthe. (p.42)[46]

Since God sent Christ to sacrifice himself in order to save humanity, then Jerusalem must be the centre of the earth because it is the place where Jesus had been crucified. In this passage, the author proves his point by using logic: if the Scriptures affirm that God worked salvation in the middle of the earth and the death of Jesus corresponds to salvation, then Jerusalem is the middle of the world because Jesus died there. In chapter XV, Mandeville re-affirms his original statement of the prologue, and he reports again the same quotation taken from the Psalms that he used in chapter VI.

> And als mykille as a man ascendes vpward oute of oure cuntreez to Ierusalem, als mykille schalle he go dounward to þe land of Prestre Iohan, and þe cause es for þe erthe and þe see er rounde. For it es þe comoun worde þat Ierusalem es in myddes of þe erthe, and þat may wele be proued þus. For and a man þare take a spere and sett it euen in þe erthe at midday when þe day and þe nyght er bathe ylyke lang, it makez na schadowe tille na party. And Dauid also beres witnes þeroff þare he saise, *Deus autem rex noster ante secula operatus est salutem in medio terre*, þat es to say, Godd oure kyng before þe begynnyng of þe werld wroght hele in myddes of þe erthe. (p.100)[47]

In this case, the proof of the centrality of Jerusalem seems almost empirical. The author affirms that since the earth is round, a man wanting to reach Jerusalem from the east (so, from the upper part of a medieval map) should descend while a man from Europe should ascend. Moreover, Jerusalem can be proved to be the centre of the world by placing a stick on the ground at midday and observing that it will cast no shadows since the sun will be completely above it. In opposition with many earlier pilgrim accounts, Jerusalem and its centrality are of primary importance for the author of the *Travels* because the

[46] Psalms 73:12; "Where Our Lord was crucified is […] an inscription, which reads […] *Hic deus, rex noster, ante saecula operatus est salutem in medio terre*, which is to say, 'Here God our King before all worlds has wrought salvation in the midst of the earth.'" (translation by Moseley, C. W. R. D., p.78.)

[47] "And however much a man climbs when he goes from our country to Jerusalem, he must descend as much to the land of Prester John. The cause is that the earth and sea is round. For it is a commonplace that Jerusalem is in the middle of the earth; it may be proved thus. Let a man take a spear and stick it in the ground at noon at the time when day and night are of equal length, and it will cast no shadow on either side. David bears witnesses of this where he says, *Deus autem rex noster ante secula operatus est salutem in medio terre*, which means, 'God our King wrought salvation in the midst of the earth before the beginning of the world.'" (translation by Moseley, C. W. R. D., p.129.)

eternal city had gained a new central value in the imaginary of European Christendom.[48] In fact, this emphasis may be interpreted both as the affirmation of Christian centrality in the history of the world and as the necessity to reaffirm the Christian dominion on the Holy Land ruled by Muslims.

Owing to its centrality and its important role as a bridge between the Christian West and the unknown East, Jerusalem might be seen as the door of Asia. In the medieval cosmic view, the East is the land of the Ancient Testament as many of the places that characterise it are located eastward. For instance, both the Hereford map and the *Travels* assign to the continent the Ararat hill where the ark of Noah is preserved, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the tower of Babel and, notably, the Earthly Paradise. As its prominent position in the Hereford map undoubtedly demonstrates, the relevance of the Earthly Paradise in medieval imaginary is unquestionable. The Garden of Eden, enclosed within its walls, is located at the top of the map, in a central position and in the same virtual line that links the crucified Christ to the Last Judgment. A little below the perfectly round Garden, an angel is represented in the act of banishing Adam and Eve from Eden. Undeniably, the connection between these three images, which compose the ideal vertical diameter of the map, has a strong theological value. The expulsion of Adam and Eve constitutes the event that generates the original sin, while the crucifixion represents the salvation of human race from the same original sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Due to this event, the Last Judgment is possible since the ones who lived rightfully can resurrect and access Paradise. Therefore, the virtual line that begins in Jerusalem, goes through Asia and ends in the representation of the Last Judgment has a temporal value, summarising the main steps of the history of humankind. This is an additional proof to the aforementioned theory about medieval maps owning both a symbolic-spatial meaning and a temporal meaning.

The *Travels* presents a different vision of Earthly Paradise. To a certain extent, it can be considered a "no place" since the narrator affirms that he did not personally visit it, but he has been told about it by "wyse men and men of credence" (p.165). The description he gives is traditional and coincides with the graphical representation in the Hereford Map: a fertile garden, surrounded by walls, from which four important rivers

[48] Higgins, I. M., "Defining the Earth's Center in a Medieval "Multi-Text": Jerusalem in The Book of John Mandeville", *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, pp.44-45.

spring, namely, Ganges, Nile, Tigris and Euphrates. However, after this detailed depiction of the Earthly Paradise, he affirms that no man can enter it, neither by land nor by water, because the nature outside it is particularly dangerous, the only way to reach it is "thurgh specialle grace of Godd" (p.166). The fact that Mandeville does not prove the existence of the Earthly Paradise in the Far East might be interpreted as an imitation of real travellers' accounts. As the next subchapter endeavours to demonstrate, real travellers often searched for the elements they traditionally ascribed to the East, but they could not find traces of them and, consequently, began to impugn their truthfulness. Earthly Paradise and the monsters were some of their major concerns.

Another myth of paramount importance for late medieval Christian tradition is that of Prester John. Even though since the beginning of the history of Christianism little communities of believers were known to inhabit some lands of the Middle and Far East, the legend of Prester John began to spread across Europe more or less during the twelfth century. For instance, in 1165 a letter signed by the fictitious ruler of India was sent to the Byzantine emperor, Manuel Comnenus. The content of the letter was probably directed also to the sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick Barbarossa.[49] Indeed, in the *Letter* the self-professed Prester John revealed he was both a priest and the supreme ruler of a vast prosperous empire that included seventy-two provinces and a land full of wealth and marvels. Notably, he claimed to be a Christian belonging to the Nestorian heresy and to be ready to support European military forces in the reconquest of the Holy Land against the infidels.[50] It goes without saying that the authorship of the letter should be located in Europe rather than in the East, since many of the marvels described in the *Letter* come from the tradition of Alexander romances or dates back to antiquity. All this acknowledged background, however, is refashioned for a political purpose: lifting Christian pride and inviting to inner unity in order to defeat the external threat. In other words, the *Letter* represents a medieval utopia that should be read as a model for Europe, which was divided by internal conflicts.[51] Indeed, not only had the Second Crusade (1145-1147) ended with the defeat of the western powers, but also an open conflict between Fredrick Barbarossa and the pope had led to a schism inside the Western Church.[52] The

[49] Nowell, p.435.
[50] Helleiner, Karl F., "Prester John's Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia", *Phoenix*, 13 (1959), p.47-48.
[51] Nowell, p.437.
[52] Helleiner p.49 and Nowell, p.438.

unification of the temporal and the spiritual power in the person of Prester John was probably meant to be interpreted as the solution to European problems. The impact of the *Letter* in late medieval times was so durable that in 1177 pope Alexander III, after the defeat of Frederick Barbarossa against the Lombard League, decided to send a formal answer to Prester John asking him to convert to the true Christian faith and to help in the sacred wars against infidels.[53] Although the pope never received an answer, the myth of Prester John became even more durable and many travellers searched for his fabulous reign in the Far East. Mandeville reshapes the tradition by considering Prester John more as a title than the proper name of a single man. He narrates that:

> And þan he asked þe knyght þat was wiþ him what maner of folk þase ware þat ware so ordayned and what þai hight, and he said þat þai ware prestez. And þan þe emperour said he wald na mare be called kyng ne emperour bot preste, and also he wald hafe þe name of þe first preste þat come oute of þe kirke. So it felle þat þe first preste þat come first oute of þe kirke hight Iohan. And þarfore þat emperour and alle oþer emperoures seyne hase bene called Prestre Iohan, þat es als mykille at say as preste Iohan. (p.161)[54]

In this description, Prester John survives as an eternal myth since he is not limited to a single life, but he is submitted to a process of 'reincarnation' from generation to generation. In this way, the utopic paradise of the good Eastern Christian might last forever.

Having proved the allegorical value that space assumes in the *Travels*, it is possible to conceive the whole work as a sort of written *mappamundi* whose role is to straighten the traditional Christian values and knowledge. In an historical context of great difficulties and of important military defeats and with the emergence of new strong Eastern powers, the *Travels* presents itself as a reactionary resistance. More than a medieval utopia, it is a naïve throwback that leans on undead myths in order to re-imagine the possibility of a universal Christian empire. It presents a countertrend if compared with the accounts of real travellers whose main concern was to describe the world as it was and whose work represents the beginning of the so-called age of discoveries. The world

[53] Nowell, p.445.
[54] "He then asked the knight what sort of people these were who were being ordained, and what they were called; the knight said they were priests. Then the Emperor said that no longer would he be called King or Emperor, but priest instead, and that he would take the name of the first priest who came out of the church. It happened that the first priest to come out of the church was called John; and so that Emperor and all the other Emperors since have been called Prester John, that is, Priest John" (translation by Moseley, C. W. R. D., p.182).

the author of the *Travels* is considering is an allegorical and traditional one whose interpretation in Christian terms was always possible.

1.3 Real Travellers, Monstrosity and Accounts from the Unknown

As suggested before, in the late medieval period the Eastern issue gained a momentous relevance for the Christian West. Indeed, the unification in 1206 of the many Mongolian hordes under the dominion of Chinggis Khan marked the first step towards the creation of one of the largest empires that ever existed.[55] After the death of Chinggis Khan, his third son Ögödei, chosen by his own father to be his successor, continued the process of expansion of the Mongolian dominion.[56] In 1235 Mongol armies reached Eastern Europe and in the following years they managed to conquer large territories in both Hungary and Poland.[57] As stated before, in the same period Europe was facing important internal crises due to the confrontation between pope Alexander III and Fredrick Barbarossa, ruler of the Holy Roman empire. Moreover, the defeat in the Second Crusade had proved the military weakness of the Western armies against the growing Eastern powers. In this background, the conquest of Hungary and Poland by the Mongol hordes was seen as the beginning of the Apocalypse – namely, the coming of the Antichrist. While Frederick II urged the necessity to stand against the new enemy, commonly Mongols started to be perceived as a menace comparable with the Saracens – the external enemy par excellence – and the Jews – the internal enemy.[58] In the absence of a direct knowledge of the East and its populations, the Europeans adapted the Mongols into the complex mythology representing the sum of their beliefs about the unknown Eastern lands. In fact, starting from a misinterpretation of the word *Tartar* – namely, the name of just one of the many tribal groups that were united in the Golden Hord – the Mongols started to be referred as *Tartars*, as in coming from the region of Tartarus or Hell.[59] Moreover, they were often associated to the tribes of Gog and Magog and, consequently, to the Antichrist that would lead the world to its end. By this association, Western Christians tried to place the arrival

[55] Giffney, N., "Monstrous Mongols", *Postmedieval: a Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 3 (2012), p.230.
[56] Franke, H., Twitchett, D., *Vol. 6.: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.366.
[57] Giffney, p.229.
[58] Giffney, pp.234 and 237.
[59] Abu-Lughod, J. L., *Before European Hegemony: the World System A.D. 1250-1350*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p.159.

of the Mongol powers as an event that stood outside time and space and to trap them in a mythical dimension far away from the contemporary historical reality. In this way, they tried to master the trauma of an invasion they could not properly react to.[60] From this point of view, the demonisation of the unknown Other is a process of fictitious mastery over a population that cannot be controlled in any other way. It is an illusion of control in the middle of defeats.

The death of Ögödei in 1241 and the consequent internal fight to elect his successor represented the end of the menace of a direct Mongolian dominion over Europe.[61] In 1245, the new pope Innocent IV recognised the importance of creating a channel of communication with the Mongol empire and organised four diplomatic missions to the East. At the head of the first mission, which lasted from 1245 to 1247, was a Franciscan friar, John of Pian di Carpine. Even though the Franciscan's journey is not the first to be undertaken inside the Mongol empire, his became very famous both for the distance he covered and for the account he wrote for the pope, *Historia Mongalorum*.[62] In 1253, portions of the account were incorporated into Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Historiae*, which will later become one of Mandeville's sources for the writing of the *Travels*.[63] In his journey, John of Pian di Carpine departed from Lyon – at the time, the seat of papal court – to reach the southern part of Russia, passing through Bohemia and Poland. It appears that the main intent of pope Innocent IV was to understand whether the Mongols could represent an ally of Christendom against the menace of the Saracen expansion. In fact, in his relation the Franciscan showed a keen interest for Mongol military practices and weapons. He recognised the superiority of his enemy military force and their predisposition to war, but at the same time he encouraged the Christians to actively engage against the threat the Mongols represented. In the friar's point of view, it seemed legitimate to believe that the Christian West represented the only obstacle to Mongol worldwide dominion and, for this very reason, union between all the European political powers was mandatory.

[60] Giffney, p.239.
[61] T'Serstevens, Albert, *I Precursori di Marco Polo*, translation Roberto Ortolani, Milano: Garzanti Editore, 1960, p.129.
[62] Phillips, K. M., *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245-1510*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, p.28.
[63] Abu-Lunghod, p.161.

> Therefore, because except for Christendom, there is no land in the world which they have not taken, they are preparing to fight us. […] Therefore if the Christians wish to save themselves, their country, and Christianity, they must gather in one body the kings, princes, barons and rectors of the lands and send men to fight the Tartars under a single plan, and before this they should begin to strip the land because after the Tartars are seen in the countryside no one will be able to help to another, because these men will, in companies, seek out and kill men everywhere.[64]

Moreover, at the end of the account he also gives practical suggestions on how to stop the Mongols, on which weapons could be more useful against them and how to resist them in battles. He also proposes methods to fortify the cities and he indicates how to deal with the prisoners. In the end, the mission of John of Pian di Carpine seems to have a spying purpose more than a diplomatic one. He needed to gain pragmatic knowledge about life and customs of the Mongols because fiction and mythology were no longer sufficient to prevent Christendom from invasion. Moreover, as Campbell brilliantly points out, by the time the first missions to the East took place, the Mongols' dominion was neither a politically neutral territory nor a blank to be filled with comfortable fictions.[65] The sudden confrontation between the two opposite poles of the *orbis terrarum* – East and West – urged Christian Europe to search a real contact with the new "demons" and to doubt every previously alleged certainty related to them.

The king of France Louis IX assigned a diplomatic mission to another Franciscan friar, William of Rubruck, who left Europe in 1253 and came back in 1255. Even though the Franciscan affirms that the main aim of his journey is the conversion of Mongols to the Christian faith, it is highly probable that king Louis IX's real purpose was to stipulate a political alliance with the Mongols for a new crusade to the Holy Land.[66] The account the friar wrote for his king, known as *Itinerarium*, presents many differences with John of Pian di Carpine's. First, the Mongols seem more suspicious of William's real purposes and the treatment for their Western hosts is harsher than the one Pian de Carpine received. This fraught atmosphere may be due to the rising tension between the Mongol empire and Europe.[67] A notable example of this tendency might be the cold welcome that William of Rubruck and his companion received when they reached the foreign land.

---

[64] Giovanni da Pian di Carpine, *The Story of the Mongols whom we Call the Tartars*, translation by Erik Hildinger, Boston: Branden Publishing Company, 1996, pp.85-86.
[65] Campbell, p.89.
[66] Phillips, p.31.
[67] Montalbano, Kathryn A., "Misunderstanding the Mongols: Intercultural Communication in Three Thirteenth Century Franciscan Travel Accounts", *Information & Culture*, 50 (2015), p.598.

> Quando ergo ingressi sumus inter istos barbaros, uisum fuit michi, ut dixi superius, quod ingrederer aliud seculum.
>
> Circumdederunt nos in equis, postquam dium fecerant nos expectare sedentes in umbra sub bigis nostris. Prima questio fuit utrum umquam fuissemus inter eos; habito quod non, […] [t]unc quesiuerunt unde ueniremus et quo uellemus ire; […] [i]psi diligenter quesiuerunt utrum irem de mea uoluntate, uel utrum mitterer.[68]

In this passage, the Mongols' suspicious attitude might be interpreted as the fear of being spied on. An innovative element of the *Itinerarium* is William of Rubruck's personality, which strongly emerges throughout the whole narration, in complete opposition with Pian di Carpine's plain and objective style. The author uses the first-person narration to report the main events of his journey, not only focusing on what he saw, but also on his perceptions and emotions.[69] In this way, the narration of his journey acquires "tridimensionality" and identification between the reader and the narrator becomes possible. Ultimately, the focus of his narration is less ethnographical and more centred on specific events and conversations he personally had. Moreover, the linguistic problem becomes a fundamental concern in Rubruck's account and an unresolvable limit in his Christianising mission, underlining the impossibility of communication between two cultures that knew so little of each other. A clear example of Rubruck's frustration for the inadequacy of his interpreter's skills might be the following.

> Aliud non poteram facere, quia loqui uerbam doctrine per interpretem talem erat magnum periculum, immo impossibile, quia ipse nesciebat.[70]

Indeed, in the closing of his work, Rubruck stresses the importance of having "bonum interpretem, immo plures interpretes"[71] among the fundamental supplies for future missions to the East.

It is important to underline that politics and religion were not the only causes that led Europeans to travel towards the East. The unification of a large territory under Mongolian control implied the reduction of tribute gatherers in the Eastern lands and led

[68] Rubruck, p.48; "So, when we came among these barbarians, it seemed to me – as I wrote before – to enter another world. They surrounded us riding their horses, then they made us wait in the open air, covered by the shadow of our wagons. Their first question was if we ever came among them, I answered negatively, […] then they asked where we came from and where we wanted to go; […] they carefully asked if it was my will to come or if I was sent." (my translation).
[69] Campbell, pp.113-114.
[70] Rubruck, p.138; "I could not do something more because explaining the principles of the faith through that interpreter was a great danger, and even impossible, since he knew nothing." (my translation).
[71] Rubruck, p.320; "good interpreters, even many interpreters" (my translation).

to the increase of safety on the roads. Thus, Italian merchants started to create new commercial networks in the East, joining Jewish and Muslim merchants, who were already accustomed to trading with the populations of the Central-Far East.[72] The Polos, a Venetian family, were one of the first families to start an enterprise in the Eastern lands. They set a trading base at Sudak, near the Black Sea, and traded jewels eastwards, managing to reach the most important cities under the Mongol control. The Polo brothers were even welcomed to the court of Kubilai Khan, the ruler of the Mongol empire. He asked them to come back to Italy in order to request the pope to send one hundred Christian missionaries to his empire with the task of teaching the basis of Christian religion. In this way, the Great Khan thought to create a connection with the far away Western lands. However, when the Polo brothers came back to Italy the seat of the pope was vacant and they had to wait for the election of a new one, Gregory X. The pope did not grant them one hundred missionaries, so the Polos came back to Kubilai's court accompanied only by Niccolò's seventeen-years-old son, Marco Polo. The boy would remain in the Eastern lands for almost twenty-four years.[73] The result of his permanence in the Mongol empire is *Le Divisament du Monde*, better known as *Il Milione*, which is the account of his journeys around the Mongol dominion. Indeed, the real opportunity for the writing of his *memoir* was supplied by a conflict between Genoese and Venetian forces, which led to the capture and incarceration of Marco Polo. While held captive, he met Rustichello of Pisa, a professional writer of Arthurian romances at the court of England, and together they started to write the first Franco-Italian version of *Il Milione*. Rustichello's impact in the work can be defined as marginal since it involves mostly the style of narration and the description of the Mongol wars. Hence, the veracity of the eye-witnessed account remains indubitable. In his work, Marco Polo manages to literally give a body to something that in Western minds was just fictional and unsubstantial.[74] As already discussed, the East was conceived as an assemblage of stereotyped images and fictional places that lay outside the plan of reality. The accounts written during the thirteenth centuries struggled to create a more realistic view of the Eastern lands and *Il Milione* is the most powerful and influential attempt to reach this goal. However, even if Polo's work is not the chronologically first testimony of a journey in the Eastern lands, it

[72] Abu-Lughod, p.158.
[73] Phillips, pp.33-34.
[74] Campbell, pp.92-93.

is through his first-hand experience and narration that the East received its first recognition as a concrete place in the common opinion. Indeed, as Campbell affirms, the real strength of Polo's work was that while all the friars' accounts were letters to kings (or popes), his "enterprise was a letter to Europe"[75]. Notably, the select audience of *Il Milione* is openly addressed in the first lines of the prologue, which states: "Signori imperadori, re e duci e tutte altre gente che volete sapere le diverse generazioni delle genti e le diversità delle regioni del mondo".[76]

Reliability of information was a crucial point in all the accounts of the East since the travellers feared to be considered liars. Both John of Pian di Carpine and William of Rubruck tend to openly distinguish between the description of first-hand experiences and the information they had acquired from others, in order to partially dissociate from them. However, truthfulness and first-hand experience gain a central role in the prologue of Polo's work, even more than in any previous account. Not obliged to address his discourse to a socially superior person, Polo proudly focuses from the very first lines on his own persona and his adventures.

> E questo vi conterà il libro ordinatamente siccome messer Marco Polo, savio e nobile cittadino di Vinegia, le conta in questo libro e egli medesimo le vide. Ma ancora v'ha di quelle cose le quali egli non vide, ma udille da persone degne di fede, e però le cose vedute dirà di veduta e l'altre per udita, acciò che 'l nostro libro sia veritieri e sanza niuna menzogna.[77]

The veracity of the book is closely connected with Polo himself, whose experience is unique and inimitable since "né cristiano, né pagano, saracino o tartero, né niuno uomo di niuna generazione non vide né cercò tante maravigliose cose del mondo come fece messer Marco Polo"[78]. Even in the prologue, Polo's work tries to normalise Eastern wonders, giving them a new place and a new shape in the plan of reality. In other words, I believe that Polo aims to state that his work is the most exact and true account of Eastern wonders. However, the wonders he will describe are nothing like the monstrous peoples

[75] Campbell, p.93.
[76] Polo, Marco, *Il Milione*, ed. Marcello Ciccuto, Milano: BUR Rizzoli, 2020 p.81; "Emperors, kings, dukes and all the people who want to know something about the different populations and the different regions of the world" (my translation).
[77] Polo, p.81; "This is the subject of the book, and it will narrate such things as Signor Marco Polo, wise and noble citizen of Venice, saw them himself. But there are many things he did not see, but he heard them from trustworthy people and so he will explicitly discriminate between what he witnessed himself and what he has been informed about, so that our book will be true and without any falsehood." (my translation).
[78] Polo, p.81-82; "neither Christian, nor pagan, Saracen or Tartar, nor any man of any generation saw or searched for so many marvellous things in the world as Signor Marco Polo did" (my translation).

or mythological animals of tradition. As I will discuss in the next chapter, many real travellers believed in the existence of monstrous wonders even if they experienced the Eastern lands first-hand and did not see them with their own eyes. On the contrary, the wonders Polo is referring to are the luxurious costumes and cities of the Eastern populations, whose lifestyle was completely different from the European one. Polo often appears fascinated by these distant peoples and by their habits and prosperity. In his description of the cities and the islands, Marco Polo often underlines the hyperbolic abundance of gold, precious stones and spices which seem to characterise the Eastern background. An example of this tendency may be detected when he is describing the region of Maabar, which is part of the marvellous India.

> E sappiate che le perle che si truovano in questo mare si spandono per tutto il mondo, e questo re n'ha grande tesoro. […] Ancora portano alle braccia bracciali tutti pieni di queste pietre carissime e di perle; e ancora tra le gambe in tre luoghi portano di questi bracciali cosí forniti. Ancora vi dico che questo re porta tante pietre a dosso che vagliono una buona città; e questo non è maraviglia, avendone cotanta quantità com'io v'ho contato.[79]

In this passage the hyperbole is obvious. The Maabar sea produces so many pearls that they circulate all around the world and, at the same time, they represent a great wealth for the king. Indeed, he wears such a number of pearls that they have the same worth of an entire city, but Polo claims this fact is not a marvel for Eastern standards since there is such an abundance of precious stones there. However, I would argue that for a Western reader it must have sounded as an almost unbelievable marvel. Another interesting example of Polo's fascination for Eastern customs might be found in chapter CXV, where he describes a pagan rite to find something that has been lost or stolen. He reports that the population of Codifu would ask an old woman to communicate with the spirits and that they would reveal to her where the lost things could be found. By such a rite, Polo claims, nothing is ever lost there. Then he admits that "anch'io, Marco, ritrovai in questo modo un anello che avevo perso"[80]. I consider this passage extremely important because here Polo is confirming the validity of a pagan and idolatrous practice, claiming to have taken

[79] Polo, pp.463-464; "And you should know that the pearls that might be found in this sea are traded all around the world and this king has great wealth thanks to them. […] Then, on their arms they have bracelets full of precious stones and pearls and they wear these bracelets also on their legs. Moreover, I tell you that this king wears so many precious stones that they are worthy a great city and this is no wonder since they have such a quantity of stones, as I told you." (my translation).
[80] Polo, p.369; "In this way even I, Marco, found a ring I had lost" (my translation).

benefit from it. It can be argued that he also states that he did not thank the idols with any gift, but still his employment of a pagan rite to find his lost ring is of paramount importance in the understanding of Polo's attitude towards the Eastern populations. The distance between the two world – East and West – that was massive in John of Pian di Carpine's and Rubruck's accounts, is here undoubtedly shortened. The other is no more an enemy to spy on or an indecipherable stranger, but something different to enter in contact with. Moreover, in Polo's *Il Milione* wonders assume an essentially positive value since they are characterised as peculiar to the Eastern background and fundamental for its recognition. From his point of view, the East and the West become two complementary halves whose possibilities are separated. Eventually, the Orient is the place of Western dreams – but not monstrous dreams – and, at exactly the same time, it is reachable.[81] While giving it a marvellous atmosphere, Polo manages to reify the unlikely existence of the East better than anyone else.

Another cardinal figure for early travels towards the East is the Franciscan friar Odoric from Pordenone. Furthermore, in the present dissertation his centrality is reinforced by his key role as Mandeville's source. To some extent, Odoric might be considered a professional traveller since, before his expedition in the Far Eastern territories, he had spent around twenty years in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East, doing missions in Turkey, Russia and Persia.[82] He left from Venice in 1318 and came back to Venice between 1329 and 1330. At this point, it seems Odoric wanted to reach the papal seat in Avignon, but his health did not allow him to leave.[83] However, in order to inform pope John XXII of his mission, Odoric dictated his *Relatio* to a fellow friar, William of Solagna, and the account was reworked later on by the many scribes who copied it. It must have been quite famous at the time since 117 manuscripts survive.[84] Maybe due to Polo's influence in the work, the narrator's gaze is disenchanted and objective. In the *Relatio* there is an almost total absence of monsters and the narrator discredits many of the common beliefs about the East. The most striking example of this process is the passage where he affirms that Prester John does not exist and everything that is told about him is false.

[81] Campbell, pp.105-112.
[82] Phillips, p.41.
[83] Odorico da Pordenone, *Racconto delle Cose Meravigliose d'Oriente*, translation by Luigi Dal Lago, Padova: Edizioni Messaggero, 2016, pp.11-12.
[84] Phillips, p.41.

> De hoc imperio Cathay recedens versus Orientem, in quinquaginta dietis, transeundo per multas civitates et terras, veni in terram Precezoan; de qua centesima pars non est, sicut olim dicitur fuisse.[85]

He was the first traveller to doubt the existence of Prester John, since even Polo's work presents an extensive narration of Prester John's deeds and his wars against the Mongols. Moreover, even if his narration reports the description of some miracles made by Christian men, he presents an almost empirical attitude in describing some allegedly preternatural phenomena, depriving them of their miraculous aura. For instance, in the following passage he is reporting his visit to the island of Silan (Ceylon).

> In hac terra est quidam mons magnus, de quo dicunt gentes illae, quod super eum luxerit Adam filium suum centum annis. In supremo huius montis est quaedam planicies pulchra, in qua est unus lacus non multum magnus, sed profundus. Huius laci aquas gentes errore delusae, dicunt esse lacrimas quas fudit Adam ex Heva pro filio suo Abel.[86]

Odoric refutes the mythologic creation of the lake and defines the common belief a mistake. Later in the chapter he even claims that the water comes from the lake itself, giving an almost scientific explanation to the phenomenon. In the *Relatio*, the objectivity of the narrator is particularly important, especially if compared with the narrator of the *Travels*. In fact, the attitude of the Mandeville narrator is more or less the same, but the matter is completely different. While the monsters in Odoric have no place at all, Mandeville resumes the tradition and grants them the place Odoric devoted to their confutation. Indeed, the two works might be considered as symmetrical for their style and opposed for their subject. Mandeville extensively uses his source, but momentously changes the conclusion the *Relatio* aims to reach. As Campbell claims, Mandeville was writing a realistic prose fiction that challenged the fixed dichotomy that divided fable and romance from truth, which was emphasised even more by the rhetorical opposition between prose and verse.[87] Paradoxically (from a medieval point of view), the narrator of the *Travels* was describing something fictitious in a realistic manner and using a realistic

---

[85] Odoric, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli/40-relatio/capitoli/134-capo-lxv-delle-terre-di-prete-gianni?start=2; "From this empire of Cathay, descending Eastwards for fifty days and passing through many cities and many lands, I came to Prester John's land and the things that are been told about it are not true, neither in the slightest part." (my translation).

[86] Odoric, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli/40-relatio/capitoli/108-capo-xxxix-sillam?start=2; "In that land there is a great mountain and people say that on that mountain Adam cried for his son for one hundred years. On the top of this mountain there is a pleasant plain in which there is a little but deep lake. People are mistaken since they claim that the waters of this lake are the tears Adam and Eve shed for their son Abel." (my translation).

[87] Campbell, 122-123.

style, the same style the missionaries used for their accounts. In the *Travel*, the line between fictitious and real is blurred. Moreover, the reuse of a fictitious tradition, which came back from ancient times and was verified by authorities like Plinius and Saint Augustine, contributed to give the account reliability. In this way, the distance between matter and style was mitigated by the authoritative value of the sources from which the fictitious matter was taken. It is for this reason that the *Travels* represents an *unicum* in medieval literature.

By propounding a short analysis of different journey accounts written between the thirteenth and the fourteenth century, I wanted to introduce the problem of the representation not only of the unknown, but also of the Other. Orient and Otherness are a common object of study, especially in later literature where the East becomes the embodiment of Western desires. *Orientalism* by Edward Said represents one of the most influential postcolonial works on the subject and some scholars tried to adapt its conclusion to medieval times. However, medieval Europe lacked almost completely the inherent Eurocentric vision of the West as a strong masculine force which must impose itself on the feminine submissive East, in order to bring prosperity to the faraway lands. On the contrary, the travellers often described the East as a militarily stronger and wealthier land. Moreover, an inflexible dichotomy opposing East and West, Self and Other, did not exist, but the relation between the geographical spaces was still a matter that needed negotiation. From this point of view, the Self and the Other might be considered opposed for many aspects, but there was still a possibility for sameness and dialogue.[88] The example given by Marco Polo's own experience is obvious, but also Rubruck's interest in the Eastern beliefs might be cited as well. Indeed, he spent many chapters reporting debates he had with people adhering to different faiths and different cultures, whose ideas were often different, but sometimes similar. Furthermore, the importance of direct knowledge and dialogue was underlined by every traveller in the Eastern land, standing to highlight the possibility of connection and of rewriting the authoritative knowledge coming from the past. In short, the Middle Ages were still a transitory phase where a firm distinction and opposition between Self and Other was not possible. Otherness was perceived and continuously reshaped, without reaching a definitive state.

[88] Phillips, pp.59-60.

2. The Deviant Body: Monstrosity in the Far East

The present chapter aims to analyse the employment of monstrous characteristics in the representation of exotic populations in the *Travels* and to investigate the tradition that lies behind these monsters. More specifically, the first subchapter presents a summary of monstrous appearances in cardinal texts for medieval knowledge, starting from ancient *auctoritates* such as Pliny the Elder and Saint Augustine, passing through Old English sources and ending with medieval real travellers' accounts. Then, the dissertation will focus on the *Travels* and on the possible interpretations of monstrosity in the unique background of the text. More precisely, monstrosity will be discussed as being the reification of an extreme Otherness through which the Self can be created and identified and, at the same time, as being peculiar to Creation. In fact, admitting monstrosity to be a form of degeneration would imply an error in the perfection of Creation. Conversely, it may be interpreted as a manifestation of God's will and power.

2.1 The Tradition of Monsters in the East

In order to better understand the origin of Mandeville's monsters, it is important to analyse the traditional imagery the author is evoking. As a matter of fact, the mythology linked to the East was not limited to Christian *topoi*, but it also included a large variety of ancient beliefs about monsters living at the edge of the known world. Such monstrous appearances might be spotted at the borders of many medieval *mappaemundi* and they stand to indicate the very limits of the human world. However, the iconography of these monsters is not unique of medieval times, but it stems from a long tradition which has its origins in the Hellenic period. In fact, the first accounts of real travellers in the East to include monstrous encounters are the ones written by the Greeks Ctesias and Megasthenes and known by medieval audience through Latin mediation.[89] Little is certain about these figures and scholars doubt that they ever visited the places they talk about. Nonetheless, their narratives represent an important source in the creation of the tradition that eventually converges on Mandeville.

The Greeks often showed a great interest for human diversity and their proximity to the East led them to come into contact with many different Eastern populations. Some

[89] Friedman, J. B., *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, London: Harvard University Press, 1981, p.5.

of the terms they used to refer to this population still persist in our vocabulary, even if with slightly different meanings. For instance, the term "barbarian" has a Greek origin and initially it indicated foreign populations whose native language sounded like a "bar bar" to Greeks.[90] In other words, the barbarians may be defined as the ones who stutter and stammer, the ones who cannot use the *lógos* properly.[91] In the Greek ethnocentric view of the world, language was a fundamental characteristic not only to distinguish between human and animals, but also to distinguish between men and non-men. However, the use of an articulate speech was not a sufficient factor to determine the humanity of a population. All the languages that did not sound like Greek were considered "bar bar" and, consequently, the populations who spoke them were inferior.[92] Moreover, the word "xenophobia" encapsulates the Greek attitude towards strangers. Coming from the Greek words *xenos* (stranger, foreigner) and *phobia* (panic, fear of), it stands to indicate the irrational fear of what is unknown, which can often degenerate into hatred.[93] The foreigners were seen as diverging from the normative Self not only for the language they spoke, but for what they ate, how they dressed and how their organised their own society as well. In depicting other populations, the Greeks gave great importance to these factors, creating durable stereotypes that survived long after the Middle Ages. For instance, their perception of humanity was closely linked to the concept of *polis*, the city. People who did not organise their societies into cities were considered inferior since they shared a condition of lack of freedom that was typical of the slaves in Greek society. The *polis* was considered the cradle of civilisation for it enabled the exercise of human faculties and the elevation of the individual's condition.[94] In this way, the absence of cities and of political organization is often associated to barbarity and degradation. When describing the monstrous races, this lack of structure is often emphasised in ancient texts as a sort of reminder of their inherent lack of civilisation.

Ctesias is supposed to have lived around the first half of the fifth century B.C. and to have been a physician at the Persian court. His description of India and of the East was collected in a book called *Indika*, which arrived to us in fragments through the mediation

[90] Friedman, p.29
[91] Vignolo, Paolo, "Una Nación de Monstruos. Occidente, los Cinocéfalos y las Paradojas del Lenguaje", *Revista de estudios sociales*, 27 (2007), p.141.
[92] Friedman, p.26.
[93] https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/230996?redirectedFrom=xenophobia#eid
[94] Friedman, p.30.

of Photius of Constantinople.[95] The work has been almost certainly influenced by Herodotus' *Historia* (even if Ctesias claims to have observed most of the phenomena first-hand or to rely on people who have actually witnessed what he recounts) and it presents India as the natural land of marvels.[96] However, *Indika*'s reliability was doubted since the ancient time and Lucian in his *True Histories* claims that not only did Ctesias never visit India, but also that his sources are untrustworthy. Indeed, it might be possible for Ctesias' narrative to be fictitious and mostly inspired by tales he heard from the merchants he met in Persia.[97] Nonetheless, *Indika* is a fundamental text in discussing the tradition of Eastern accounts since it is an important witness of the changeableness monsters had in the works related to the East. To give an example, Ctesias recognises India as the land of the dogheads, which were previously located in Libya. This shift may be considered prototypical of monstrous wonders since, little by little, the East (more than Africa) would gather them all.[98] On the contrary, the fragments of Megasthenes' work that survived indicate a wider knowledge about the real customs of Indian population. This may be explained by the fact that at the beginning of the fourth century B.C. Megasthenes was sent to the city of Chandragupta with the role of emissary of Seleucus. This experience allowed him to visit most part of the Indian territories and to enter in touch first-hand with the habits of their peoples. Nevertheless, even his account is not entirely devoid of the marvellous elements associated with India.[99] Ctesias and Megasthenes' accounts are among the first written testimonies of the depiction of India – and the East – as a fabulous place at the edge of the world. From a Hellenistic point of view, however, the unnatural characteristics associated with India were not sources of perturbation, but of enjoyment and pleasure. This attitude granted these works durable success and their reusage.

Most of the Greek sources were known by medieval authors through the mediation of Latin works. More precisely, the knowledge contained in the works of Herodotus, Ctesias and Megasthenes is collected in almost its entirety in the thirty-six books of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*. It is possible that he used as sources works by other Greek authors that have been lost later in the years and that he accessed the complete works of

[95] Friedman, p.5.
[96] Campbell, p.49.
[97] Friedman, p.5.
[98] Campbell, p.51.
[99] Friedman, p.6.

Ctesias and Megasthenes. Therefore, the geographical span taken into consideration by Pliny is consistently wider than by precedent authors. However, it must be noted that the confusion between Ethiopia and India that existed in Greek perception since Homer's times survives in Pliny's work and would persist throughout the Middle Ages. This tendency suggests that people of the classical and medieval era had only a vague and imprecise idea of the world outside Western borders, and so the terms "India" and "Ethiopia" should not be interpreted literally, but as referring to something far away and unknown.[100] Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* had the aim of gathering all the knowledge of the time in one book and to describe the wonders of the natural world. Indeed, Nature's ability to amaze is not limited to monsters, but Pliny considers it an idiosyncratic characteristic of Nature itself and finds its expressions not only in the human world, but in the natural and mineral world as well.[101] However, in my dissertation I will only take into consideration the human monsters Pliny described by re-elaborating the ancient sources he had access to. In Pliny's work, the existence of monstrosity at the edges of the world might be interpreted as having an almost scientific explanation since it was believed that in those areas an imbalance between the natural element existed. As a consequence, this natural chaos affects not only the biology of marginal creatures, but also their cultural background.[102] From this point of view, the inhumanity of the monstrous races – also known as Plinian races due to the classification Pliny presents in his *Naturalis Historia* – is inextricably tied to the place they occupy in the world. Their relegation to the margins is justified by natural causes and it emphasises the disparity between the centre and the periphery, the Self and the Other. Eventually, this perception of the margins as the natural degeneration of the centre will endure in medieval times and perdure until modern times.

The characterisation of monstrosity in Plinian races is obtained through different processes. The most significant ones in this passage of my dissertation are the blurring of boundaries between the human and the animal world, the addition or subtraction of some parts to the whole normative body and the exaggeration of size. The most famous example of monsters in which human characteristics are mixed with animal features is the cynocephali. Literally, the name means "dog-head" since they are humans with dog

[100] Friedman, pp.7-8.
[101] Beagon, "Situating Nature's Wonders in Pliny's 'Natural History'", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement*, 100 (2007), p.19.
[102] Beagon, p.22.

heads, and they are often characterised by the absence of language. They are said to bark in order to communicate and to be dressed in animal skin only.[103] I assume that the detail of their clothing is particularly important to stress since it is an additional lowering of their human condition: while Western populations work materials in order to obtain dresses, the cynocephali just use raw materials and have no craft. Another Plinian race are the hippopodes, whose name means "horse-feet" and who are characterised by having horse hooves and no feet.[104] In order to explain some of these mixtures between the animal world and the human world, Pliny states that "some of the Indians have connection with beasts, and from this union a mixture of half man, half beast, is produced"[105]. Moreover, many different populations of men and women with an abnormal quantity of body hair may be found in Pliny's work, and sometimes horns and tails have been added to their description.[106] Again, these populations are not ashamed of their physical appearance, so they are often naked, covered only in their own fur like animals. Deformation is another process through which the monstrous is obtained. For instance, the blemmyae have no neck and head and their face is placed on their chest, the epiphagi have eyes on their shoulders and the monocoli or scipods have just one leg and one big foot they use as an umbrella to protect themselves from the sun.[107] All these examples show how the monstrosity of these races is given by the displacement of their body parts or the subtraction of some parts. They are recognisable as human because all their features belong to the human world, but at the same time these human characteristics are misplaced or incomplete. An additional example may be the following.

> there is a country called Abarimon, situate in a certain great valley of Mount Imaus, the inhabitants of which are a savage race, whose feet are turned backwards, relatively to

[103] Friedman, p.15; citing directly from Pliny: "there is a tribe of men who have the heads of dogs, and clothe themselves with the skins of wild beasts. Instead of speaking, they bark; and, furnished with claws, they live by hunting and catching birds." (https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plin.+Nat.+7.2&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0137)
[104] Friedman, p.16.
[105] Pliny the Elder, https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plin.+Nat.+7.2&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0137#note68.
[106] Friedman, pp.15-16.
[107] Friedman, pp.9-18.

> their legs: they possess wonderful velocity, and wander about indiscriminately with the wild beasts.[108]

In this description, the inhumanity of the race is openly stated. They are a "savage" race whose manners resemble more the wild beasts than the human beings. They are clearly creatures who escape the Latin normative idea of civilisation and who live outside a real social structure with its social norms. For this reason, Pliny considers them equal to the wild beasts they wander with. Lastly, size determines monstrosity too. The most common examples are giants, which crowd almost all the mythologies of the world, but also their opposite: the pygmies. The origins of this race might be traced back to Homer, but Herodotus, Ctesias and Megasthenes refer to them as well. Pygmies are characterised by their short stature – they are only one and a half or two cubits tall, that is to say between sixty-five and ninety centimetres – and their cattle is proportionated to their size. They wear no clothes, but they braid their hair into garments.[109] However, all these monstrous figures represent just the first step in the creation of a large and enduring tradition of monsters in the East. The success that *Naturalis Historia* and other works concerning the East enjoyed over the following years led to a multiplication of the original Plinian races. This process of augmentation proceeds in many different ways. In some cases, the characteristics attributed to a particular race were used to create as many races as the characteristics were, so that every race was determined by a single monstrous attribute. In other cases, the misreading of the names gave place to the creation of a multitude of other races which shared some characteristics with the precedent races, but also gained new ones. Again, the abbreviations often used in manuscripts led to misreading and, consequently, to the modification of some races.[110] In this way, the monstrous races multiplied during the Middle Ages and their classification and interpretation represented a great concern of the time.

In the medieval period, monstrosity and monstrous forms had to find their place in the complex organisation of the world that was seen as the representation of God's will and plan. In order to understand the importance of the monstrous discourse in the medieval Christian perspective, it is essential to analyse the meaning that marvel and

---

[108] Pliny the Elder, https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plin.+Nat.+7.2&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0137.
[109] Friedman, p.18.
[110] Friedman, pp.22-24.

monster held for thinkers of the time. As Caroline Walker Bynum points out, wonder was interpreted not as a mere psychological response to an event, but rather as "a recognition of the singularity and significance of the thing encountered".[111] In other words, only what is radically different from the observer and what cannot be completely understood can provoke wonder. Consequentially, wonder is the feeling that leads men to seek explanations for what is not comprehensible and, eventually, it can be replaced by knowledge or philosophy. At this point, however, it is necessary to analyse two cardinal points of medieval thinking: the ontological distinction between *miracula*, miracles, and *mirabilia*, marvels. While marvels were understood as phenomena impossible to explain by common knowledge, miracles were defined as extraordinary events produced by God's will which escape rational explanation and oppose the ordinary cause-effect principle.[112] More precisely, marvels engender wonder in the observers since they are something rare to them and they are not yet able to explain them. On the contrary, miracles should not elicit wonder since they represent a sign of God's power over Nature, and they mostly have a didactic aim.[113] Miracles cannot be understood with logic and knowledge because they should and must be understood with faith. At this point, monsters represent a problem in the categorisation of earthly beings and of their intrinsic role inside God's plan. A partial solution to the problem is given by Saint Augustine, one of the most important Christian thinkers during the Middle Ages, who interpreted the existence of monstrosity as a divine sign.

> Therefore, just as it was not impossible for God to create whatever natures He chose, so it is not impossible for Him to change those natures which He has created in whatever way He chooses. This is why there has sprung up so great a multitude of those marvels which are called 'monsters', 'signs', 'portents' or 'prodigies'. […] The word 'monster', we are told, clearly comes from 'to demonstrate' [*monstrare*], because monsters are signs by which something is demonstrated. 'Sign' [*ostentum*] comes from 'to show' [*ostendere*]; 'portent' from 'to portend', that is 'to show in advance' [*praeostendere*]; and 'prodigy' from 'to speak of what is far away' [*porro dicere*] that is, to foretell the future.[114]

The etymology Augustine is reporting in the present passage is not of his own invention, but it comes from a long-lasting Latin tradition, which has its origin in Cicero's *De*

[111] Bynum, Caroline Walker, "Wonder", *The American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), p.3
[112] Bynum, pp.3-4.
[113] Bynum, p.17.
[114] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, edited by R. W. Dyson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.1063.

Divinatione. From Cicero's point of view, the cardinal role of the monster was to link a marvellous event in the present to a future possible nefarious upheaval. Consequently, the word *monstrum* becomes on one hand something that shows (*monstrat*) and on the other hand something that warns (*monet*).[115] This tradition converges in the etymology of *monstrum* (monster) provided by Augustine which, even if false, fits the role that monsters had in medieval times perfectly. They were seen as signs of the power of God He sent as the ultimate demonstration of His omnipotence. Campbell claims that Augustine also aims to prove God's power over matter in order to reassure men of the reality of resurrection. If God is able to create such monsters, then he must surely be able to give life back to human beings, who have been created to resemble His own shape.[116] However, I argue that monsters represent the in-between blurred space in the dichotomy between marvel and miracle. On one hand, their existence escapes rational explanation, but on the other hand the explanation of their existence is a demonstration of God's power above earthly matter. They are a living sign of the presence of God and of his involvement in human life. The monsters that Augustine refers to when writing this passage of *The City of God* are the traditional ones, all coming from ancient sources. The confirmation can be found in chapter XVI, when he lists a large number of prodigies.

> Some of these are said to have only one eye, in the middle of their forehead. Others have feet which point backwards, behind their legs. […] Others again are only a cubit high, and these are called Pygmies by the Greeks, after their word for a cubit, *pygme*. […] Again, there is a race whose feet are attached to a single leg which does not bend at the knee, yet they move with marvellous speed. These are called 'Shadow-feet' because in hot weather they lie on their backs on the ground and take shelter in the shade of their feet. There are some men without necks, who have eyes in their shoulders. […] And what am I to say of those dog-headed men whose dogs' heads and actual barking show that they are more beasts than men?[117]

However, he appears sceptical about the existence of all these monsters. Indeed, a little later in the chapter he affirms that: "It is not, of course, necessary to believe in all the kinds of men which are said to exist".[118] Despite this hint of disbelief, Augustine proceeds in his discussion by outlining the idiosyncrasies of human nature in order to create boundaries between what can be defined as human and what not. More than any physical

[115] Baratta, L., *"A Marvellous and Strange Event": Racconti di Nascite Mostruose nell'Inghilterra della Prima Età Moderna*, Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2016, p.32.
[116] Campbell, p.77.
[117] Augustine, pp.707-708.
[118] Augustine, p.708.

appearance, the cardinal feature of humanness is rationality. However, this statement does not prevent him from claiming that it "is […] clear what constitutes the natural norm in the majority of cases and what, in itself, is a marvellous rarity".[119] In the end, the existence and the inherent didactic significance of monsters is not doubted.

When discussing the matter of the East and monstrosity, it is impossible not to mention Alexander the Great. His feats became legendary during classical times and a large mythology about his conquest of India started to circulate all over Europe. His fame as tamer of the East has proved durable during the centuries and he was even included in Christian legends, such as the enterprise of enclosing the peoples of Gog and Magog in the mountains, discussed in the first chapter. Moreover, the extraordinariness of his experience led to the creation of a large literature about Alexander's enterprises and victories. A famous example is *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, an apocryphal letter allegedly written by Alexander himself and sent to his supposed teacher, the philosopher Aristotle, about the marvels he found while defeating Porus and conquering India.[120] Originally written in Latin, the *Letter* gathered great success throughout Europe and, consequently, was translated into many vernaculars. The text I will use as my reference is the Old English translation, which differs from the original Latin by representing Alexander as prouder and more violent than its Latin original.[121] Moreover, the Old English text ends immediately after the prophecy of the imminent death of Alexander in the Eastern land, while the Latin original expands a little more after this part.[122] However, I decided to refer to the Old English translation because it gives a more precise idea about the perception of monsters in the British context and it proves the expansion of the Eastern monsters' tradition in Britain too. Even though the original version of the *Travel* might have been written on the continent, the existence of a Middle English translation proves how influential the text was throughout the Middle Ages. Moreover, a comparison with its Old English antecedents may highlight a change in the description and in the perceptions of Eastern monsters as well. From this point of view, the *Letter* represents an important document in medieval times since the veracity of Alexander's figure

[119] Augustine, p.708.
[120] Friedman, pp. 6-7.
[121] Khalaf, Omar, "The Old English *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*: Monsters and *Hybris* in the Service of Exemplarity", *English Studies*, 94 (2013), pp.659–667.
[122] Orchard, Andy, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscrip*t, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995, pp.135-138.

contributed to increase the reliability of the text. Indeed, in his journey to the core of India, Alexander meets various monstrous figures which evoke the same tradition of the Plinian races.

> Ða gesawon we þær ruge wifmen, 7 wæpned men wæron hie swa ruwe 7 swa gehære swa wildeor. Wæron hie nigon fota uplonge, 7 hie wæron þa men nacod 7 hie næniges hrægles ne gimdon.[123]

The first monstrous race encountered by Alexander is that of the hairy men and women, who are not ashamed to stay *nacod* (naked) like *wildeor* (wild beasts). Moreover, even the size of these creatures is extraordinary and comparable to semi-giants: they are over two metres and a half tall. Alexander claims he wanted to see them more closely, but they got scared and fled away, just like wild animals. In this description, the monstrous prodigies not only resemble animals, but they also act like wild animals. Later in the same chapter, Alexander meets the cynocephali.

> Þa æfter þon gesawon we betweoh þa wudu bearwas 7 þa treo healfhundinga micle mængeo, ða cwoman to þon þæt hie woldon us wundigan. 7 we þa mid strælum hie scotodon, 7 hie sona onweg aflymdon ða hie eft on þone wudu gewiton.[124]

As in the previous passage, the behaviour of the monsters is more similar to animal behaviour than to human. The characteristic blurring of features between animal and human affects both appearance and essence of these Plinian races, emphasising their bestiality more than their humanity. This emphasis might have been placed in order to both legitimate Alexander's violent conquest and embellish the background of Alexander's feats. Indeed, these Cynocephali cannot be considered monsters in Augustine's interpretation of the term since they have no allegorical function and no didactic aim. They are simply marvellous creatures that can be compared with other strange wild animals Alexander encounters over the course of his journey, but they have no further meaning. Their grotesque appearance has no impact on the whole narration and in the actions of the protagonist. They are treated like wonderful decorations whose role is not inquired upon. Interestingly, this is not the only appearance of the Cynocephali in the Nowell Codex, the part of the Cotton Vitellius A.XV manuscripts that contains both

[123] Orchard, p.242; "There we saw shaggy women, and men who were as shaggy and hairy as beasts. They were nine feet tall, and naked, not bothering about any clothing." (translation by Orchard, p.243)
[124] Orchard, p.244; "After that we saw amongst the wooded groves and trees a great multitude of Cynocephali who came because they wished to wound us, and we shot them with arrows, and they soon fled away and went back into the woods." (translation by Orchard, p.245)

Alexander's Letter to Aristotle and *The Wonders of the East*. The first text that appears in the Nowell Codex is *The Passion of Saint Christopher*, an acephalous text presenting the deeds and the martyrdom of a dog-head saint, a Cynocephalus. The characterisation of Saint Christopher, however, is completely different from the one presented in *The Wonders of the East* since, while being a horrid creature and belonging to a population with anthropophagic habits, he still manages to embrace the Christian faith and to become a saint. In other words, his monstrous features, which lead king Dagnus to define him *wyrresta wildeor* ("the worst of wild beasts"), are counterbalanced by his human soul. In this case, Christopher becomes a sign of the infinite possibilities of Christian faith and of the instability of the boundary that divides the human from the monstrous. In fact, king Dagnus imposes a cruel death onto Christopher, paradoxically behaving more like a beast than the Cynocephalus saint.[125] This blurring of boundaries between human and monstrous and the recognition of the monster as essentially a positive presence are fundamental in the interpretation of the *Travels*, in which the characterisation of the monstrous encounters escapes a simplistic explanation and creates contradictions impossible to solve.

Another cardinal Old English text regarding the matter of the East is the already cited *The Wonders of the East*, a sort of miscellany of knowledge about the Eastern world without a coherent narrative. It lists and describes many places, plants and animals that may be found Eastwards and provides descriptions of them. Naturally, the monstrous races represent an important part of the content, being a perfect example of the process of multiplication the Plinian races were subjected to during the Middle Ages. Some of the monsters which can be found in *The Wonders of the East* are hybrids constituted by parts of many different creatures.

> þær beoð kende Homodubii þæt byð twylice. Hi beoþ oð ðene nafelan on menniscum gescape 7 syanððan on eoseles gescape; hi habbað long sceancan swa fugelas 7 liðelice stefne. Gyf hi hwylcne mon on ðam landum ongitað oððe geseoð þonne feorriað hi 7 fleoð.[126]

This race is referred as Homodubii, a name that openly points out the doubtfulness of their belonging to the human world. Indeed, their body is a mixture of human features,

[125] Orchard, pp.12-18.
[126] Orchard, p.194; "There are born there *Homodubii*, that is 'doubtful ones'. They have a human shape to the navel and below that the shape of a donkey, and they have long legs like birds, and a soft voice. If they see or perceive anyone in those lands, they run far off and flee" (translation by Orchard, p.195)

donkey parts and some characteristics that recall the shape of birds. Moreover, coherently to what happens in the *Letter*, their behaviour resembles that of wild animals as they flee when they are spotted. However, this is not the only race referred to as Homodubii in the *Wonders*.

> On sumon lande beoð menn akende ða beoþ on lenge six fotmæla lange. Hi habbað beardas oþ cneow side 7 feax oð helan. Homodubii hi sindon hatene, þæt bioð twylice, 7 be hreawan fisceon hi libbað 7 þa etað.[127]

This other population is more similar to the hairy men portrayed by Pliny, but their fur is limited to knees and heels, leaving space to the creation of other races which might be interpreted as variations on the theme of the hairy populations described in the *Naturalis Historia*. Indeed, in a land called Ciconia there reportedly live multi-coloured people "þara heafda beoð gemona swa leona heafdo"[128], while in a region around the Red Sea there are women "ða habbað beardas swa side oð heora breost"[129]. All these examples might be useful to clarify the medieval tendency described by Friedman for multiplying the number of Plinian races and creating many new monstrous prodigies starting from a single ancient category. However, some of the races described by Pliny remained unchanged in most medieval texts, becoming fixed stereotypes and stable graphical representations of the deviant humanity in the East. For instance, the Blemmies represent a capital specimen of this tendency.

> Đonne is oðer ealand suð fram Brixonte on þam beoð menn akende butan heafdum, þa habbaþ on heora breostum heora eagan 7 muð. Hi syndan eahta fota lange 7 eahta fota brade.[130]

In this case, deformity is obtained through subtraction: the members of this population have their face on the chest since they lack neck and head. Moreover, their height is equal to their width, transforming them in square-like figures that have very little in common with the human body, whose perfection can be demonstrated by inscribing it in a circle, the figure of perfection par excellence. However, subtraction is not the only way in which

[127] Orchard, p.188; "In one land people are born who are six feet tall. They have beards to their knees, and hair to their heels. They are called *Homodubii*, that is 'doubtful ones', and they eat raw fish and live on them." (translation by Orchard, p.189)
[128] Orchard, p.192; "whose heads have manes like lions' heads" (translation by Orchard, p.193)
[129] Orchard, p.198; "who have beards down to their breasts" (translation by Orchard, p.199)
[130] Orchard, p.192; "Then there is another island, south of the Brixontes, on which there are born men without heads who have their eyes and mouth in their chests. They are eight feet tall and eight feet wide." (translation by Orchard, p.193)

deformity is expressed in the *Wonders*, since addition too may constitute an important divergence from the normative body.

> Đær beoð akende men, ða beoð fiftyne fota lange 7 hi habbað hwit lic 7 tu neb on anum heafde, fet 7 cneowu swiðe read, 7 lange nosu 7 sweart feax.[131]

In this case, not only is the size of the body extraordinary (fifteen feet corresponds to more or less four meters and a half), but also the presence of two faces on the same head. Lastly, exaggeration might be used in order to obtain a deformed and grotesque body. A widespread and famous example representing this kind of deformation is a population connotated by their enormous ears.

> Đanan is east ðær beoð men akenned þa beoð awæstme fiftyne fota lange 7 on bræde tyn fotmæla. Hi habbað micle heafda 7 earan swa fann. Oþer eare hi him on niht underbredað, 7 mid oðran hy wreoð him. Beoð þa earan swiðe leohte 7 hi beoð an lichoman swa hwite swa meolc.[132]

As Pliny the Elder described a population who used their one big foot to cover from the sunlight, in this case the members of this monstrous race use their own ears to find repair during the night. I argue that this feature might also hint at the nomadic nature of the population, suggesting a sort of innate inferiority that was attributed to people who did not live in urban centres. As already discussed, Greek culture created a strong correlation between the concepts of city and civilisation. This tendency survives during the Middle Ages, since nature outside the city represented a danger for the individual adventuring in it. From this point of view, I believe that nomadic life might have had a negative connotation since it implied continuous migration, also a typical characteristic of many animals. Again, the monstrous races – sleeping out in the open rather than in a house – resemble animals more than human beings.

The appearance of monstrous races in the Eastern territories is not limited to fictional text, but it also involves the real accounts written by friars and merchants who travelled Eastwards. As it happened for the Earthly Paradise and other myths, these travellers left Europe believing in their existence. In this way, they searched for proofs in

[131] Orchard, p.190; "There are people born there, who are fifteen feet tall and have white bodies and two faces on a single head, feet and knees very red, and long noses and black hair." (translation by Orchard, p.191)

[132] Orchard, p.196; "Going east from there is a place where people are born who are in size fifteen feet tall and ten broad. They have large heads and ears like fans. They spread one ear beneath them at night, and they wrap themselves with the other. Their ears are very light and their bodies are as white as milk." (translation by Orchard, p.197)

the Eastern territories, finding few or none first-hand. The first instance of this tendency might be recognised in John of Pian di Carpine's account, *Historia Mongalorum*, which contains many descriptions of monstrous races, but none of them comes from direct experience. The friar underlines that he is just reporting what others had told him, reassuring the reader that it is the truth. However, this distancing leaves a margin of doubt so that the reader may decide to believe the story or not.

> Going further the Tartars came to a certain land beyond the ocean where they found monsters, *as was forcefully told to us*, that had in every way a human shape, but their feet ended in cattle feet and they have a human head but they have a face like a dog. They speak two words like a human being and the third they bark like a dog and so, over time they intersperse barks and yet come back to their nature and so what they say can be understood.[133]

The passage is taken from a chapter in which the friar is reporting information about the wars conducted by the Mongol empire to enlarge their dominion. While fighting against the other Asian populations, they encountered some monstrous races too. This first example seems to recall Plinian cynocephali since they are a mixture of human bodies and dog faces. Moreover, their language too is a mixture of human speech and dog barking, so they appear as fully hybridised creatures. However, this mixture is not fixed since they can stop their barking on cue and communicate completely through human language. In this way, the border between animal and human, barbary and civilisation, is continuously subjected to mutations. If the ability to speak – the *lógos* for the Greeks – is the expression of wit and reason, which are the elements of human superiority, in this passage this ability is not permanent. In other words, there exists an ambiguous relationship between their ability to speak and their ability to bark, between their humanness and their animal side.[134] Furthermore, unlike what we read in other sources, the legs of these cynocephali resemble cattle feet, recalling vaguely the half human and half donkey monsters described in the *Wonders of the East*.

> It is near a great wasteland where *it is said that* forest people live who are mute and do not have knees, so that if they fall they cannot get up without the help of others.[135]

Language offers a hint at monstrosity also in the case of the forest people who are extremely able in working the wool of camels, but who cannot communicate since they

[133] Giovanni da Pian di Carpine, p.69 (my emphasis).
[134] Vignolo, p.141.
[135] Giovanni da Pian di Carpine, p.57 (my emphasis).

seem not to be able to. However, the real confirmation of their monstrous nature is the absence of knees, a deformation which represents a deviation from the standard human body. As already discussed, it is a deformation obtained through subtraction of some characteristics to a normative body. An even clearer example of this process can be found in the following passage.

> But as the Tartars crossed a wasteland they discovered certain monsters (*as was told to us for certain*), who had only one arm and hand in the middle of the chest and one foot and so that two of them shot as one person with a single bow, and they ran so fast that horses could not catch them. They ran jumping on this one foot and when they tired of going that way they would go on hand and foot revolving as in a circle. Isidore called these people ciclopedes.[136]

Deformation is obtained by subtraction of one arm and one leg, and by the displacement of the only arm at the centre of the chest. This implies they move by jumping or, more often, by going on all "fours". They use their two limbs to walk and run, taking a non-erect position and crawling as most animals do. Again, deformation is connected to an animal-like behaviour that lowers these monsters' status from the status of human beings. Moreover, the story John of Pian di Carpine reports as certain, since it was confirmed by his Mongol direct sources, finds an ulterior confirmation in an indirect source, the texts of Isidore of Seville. Like Augustine, Isidore was a cardinal reference for medieval Christian culture and believed in the centrality of monsters as signs given by God. While openly citing Isidore, John of Pian di Carpine is giving his reader a commonly shared interpretative key to understand the presence of monsters in the faraway lands he visited.

The attitude William of Rubruck displays towards the monstrous races is more sceptical than Carpine's. As already discussed in chapter one, he is a fine observer, so that he manages to correct Isidore's *auctoritas* on the shape and the structure of the Caspian Sea. Again, in chapter XXIX he indirectly casts doubt on the existence of the monsters traditionally associated with the Eastern territories.

> Multum quesiui de monstris siue de monstruosis hominibus de quibus narrat Ysodorus et Solinus; ipsi dicebant michi quod numquam uiderant talia, de quo multum miramur si uerum sit.[137]

[136] Giovanni da Pian di Carpine, p.69 (my emphasis).
[137] William of Rubruck, p.198; "I often asked about the monsters or the human monsters Isidore and Solinus narrate about; they told me that they never saw such things, whose real existence I searched for a long time." (my translation).

In this passage, Rubruck alludes to the possibility that the whole mythology about the Eastern monsters is false since neither he nor the natives he encountered ever met the monstrous races. The open reference to his sources – namely Isidore and Solinus – is used in the opposite way from Pian di Carpine's: while Rubruck names them in order to challenge their assertions, Pian di Carpine cites Isidore as an *auctoritas* whose beliefs can give more credibility to the story he is reporting. The assertion, however, does not completely exclude the unnatural from Rubruck's account since in a number of passages he refers to demons that live in Eastern territories and enter in contact with Eastern oracles. For instance, he describes a rite where people who want to know something about their future ask the oracle to enter in contact with a demon. In exchange, they offer the demon cooked meat and during the night it comes to deliver the answer to the people who asked. To take part in the rite, it is necessary to embrace their religion since the demon can perceive the real faith of people who ask for this rite. In order to prove this point, Rubruck reports the story of a Hungarian who hid in a house where the rite was taking place and the demon "existens super domum clamabat quod non posset ingredi, quia christianus quidam erat cum eis"[138]. However, this demon is very different from the monstrous races described by the previous sources I took into consideration. It may be seen as an almost religious force that opposes Christianity, which the Hungarian who escapes the house of the rite may stand to symbolise. Its role is completely different from the role the monstrous races were given in medieval times. Unable to encounter real monsters whose appearance openly diverges from the Western European standards, William of Rubruck concentrates his attention on religious divergences and on the impossibility of communication between populations who have almost nothing in common. The monstrous possibility that Carpine leaves as almost a certainty is completely disintegrated by Rubruck's discourse in favour of a cultural-based kind of divergence. This is a tendency that would prevail also in later accounts of the Eastern territories.

In his descriptions of Eastern wonders, Marco Polo reports many prodigies that seemed unbelievable for a Wester gaze. However, for the most part they are wild animals, unknown in Europe, like the crocodile, or unusual customs or cities full of richness. The

[138] William of Rubruck, p.272; "standing above the house claimed that he could not enter, because there was a Christian among them." (my translation).

only reference to monstrous-like creatures might be found in his description of islands that are not part of the Mongol empire, as Nenispola and Angaman. In the first case, he affirms that there live men "che vivono come bestie, e istanno ignudi sanza niuna cosa addosso"[139]. In this case, the comparison with the animals is explicit, aiming to lower their status as human beings. In the second case, the island of Angaman is referred to as being inhabited by a population of idolaters: the cynocephali.

> E sono come bestie salvatiche; tutti quegli di questa isola hanno capo di cane, e denti e naso a somiglianza di gran mastino.[140]

In this passage the comparison with the animal world is again explicit and the author expresses his personal disgust for this population. Later in the chapter they are referred to as eating all the people they can take. This detail is stressed to increase their inhumanity, especially if compared with Mongols or other populations Polo describes with fervent admiration. Despite these few examples, however, Polo's account does not present an abundance of monstrous beings populating the extreme Eastern borders, demonstrating how reports of real travellers tended to discredit the traditional view of the world.

In a similar fashion to William of Rubruck and Marco Polo, Odoric from Pordenone shows an acute and sceptical gaze, which enables him to refute many well-established beliefs, as in the case of Prester John analysed in chapter one. His search for an almost entirely empirical truth leads him to write only about what he had seen and experimented first-hand. Nevertheless, a hint of common tradition can be found when he reaches an island he calls Nichonoram and he affirms that: "Illic viri et mulieres facies habent caninas"[141]. This is yet another appearance of the cynocephali in both fictitious and real accounts of the East. Their existence was continuously confirmed by the travellers. Odoric does not limit himself to affirming the existence of the cynocephali, he also describes their customs. He claims that they worship oxen and they put on their foreheads a silver or golden ox in order to show foreign peoples their veneration. Apart from these adornments and a piece of cloth covering their genitals, the cynocephali are

[139] Polo, "p.458; "who live like beasts, and they are always naked, without wearing anything." (my translation)
[140] Polo, p.458; "And they are like the wild beasts; every man on this island has dog head and their teeth and nose resemble the ones of a hound." (my translation)
[141] Odoric from Pordenone, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli/40-relatio/capitoli/107-capo-xxxviii-nicuvera?start=2; "There, men and women have dog faces." (my translation).

usually naked. They are also very fierce in war and if their prisoners cannot pay for their freedom, they eat them. The image given by Odoric is more vivid than any other and the humanness of the cynocephali is at stake not just for their appearance, but for their customs too. They concentrate in one single race hybridisation, idolatry, nakedness and cannibalism. Even if no other monstrous races appear in Odoric's account, the cynocephali subsume many traditional characteristics in themselves. Another interesting passage to analyse is the one in which Odoric arrives to a city called Ahamsane.

> Acceptoque uno cymbalo, coepit pulsare. Ad cuius sonitum mox animalia multa et diversa de illo monticulo descenderunt, sicut essent simiae, cathi maymones et plura alia, et quaedam quae faciem hominis videbantur habere.[142]

When Odoric asks how it is possible that these animals have human faces, the man answers him that they are the reincarnations of noble souls. While the souls of the common people reincarnate in despicable animals, the noble souls find room in noble animals, so that they can be fed by living people. Odoric has seen the human faces in the animals, nonetheless he is sceptical about the explanation of the phenomenon he is given. Even though he cannot find a different explanation to give his readers, he does not believe that those animals are a product of reincarnation, and he states so confidently. As a consequence, he leaves open the possibility of the existence of something marvellous and inexplicable with reason, reactivating wonder in an Augustinian way. These creatures with animal faces are a wonderful prodigy in the sense that they represent a sign that cannot be completely explained, but that is part of God's creation. It is not up to human beings to find a reasonable explanation, since their role is limited to proving their existence.

As all these examples have tried to prove, the more journeys were taken into the Eastern territories, the more the scepticism about the monstrous races grew. Real travellers' accounts depicted an Eastern world whose differences from the West were more in terms of customs and wealth than in terms of corporeal appearance. The gradual disappearance of monsters implicated a blurring of boundaries and a nearing of two worlds considered as diametrically opposed, Self and Other. The monsters at the edge of

[142] Odoric, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli/40-relatio/capitoli/117-capo-xlviii-cansave?start=2; "Taking a cymbal, he started to play. Hearing the sound, suddenly many and different animals came down from the mountain, there were some monkeys, some wild cats and many more, and some of them seemed to have human faces." (my translation).

the world were repetitive and this very repetitiveness was comforting to a Western perspective. Monsters were associated with degeneration, so their displacement as far away possible from the centre permitted a clear distinction between good and evil, human and inhuman.[143] However, during the late Middle Ages many fictitious works, responding to a conservative impulse of order, tried to re-establish monstrosity in the East in order to re-adapt it to ancient conventions based both on classical authority and the equilibrium of creation.[144] The most important work concerned with the return of the monsters is the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville. The text contains the most significant and influential passages about the monstrous races of all medieval travel literature and, as Philipps claims, it "was through Mandeville and the countless copies of his book snapped up by medieval readers that representations of monsters reached something approaching a mass market"[145]. Mandeville's work responded to a desire for the conservation of a traditional view that was incredibly successful and overshadowed all other accounts.

2.2 Monstrosity: the Radical Otherness

Monsters in Mandeville's work hold a central position since their intrinsic diversity responds not to a desire for realism in the depiction of the world, but to the need for exemplarity. The aim of the *Travels* is to give the world back to God and to represent a moral order comparable to the one of medieval *mappaemundi*.[146] From this point of view, the monsters that populate the edges of the map have the role to represent a radical Otherness against which the image of the perfect Christian could be shaped. In this process, the body occupies a central position. In fact, if God created man "ad imaginem suam: ad imaginem Dei creavit illum, masculum et feminam creavit eos"[147], every divergence from the standard represents an abomination of God's own image. From this point of view, the monstrous races could be considered an exemplum of Otherness that contrasts the perfection of the human being and a reassuring proof of the intrinsic rightness of European Christians. Indeed, the beauty of the Western body, if compared with Eastern monsters, may be read as a physical sign of their moral superiority. Their

[143] Philipps, pp.189-190.
[144] Philipps, p.189.
[145] Philipps, p.195.
[146] Philipps, pp.194-196.
[147] Genesis 1:27; "in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." (translation from King James Bible).

closeness to God is proved by a body which is more similar to the original body, the body of Adam, the first man created as a duplicate of God's shape and beauty. The images Mandeville uses to embody monstrosity are, comprehensibly, the ones belonging to the tradition briefly summed up in the previous subchapter. Therefore, two main categories of monsters can be recognised: the half animal and the deformed.

Hybridisation between the animal and the human world in a single body may be read as the embodiment of the crossing of boundaries that divide the civilised from the wild. During the Middle Ages, the destructiveness of wilderness was a common topic of folklore and romance. Indeed, the distinction between the civil world – the place of human beings – and the natural world – the place of beasts – was perceived as a blurred and unfixed limit. The crossing of this limit implied a hybridisation between the civilised and the bestial, the human and the animal. In other words, medieval communities shaped their own identity in opposition to the brutality of wilderness, where the animal reigned unbounded.[148] Moreover, in the extremely hierarchical medieval system, every realm occupied a precise place in the organic plan of God and responded to precise laws that were perceived as naturally limited to the realm itself. Hybrid creatures escape this logic because they incarnate the transgression of a fixed boundary and, as a consequence, they imply the transgression of the laws linked to both realms that converge in them. In other words, the monstrosity of the animal-human beings located in the East is obtained by the crossing of the boundary that should divide the animal from the human world. This transgression is closely linked to the crossing of the ideal boundary dividing the city from the wilderness, the civilised from the barbaric. This transgression is illicit and, consequently, demonic.[149] In the following examples, the instability of the boundaries that separate the human from the animal is the intrinsic cause of monstrosity. The monster is the being that evades a fixed categorisation and that stands in-between two incompatible reigns.[150] So, not only do these creatures inhabit a geographical space which is an extreme border of the medieval world, they are themselves incarnations of borders between worlds which were conceived as opposite and hierarchically separated. They are an abomination of God's harmonious plan and a threat to the natural order.

[148] Smith, William B., "Crossing the Boundaries of the Civic, the Natural, and the Supernatural in Medieval and Renaissance Europe" in Bump, N. et al. eds., *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013, pp.134-136.
[149] Smith, pp.145-146.
[150] Smith, p.150.

The first example I want to report about hybrid races is the description of the Cynocephali because it is strongly influenced by Odoric's account. They are referred to as inhabiting an island called Natumeran, which seems to correspond to the Nicobar Islands, in the Indian Ocean.

> Men and wymmen of þat ile hase heuedes lyke hundes and þai er called Cynocephales. Þis folk þof alle þai be of swilke schappe ȝit þai er fulle resonable and sutille of witte. And þai wirschepe ane ox for þaire god, and ilk ane of þam beres ane ox made of gold or of siluer in his front in taken þat þai lufe þaire godd wele. And þai gang alle naked bot a lytille clathe before þaire priuee membres. Þai er large of stature and gude werrayours, and þai bere a grete target with whilk þai couer alle þaire body and a lang spere in þaire hand, and on þis maner arayd þai ga baldely agayne þaire enmys. And if þai take any man in bataile þai ete him.[151] (p.106)

Like Odoric, Mandeville recognises the Cynocephali as ox worshippers, and he reports the same habit of wearing a silver or a golden ox as a proof of this worship. Moreover, he describes them as extremely good warriors with sophisticated weapons. However, if they imprison someone during battles, they eat them. While Odoric limited their cannibalistic practices to prisoners who could not afford to pay for their freedom, Mandeville exacerbates the habit by including all prisoners in the cannibalistic ritual. Again, unlike Odoric, Mandeville recognises the Cynocephali's ability to reason stating that they are "fulle resonable and sutille of witte", qualities that are inherent to the human condition. Mandeville recognises this aspect of the Cynocephali as a pure contradiction since their physical shape is in complete contrast with the possession of reason ("þof all þai be of swilk schappe"). In this way, the dichotomy between the Cynocephali's animal part and human part is enlarged if compared to Odoric's perspective. They are human not only in half of their appearance, but also in their ability to reason. However, this human half is counterbalanced by both a half animal appearance and an animalistic absence of piety. Furthermore, they are referred to as being socially organised in a monarchy, with a rightful king ruling over all of them. As already discussed, social organisation in the Greeks' perspective was an important factor to establish alterity and to evaluate the Other's degree of civilisation. The necessity of a fixed social organisation is something

[151] "Men and women of that isle have heads like dogs, and they are called Cynocephales. These people, despite their shape, are fully reasonable and intelligent. They worship an ox as their god. Each one of them carries an ox made of gold or silver on his brow, as a token that they love their god well. They go quite naked except for a little cloth round their privy parts. They are big in stature and good warriors; they carry a large shield, which covers all their body, and a long spear in their hand, and dressed in this way they go boldly against their enemies. If they capture any man in battle, they eat him." (translation by Moseley, p.134).

that endures in the European Middle Ages since the social order is the earthly image of the divine order. The almost utopic reign of the cynocephali contrasts with their abominable appearance and, to some extent, it seems to recall the perfection of Prester John's domain, reinforcing the contradiction they embody in the text. Their unity also contrasts Christendom's internal fight and fragmentation that were weakening Europe against the Mongol threat. Mandeville's concern for European weakness against the new conquerors is continuously exposed in the text, so it seems possible to me that, in underlining the cynocephali's unity and expanding Odoric's description of their social organisation, Mandeville is trying to force Europe to face the real source of its weakness against the infidels. When discussing with the Sultan, Mandeville is told that:

> certaynely for ȝour synne ȝe hafe lost alle þis land, þe whilk we hafe and haldez, for bycause of ȝour ille liffing and ȝour synne and noȝt of oure strenth Godd has giffen it intille oure handes. […] Bot als lang as ȝe liffe as ȝe do in wikkednes and in synne we hafe na drede of ȝow, for ȝour Godd wille noȝt helpe ȝow.[152] (p.76)

Significantly placed at the doors of the Eastern world, the dialogue with the Sultan may be considered an interpretational key for most of the later journey eastwards. In this way, the comparison with the population Mandeville would meet in his journey gains a double meaning: on one hand their appearance is in contrast with the perfection of God's creation, on the other hand they sometimes embody characteristics the Christians seem to have lost and forgotten. As in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, where all lost wits are gathered on the moon, the lost unity in the *Travels* may be found at the edges of the Christian world, all gathered among infidel populations. Just like Astolfo, Mandeville is the knight who has the duty of taking a journey at the edges of the known world in order to regain what had been lost.

Another example of animal-like population is reported to inhabit Tracota island. In this case, however, Mandeville does not directly assign them animalistic physical features.

> þe folk er as bestez wiþouten resoun. And þai dwelle in cafes for þai hafe na witte to make þam housez, and when þai see any straunge men passe thurgh þe cuntree þai rynne to

[152] "Certainly it is because of your sinfulness that you have lost all this land which we hold and keep. Because of your evil living and your sin and not because of our strength God has given it into our hands. […] But as long as you live as you do in wickedness and sin, we have no fear of you; for your God will not help you." (translation by Moseley, p.108).

> þaire cafes and hydes þam. Þai ete nedders and þai speke noȝt bot hisszes ane tille anoþer as nedders duse.[153] (pp.105-106)

This population is placed at the same level of the "bestez" because of their lack of reason. Opposite to the cynocephali, they are not openly described as half animals, but their lack of intelligence degrades them to an animal-like state. Indeed, not only are they not able to speak, but they are also unable to build houses. As already discussed, the ability to speak is considered inherently human since the times of the Greeks. Moreover, the Christian religion is based on language since Christ himself is "Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis"[154]. The word assumes a cardinal importance in Christianism since without language there is no evangelisation. This population's inability to speak implies an inability to receive God's word and to spread it, which is the mission of every good Christian during the Middle Ages. Their impossibility to receive the Revelation is an inherent proof of their inferiority. Indeed, their serpent-like hissing is a degeneration of human communication, which relegates them to a place closer to animals than to human beings. Moreover, their living in caves instead of houses is another sign of their inferior state. The city and the house had a paramount importance during medieval times because, as already pointed out, they represented the boundaries between civilisation and wilderness. By living in caves, this population was directly associated to wilderness and, consequently, opposed to civilisation. They live not just at the edges of the known world, but also at the edges of the civilised world. Lastly, they do not assign any value to gold or silver, they only care for a stone called traconite. However, the reason for their love is not logical, but simply moved by pleasure: "Þis ilke stane lufe þai wonder mykille þof alle þai knawe noȝt þe vertu þeroff, bot þai coueit it for þe fairness þeroff." (p106)[155]. More precisely, their attachment to this stone has no pragmatic aim, they like it exclusively for its surface beauty.

This population is not the only one characterised by the absence of language. Later in the journey, near the domain of Prester John, Mandeville has another monstrous encounter.

---

[153] "the people are like animals lacking reason. They live in caves, for they do not have the intelligence to build houses; and when they see a stranger passing through the country, they run and hide in caves. They eat snakes, and do not speak, but hiss to one another like adders." (translation by Moseley, p.134).
[154] John, 1:14; "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (translation by King James Bible).
[155] "They love this stone very much indeed, even though they do not know its properties; they desire it simply for its beauty." (translation by Moseley, p.134).

> And in þe forsaid wildernes er many wylde men wiþ hornes apon þaire heueds, and þai dwelle in wodes as bestez and spekez noȝt, bot gruntils as swyne duse.[156] (p.147)

Again, they lack a real social organisation since they live in the woods, like beasts. They are not able to speak and, this time, they are referred to as communicating just like pigs. In this case as in the previous one, the animal connotations exceed the human, and the ultimate effect of this process is the almost complete dehumanisation of these "wylde men".

Instances of deformed populations are present since the beginning of Mandeville's journey to the Far East. Many of the monstrous races he describes are taken directly from Pliny, while others are re-elaborations of the same races. Most of these races are listed rather than described in detail and many are gathered together in the same passage. Again, the effect is more or less the same of analysing a *mappamundi* with monsters painted all over the upper part, in the Eastern side. One of the few races to be analysed in detail is the Pygmies. Their description is coherently placed in the tradition of the race, but in my opinion, there are some interesting details to focus on.

> þe pigmens, whilk er men of litille stature for þai er bot iii. span lang bot þai er riȝt faire and wele proporciound of þaire mykille. Þai er weddid when þai er a half ȝere alde and getez childer. And þai liffe comounly vii. ȝere or viii, […] Þise smale men wirkez wonder wele silk and bombe and swilke oþer sutille werkes, ȝa mare sutilly þan oþer men. […] Þai trauaile noȝt aboute telyng of land ne oþer grete laboures bot þai hafe amanges þam men of oure stature þe whilk telez þe land and dightez vynes and duse alle oþer grete laboures þat er nedefulle to þam.[157] (p.113)

First of all, their physical deviation from the standard is not even a real deformation since it just involves their height. Apart from that, they are openly referred as "proporciound" and "faire". Moreover, their ability in the work of silk and cotton is even superior to that of any other population. They are not dedicated to hard work, so they have normal size men who work for them in all the fields in which their height poses an obstacle. At this point, Mandeville states that "þise smale men hase als grete scorne at þe grete men and

[156] "In this wilderness are many wild men with horns on their heads; they dwell in woods and speak not, only grunting like pigs." (translation by Moseley, p.169).

[157] "the Pigmens, who are men of small stature, for they are only three spans tall [two feet]. But they are very handsome and well proportioned to their size. They marry when they are a year and a half old, and beget children; they usually live seven or eight years. […] These small men do marvellous work in silk and cotton, and other such delicate work – much more delicately than other men. […] They do not work in tilling the land, or other heavy labour; they have among them men of our size who till the land and dress the vines and do all the other heavy work that is necessary." (translation by Moseley, p.140).

wonders als mykille of þam as we wald do of geauntz amanges vs" (p.113).[158] This sudden change of perspective implies a relativisation of the narrator's point of view. In fact, the Pygmies' contempt for standard size men is exactly the same contempt the giants may provoke in the reader. This subversion of the point of view is extremely important in the text because it allows the reader to embrace the perspective of the Other, leaving the Self aside. The opposition that the dichotomy Self-Other implies is here annihilated in order to create an in-between place of communication – or just comprehension – between the two extremes. As Campbell points out, Mandeville's tendency for "amplification of his inherited iconographic images" both emphasise the marvels and naturalise them.[159] However, Mandeville's re-elaboration of tradition is not limited to the length of his examination, but it extends to the point of incorporating the pygmies' own point of view. From this perspective and due to this kind of narration, the pygmies result more human than every other race, even the rational cynocephali. Moreover, not only do they live in a city that resembles the Western ones, but in this city Pygmies and standard men live together in harmony. They are all part of the Great Khan's dominion, and the Khan is reported to understand "þat þir pigmenz if alle þai be lytille, þai er riȝt resonable after þaire elde and wonder sutille of witte and can discerne betwix gude and euille" (p.113).[160] This statement is of paramount importance for it focuses not only on the fact that the Pygmies possess reason, but also on their ability to distinguish between good and evil. In a complete opposite tendency to the non-speaking races, the Pygmies are suggested to be the perfect and logic recipient of evangelisation because of their innate inclination for the recognition of good. If Christ is the extreme good, then the Pygmies should accept his word and follow his path.

The extreme opposite of the Pygmies may be traced back to giant populations living on some islands near a valley Mandeville referred to as Vale Perilous.

> Beȝond þat valay es a grete ile whare þe folk þat wonnez þerin er als mykille of stature as þai ware geauntes of xxviii. or of xxx. fote lang. Clathez hafe þai nane to were bot skynnez of bestez wharewiþ þai couer þaire bodys. Breed ete þai nane, bot þai ete raw flesh and drinkez mylke for þare es grete plentee of bestez. Housez hafe þai nane to dwelle in. And þai will gladlyer ete mannez flesch þan any oþer. Þis ile dare na pilgrim come in ne nere it þaire thankes, for if þai see a schippe in þe see with men þerin, þai wille wade

[158] "these small men have great scorn for big men, and find them as much an oddity as we find giants" (translation by Moseley, p.140).
[159] Campbell, p.158.
[160] "that the pygmies, even if they are small, are perfectly sensible according to their age, and are very cleaver, and can judge between good and evil." (translation by Moseley, p.140).

> into þe see for to take þe men to þaire mete. And men talde vs þat þare es anoþer ile beȝond þat whare geauntz er mykille mare þan þir, for sum of þam er fyfty fote lang, sum sexty.[161] (pp.152-153).

The contrast with the Pygmies is not limited to the size. This population does not work to produce clothes, they simply use animal skin to cover their body, and they do not live in houses. Moreover, they eat raw flesh. Cooking food, especially meat, became a central concern in Roman times and this preoccupation endured throughout the Middle Ages, mainly for hygienic reasons. Cooking allowed a better preservation of meat and reduced the possibility of intoxication. In fact, the process of boiling meat before cooking had the aim to sterilise it.[162] But apart from this practical concern, cooking was considered a synonym of civilisation since it implied a coherent opposition to wildness. The wild man is characterised by his distance from the city centre and from the tools and the tastes of civilised man. Indeed, the very act of cooking meat may be interpreted as a token of civilisation.[163] Moreover, in the highly hierarchical medieval society, meals represented an occasion for social display. The status and the good manners of the commensals determined their place at the table and the food they could eat. Meat, for example, was reserved particularly to male and high-status commensals. However, often meals were mere pretexts for socialisation, so that the dining social norms became more important than the dining itself. The social behaviour of the commensals was strictly regulated by the first instance of *galateo* and their degree of civilisation was measured by their adherence to the etiquette.[164] The giants Mandeville is describing in this passage do not present any sign of organised and civilised society and, as a consequence, they resemble wild beasts much more than human beings. The barbarian state of these giants – and many other monstrous races – is further proved by the absence of bread in their diet. Indeed, in Western tradition, bread is a synonym of civilisation and an uncontested sign of humanness. As a consequence, the absence of bread in a diet hints at a lack of humanity

[161] "Beyond that valley is a great isle where the folk are as big in stature as giants of twenty-eight or thirty feet tall. They have no clothes to wear except the skins of beasts, which they cover their bodies with. They eat no bread; but they eat raw flesh and eat milk, for there is an abundance of animals. They have no houses to live in, and they will more readily eat human flesh than any other. Thanks to them no pilgrim dare enter this isle; for if they see a ship in the sea with men aboard, they will wade into the sea to take the men. We were told that there is another isle beyond that where there are giants much bigger than these, for some are fifty or sixty feet tall." (translation by Moseley, p.174).
[162] Massimo Montanari, *Alimentazione e cultura nel Medioevo*, Roma: Laterza, 1988, pp.45-46.
[163] Mameli, Beatrice, "Wylde and Wode. Wild Madness in Middle English Literature", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Padua, 2013, pp.47-48.
[164] Adamson, Melitta Weiss, *Food in Medieval Times*, London: Greenwood Press, 2004, pp.168-170.

in the population that observes that diet.[165] Lastly, these giants are particularly fond of human flesh. For this very reason, missionaries do not dare to approach the islands where they live since evangelisation is made impossible by this habit. This impossibility to spread God's word due to their cannibalistic custom is in complete opposition with the Pygmies' recognition of good. While in the first case missionaries have to renounce their mission to save their own life, in the second case the necessity of a missionary expedition is hinted at and corroborated by the innate inclination of the Pygmies for what is good. Mandeville expresses his belief in the possibility of a mass conversion of Eastern peoples at the end of the *Travels*, where he claims that:

> And ȝe schalle vnderstand þat in alle þir landes, rewmes, and naciouns, outaken þase þat er inhabited wiþ vnresonable men, es na folk þat ne þai hald sum articlez of oure beleue.[166] (p.169)

In this passage, he clearly distinguishes between populations capable of reason and populations not endowed with reason. This distinction is useful to him in order to identify a recipient for future missions of evangelisation. Mandeville finds traces of Christian faith in every population gifted with human reason, even if they have different beliefs and do not worship God. This common substrate, however, represents the basis of distinction between human and non-human, between Pygmies and giants.

Besides the lengthy descriptions of pygmies and giants, which appear as two faces of the same medal, the passages about other deformed races are less extensive. In the account, the Sciapods are the first monstrous race to appear, and they are located in Ethiopia, a vast region placed at the border of Chaldea, far away from the islands where all the other races are located.

> For þare er sum þat hase bot a fote, and þai wille rynne so fast apon þat a fote þat it es wonder to see. And þat ilke fote es so mykille þat it wille couer and oumbre alle his body for þe sone. (p.87)

As their name suggests, the deformity in their body consists in the absence of a leg and a foot and the presence of just one enormous foot they use both to move and to cover themselves from the sun. However, this is not the only instance of one-footed populations. Mandeville reports also the existence of:

[165] Philipps, pp.79-80.
[166] "Know that in all those lands, realms and nations, except for those inhabited by men lacking reason, there is no people which does not hold some of the articles of our faith." (translation by Moseley, p.188).

> Ȝit es anoþer ile whare þe folke has bot a fote, and þat fote es so brode þat it wille couer alle þe body and owmbre it fra þe sone. Apon þis fote will þai rynne so fast þat it es wonder to see. (p.110)

Comparing the descriptions, the many common traits seem to be ascribed to the very same population. The members of both races are characterised by "bot a fote" (an only foot), which does not prevent them from running since watching them run is a "wonder to see". In both cases, however, the foot is not only used for walking, but also as a cover for the sun.

Other examples of physical deformation regarding the legs and, consequently, affecting movements, may be found in chapter XV.

> Anoþer ile þer es whare þe folk gase on þaire kneesse wonderfully and it semez as þai schuld falle at ilke a passe. And þai hafe on ayther fote viii. taasse.[167] (p.109)

Unlike to the Scipods, in this case the wonderous sight of their movement is given by their instability. The passage suggests that the deformed feet of this monstrous race impede them from walking properly, so they must resort to crawling on their knees.

Apart from deformities linked to legs and walking, many monstrous races present head and facial deformations.

> In anoþer ile er foule men of figure wiþouten heuedes and þai hafe eghen in ayther schulder ane, and þaire mouthes er round schapen lyke a hors scho ymiddes þaire brestez. In anoþer ile er men wiþouten heuedes, and þaire eghen and þaire mouthes er behind in þaire schulders.[168] (p.109)

In this case, the monstrous race of the headless humans has been divided into two different races with slightly different characteristics, coherently with the medieval tendency to multiplicate the Plinian races.

> In anoþer ile es a maner of folk þat hase a platte face wiþouten nese or eghen, bot þai hafe twa smale holes in steed of eghen and þai hafe a platte mouth lipplesse.[169] (p.109)

In this case, the facial features are reduced to a minimum by the absence of both nose and mouth.

---

[167] "There is another isle where the folk move on their knees marvellously, and it seems as if at each step they would fall; on each foot they have eight toes." (translation by Moseley, p.137).
[168] "In another part, there are ugly folk without heads, who have eyes in each shoulder; their mouths are round, like a horseshoe, in the middle of the chest. In yet another part there are headless men whose eyes and mouths are on their backs." (translation by Moseley, p.137).
[169] "And there are in another place folk with flat faces, without noses or eyes; but they have two small holes instead of eyes, and a flat lipless mouth." (translation by Moseley, p.137).

> In anoþer ile er foule men þat hase þe ouerlippe so grete þat when þai slepe in þe sone þai couer all þe visage with þat lippe.[170] (p.109)

In this example, the mouth is used as a cover during the night, similarly to the race in the *Wonders* that used the ears as a sort of pallet. A reference to enormous ears is mentioned in another monstrous race, described as having ears "so syde þat þai hing doune to þe kneesse" (p.109).[171] However, Mandeville does not provide a description of their usage as the narrator of the *Wonder* does.

> In anoþer ile er folk of lytille stature as þai ware dwerghes and þai er sumwhat mare þan pigmez. Þai hafe na mouth bot þai hafe in steed of þaire mouth a lytille hole, and þerfore when þai schalle ete þam behoues souke it wiþ a rede or a pype. Tunges hafe þai nane and þerfore þai speke noȝt but hizssez and makez signes as mounkes duse ilke ane till oþer, and ilk ane of þam wate wele what oþer menez.[172] (p.109)

This last instance presents some more details to define the monstrous race. Arguably, the most interesting detail is their absence of a tongue which forces them to hiss and gesticulate in order to communicate. It is the only race in this long list for which some information on its way of communicating is provided and it is the first time a human comparison is applied. Indeed, they are compared to monks, who had to communicate through signs because they had to maintain silence in the monastery. This comparison may imply that if the members of this monstrous race had had the ability to speak, they would have spoken a human language. Also, the reference to hissing does not peremptorily imply an animal connotation since when the author intends to refer to the feral status of other races, he openly expresses it. I have already analysed an animal-like race which communicates by hissing and in that case the animal comparison is made explicit ("hisszes ane till anoþer, as nedders duse"). The absence of an animal comparison and the use of a human comparison instead seem here to suggest the superiority of this monstrous race in relation to the others.

As these examples were meant to demonstrate, Mandeville's perception and representation of the monstrous Otherness in the East is quite contradictory. Indeed, not all the monstrous races' characterisation is negative or demoniac and some of them are

[170] "In another isle there are ugly fellows whose upper lip is so big that when they sleep in the sun, they cover all their faces with it." (translation by Moseley, p.137).
[171] "so big that they hang down to their knees." (translation by Moseley, p.137).
[172] "In another [isle] there are people of small stature, like dwarfs, a little bigger than pygmies. They have no mouth, but instead a little hole, and so when they must eat they suck their food through a reed or pipe. They have no tongues, and hiss and make signs as monks do, to each other, and each of them understands what the other means." (translation by Moseley, p.137).

even recognised as possessing reason, like human beings. In other words, Mandeville seems to relativise the radical Otherness embodied by these monstrous creatures in order to diminish the sense of horror and repulsion they should give rise to. In this way, the opposition between the Self and the Other appears blurred and unfixed. This permeability of the boundary that divides the Self and the Other is proved by the very last part of the account that Moseley in his translation interestingly named "Justification of the Pagans". The existence of a common ground that links Europeans and infidels is recognised in the final passages. Mandeville explicitly reports some pagan habits which can be read as mirroring Christian habits. In order to do so, he shifts the point of view as he did with the Pygmies.

> And of ydoles and simulacres þai say þat þer es na folk þat þai ne hafe simulacres, and þat say þai principally for þai see Cristen men hafe crucifixez and ymages of oure lady and of oþer sayntes and do wirschepe to þam.[173] (p.169)

Mandeville recognises that the Christian worship of images is not linked to the images themselves, but to the meaning they have. Anyway, in pointing out the Christian tendency to idolatry, he blurs the boundary between pagan and Christians, silently recognising a common perspective unifying the whole humanity against differences. However, this does not imply a utopian view of fraternity beyond the differences: the supremacy of the Christian faith and the necessity to unite humanity under the same faith is never doubted. I do not want to apply a cosmopolitan view to Mandeville's account, I am simply recognising a tendency to relativisation, which weakens strict and competitive divisions between the Self and the Other. Clearly, the fixed dichotomy that opposes a feminine East and a masculine West, whose main role is to take control over the luxurious and wonderful opposite, is a long way from being established in medieval times. The colonial stereotypes that support Said's theory of orientalism are still distant in medieval Western perception.[174] It cannot be denied that, as Campbell points out, sometimes the atmosphere of the *Travels* is "both grotesque and otherworldly"[175] and that the marvels are useful to create a fictional Elsewhere for European minds. However, the space of the Other is not completely opposed to and different from the space of the Self and the *Travels* presents

[173] "And about idols and simulacres they say that there is no people that does not have simulacres; they say that especially as they see Christian men with crucifixes and images of Our Lady and of other saints, doing honour to them." (translation by Moseley, p.188).
[174] Philipps, p.59.
[175] Campbell, p.153.

moments of alienation, but moments of similarity too. The binary distinction between the Western European Self and the exotic – especially Eastern – Other was not a persuasive theme yet and did not depend on a supposed superiority of one on the other. The Eurocentric perspective legitimising Western acts as always intrinsically good in opposition with the errancy of the Other is not a concern of the *Travels*. In quite the opposite way, the encounters with some monstrous races should be exemplary to a Westerner reader, who may find a moral value in them. Mandeville's main concern seems to portray the infinite diversity of Creation, giving a coherent and organic shape to Saint Augustine's theories. Rather than creating a real dichotomy between West and East, his monsters aim to show the unbelievable possibility of God power to create and shape nature so that every being ends up covering its specific place in His plan, maintaining static the equilibrium of Creation.

2.3 Monstrosity, Sub Humanity and the Chain of Being

As already pointed out in this chapter, the etymology of the word "monster" implied a double meaning and a double interpretation during the Middle Ages: on one hand monsters were manifestations (from the Latin verb *monstrāre*, to show) of the divine, on the other hand they were warnings (from *mŏnēre*, to warn). The origin of this complex meaning comes only in part from the ancient times; in Greek and Latin cultures, the monsters were considered accidents. As Friedman suggests, monsters were seen as accidental disruptions of the natural order, and most of these disruptions were individual, unusual phenomena like strange births.[176] In medieval times, admitting the possibility of a failure in nature implied an error in God's creation, which was not imaginable since it would necessarily challenge the omnipotence of God Himself. For this reason, the thinkers of the Middle Ages had to transform the classical idea of the monster in order to adapt it to Christian theology. Therefore, the monster ceased to be an accident and became the reification of God's will and power, with a strong didactic aim. Indeed, from the medieval perspective, nature should necessarily be perfect because it is the reflection of God and, as a consequence, all its parts should make sense in the universal plan.[177] Thus, men may not understand the meaning of monsters, but the reason for this lack of

[176] Friedman, pp.108-109.
[177] Baratta, p.33.

understanding lies in the limits of the human mind and not in a failure of nature. In other words, monsters cease to be oddities against nature and become a part of nature which carries an ulterior meaning to be decrypted. As Baratta states, during the Middle Ages monsters became symbols in a world full of signs.[178]

The first thinkers to conceive monsters as something not simply against nature are Isidore of Seville and Saint Augustine. While re-elaborating some of Aristoteles' theories, Isidore of Seville defined monstrosity as an excess or a defect in the matter that constitutes the body, rather than as a real disruption of the laws of nature. Therefore, monstrous births and creatures only apparently go against nature. While some parts or some aspects of their monstrous bodies may appear to violate natural laws, their bodies are still subjected to the very same rules of all other bodies.[179] The recognition of monsters as being part of the natural order is corroborated by Augustine as well. In chapter XVI of the *City of God*, he affirms that:

> The man who cannot view the whole is offended by what he takes to be the deformity of a part; but this is because he does not know how it is adapted or related to the whole. We know of men who were born with more than five fingers or five toes. This is a trivial thing and not any great divergence from the norm. God forbid, however, that someone who does not know why the Creator has done what He has done should be foolish enough to suppose that God has in such cases erred in allotting the number of human fingers. So, then, even if a greater divergence should occur, He Whose work no one may justly condemn knows what He has done.[180]

Saint Augustine defends the idea of the perfection of nature by claiming that the mistake is not in nature itself, but in the eyes that judge. In other words, man does not understand the complexity of God's plan and so, while judging alleged imperfections in God's creation, he is certainly mistaken since he is limited and unable to comprehend "the whole". Therefore, the monstrous body lacks significance when it is considered *per se*, it is part of a whole and it gains meaning from the whole. In order to prove his point, Augustine reports the example of people born with more than five fingers. In my opinion, the most interesting aspect of the example provided by Augustine is the fact that he is not linking deformity to something necessarily living outside and away from the centre of humankind, but to something which could be found everywhere in the world. Unlike the examples of the previous subchapters, the monstrous characteristics are recognised as

[178] Baratta, p.34.
[179] Friedman, pp.112-115.
[180] Augustine, p.708.

universal and equally possible in every spot of the globe. Interestingly enough, Augustine also claims that "the explanation which is given of monstrous human births among us can also be given in the case of some of these monstrous races"[181], openly regarding monstrous races on the same level as human beings. Indeed, in Augustine's view, the humanity or inhumanity of these races does not depend on their appearance, but rather on their ability to reason.

> But anyone who is born anywhere as a man (that is, as a rational and mortal animal), no matter how unusual he may be to our bodily senses in shape, colour, motion, sound, or in any natural power or part or quality, derives from the original and first-created man; and no believer will doubt this. […] the same is therefore true of all those races which, by reason of their bodily differences, are said to have deviated from the usual pattern of nature exhibited by most - indeed, by almost the whole - of mankind. If these races are included in the definition of 'human', that is, if they are rational and mortal animals, then it must be admitted that they trace their lineage from that same one man, the first father of all mankind.[182]

Apart from mortality, the characteristic that defines humanity is rationality, the ability to reason. Augustine is not interested in the shape of human beings, but rather in their descendance from Adam, the first created man. At the end of his reflection on the monstrous races, he states that either "the written accounts which we have of some of these races are completely worthless; or, if such creatures exist, they are not men; or, if they are men, they are descended from Adam"[183]. In this passage, Augustine focuses on two cardinal points to understand the idea of humanness in the medieval times: reason and Adam's lineage. Indeed, reason is the key element that separates human beings from animals, since through reason people can understand the message of the Gospel and embrace it. In other words, the ability to reason is essential to obtain salvation and all the creatures that cannot comprehend the Christian message are consequently inferior and unable to reach eternal life. The reason for this inferiority consisted in a greater or smaller proximity to the perfection of God. In fact, the world was conceived as hierarchically organised in a scale going from Heaven to Hell, where Heaven corresponded to the maximum perfection of God and Hell to its direct opposite. In this cosmological organisation, human beings stand above both animals and plants, as earthly creatures closer to God due to their faculty of reasoning. This hierarchical system is known as the

[181] Augustine, p.708.
[182] Augustine, pp.708-709.
[183] Augustine, p.710.

Great Chain of Being and its role is to organise the whole of creation in a theologically acceptable structure. In this way, every individual which is part of creation may recognise its position in the Chain and understand its role in God's project.[184] However, the monstrous races constituted a great problem in this synthetic organisation of creation since they seemed not to fit completely in any category: they were not animals, but at the same time they were not perceived as completely human. Their existence at the borders of the medieval known world mirrored their liminal position in the Chain of Being since their humanness was an open question. Augustine solves this problem by affirming that monstrous births happen not only at the periphery of the world, but also at its centre. The consequence of this statement is that monsters do not represent a real divergence from the norm, but odd deformities of the same substance. Consequently, their physical appearance does not matter: so long as they possess reason, they are part of Adam's descendance.

In medieval times asking if a human race descended from Adam was equivalent to questioning its humanness. Monstrous races represented a challenge not only for their physical appearance, but also because they are not mentioned in the Scripture. Information about whether they are human or not or how they survived the Flood is not provided by the sacred text, which opened the way to speculations.[185] During the Middle Ages, the limits and the omissions of the Scriptures were filled with apocryphal texts concerning the main Biblical characters. A common theme in the apocryphal texts concerning Adam's life after the Fall was his vast knowledge of the properties of herbs. Namely, he had the ability to distinguish between curative herbs and herbs which could damage the offspring of pregnant women. For this reason, he had forbidden his daughters to eat them, but they disobeyed him and, consequently, they ended up bearing monstrous children.[186] For instance, the *Rothschild Canticles* give specific examples of the monsters that may be generated by women fed with those herbs, associating the descriptions with detailed miniatures. The monstrous births listed in the manuscripts have many traits in common with the Plinian races since there are cynocephali, scipods, men with horses' hooves and hairy half-ape men among them (figure 2, 3, 4). However, these creatures are described as monstrous not only for their physical appearance, but also because they have

[184] Ramey, Lynn, "Monstrous Alterity in Early Modern Travel Accounts: Lessons from the Ambiguous Medieval Discourse on Humanness", *L'Esprit Créateur*, 48 (2008), pp.82-83.
[185] Friedman, p.88.
[186] Friedman, pp.93-94.

beast-like souls.[187] Therefore, even though they are part of Adam's descendance, they are not completely human. The attitude of this text is consistently more rigid than Augustine's since it implies a neat division between what is human and what is necessarily sub-human. While Augustine recognises monstrosities as inherent to creation and to the human world, both at its centre and at its periphery, the *Canticles* sees monstrosity as inherently opposed to what is human. Moreover, Augustine seems to consider Adam's offspring as necessarily human, not matter how their shape may diverge from the normative body. On the contrary, the *Canticles*, as many other apocryphal texts, recognises Adam as the progenitor of both human and sub-human races.

Other famous Biblical passages which were consistently enlarged by apocryphal texts were Adam's curse on Cain and Cain's life in exile. In Genesis, Abel's murder and the consequent punishment given to his brother Cain for the fratricide are described in few lines.

> Dixitque ad eum: Quid fecisti? vox sanguinis fratris tui clamat ad me de terra. Nunc igitur maledictus eris super terram, quae aperuit os suum, et suscepit sanguinem fratris tui de manu tua. Cum operatus fueris eam, non dabit tibi fructus suos: vagus et profugus eris super terram. […] Dixitque ei Dominus: Nequaquam ita fiet: sed omnis qui occiderit Cain, septuplum punietur. Posuitque Dominus Cain signum, ut non interficeret eum omnis qui invenisset eum. Egressusque Cain a facie Domini, habitavit profugus in terra ad orientalem plagam Eden.[188]

The Bible does not openly explain what the physical sign that God impresses upon Cain is, neither does it openly attribute him monstrous characteristics. However, apocryphal texts written during the Middle Ages added many details to Cain's physical description, often degrading his human status through many physical deformities or animal features.[189] His offspring, then, inherited all his monstrous characteristics and his degenerate human state, creating a parallel sub-humanity in complete opposition with the perfection of Seth's offspring. An example of this tendency to consider Cain's lineage as monstrous – or at least not completely human – may be found in the Hereford Map

[187] Friedman, p.94.
[188] Genesis 4:10-12 and 4:15-16; "And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. […] And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden." (translation from King James Bible).
[189] Friedman, p.95.

analysed in the first chapter, in which it is stated that: "Hic sont homines truculenti nimis, humanis carnibus uescentes, cruorem potantes, fili Caim maledicti".[190] Another widely famous instance of Cain's descendance is present in the poem *Beowulf*, in which the monster Grendel and its mother are referred as "Caines cynne".

> wæs se grimma gæst Grendel haten
> mære mearcstapa se þe moras heold
> fen ond fæsten· fifelcynnes eard
> wonsæli wer weardode hwile
> siþðan him scyppend forscrifen hæfde
> in Caines cynne þone cwealm gewræc
> ece drihten þæs þe he Abel slog·
> ne gefeah he þære fæhðe ac he hine feor forwræc
> metod for þy mane mancynne fram·
> þanon untydras ealle onwocon
> eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas
> swylce gigantas þa wið gode wunnon
> lange þrage· he him ðæs lean forgeald.[191]

Grendel and his mother are described as wanderers and monsters, two characteristics inherited from their progenitor Cain. Indeed, the passage creates a strong link between Cain's exile and the birth of monstrous races. As a consequence, the monstrous races are creatures dwelling at the periphery of the world, away from mankind. As in the *Rothschild Canticles*, human and monsters in this passage are understood as completely in opposition. Mirroring the schematic division of medieval *mappaemundi*, the dichotomy between human and subhuman is emphasised by the geographical distance that separates the offspring of Cain from the rest of humankind. In this way, their position in the Chain of Being is never in doubt: even if their ancestor is the first man, Adam, they fell from that human state and ended up being a degeneration of that previous perfect condition. Their monstrous and sometimes diabolic connotations neatly separate them from the privileged position that human beings hold in the logic of the Chain. However, rather ironically, the hero that will eventually kill Grendel and its mother in the *Beowulf*, freeing the society of human beings from their threat, is a super-human, even a monstrous human.

---

[190] Hereford Map, https://sims2.digitalmappa.org/36; "Here are exceedingly savage people, eating human flesh and drinking blood, the evil sons of Cain".

[191] Orchard, p.59; "the grim spirit was called Grendel, a well-known wanderer in the borderland wastes, he who inhabited the moors, the fen and the fastness; the unhappy man dwelt for a while in the land of the monster-race, after the Creator had condemned him as one of the kin of Cain: the eternal Lord avenged that killing, because Cain slew Abel; he did not rejoice in that feud, but the Creator cast him far out for that crime, away from mankind. Thence arose all the evil breed: giants and elves and evil monsters, also those gigantic ones who strove against God for a long time; he repaid them for that." (translation by Orchard, p.59).

This debate on humanness is fundamental also in analysing the monstrous races in the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville. Indeed, when the narrator of the *Travels* is describing the Holy Land and the places where famous Biblical episodes took place, he mentions Cain.

> seuen myle fra Nazareth es þe mount Cain, and vnderneth it es a welle whare Lamech slew Cayn wiþ ane arowe supposing he had bene a wylde beste.[192] (p.62)

The episode of the Bible cited by Mandeville does not openly state that Lamech kills Cain because he mistook him for a wild beast.

> Dixitque Lamech uxoribus suis Adae et Sellae: Audite vocem meam, uxores Lamech; auscultate sermonem meum: quoniam occidi virum in vulnus meum, et adolescentulum in livorem meum. Septuplum ultio dabitur de Cain: de Lamech vero septuagies septies.[193]

On the contrary, while referring to him as "virum", Lamech seems not to doubt Cain's humanness, as the *Travels* arguably does. Indeed, Mandeville does not state that Cain resembles a wild beast, but simply that Lamech supposed he was a wild beast. This means that Cain's inhumanity is hinted at, but not completely confirmed by the narrator. While reproposing the common thematic of the killing of Cain the wanderer, Mandeville is ambiguous in recognising the murderer as a sub-human. This tendency, however, is not specific to this episode, but may be found in many descriptions of the monstrous races analysed in the previous subchapter. If, as Augustine points out, the real marker of humanness is reason, then many monstrous races are undoubtedly sub-human. For instance, Mandeville openly states that the inhabitants of Tracota are beast-like creatures lacking reason, and consequently are inferior to human beings. Their inferiority is demonstrated by their lack of civilisation and their obsession for a stone without value.

In other cases, however, he only suggests the monstrous races' lack of humanity, pointing at their lack of civilisation. For example, the giants have no clothes to wear, no houses to live in and they do not cook their meat, which implies that they are not fully human beings. On the contrary, other populations are clearly human: both the Pygmies and the Cynocephali are referred to as possessing reason and as being part of a civilised

[192] "Seven miles from Nazareth is Mount Cain; at its foot is a well where Lamech slew Cain with an arrow, taking him for a wild beast." (translation by Moseley, p.96).
[193] Genesis 4:23-24; "And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold." (translation from King James Bible).

community. Therefore, one could infer that they cover the same place as human beings in the Chain, even if their being pagans may place them at an inferior level since they did not receive the revelation. But, as already discussed, at the end of the *Travels* Mandeville seems quite optimistic on the possibility of a mass conversion of many different populations in the East who, while believing in fake idols, still show a basic knowledge on the principles of Christian faith. I assume that the Pygmies and the Cynocephali may be included in these potential future Christians since they are fully rational and their societies are developed and civilised. In this case, Mandeville seems to agree with Augustine in recognising their physical divergence from the normative body as a mere accident which may depend on the human impossibility to understand the cosmos. Even more precisely, while describing the Pygmies, Mandeville takes their own point of view, showing how monstrosity is subjective, rather than objective. Just as Augustine aims to demonstrate the unfoundedness of the association of deformity with inhumanness by reporting examples of monstrous births happening at the core of the Western world too, Mandeville takes the Other's point of view to demonstrate how monstrosity lies in the eyes of the beholder who witnesses and judges. What may be inferred in this passage is that human judgment may err: the Pygmies may consider normal-sized men an oddity or even monsters, but judgment alone does not make them really monstrous. Indeed, all the Christian readership of the *Travels* may agree on this point. Therefore, the size of the Pygmies is also not enough to define their monstrosity, as Augustine would argue. On the contrary, all other characteristics of their society prove their intrinsic humanness. The example of the Cynocephali is even more interesting since their divergence from the normative body is not only a matter of size. While Mandeville openly affirms that they are fully rational, their bodies could still have represented a problem from a medieval point of view. Indeed, is it truly possible that people whose physical features are partially beast-like are at the same level as human beings whose body is the perfect mirror of God's? The very fact that their kind of monstrosity is not a simple deformation of entirely human features, but a mixture between human and non-human, implies a greater degree of problematisation. During the Middle Ages, the dog was considered a liminal creature since it was not entirely a wild beast, neither was it completely domesticated.[194] As a

[194] Weinreich, Spencer J., "How a Monster Means: The Significance of Bodily Difference in the Christopher Cynocephalus Tradition" in Godden, R. H. et al., eds., *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p.187.

consequence, the Cynocephali represent a double problem: they possess both human and wild animal characteristics, therefore they are both civilised and uncivilised, human and non-human. In the *Travels*, this dichotomy is emphasised by the degree of civilisation that Mandeville attributes to them. Mandeville's Cynocephali are great craftsmen since they produce shields and spears to fight in the wars and are described as good warriors, so able that the Great Khan did not manage to conquer them. Their society is well organised and their king is righteous in punishing whoever harms someone else, so that their land is safe even for the travellers and the strangers passing by. I would argue that this focus on the security of their land is important since it suggests that the Cynocephali are trustworthy. This suggestion may seem in contradiction with their anthropophagic custom of eating their prisoners, but in fact it emphasises how this practice is regulated and submitted to reason rather than beastly impulse, as in the case of the giants. Furthermore, while ancient tradition starting with Ctesias recognised them as cave dwellers[195], Mandeville does not give any account of their houses. Interestingly, he spends many lines describing their pagan belief and he states that "riȝt as we say oure Pater Noster and oure Auez apon oure bedes, riȝt so þe kyng sayse ilk day apon his bedes ccc. praieres to his godd before he ete" (p.106).[196] The comparison with the Christian faith and with Christian prayers may suggest a greater degree of humanness in the Cynocephali's customs, since the comparison implicitly puts its two terms on the exact same level. In the end, all these elements contrast with both their physical appearance and their anthropophagic custom; they become liminal creatures whose humanness can be fully recognised, but whose inhumanity cannot be affirmed either.

The recognition of a Cynocephalus as part of Christendom and, as a consequence, as part of humankind is not alien to Christian European tradition. Indeed, Saint Christopher was traditionally a Cynocephalus and many of the hagiographic stories about him focus on the monstrosity of his body. As Weinreich suggests in his essay, the power of this saint lies exactly in his monstrous appearance and in his ability to trouble both the normative body and the religious order. He is something extraordinary that breaks all categories and hierarchies, proving the instability of all these divisions.[197] By attributing

[195] Weinreich, p.187.
[196] "just as we say our Pater Noster and Aue Maria by telling our beads, just so the King says each day on his beads three hundred prayers to his god, before he eats." (translation by Moseley, p.135).
[197] Weinreich, pp.201-202.

sanctity to a questionably human creature, his humanness is proved, his salvation is confirmed and consequently all the members of his (monstrous) race – and maybe of all monstrous races – may be considered human too. This recognition has its reassuring aspect in the possibility of the universalisation of the Christian faith through evangelising missions, but at the same time it implies a blurring of boundaries between normative and non-normative, between Self and Other. Saint Christopher is monstrous because he is a half-dog and he has these features because he is a foreigner, an Other. When he becomes a Christian, he changes his original name into Christopher, implying a rebirth and change in both his identity and moral status. Nevertheless, his body remains significantly monstrous and non-normative.[198] The same meaningful contradiction persists in the *Travels*, in which Mandeville's Cynocephali are rightful and endowed with reason and, at the same time, they have non-normative bodies and anthropophagic customs.

Furthermore, there are examples in the text in which it is not completely clear whether the monstrous creatures are capable of reasoning or not.

> Beȝond þir iles es anoþer ile, þat es called Pytan, whare þe folk nowþer tillez ne sawez na land, ne nowþer etes ne drinkez. […] Þis folk liffes wiþ þe smelle of wylde appels þat growez þare […] Þis folk es noȝt fulle resonable, bot riȝt symple and as it ware bestez.[199] (p.159)

In this passage, Mandeville is describing the apple-smellers, another Eastern population coming from classical tradition. Their strangeness lies in the fact that they do not need to eat, since they feed only upon smells. Arguably, the passage is not completely clear about their ability to reason: on one hand they are compared to beasts, but on the other hand the passage seems not so peremptory in affirming their lack of reason. They may be considered in-between creatures whose place in the Chain is not completely determined. Moreover, there are other populations of which Mandeville does not provide a satisfying description. Their descriptions are placed in sequence and they are all centred around the physical appearance of these monsters. This may imply that in these passages the author was not interested in analysing these creatures, but he uses them as exotic marvels whose role is to enrich the work. They are placed at the margins of the world Mandeville is creating, enriching it as they traditionally enriched, for instance, medieval *mappaemundi*.

[198] Weinreich, pp.203-204.

[199] "Beyond this isle is another that is called Pytan, where the folk neither plough nor sow the land, and neither eat nor drink. […] This people lives on the smell of wild apples that grow there; […] This people is not fully rational; they are very simple, like beasts." (translation by Moseley, p.181).

Indeed, Mandeville creates his own *mappamundi* in the *Travels*, but the fixed boundaries that traditionally divide the West and the East, the human and the monstrous sometimes seem to blur. The world that emerges from the text is complicated and paradoxical and it is almost impossible to give a univocal reading of all monstrous appearances. The monstrous races are at the same time human and subhuman, central and marginal and their role shifts from didactic to merely decorative. While revitalising an ancient tradition, Mandeville sometimes manages to enlarge it, sometimes he simply reports it without any addition or furtherance. The final result is a contradictory work in which the monstrous races do not have a fixed and univocal connotation, but in which they assume different meanings in different parts: some populations maintain their merely decorative aim, some others persist as abominations of human nature, but some others are elevated at the level of human beings and may even be interpreted as models for European societies. A single and fixed interpretation of all these wonders would be reductive and would not respect the diversity Mandeville tried to depict. Indeed, similarly to Augustine's *City of God*, the text does not conceive diversity as necessarily negative, but it manages to find similarities among diversities. In the end, the aim of the *Travels* is to give the world back to God and the text does it by recognising the possibility to evangelise all human Eastern populations, whether monstrous or not. This evangelisation, rather than being presented as a violent imposition, seems to be the natural completion of their own beliefs since every population is reported to possess at least the seeds of Christian faith. The point of view is mostly Eurocentric and "Christian-centric", but this fact does not exclude a clear and naïve fascination for a world that Europe had just started to explore and that amazed its Western counterpart.

3. Anthropophagy and Liminality: Paradoxical Links to Home

The aim of the present chapter is primarily to analyse another kind of monstrosity, whose correlation with the theme of the body is different from that of the previous chapter. Anthropophagy implies the assimilation of bodies; however, the term may have different connotations and not all of them were completely monstrous or at least alien to a European perspective. Cannibalistic acts are reported in the chronicles of great medieval famines and, in some ways, the Eucharist itself is a sort of cannibalistic ritual. These similarities tend to blur the boundary that divides the monstrous anthropophagy of the Other from the rightful and even sacred anthropophagy of the Self. In this way, the Other sometimes becomes an extreme mirror of the Self. The second part of the chapter aims to explore the liminality of these figures, understanding the connection between the periphery and the centre. Namely, it focuses on the location of monsters at the borders of the Self whose aim is to alienate them and remove them from the perfect centre of Christianity. However, this process results extremely paradoxical in the *Travels* and monstrosity, while securely located at the margins of the world, still mirrors some aspects of the centre. This hints of resemblance between the centre and the periphery may be interpreted as the first steps for the shifting of monsters from the borders to the centre, a process that begins in the Early Modern Period.

3.1 Anthropophagy between Alienation and Familiarity

As already hinted in the previous chapter, the diet of a particular population may be used to define its Otherness from the speaking Self. Indeed, food and cuisine are often culturally bonded. After the agricultural revolution, new techniques and new recipes started to be created and food was even linked to important social events like religious rites, weddings, funerals and so on. Food differed more and more from one country to another, from one region to another. It became a symbol of distinction between different social groups, a sign of belonging to a specific group or its direct opposite. Indeed, eating the same things is a way to strengthen and consolidate the bond between members of the same community. From this perspective, alien alimentary practices were – and sometimes still are – seen as barbaric and deplorable by the members of a different community, whose practices may be largely different.[200] The importance of food in a specific culture

[200] Fabietti, Ugo, *Elementi di Antropologia Culturale*, Milano: Mondadori, 2015, pp.170-171.

is also proved by the fact that both monotheistic and polytheistic religions often make laws about what should be eaten and what should not. The purity or impurity of food is not universal and it varies from culture to culture, becoming a clear token of distinction between one culture and the other. From this point of view, cannibalism represents the extremization of this principle since it implies the consumption of human flesh, an act which caused abhorrence but, at the same time, evoked curiosity among Western peoples. The use of the term "cannibalism" is however incorrect if referred to the Middle Ages. In fact, the word appeared for the first time in Columbus' *Journal*, referring to the natives of the Caribbeans. Namely, it is the corruption of the term *carib* which meant "bold" and "fierce" in the natives' language. However, Columbus misunderstood its meaning and he attributed it to the inhabitants of the Caribbean Islands, whom he considered to be man-eaters.[201] Another interpretation of the term links it to the Latin word *canis*, dog. This fake etymology had been proposed because of the classical close association of cannibalism with dogs and wolfs.[202] Indeed, the existence of dog-headed men feeding on human flesh is not Mandeville's own invention, but it came from the same long tradition that located monsters in the Eastern side of the world. The first descriptions of cannibal Cynocephali date back to the Greek times, and they endured until Columbus' times. It is not to be forgotten that Columbus did not realise he had discovered a new continent, but that he was sure he had reached the Far East by circumnavigating the world. So, the attribution to the natives of cannibalistic habits is not surprising since it was a common topic in the accounts of the East that formed Columbus' background knowledge; on the contrary, he expected to encounter man-eating monsters.

Following Philipps' distinction, I decided to use the term "anthropophagy" rather than "cannibalism" because, while cannibalism refers only to human beings eating other humans, anthropophagy implies a wider connotation for its agents. Namely, the act of man-eating can be perpetrated by both human and non-human subjects.[203] The humanity of the monstrous races, as previously discussed, is constantly challenged, so using the term anthropophagy seems more appropriate to me. Moreover, anthropophagic acts were not alien from Western experience and, despite the abhorrence to which they give rise,

[201] Rawson, C., "Unspeakable Rites: Cultural Reticence and the Cannibal Question", *Social Research*, 66 (1999), pp.168-169.
[202] Rawson, p.169.
[203] Philipps, p.90.

their brutality and immorality were damped down by the contextualising necessities that led to them. Indeed, there are different kinds of anthropophagy which differ in their motivations. The first is anthropophagy due to necessity, which implies the consumption of human flesh in the absence of any other kind of nourishment.[204] Chronicle accounts suggest that it was a practice largely present in Europe during periods of great famine. Even while remaining a taboo, it seemed morally more understandable, even justifiable – but still never forgivable – according to the gravity of the situation.[205] It remained a sin, and a serious one, but some extreme situations could have rationally led to it. A greatly famous account of anthropophagy in European medieval literature is the episode of count Ugolino in Dante's *Inferno*. It tells the story of a father and his sons, imprisoned in a place called "la muda" that Ugolino describes in this way: "dentro dalla muda, / la qual per me ha il titol della fame"[206]. From the beginning of Dante's narration, the episode is linked to hunger. Indeed, the father and his sons are enclosed there without food and this lack is constantly recalled throughout the whole episode: "pianger senti' fra 'l sonno i miei figliuoli / ch'eran con meco, e dimandar del pane"[207]. It is a reminder of the precarious condition that eventually led to the inconceivable sin.

> Poscia che fummo al quarto dì venuti,
> Gaddo mi si gittò disteso a' piedi,
> dicendo: "Padre mio, ché non m'aiuti?".
>
> Quivi morì; e come tu mi vedi,
> vid'io cascar li tre ad uno ad uno
> tra 'l quinto dì e 'l sesto; ond'io mi diedi,
>
> già cieco, a brancolar sovra ciascuno,
> e due dì li chiamai, poi che fur morti.
> Poscia, più che 'l dolor, poté 'l digiuno.[208]

[204] Tattersall, Jill, "Anthropophagi and Eaters of Raw Flesh in French Literature of the Crusade Period: Myth, Tradition and Reality", *Medium Ævum*, 57 (1988), p.240.
[205] Adamson, p.182.
[206] Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII, ll.22-23 in Alighieri, Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno, Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1957; "in the Eagles' tower / which now, through me, is called the Hunger Tower" (translation by Allen Mandelbaum in Alighieri, Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, translation by Allen Mandelbaum, New York Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).
[207] Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII, ll.38-39; "my sons, who were together with me there, / weeping within their sleep, asking for bread." (translation by Allen Mandelbaum).
[208] Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII, ll.67-75; "But after we had reached the fourth day, Gaddo, / throwing himself, outstretched, down at my feet, / implored me: 'Father, why do you not help me?' / And there he died; and just as you see me, / I saw the other three fall one by one / between the fifth day and the sixth; at which, / now blind, I started groping over each; / and after they were dead, I called them for / two days; then fasting had more force than grief." (translation by Allen Mandelbaum).

This anthropophagic act is a desperate and extreme result, which exceeds the Count's sorrow for the loss of his children. Ugolino, after witnessing the long and painful death of his children, is overcome by hunger and ends up eating the corpses of his own sons. In the whole passage, Dante clearly recognises the responsibility of the world outside the prison in the tragic end of the story; nevertheless, it is Ugolino who sins in the end, and he is the one that should be punished. Dante's episode is exemplary of the medieval attitude towards anthropophagy. Even though the conditions that led to the anthropophagic act are fully understandable, it remains an unforgivable sin and the place for sinners is Hell.

The second kind is ritual or religious anthropophagy, which may have a magical connotation and is often linked to the burial or the funeral of a member of the community. Finally, the third is anthropophagy "for anthropophagy's sake", which consists in the decision to consume human flesh only for its taste. In this case, human flesh represents the basis of the diet and not an extreme choice due to hunger.[209] Coherently with the assignation of a less strict judgment to the first kind, monstrous races are traditionally recognised as practising the other two forms of anthropophagy. From this perspective, the act of eating human flesh becomes a violation of a natural law and a sign of a monstrous nature. Monstrosity, even when not expressed through physical appearance, manifests itself through the behaviour of the race. A discussion about these two other kinds of monstrosity may be found in the seventh chapter of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, where he compares some populations who practised anthropophagy in the past and some who still practise it at the moment of narration.

> We have already stated that there are certain tribes of the Scythians, and, indeed, many other nations, which feed upon human flesh. This fact itself might, perhaps, appear incredible, did we not recollect, that in the very centre of the earth, in Italy and Sicily, nations formerly existed with these monstrous propensities, the Cyclopes, and the Læstrygones, for example; and that, very recently, on the other side of the Alps, it was the custom to offer human sacrifices, after the manner of those nations; and the difference is but small between sacrificing human beings and eating them.[210]

Pliny considers the practise of feeding upon human flesh and the sacrifice of human beings as an equally "incredible" ritual propitiatory act. From his point of view, both these

[209] Tattersal, pp.240-241.
[210] Pliny the Elder, book VII, chapter 2, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plin.+Nat.+7.2&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0137.

possibilities are wrong and monstrous. However, the most interesting detail of this passage is the recognition of the proximity of these inhuman acts to "the very centre of the earth". Indeed, from Pliny's own perspective, the centre of the known world is Rome, the capital of the empire. By reporting anthropophagic practises perpetrated by populations who inhabited Sicily and the Italian peninsula, he is describing a reality which is not only very close to the centre, but it is also part of the centre. When Pliny was writing, the entirety of the Italian peninsula and its islands were under Roman dominion, so these places were entirely part of the empire. Moreover, the custom of human sacrifice was attributed to peoples who lived on the other side of the Alps too, a place which was not totally alien since the Roman conquest reached the borders of the river Rhine. In this case, proximity of space is also linked to proximity of time. In the Northern border, these practices are not completely associated with a distant past, they are part of a very recent past which might even coexist with the beginnings of the Roman empire. In Pliny's account, anthropophagy is a complex subject which is equally related to the past and the present, to the periphery and the centre. While not openly associated with the core of the empire, the memories of anthropophagic rites near its centre hints at a connection between Rome and its distant and less distant borders.

While reproposing an ancient theme, medieval historians and writers never doubted the existence of man-eating monsters in the exotic peripheric lands, especially the East. Even real travellers, instead of discrediting these beliefs, searched for proofs of the existence of these populations and reported stories about them. John of Pian di Carpine, for instance, suggested that the Tartars themselves ate human flesh, which was a common belief at the time. This detail also helped the connection between the Tartars and the populations of Gog and Magog, both recognised as man-eaters.

> They regard anything which can be eaten as food: they eat dogs, wolves, foxes and horses, and, *when in difficulty*, they eat human flesh. Thus, when they attacked a particular Chinese city, and their emperor himself conducted the siege, they found after they had besieged it a long while that the Tartars had used up all their supplies and did not have enough for all the men to eat, so they took one of every ten men to eat.[211]

While this attribute was certainly meant to exacerbate the cruelness and the inhumanity of the Tartars, Carpine limits their anthropophagy to the case of necessity. The example he reports underlines this aspect: Mongols were forced to eat one another because they

[211] Giovanni da Pian di Carpine, p.52 (my emphasis).

were at war with a Chinese city, and they ran out of supplies. This implies that, when they can choose, they prefer not to eat human beings. Their monstrous connotation is only partial since, as previously discussed, necessity could lead also European people to eat human flesh.

Instead, the population of Tibet is referred to as practicing anthropophagy for ritualistic purposes.

> Then the Mongol army returned and came to the Burithabets' country which they conquered. The Burithabets are pagans and have the most miserable of customs because when someone's father passes away they all gather around their relative and eat him; we were assured that this was true.[212]

The first detail to note is that this is not first-hand information. John of Pian di Carpine claims that he was assured of the veracity of the story, but he is not a direct witness of the custom he openly considers "the most miserable". In this case, the moral judgment is explicit and absolute. The eating of the father, however, is a leitmotif in travel literature concerning the East and more details about this rite are given by the travellers who visited the Eastern lands after Carpine; William of Rubruck is one of them.

> Post istos sunt Tebet, homines solentes comedere parentes suos defunctos, ut causa pietatis non facerent aliud sepulchrum eis nisi uiscera sua. Modo tamen hoc dimiserunt, quia abhominabiles erant omni nationi; tamen adhuc faciunt pulchros cifos de capitibus parentum, ut in illis bibentes habeant memoriam eorum in iocunditate sua. Hoc dixit michi qui uiderat.[213]

As in Pliny, in Rubruck's account the anthropophagic practice is described as something linked to the past, which is not practised at the time of the narration. However, the custom of making a cup out of the relatives' head in order to drink from it in their memory still persists. Contrary to Carpine, Rubruck gives a reason for the habit of eating the relatives and reshaping their skulls. In fact, while suggesting these acts are abominable from an external point of view, he recognises their validity in a system of values which is different from his own. These acts are not "the most miserable" in absolute, since from the point of view of the population that practises them, they are positive. In this way, the anthropophagic act gains a new meaning or, at least, a logical explanation. The logic

[212] Giovanni da Pian di Carpine, p.61.

[213] Rubruck, pp.126-128; "After these, there are the [inhabitants of] Tibet, people who are used to eating their dead relatives out of respect, so as not to give them other burial than their own entrails. However, nowadays they stopped practising this custom because they were considered abhorrent by every other nation. However, they still make beautiful cups out of their relatives' heads, so as to keep memory of them in their moments of joyful drinking. I was told this by people who witnessed it." (my translation).

behind the practice does not lessen the gravity of the sin or the inhumanity of the act, it just associates it to a system of thought which is completely different from the European one. Again, it is not acceptance of the difference, but simple recognition of the existence of a fundamental difference.

The previous one is the only passage of the *Itinerarium* in which Rubruck mentions anthropophagy. While describing his long permanence at the Tartar court and often lamenting the lack of food, he never states or assumes that the Tartars eat human flesh. Indeed, while previous tradition ascribed anthropophagic practises to the Tartars, real travellers discredited these theories, displacing the practice to populations outside the borders of the Mongol empire. A cardinal instance of this tendency may be traced in Polo's work.[214] The descriptions of cruel populations practising anthropophagy are relegated to faraway places standing at the border of the Mongol dominion to which he often did not go. The most obvious example is his account of Japan, based on indirect sources. The importance of the passage lies especially in the fact that Polo is one of the first travellers in the East to mention Japan at all.

> Ora vi dirò d'una usanza ch'è in questa isola. Quando alcuno di questa isola prende alcuno uomo, che non si possa ricomperare, convita suoi parenti e' suoi compagni, e fallo cuocere e dàllo mangiare a costoro; e dicono ch'è la migliore carne che si mangi.[215]

This example presents some characteristics comparable to Odoric's cynocephali since the anthropophagic practice is linked just to prisoners who cannot pay for their freedom. However, the last sentence may hint at a preference for human flesh which is not clearly stated in Odoric. In this case, anthropophagy is a choice based on taste, not on necessity. Moreover, it is a social practice which, in some way, may call to mind a ritual, especially the father-eating ritual that the other travellers localised in Tibet. Polo describes Tibet in a couple of chapters in his account, but he never mentions anthropophagic rituals related to that country. Another case of ritual man-eating practises may be found in the Dragouain realm, near Sumatra.

> Mad io vi conterò un mal costume ch'egli hanno: che, quando alcuno ha male, e' mandono per loro indovini e incantatori che fanno per arti di diavolo, e domandano se 'l malato dee guarire o morire. E se 'l malato dee morire, egli mandano per certi, ordinati a ciò, e

[214] Tattersall, pp.244-245.
[215] Polo, p.441; "Now I shall tell you about a custom of this island. Whenever someone is caught by a man of this island, if this prisoner cannot enfranchise himself, the islander invites his relatives and friends and has him cooked and served to them. They say it is the best meat one can eat." (my translation).

> dicono: «Questo malato è giudicato a morte: fa' quello che dee fare». Questi gli mette alcuna cosa sulla gola, e affogalo; e poscia lo cuocono; e quando è cotto, vengono tutti li parenti del morto e mangianlo. Ancora vi dico ch'egli mangiano tutte le midolle dell'ossa, e questo fanno perché dicono che non vogliono che ne rimanga niuna sostanza; perché, se ne rimanesse alcuna sustanza, farebbe vermini, e questi vermini morrebbono per difalta di mangiare, e della morte di questi vermini l'anima del morto n'avrebbe gran peccato. E perciò mangiano tutto; poscia pigliano l'osse, e pongonle in una archetta in caverne sotterra nelle montagne, in luogo che non le possa toccare né uomo né bestia.[216]

Unlike the previous example, in this case Polo gives a moral judgment to the practice, whose characteristics again resemble the ritual anthropophagy reported by both Carpine and Rubruck. The main difference consists in the mediation of a demon whose role is to predict the future of the sick. If the sick is going to die, then he is to be killed, cooked and eaten in order to prevent putrefaction. Like Carpine's and Rubruck's accounts, it is a funeral ritual which implies the consumption of the dead by the family of the dead himself, in order to re-absorb his matter in their body. Then, the bones are preserved, hidden at the core of the mountains, faraway from both animals and humans. However, this population also practises anthropophagy at the expense of the surrounding peoples because Polo claims that "se possono pigliare alcuno uomo d'altre contrade, che non si possa ricompensare, sì lo si mangiano"[217]. This second statement closely resembles the description of Japan and its own population. The anthropophagic act is perpetrated against aliens and strangers who cannot pay for their own freedom. Another recurring theme is the fondness for human flesh and the presence of a population almost entirely living on it.

> Egli mangiano d'ogni brutta carne, e d'uomo che non sia morto di sua morte; e molto la mangiano volentieri, e hannola per buona carne. […] sono uomeni molto crudeli i piú del mondo, ché tuttodì vanno uccidendo gli uomeni e bevendo il sangue, e poscia gli mangiano tutti: ed altro non procacciano.[218]

---

[216] Polo, pp.453-454; "But now I shall relate an evil custom they have: whenever someone is sick, they send for their soothsayers and enchanters, who partake in the devil's arts, and ask them whether the sick shall live or die. If the sick has to die, they send for people, tasked with doing this, and they say: "This person is deadly ill, do what you have to". The man tasked with doing this puts something in his throat and strangles him; after that, they cook him and, once he is cooked, all the dead's relatives come to eat him. I shall tell you something else: they eat everything, even the marrow, and they do this because they do not want any remains since otherwise the remains would rot and generate worms. Then, these worms would starve, and their death would offend the soul of the dead. Therefore, they eat everything; after that, they take the bones and put them in an urn and bury them in underground caves in the mountains, where they are far away from both humans and animals." (my translation).

[217] Polo, p.454; "if they can take hold of a foreigner who cannot enfranchise himself, they eat him" (my translation).

[218] Polo, p.421; "They eat every kind of impure meat, even that of someone who has not died of natural causes, and many eat it gladly and they consider it a good meat. […] they are the cruellest men in the world

In this case, the only limit is that the victim should not have died of natural causes: anthropophagy implies homicide. Like Polo's cynocephali, this population (called Fugui) is defined as cruel because their diet depends completely on human beings. While the dog-headed creatures manifest their beast-like nature in their physical appearance too, this population acquires their beastly characteristics through their thirst and taste for human blood. Their description may resemble that of carnivorous wild beasts, which spend their days searching for food. Even more precisely, this account of the Fugui may be related to Odoric's description of the Lomori. In this place there is a population who "est pestifera et immunda; nam carnem humanam sic comedunt, sicut alibi carnes bovum et animalium"[219]. The consumption of human flesh is not due to necessity since Odoric claims that their land is fertile and abundant with animals, forage and rice. Indirectly, Odoric is implying that animal breeding is practicable and so is agriculture. They simply prefer to consume human flesh. Moreover, their land is full of gold and attracts many merchants who trade slaves in exchange for these riches. The slaves are the basis of this population's diet since they do not buy them as workforce, but as a source of nourishment. While Polo's Fugui practise hunting to get human flesh, Odoric's inhabitants of Lomori are basically merchants. However, both populations practise these human activities to achieve an inhuman purpose, eating other human beings. In both cases, the contradiction in their behaviour causes repulsion on the narrative voice, who feels the necessity of dissociating itself from them by attributing a negative moral judgment to them. Nevertheless, the contradiction persists and these two peoples stand paradoxically on the boundary between human and inhuman.

This is not the only parallel that can be established between Polo's and Odoric's accounts. Indeed, Odoric reports a ritual anthropophagic practise which presents many similar features with the ritual of the sick man who is strangled and then eaten by the family.

> Habent eciam et hanc consuetudinem pessimam, quod pater comedit filium, et filius patrem, maritus uxorem et e converso: quod agitur isto modo. Si pater infirmatur, filius accedit ad sacerdotem idolorum, dicens: Domine, pater meus aegrotat: consulite Deum nostrum, utrum possit vivere, an non. […] Si autem dicit eum evadere non posse, tunc

since they spend all day killing men and drinking their blood. Then, they eat them all and they do not have any other kind of nourishment." (my translation).

[219] Odoric from Pordenone, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli/40-relatio/capitoli/99-capo-xxx-degli-uomini-nudi-e-di-lamori?start=2; "is devilish and filthy because they eat human flesh, as in other places people eat beef and other animals" (my translation).

> sacerdos accedit ad infirmum, et ponens unum pannum super os eius, ipsum suffocat et extinguit. Et tunc parentes et amici cum hystrionibus de civitate illa ad hoc convivium invitantur. Epulantur itaque cum canticis et gaudio magno valde. Post haec accipientes ossa, sepulturae tradunt cum magna sollemnitate.[220]

There are many recurrent themes: the consultation of a religious figure on the future of the sick, the impossibility of healing which implies the killing of the sick through strangulation, the banquet where the members of the family – and, in this case, of the community – eat the dead and, finally, the burial of bones. All these characteristics are unchanged in comparison with Polo's account, maybe implying a direct influence of Polo's work in Odoric's. However, the main change is the even more rigid moral judgment expressed by the focus on the name of the population, Dondin, which Odoric claims to mean *immundum*, "filthy".

Other analogies with previous accounts of the Eastern lands may be found in the passage in which Odoric describes Tibet and the ritual anthropophagic funeral practised by its inhabitants.

> sacerdotes amputant illi caput, quod postea filio tradunt. […] Sacerdotes quoque simul orando corpus incidunt, membra singula dividentes. Deinde veniunt volucres et aquilae de montibus, quarum quaelibet frustum unum accipit et asportat. […] Postea caput patris filius decoquit et manducat. De testa vero vel cerebello facit sibi fieri unum scyphum, de quo ipse et domus eius tota speciali cum devocione bibunt, defuncti memoriam facientes.[221]

Unlike the previous example, most of the body of the dead is eaten not by men, but by birds. Seeing the dismembered body of the beloved dead taken and eaten by birds is considered a great honour since the birds are conceived as positive emanations of the divinity. However, the son receives the head of the father as inheritance and has to cook it, eat it and create a cup out of the skull. The recurring theme of the head used as a cup

[220] Odoric from Pordenone, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli/40-relatio/capitoli/109-capo-xl-di-coloro-che-mangiano-gli-uomini-e-di-dodim?start=2; "They also have this terrible custom in which the father eats his son and the son his father, the husband eats his wife and vice versa: this is done in this way. If the father gets sick, his son goes to the pagan priest and says: "Lord, my father is ill: speak with our God and ask whether he shall live or not." […] But if it is said that he shall not survive, then the priest goes to the sick and, by putting a cloth on his mouth, he chokes and kills him. And then, his relatives and his friends, along with the performers, are invited to this feast. And so, they feast with songs and great joy. After the bones have been taken, they bury them with great solemnity" (my translation).

[221] Odoric from Pordenone, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli/40-relatio/capitoli/137-capo-lviii-del-gran-lama-degli-infedeli?start=2; "the priests cut his head, which is then taken to his son. […] The priests also cut his body while singing and divide it into pieces. Then, vultures and eagles come from the mountains, and each of them takes a little piece of it and takes it away. […] Then, the son cooks and eats the head of his father. He even makes a cup out of his head, more precisely out of his cranium, from which he and his household drink with a most remarkable devotion in memory of the deceased." (my translation).

in order to commemorate the memory of the deceased is once again present. The main difference with other accounts is the dismemberment of the body and the division of the carcass between animals and humans, namely the son. In this ritual, the animal and the human both have a role in the consumption of the body. Indirectly, the son is associated to eagles and, less pleasantly, to vultures. The animal and the human act seem to be on the same level of importance because the sacrality of the funeral consists in a mixture of the two, without the supremacy of one on the other.

While re-elaborating this tradition, Mandeville gives great importance in his fictitious account to anthropophagy in all its forms. Sometimes his reports are very similar to his sources, but many other times he adds interesting details which may change the reception of the narrated episode. The first example I want to analyse is the account of the people of Sumatra (or Lamory, as Mandeville calls the island), which is clearly a re-writing of Odoric's description of the Lomori. Both descriptions follow the same thematic pattern, starting with nakedness: the inhabitants of Sumatra do not wear clothes because they believe that men should not be ashamed by the body God gave them and they scorn all the people who wear clothes. To prove this point, Odoric states that he was directly ridiculed by them, since they believed he wore clothes against God's will. Unable or unwilling to provide a first-hand proof like Odoric, Mandeville decides to partially abandon his point of view to assume theirs. He claims that "Þai say also þat men þat vsez clathez er of anoþer werld or elles þai trowe noȝt in Godd þat made alle þe werld"[222] (p.97). Just as a land inhabited only by naked people would have appeared unimaginable to a European reader, a world where all people use clothes would have been perceived as alien and alienating by the people of Sumatra. The subversion reaches its peak in the next line, when the clothed men's faith is doubted. Indeed, if for the Sumatrans being naked is a form of devotion to God and its creation, the Europeans must appear to them as heathen as they appear to the Europeans. In other words, Mandeville is creating in this passage a mirror game where the Sumatran are the mirror image of the Europeans. Indeed, from a Western and European perspective they are heretics, but Mandeville shows both perspectives at the same time, hinting at the fact that from a different point of view the Europeans themselves become heretics. This does not necessarily imply that Mandeville

[222] "They say also that men who wear clothes are of another world, or else believe not in God who made all the world." (translation by Moseley, p.127).

is taking the Sumatrans' side, he simply manages to describe a reality which is much more complex than a univocal dichotomy between good and bad, right or wrong. Another common theme to both Odoric's and Mandeville's descriptions is the absence of property. Indeed, in the Sumatrans, the land is shared, as are women and children. Therefore, marriage does not exist and when a woman gives birth to a child, she decides which man among the ones she slept with should raise the child as a father. Mandeville justifies this custom by citing the Bible.

> And þai say if þai did oþerwyse þai did grete synne bycause Godd said tille Adam and Eue, *Crescite et multiplicamini, et replete terram*, þat es to say, Waxez and beese multiplied and fillez þe erthe.[223] (p.98).

Moreover, while Odoric claims that at least every one of them owns a house which is private, Mandeville denies this possibility by stating that they do not possess houses, but they rotate houses every year. In this way, all riches are distributed equally among them, and they are all rich to the same extent. This long excursus on Sumatran customs and beliefs is indeed cardinal to understand – or, more likely, not understand – their anthropophagy. Indeed, while describing an alien population with very different habits from the Europeans, Mandeville never hints at monstrous aspects in their society. On the contrary, their life choices are all determined by the Bible and their faith in God, the very same God of the Europeans. However, this arguably positive consideration of the Sumatrans is abruptly interrupted by the conjunction *bot* which introduces the passage reporting their anthropophagic habits.

> Bot þai haue ane euille custom amanges þam, for þai wille gladlier ete mannes flesch þan any oþer. Neuerþelatter þe land es plentifous ynogh of flesch and fisch and of corne, and also of gold and siluer and many oþer gudes. And þider bringes marchandes childer for to selle, and þe men of þat cuntre byes þam. And þase þat er fatte þai ete, and þase þat er noȝt fatte þai fede to þai be fatte and þan slaez þam and etez þam. And þai say it es þe best and þe swettest flesch of þe werld.[224] (p.98)

As in Odoric's account, their preference for human flesh contrasts with their abundance of any other kind of food and riches. The juxtaposition between the fertility of their land

[223] "They say that if they were to do otherwise they would sin greatly, because God said to Adam and Eve, *Crescite et multiplicamini et replete terram*, that is to say, 'Increase and multiply and fill the earth'" (translation by Moseley, p.127).

[224] "But they have an evil custom among them, for they will eat human flesh more gladly than any other. Nevertheless the land is abundant enough in meat and fish and corn, and also gold and silver and other goods. Merchants bring children there to sell, and the people of the country buy them. Those that are plump they eat; those that are not plump they feed up and fatten, and then kill and eat them. And they say it is the best and sweetest flesh in the world." (translation by Moseley, p.127).

and the anthropophagic custom is used to stress this concept, creating an even more pervasive sense of aversion and repugnance. Moreover, Mandeville specifies that their diet does not consist of slaves in general, but only of children. Like lambs or pigs, these children are bought and, when necessary, raised. I argue that this focus on the breeding – not only on the eating – of children is essential to create distance between the actions described and the readers. The brutality of the act is monstrous and inhuman since, like in Odoric, it implies the usage of a human activity for an inhuman purpose. The orderliness of the practise suggests it is an abomination of the breeding activity and it helps the audience to dissociate themselves from a population whose point of view they have taken a few sentences earlier. As such, the sense of abhorrence and alienation is even stronger than in Odoric's account. In the same passage, Mandeville condenses both a sense of familiarity or, at least, of possible acquaintance and a sense of extreme difference, even abhorrence. There is not a fixed and univocal perspective, but a variety of possibilities that coexist in the same text and in the same passage.

The same paradoxical coexistence of fascination and abhorrence, familiarity and alienation, may be traced in the diet habits of some monsters analysed in the second chapter. Indeed, anthropophagy changes connotation if it is practised by the cynocephali or if it is practised by the giants. While in the first case it is a negative but still quite marginal detail in the cynocephali's perfect social organisation, in the second case it is a great and ulterior proof of the giants' lack of civilisation and, consequently, inhumanity. In other words, in the case of the cynocephali, anthropophagy is used to counterbalance their intrinsic humanity while for the giants it is used to further prove their inhumanity. In the end, both cynocephali and giants are monstrous, but not on the same level. The giants lack every form of civilisation and every kind of restraint: they throw themselves in the water in order to catch the boats and eat the missionaries that are in them. Their longing for human flesh may be compared to the thirst for blood of the inhabitants of an island Mandeville calls Melk and that may be recognised as Malacca.

> And fra þis ile men wendez by many iles in þe see til ane ile þat es called Melk, and þare es also wikked folk and cruelle. For þai hafe nerehand na lyking bot in slaughter of men for to drink þaire blude, and he þat may slae maste noumer of men es of grettest name

> amanges þaim and maste wirschipfull. Þare es na drink þat þai lufe so wele as mannes blude, and þat þai say es Godd.[225] (p.105)

In this case, there is no physical description of this population. The implicit monstrosity of this "wikked" and "cruell" folk only lies in their behaviour and habits. Indeed, their greatest pleasure is to slaughter other human beings and to drink their blood. Blood itself becomes an obsession to them to the point of becoming their God. In this way, deity and nourishment are literally the same thing for them. Indeed, the most important member of their society is the one who shows the greatest devotion to blood by slaughtering the greatest number of people.

In order to better understand the usage of anthropophagy in Mandeville, it is necessary to take into consideration two ulterior examples, whose basic source may arguably be Odoric. They are both instances of ritual anthropophagy linked to funerals. The first passage is taken from the description of an island Mandeville calls Dundeya, which may correspond to the Andamands Islands.

> In þis ile dwellez a maner of folk þat es of euille condiciouns for þe fader etez þe sone and þe sone þe fader, þe husband his wyf and þe wyf hir husband. For if it falle þat a mannes fader be seke þe sonne gase to þe preste of þe lawe and praies him þat he willle ask þaire godd, whilk es a mawmet, whedir his fader salle dye of þat sekeness. […] if he say þat he schalle dye þe preste and þe sone and þe wyf of þe seke man commez tille him and castez a clath on his mouth and stoppez his wynde, and so þai slae him. And when he es deed þai take his body and hewes it in smalle pecez and callez all his frendez togyder and all þe mynstralles þat may be geten and makes þam a sollempne feste and etes þe deed mannes body. And, when þai hafe eten all þe flesch, þai gader all þe banes togyder and grafez þam on þaire maner wiþ grete sollempnitee and lowd sang.[226] (p.108)

The rite is extremely similar to the one reported by Odoric. In both cases there is an idol who intervenes, deciding whether the sick man has to live or to die. Once dead, the corpse is dismembered, cooked and eaten by the family and the friends. While this rite may be

[225] "And from this country you go via many others in the sea to one called Melk. There are wicked and cruel folk there too. For they have no delight or pleasure in anything except slaughtering people to drink their blood. And the man who can kill the greatest number of men is the most respected and worthiest among them. There is no drink they like so much as man's blood, and they call it God." (translation by Moseley, p.134).

[226] "There live here a people of evil customs, for fathers eat their sons and sons their fathers, husbands their wives and wives their husbands. For if it chance that a man's father is sick, the son goes to the priest of their religion and asks him to inquire of their god – who is an idol – whether his father will live or die of that sickness. […] if it says he will die, the priest and the son and the wife of the sick man come to him and throw a cloth over his mouth and stop him breathing, and kill him. When he is dead they take his body and cut it in little pieces, and summon all his friends, and all the musicians they can get, and make a solemn feast and eat the dead man's body. And when they have eaten all the flesh, they collect all the bones together and bury them according to their custom with great solemnity and loud singing." (translation by Moseley, p.136).

interpreted as cruel and abominable from a European perspective, in both Odoric's and Mandeville's account it is referred as extremely solemn for the population in question. In my opinion, the main difference between the two narrations is the moral judgment given to the population itself. Odoric introduces the description of the people of Dondin by claiming that their name means filthy and that "ibi mali inhabitant homines, edentes carnes crudas, et aliam immundiciam, quod eciam abominabile est audire"[227]. Moreover, after the description of the rite, he reports a dialogue he had with some members of this population in which he enquires about their custom of eating the sick members of their families. In the brief dialogue, Odoric is very accusatory. He does not understand how people who are gifted with reason may lower themselves to such an inhuman habit. In order to express his disgust, he asks them: "Si canis occisus ab alio cane non comeditur; cur vos, existentes homines, facitis vos bestiis viliores?"[228]. In this accusation, not only is Odoric comparing them to dogs, but he is explicitly considering them inferior to dogs: their humanity is strongly doubted. On the other hand, Mandeville's judgment is more contradictory. While stating that they display "euill condiciouns", he also claims the king of that land is "grete lord and a mighty" (p.108) and all the people are extremely obedient to him. This fact implies a functional and rightful social organisation, which is the basis for civilisation. Moreover, while Odoric uses direct speech to ask the population about the reasons for their inhuman customs, Mandeville neutrally reports their reasons without displaying an openly negative judgment. He has been told that the preventive killing of the sick alleviates their suffering and that eating their bodies saves them from worms, which would torment the dead's souls. On the contrary, the rite allows the dead to reach paradise. In this specific passage, Mandeville's neutrality does not necessarily imply a negative or a positive judgment of the population; more than a real judgment, Mandeville displays a sort of fascination for a culture and a custom which is so alien – and alienating – from his European perspective.

The second instance of this rewriting process concerns one of the places traditionally most linked to anthropophagy: Tibet.

---

[227] Odoric from Pordenone, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli/40-relatio/capitoli/109-capo-xl-di-coloro-che-mangiano-gli-uomini-e-di-dodim?start=2; "there live evil people who eat raw flesh and other filthy things too horrible to even hear" (my translation).

[228] Odoric from Pordenone, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli/40-relatio/capitoli/109-capo-xl-di-coloro-che-mangiano-gli-uomini-e-di-dodim?start=2; "If a dog killed by another dog is not eaten, how is it that you, who are human beings, make yourselves worse beasts?" (my translation).

> In þis ile þai hafe a custom thurghoute all þe land þat, when any mannez fader es deed and his sone wille do him wirschepe, he sendez after all his kynredyn and his gude frendez, prestez of þaire lawe, minstralles and many oþer, and þai bere þe body to a hill with grete sollempnytee and grete myrth. And when it es þare þe grettest prelate smytet off þe deed mannez heued and lays it apon a grete plater of siluer, or of gold if he be a riche man, and giffez it to his sone. And þan all his frendez singez and saise many orisouns, and þan þe prestez and religious men of þaire lawe hewez þe body alle in smale pecez and saise many orisouns. And fewles of þe cuntree þat knawez þe custom commez þider and houers abouue þam, as vowltures, egles, rauyns, and oþer fewlez of rauyne, and þe prestez castez þis flesch to þam, and þai bere it a lytille þeine and etez it. […] And þe sonne gers sethe his fader heued and þe flesch þeroff he partez amang his speciale frendez, ilke man a lytille, for a dayntee. And of þe scalpe of þe heued he gers make him a coppe and þeroff he drinkez all his lyf tyme in remembraunce of his fader.[229] (pp.167-168)

The description of the rite is very similar to Odoric's, faithfully repeating the same steps of the rite in the same order. However, as Howard points out, the rite is not described as something repugnant and completely distant, but as something natural.[230] Even more than natural, it seems an anti-mass, an inversion of the Christian ritual par excellence. More than a repugnant habit whose role is to cast doubt on the Tibetans' humanity, it is a pious mirroring and distortion of the Christian ritual.[231] I would add that the parallel between the Tibetans and the Europeans is made clear in the text, when Mandeville openly states:

> And þan, riȝt as prestez in oure cuntree syngez for saulez *Subuenite sancti Dei*, so þase prestez þare singez wiþ a hie voice on þaire langage on þis wyse, Takez tent now and seez how gude a man þis was wham þe aungelles of Godd commez to fecche and bere in to paradys.[232] (pp.167-168)

In this case, not only has the comparison a human basis rather than a human-animal one, but it also juxtaposes the Tibetan rite with a Christian European practise. One could infer that this link makes the similarities in the two rituals evident. Moreover, the act of eating the body and drinking the blood – not only in this specific episode, but also in the previous

[229] "In this land it is a custom everywhere that when any man's father is dead and his son wants to honour him, he sends for all the kinsfolk, his good friends, priests of their religion, minstrels and others; and they carry the body to a hill with great solemnity and great rejoicing. When they get there, the most important priest strikes off the dead man's head and lays it on a great platter of silver, or of gold if he is a rich man, and gives it to his son. And then all his friends sing and say many prayers, and then the priest and religious men of their cult hew the body into small pieces and say many prayers. And birds of that land, familiar with this custom, gather there and hover around them – vultures, eagles, ravens, and other raptors; the priests throw this flesh to them, and they carry it a little way off and eat it. […] Then the son boils his father's head, and the flesh from it he distributes among his special friends, giving each one a little bit, as a dainty. And from the cranium of the head he has a cup made, and he drinks from it all his lifetime in remembrance of his father." (translation by Moseley, pp.186-187).

[230] Howard, Donald R., "The World of Mandeville's Travels", pp.12-13.

[231] Howard, p.16.

[232] "And then, just as priests in our country sing for the souls of the dead *Subuenite, sancti Dei*, so those priests there sing with a loud voice in their language, 'Regard and see how good a man this was, whom the angels of God come to fetch to Paradise.'" (translation by Moseley, p.186).

ones – openly resembles the Eucharistic act. In the Christian belief, during the mass, bread and wine truly become the body and the blood of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for the salvation of humanity. While the usage of bread and wine constitutes a metaphor for the anthropophagic act, the real presence of Christ in them is strongly defended by the Christian Church.[233] The real transformation of bread and wine into the historical body and the historical blood of Jesus Christ is called transubstantiation. This change in the substance of bread and wine means that during the Eucharist the believers actually perform an anthropophagic act which implies the consumption of the body of the divinity. Indeed, the link between anthropophagy and the Eucharist is not Mandeville's invention, but it re-emerges from time to time in medieval literature. Recalling Dante's example given at the beginning of the chapter, the whole Ugolino passage has strong biblical connotations. Indeed, not only do the children use a biblical language, but they offer themselves as nourishment to the father, mimicking Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of humankind.[234]

> ambo le man per lo dolor mi morsi;
> ed ei, pensando ch'io 'l fessi per voglia
> di manicar, di subito levorsi
>
> e disser: "Padre, assai ci fia men doglia
> se tu mangi di noi: tu ne vestisti
> queste misere carni, e tu le spoglia"[235]

In this case, the children are offering their bodies to save the father from starvation and death. In this way, their bodies would become a means to salvation. The passage recalls the Gospel: "Et accepto pane gratias egit, et fregit, et dedit eis, dicens: Hoc est corpus meum, quod pro vobis datur: hoc facite in meam commemorationem"[236]. In this way, the sacrifice of Jesus, of Ugolino's sons and of the fathers of some populations in Mandeville's account may be placed more or less on the same level. They all recall the same tradition, they are all variations on the same theme and the connection would have

[233] Rawson, p.179.
[234] De Rooy, Ronald, "On Anthropophagy in Dante's *Inferno*", *Lectura Dantis*, 8 (1991), p.69.
[235] Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIII, ll.58-63; "out of my grief, I bit at both my hands; / and they, who thought I'd done that out of hunger, / immediately rose and told me: 'Father, / it would be far less painful for us if / you ate of us; for you clothed us in this / sad flesh – it is for you to strip it off.'" (translation by Allen Mandelbaum).
[236] Luke 22:19; "And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it,* and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (translation from King James Bible).

been obvious for the readers of the time.[237] Moreover, in Mandeville's passage about Tibet, the very act of distributing little pieces of the father's boiled head to his friends may seem a mimesis of the distribution of particles during the Eucharist. As Fleck points out, all these anthropophagic rituals, rather than increasing the dichotomy between the Self and the Other, blur the boundary between what is familiar and what is alien, creating paradoxical links with the Self. The Other appears less Other than it should appear, opening to the possibility of paradoxes. I posit that Mandeville is not trying to give straight and easy answers, as many real travellers tried to do, but he leaves all the questions open to many kinds of different interpretations, which can coexist. If on one hand all these anthropophagic practices seem inhuman and abominable, on the other hand they appear as the literal reification of European practices. While not providing a univocal answer, Mandeville is paradoxically reporting the incongruences of a world which embraces differences and contradictions. Clearly, the paradox lies in the fact that Mandeville is not a real traveller and that the world he is describing is a completely fictitious one. However, he manages to depict diversity in a more convincing and even natural way than other writers who did travel to these locations. The magnificence of this text lies in this intricate tangle of possibilities which manages to stay proudly unresolvable.

3.2 Deformity, Liminality and their Connections to the Centre: Possible Conclusions

As already suggested in the previous chapter, the monstrous characteristics of some populations encountered by Mandeville cast some doubt on the position they may occupy in the Chain of Being. Even though some peoples may be considered civilised and fully rational, nevertheless their humanity – and their inhumanity too, in a way – is questioned. The reason for this doubt lies mostly in their appearance, which is not normative. Many interpretations given by literary criticism to monstrous appearances in the *Travels* focus on their aesthetic value and on their sub-humanness, which are in contrast with the reader's sense of Self. In other words, they are often depicted as the direct liminal counterbalance to the perfection of the Christian European centre. Therefore, their monstrosity is completely coincident with their marginalisation and their only role is to create a complete contrast with the Self, underlining the strength of the privileged and

[237] Fleck, p.394.

centred European point of view.[238] On the contrary, the Saracens and other "human"[239] populations are recognised as contrasting a clear and neat division between the Self and the Other. As already discussed, the dialogue between Mandeville and the Sultan has a strong didactic aim since Mandeville uses the figure of the Sultan to address all Christendom and to reproach all Christians for their frivolity and for all the internal fights that were lacerating Europe, weakening it against outside threats. Moreover, it is a means to demonstrate that the Saracens possess some knowledge in common with the Christian faith. As a consequence, the extreme diversity that should divide the Christian from the Muslim world collapses, giving space to similarities.[240] Fleck interprets these similarities as a way to reconduct the infidels to the truth of the Christian faith and this very recognition as a sign of "the hegemonic impulse of pre-colonial Western Christianity"[241]. However, as already discussed in the previous subchapter about anthropophagy, sometimes the Other may become the mirror of the Self. Indeed, in many cases the attitude of the narrator seems more problematic than a simple pre-colonial longing to possess.

The most stunning detail in Mandeville's narration is the partial recognition of the Self in the Other: the extreme difference that should divide the two cultures seems to blur, showing the many similarities between the attitudes and the beliefs of the Self and of the Other. The division is not so neat as it is supposed to be, so conquest is not the clear and logical consequence, as it is often believed to be. While taking into consideration some populations practising ritual anthropophagy, Fleck affirms that their rituals openly and clearly resemble the Christian rites, showing Mandeville's "ambivalent desire both to minimize difference […] and to maintain, at the last moment, a semblance of separation"[242]. I would argue that this attitude is not limited to "human" populations with monstrous anthropophagic habits, but also to some of the monstrous races. Indeed, populations like the Pygmies and the Cynocephali present many points in common with

[238] Fleck, p.385.
[239] I decided to use the quotation marks in order to underline the doubtful distinction between human and non-human in association with Eastern populations. Indeed, I will not affirm that the characteristics associated to the Saracens are more human than the ones associated to the Pygmies, for example. However, in the descriptions Mandeville provides of the Saracens, for instance, the divergence from European norm includes only culture. The Saracens are physically equal to their Western counterpart and, as Mandeville seems to claim, even their culture is not so different, in the end. For these reasons, recognition is easier. The monstrous races with their ambiguous body represent a more complex problem and, consequently, recognition too becomes more problematic.
[240] Fleck, pp.387-390.
[241] Fleck, p.390.
[242] Fleck, p.393.

their European counterparts and their geographical marginality does not completely imply an opposition with the centre. The links between the periphery inhabited by these monstrous races and the centre where the Europeans dwell are many and are often emphasised by the narrative voice. For instance, as already discussed, the shift of perspective in the case of the Pygmies is a clear sign of the interchangeability of their condition with the normative one. Indeed, the recognition of similarities between the centre and the periphery casts some doubt on the validity of this division and, consequently, on the perception that monsters may occupy only a marginal position in the complexity of the world.

As Serina Patterson affirms, medieval *mappaemundi* and travel narrative localised monstrosity at the borders of the world, in the attempt to enclose them into inaccessible places completely divided from the demarcated domestic boundaries.[243] Therefore, in order to annihilate their disturbing potential, they are securely divided from the Europeans. By physically separating the abnormal from the normative, the boundaries that divide the world of the Self from the world of the Other assume reassuring characteristics, and the perception of the insuperableness of these boundaries frustrates the threat represented by monsters and their questionable humanity. For this very reason, many of the monstrous representations in the *mappaemundi* and some of the monstrous races in the *Travels* seem more aesthetic and exotic details than real meaning-bearers. However, this very liminal space they occupy in the representation may be reconducted to a certain and specific meaning.

When I began analysing all the monstrous encounters in Mandeville's narrative, I asked myself if all these creatures may be interpreted also as disabled figures whose marginalisation at the edge of the world can be seen as a way to exorcise their disturbing potential. The direct association between monstrosity and disability may be an excessive simplification, but still the study of monsters and disabilities studies present overlapping characteristics, which can be seen as a starting point for a more precise inquiry.[244] For instance, Richard Godden, citing Irina Metzler, defines the disabled as a state in-between

[243] Patterson, Serina, "Reading the Medieval in Early Modern Monster Culture", *Studies in Philology*, 111 (2014), p.289.
[244] Godden, Richard H, and Mittman, Asa Simon, "Embodied Difference: Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman" in Godden, R. H. et al., *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp.9-11.

two conditions, dead and alive.[245] As already discussed, monsters too are creatures standing in-between two conditions: human and animal, human and non-human. In his discussion, Godden takes into consideration the centrality of the inhuman neighbour in the construction of the Self: in fact, the category of the neighbour and the category of the monstrous may be both interpreted as in-between state, whose complete definition is never possible. As the monster is in-between humanness and in-humanness, the neighbour is both proximate and remote, both reassuring and threatening. For this reason, the neighbour is necessarily Other and, consequently, it is inherently and ontologically monstrous. From this point of view, the inhuman is not simply "not human", but it is different from the human to an extent that cannot be quite defined.[246] I would argue that this definition of the neighbour as monstrous is perfectly applicable to the monsters of the *Travels*. Indeed, they are part of a world which was itself an in-between during the late Middle Ages: the East was both something mysterious and unknown and, at the same time, something that both was being explored and that reached the very borders of the European world. The Mongol expansion had shortened the distances between East and West and the Eastern populations were eventually the real neighbours of the Europeans. From this perspective, the monstrous races seem less distant from the European world than they could have been perceived before. This forced closeness permitted the confrontation with the populations that dwelt on the other side of the border and, as Godden points out, this "ethical encounter with the neighbor […] demonstrates that what is outside those borders may also be inside, a monstrous, yet extimate Other"[247]. This recognition of the Self in the Other is present in the *Travels* since, as already seen, the narrator often uses comparisons with his own culture to describe other cultures.

While shortening the distances between the Self and the Other, Mandeville is one of the first authors to partially embrace the Early Modern and Modern tendency to shift the position of monsters from the borders of the world to its centre, often the city centres.[248] In a pamphlet anonymously published in 1640 and entitled *A Certaine Relation of the Hog-Faced Gentlewoman called Mistris Tannakin Skinker*, the author analyses this tendency to bring monstrosity from the geographical peripheries of the world to its core

[245] Godden, Richard H., "Neighboring Disability in Medieval Literature", *Exemplaria*, 32 (2020), p.232.
[246] Godden, pp.231-232.
[247] Godden, p.232.
[248] Patterson, p.289.

and he identifies this process as intrinsically modern. In his discussion, he refers to the monstrous appearances described by Mandeville as the everyday reality of the city. Indeed, he claims, in the city there are many places where monsters are shown and spectacularised to satisfy the curiosity of the observers.[249] Then, the author of the pamphlet focuses great part of his interest on monstrous births. The specific motif of the monstrous births finds its origin during the Middle Ages, but it became extremely popular during the Early Modern period, thanks to the rise of printing.[250] At the end of the second chapter, I already cited an example of monstrous birth given by Augustine in the *City of God*, but he provides many more during the chapter, proving that these unusual births provoked curiosity and demonstrating how they were well known by the audience.

> There is at Hippo Zaritus a man who has crescent-shaped feet with only two toes on each; and his hands are similar. If there were any race with these features, it would be added to our list of the curiosities and wonders of nature. […] Some years ago, but certainly within my memory, a man was born in the East with a double set of upper members but a single set of lower ones. He had two heads, two chests and four arms, but only one belly and two feet, as if he were one man; and he lived long enough for *his fame to draw many people to come and see him*.[251]

As the emphasised sentence aims to demonstrate, the spectacularisation of unusual births was something common during the ancient and medieval times too. These monstrous births could come from the outside – as in the second example, where Augustine points out that the strange creature comes from the East –, but they could also happen nearer home, as the first example demonstrates: Hippo Zaritus was part of the Western Roman Empire before its fall in 418 AD, as was Hippo Regius, the city where Augustine was born.

However, the interest for monstrous births grew during the Early Modern Age, especially after the Reformation, since they were interpreted by Catholics as a sign of God's repulsion toward the protestant heresy and vice versa.[252] Monstrous births inside the European and, more specifically, English context have been studied by Luca Baratta, who managed to give an organic and complete interpretation of the various meanings they assumed during all the Early Modern and Modern Age. He recognised the centrality that monstrous births had in the dispute between the Catholic and the Protestant faith and the

[249] Patterson, pp.294-295.
[250] Patterson, pp.287-288.
[251] Augustine, p.709 (my emphasis).
[252] Patterson, p.288.

apocalyptic value they were often associated with. Indeed, even before the Protestant schism took place, Martin Luther collaborated in the writing of *Deuttung der czwo grewlichen Figuren*, a pamphlet whose main aim was to interpret two monstrous births as divine signs against the corruption and the degradation of the Christian church. Eventually, the interpretation that Luther gave to one of these prodigies was used against him by his Catholic opponents, becoming a satirical symbol of Luther himself. This distorted image of Luther had a great impact in the anti-Lutheran propaganda that was the basis of the Counter-Reformation process. The deformity and the monstrosity of Luther's body were seen as clear signs of his demonic nature whose only interest laid in the disintegration of the Church.[253] Indeed, when the enemy is not an unknown and faraway power situated in the East anymore, the monsters abandon their liminal localisation in the space to occupy the centre. While their role as significance-bearers is never doubted or eliminated, their position in the world map changes in reference to the main historical concerns that create the monsters themselves. Therefore, even though monsters are not ontologically real, they might mostly be interpreted as projections of ignorance and fear. Monsters are and always have been an in-between space to fill with the paradoxes and the contradiction that may destabilise and challenge a reality and a status quo upon which the certainties that regulate the world are built. Their basic role is to contain what cannot be fully comprehended or fully accepted, in order to marginalise these perceptions and do not let them space to contradict an equilibrium, an order we consider as fixed as the Chain of Being was for medieval people.

To sum up, the present dissertation aimed to give a more complex interpretation to Mandeville's monstrous encounters in the East by recognising to them a paradoxical nature, both of repulsion and of belonging. While the sources from which Mandeville took the information he re-elaborated in the *Travels* seem to maintain a neat boundary between what is human and what is monstrous, Mandeville sometimes seems to cross this boundary, recognising some similarities between the monstrous and the human. The author often shifts his privileged point of view with the monsters, giving the reader the chance to impersonate the Other and to understand its point of view too. Many bridges between alien cultures and Mandeville's own culture are created, as in the case of the connection between anthropophagic rites and Christian Eucharist. Moreover, disabilities

[253] Baratta, pp.58-62.

studies may suggest a more interesting interpretation even for all those monstrous races which are only briefly described in the text and whose focus on physical deformities could have led to interpret them only as mere aesthetic and exotic details, diminishing or even cancelling their importance in the economy of the text. Recognising their deformity as a sign of impairment and their marginality as a simple reflection of the marginal position they usually covered in society, they become interesting objects of study too. More specifically, while creatures like the Pygmies and the Cynocephali are described through long and articulated descriptions in the texts, other beings like the Scipods or the Blemmies are not given enough space in the text to satisfactorily describe their customs or their habits. Thus, even literary criticism often gives little space for the analysis of these creatures, attributing to them mere aesthetic and decorative purposes. On the contrary, I think that their presence in the text is as relevant as any other monstrous encounter. I would compare their role in the *Travels* with the role of the crippled monster painted in a French manuscript used by Godden and Mittman in the introduction of *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*. Even though the authors recognise that the crippled monster is not essential in the system of illuminations of the manuscripts, nevertheless its presence in the manuscript adds meaning to the complexity of the narration. The marginal position it occupies is meaningful and it summarises in its body both monstrous characteristics and signs of impairment: in brief, it is a symbol of marginality and, at the same time, it is a convergence of two categories which cannot quite find a real categorisation, the monstrous and the disabled.[254] However, sometimes in the *Travels* the monsters seem to transcend their liminal position in the world, almost appearing as the mirror images of the normative Europeans. Nevertheless, as already discussed, they too cannot find a univocal and decisive place in the Chain, the extreme medieval attempt at categorising the world.

All these characteristics of Mandeville's monsters make them more human than their previous occurrences and appearances, even if their humanity is never explicitly stated. Nevertheless, they share many similarities with the European Christian world, more similarities than they are expected to. This may be explained by a sense of fascination for the East and the unknown which was not alien to medieval accounts of the East, but which may have also been increased by the fact that probably Mandeville never

[254] Godden, and Mittman, pp.8-15.

travelled to and never visited the places he described. This may have given him more freedom in imagining how to describe these populations, their customs and their beliefs. By affirming this, I am not claiming that Mandeville has a modern and cosmopolitan view of the world, I am simply pointing at a sort of fascination for the exotic that seems to lead the author to search for similarities with the Other, rather than differences. However, this is only an interpretation since it is not possible to completely understand a text so distant from our present age and from our perception. The cultural and religious environment had radically changed since then, making it impossible to completely understand medieval points of view and, more precisely, medieval audiences' reception of texts. Moreover, the present dissertation only aimed to analyse Eastern monstrosity in the context of Mandeville's *Travels*, which is just a little aspect of the larger problem represented by the depiction of monstrosity, deformity and humanness in the Eastern lands and, as a consequence, my dissertation leaves many questions still open and valid for further research. For instance, the figure of Saint Christopher Cynocephalus, which I referred to many times, is central in the understanding of the relation between sanctity and monstrosity. Indeed, the general concept of the monstrous body is fundamental in Christian mythology since the differences between the miraculous, the wonderful and the monstrous are minimal and the boundaries that separate all these characteristics are often blurred. Moreover, monsters have great importance in Christian folklore, so a more detailed study on the role of the monstrous body in both canonical and apocryphal medieval Christian texts may be extremely interesting and may reach very different conclusions from those of the present dissertation. Even though references or suggestions to these themes are present, still they were not the real focus of my dissertation. Indeed, it aimed to and managed to reach its main goal to closely compare Mandeville's monsters with their literary antecedents and to relativise their liminality and their inhumanness in the complexity of the *mappamundi* the *Travels* wants to virtually depict.

Riassunto

L'obiettivo principale della tesi è analizzare le creature mostruose presenti nei *Travels* di Sir John Mandeville al fine di capire il loro ruolo nell'economia del testo e al fine di confrontare la loro caratterizzazione con la tradizione letteraria da cui sono tratti. È innanzitutto necessario sottolineare che i *Travels* si presentano come il resoconto di un viaggio in Oriente intrapreso da un cavaliere inglese, tale John Mandeville. Nonostante questa patina di autobiografismo, la narrazione è totalmente immaginaria e l'autore, la cui vera identità è ancora oggetto di dibattito tra gli studiosi, probabilmente non ha mai visitato i luoghi che descrive. Tutte le informazioni su cui sono costruiti i *Travels* provengono da fonti scritte, sia classiche sia contemporanee all'autore. Nello specifico, l'idea dell'esistenza di creature mostruose che abitano i limiti estremi della Terra non è un'invenzione di Mandeville o una percezione ascrivibile solamente al medioevo, ma proviene da una tradizione che ha le sue origini nella cultura greca. Tuttavia, vista la scarsa se non nulla conoscenza del greco durante il periodo medievale, la principale fonte sull'argomento era la *Naturalis Historia* di Plinio il vecchio, opera enciclopedica in cui era riassunto tutto il sapere latino riguardo la filosofia naturale.

Inoltre, dal momento che i *Travels* si presentano come il resoconto di un viaggio in Oriente, ho deciso di confrontarli anche con altri resoconti, stilati da veri viaggiatori che hanno attraversato le regioni orientali durante il medioevo. Da tale confronto volevo che emergessero le differenze significative nella percezione della mostruosità tra i veri viaggiatori e Mandeville, che invece si limita a rielaborare delle fonti scritte. Tra queste fonti, tuttavia, sono presenti anche resoconti di veri viaggiatori, dato che complica ulteriormente la recezione delle meraviglie descritte da Mandeville stesso. Infatti, sebbene le esplorazioni condotte da monaci e mercanti in territorio mongolo avessero messo in dubbio (se non proprio eliminato) la credenza che l'Oriente fosse popolato dalle creature mostruose descritte da Plinio, il testo di Mandeville sembra andare nella direzione esattamente opposta a quella proposta dai suoi predecessori. I *Travels* restituiscono l'Oriente ai mostri, riconoscendoli come legittimi abitanti di quelle regioni remote, ma la caratterizzazione di questi mostri cambia leggermente rispetto al passato. Per esplorare al meglio le contraddizioni e i paradossi che definiscono le creature mostruose descritte da Mandeville, ho deciso di dividere tali creature in due macronuclei tematici che hanno come base la percezione del corpo fisico come principale indice di

mostruosità. Il secondo capitolo è incentrato sulla mostruosità come deformazione fisica, mentre il terzo esplora l'antropofagia come indice intrinseco di mostruosità.

Il secondo capitolo analizza la storia della creazione di questi mostri, fino ad arrivare a Mandeville. Dopodiché, le creature mostruose presenti nei *Travels* vengono analizzate in base al tipo di mostruosità che presentano: da un lato ci sono le creature ibride, che concentrano nel loro corpo caratteristiche umane e caratteristiche animali, e dall'altro ci sono creature il cui corpo presenta significative deformazioni rispetto al corpo umano normativo, sia per eccesso che per difetto. Un esempio appartenente alla prima categoria è quello dei cinocefali, esseri con il corpo umano e la testa da cane. Nei *Travels*, tuttavia, la descrizione di queste creature non si limita meramente alla loro fisicità, ma prende in considerazione anche la loro organizzazione sociale e le loro abitudini religiose. Nello specifico, questa popolazione è idolatra dal momento che venera il bue e perpetra pratiche antropofaghe ai danni dei prigionieri di guerra che non possono pagare per la propria libertà. Tuttavia, Mandeville li descrive come esseri dotati di razionalità e sottolinea come il loro re sia giusto nelle dispute e nell'amministrazione del suo regno. Queste caratteristiche sembrano in netto contrasto tra di loro, così come la testa di cane è in contrasto con il loro aspetto umano. Questa ambiguità, tuttavia, non è limitata solo ai cinocefali. Altra interessante popolazione mostruosa sono i pigmei, i quali presentano una struttura fisica identica agli esseri umani, ma una taglia nettamente inferiore. Tuttavia, Mandeville li descrive come un popolo dotato di grande intelligenza e addirittura riduce la stranezza della loro conformazione fisica a una mera questione di prospettiva: come noi possiamo considerare mostruosa la loro piccola statura, così loro possono considerare deforme la nostra eccessiva altezza rispetto ai loro parametri.

Questa descrizione parzialmente positiva della diversità fisica, tuttavia, non è comune a tutte le presenze mostruose nell'Oriente dei *Travels*. A un elevato livello di civilizzazione di alcune popolazioni corrisponde un livello minimo di altre, come gli abitanti dell'isola di Tracota, la cui caratterizzazione animale esula da una vera e propria descrizione fisica. Questa popolazione si nutre di carne cruda, vive nelle caverne e fugge quando entra in contatto con un altro essere vivente, così come fuggono gli animali spaventati dall'uomo. Altre popolazioni ancora, come gli sciapodi e i blemmi, sono descritte solamente tramite la loro apparenza fisica, suggerendo solo talvolta la natura nomade o incivile delle loro società. Questa dualità nel presentare l'insieme delle creature

mostruose dei *Travels*, tuttavia, non corrisponde a una divisione netta che permetta di riconoscere negli esseri descritti più nello specifico popolazioni umane e in quelli descritti sommariamente popolazioni subumane. Al contrario, è proprio l'ambiguità di molte descrizioni a mettere in dubbio la loro appartenenza alla specie umana, o perlomeno a spingere il lettore a chiedersi quale posto possano effettivamente ricoprire queste creature nell'organizzazione del creato. Chiaramente il testo non propone nessuna risposta diretta a tale quesito, ma un'analisi più approfondita sul pensiero medievale può fornire, se non un'effettiva soluzione, perlomeno una visione più completa della problematicità di queste creature per come Mandeville le descrive.

Uno dei testi a cui ho fatto maggiormente riferimento è *La Città di Dio* di Agostino da Ippona, un pensatore cristiano vissuto tra il 300 e il 400 dopo Cristo. I suoi scritti godettero di notevole influenza durante il periodo medievale, soprattutto i passaggi riguardanti argomenti spinosi come l'esistenza dei mostri in Oriente. Infatti, ammettere che tali creature potessero davvero esistere creava due diverse implicazioni: la prima era accettare che Dio aveva creato tali mostri per una ragione specifica e la seconda era ammettere che essi, paradossalmente, rappresentassero un errore nella creazione. Dal momento che l'onnipotenza di Dio non poteva essere mai messa in discussione, i mostri dovevano per forza essere parte integrante del creato e ricoprire un preciso ruolo nella sua organizzazione. A tal proposito, usando una ricostruzione etimologica probabilmente falsa della parola *mostro*, nella *Città di Dio* Agostino legittima la loro esistenza come segno dell'onnipotenza stessa del divino e dell'infinita possibilità di Dio nel far mutare la materia. Secondo il filosofo, non solo i mostri vogliono dimostrare all'uomo l'infinito potere di Dio sui corpi umani, comprovando che la resurrezione dei corpi alla fine dei tempi sicuramente avverrà, ma la loro stessa mostruosità viene riconosciuta come tale solo e soltanto perché l'uomo non è in grado di comprenderne il loro ruolo ultimo nel progetto divino. In altre parole, essi sono mostruosi solo agli occhi dell'uomo che non è in grado di comprendere appieno il loro significato e attribuisce una propria mancanza a un errore divino. Secondo Agostino, ogni essere mortale dotato di ragione è per forza umano e discendente da Adamo, qualsiasi sia la sua apparenza fisica. Applicando questa visione agli esseri mostruosi descritti da Mandeville, alcuni di questi possono sicuramente essere visti come umani. Tuttavia, la loro caratterizzazione rimane problematica dal momento che spesso, pur possedendo la ragione, alcuni dei loro costumi implicano

l'infrazione di regole ferree che dovrebbero caratterizzare la specie umana, come ad esempio le pratiche antropofagiche dei cinocefali.

Nel terzo capitolo, quindi, l'antropofagia diventa parte integrante del mio discorso legato alla mostruosità. Essa rappresenta uno dei più grandi taboo nella storia dell'uomo, ma la sua caratterizzazione durante il medioevo è molto variegata e il giudizio verso chi la pratica varia leggermente in base alle motivazioni che sottendono le pratiche antropofagiche stesse. Per esempio, nei periodi di guerra e carestie era capitato che anche in Europa ci fossero casi di antropofagia, ma erano tutti legati a situazioni disperate; sebbene ciò non comportasse una riduzione della gravità del peccato, tuttavia le motivazioni potevano essere perlomeno comprese, anche se comunque non accettate. A questo tipo di antropofagia legato al bisogno si oppongono pratiche antropofagiche rituali, come ad esempio nella celebrazione di funerali, e casi di antropofagia a fini di nutrimento. Questi ultimi due casi rappresentano un problema in quanto implicano una volontà diversa che sottostà alla pratica. Tuttavia, nei *Travels* la mostruosità di tali pratiche è spesso messa in dubbio grazie all'abilità dell'autore di rintracciare dei punti di tangenza tra l'eucarestia e le pratiche antropofagiche funerarie ascritte ai popoli orientali. Infatti, esse spesso prevedono la consumazione del corpo o di parti del corpo del padre defunto da parte della famiglia, così come l'eucarestia prevede la consumazione del corpo e del sangue di Cristo da parte della comunità. In vari passaggi, Mandeville rende esplicito questo parallelismo, riuscendo in qualche modo a "umanizzare" delle pratiche che potevano venire facilmente interpretate come mostruose. In questo modo, viene creato un ponte tra le popolazioni orientali e l'occidente, ponte che sembra accorciare la distanza tra i due estremi del globo che veniva percepita come incolmabile.

Infine, la tesi punta ad analizzare le figure mostruose attraverso i mezzi forniti dagli studi sulla disabilità in letteratura. Infatti, interpretando l'individuo disabile come un essere a metà tra due categorie, la tesi finisce per riconoscere i mostri orientali come creature di confine che esistono in uno stato intermedio tra umano e animale, tra vicino e lontano. Inoltre, la localizzazione geografica dei mostri ai limiti estremi del mondo conosciuto può essere interpretata come paradossale in quanto le nascite mostruose avvenivano ovunque, anche nel centro stesso della Cristianità. Tuttavia, decentrare tali fenomeni e trattarli come creature a sé poteva essere un modo per annullare o limitare il loro potere disturbante. Il posizionamento di tali mostri ai margini del mondo, inoltre, non

era altro che un'estremizzazione del loro status sociale che li poneva ai margini della società medievale, fortemente gerarchizzata. Tuttavia, anche grazie all'uso della mostruosità durante il dibattito tra Cattolicesimo e Protestantesimo, risulta piuttosto immediato realizzare come tale marginalità sia solo una questione di prospettiva. Quando il nemico smette di essere geolocalizzato ai margini dell'Europa intesa come unità, ovvero quando il conflitto generato dall'avvento del Protestantesimo mette i cristiani gli uni contro gli altri, allora l'Europa stessa diventa popolata da mostri portatori di significato, il cui ruolo principale è avvertire la popolazione della malvagità o della degenerazione del nemico. Tutte queste prospettive relativizzano il potere disturbante dei mostri di Mandeville che, diversamente che per esempio nell'iconografia dei mappamondi medievali, assumono significati diversi e instabili. Sono proprio tale instabilità e tali paradossi a rendere interessante il lavoro di Mandeville in quanto contribuiscono alla rappresentazione di una realtà molto più complessa e di difficile interpretazione rispetto a quella proposta dalle nette categorizzazioni medievali.

Appendix

Figura 1. Hereford Map

Figura 2. Rothschild Canticles. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 113r.

Figura 3. Rothschild Canticles. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 113v.

Figura 4. Rothschild Canticles. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 114r.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

The Egerton Version of Mandeville's Travels, ed. M. C. Seymour, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

The Travels of Sir John Mandeville, ed. and translation C. W. R. D. Mosley, London: Penguin, 2005.

Mandeville's Travels, ed. M. C. Seymour, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

Alighieri, Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno, Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1957.

Alighieri, Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, translation by Allen Mandelbaum, New York Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Anonymous, *The Sacred Bible*, https://www.biblegateway.com/

Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, edited by R. W. Dyson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Giovanni da Pian di Carpine, *The Story of the Mongols whom we Call the Tartars*, translation by Erik Hildinger, Boston: Branden Publishing Company, 1996.

Guglielmo di Rubruck, *Viaggio in Mongolia*, ed. Paolo Chiesa, Milano: Mondadori, 2011.

Odorico da Pordenone, *Racconto delle Cose Meravigliose d'Oriente*, ed. Luciano Bertazzo, translation by Luigi dal Lago, Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova, 2016.

Odorico da Pordenone, *Relatio*, ed. Domenichelli, https://www.odorichus.it/index.php/relatio/capitoli

Polo, Marco, *Il Milione*, ed. Marcello Ciccuto, Milano: Rizzoli, 2020.

T'Serstevens, Albert, *I Precursori di Marco Polo*, translation Roberto Ortolani, Milano: Garzanti, 1960.

Critical Literature

Abu-Lughod, J. L., *Before European Hegemony: the World System A.D. 1250-1350*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp.153–184.

Adamson, Melitta Weiss, *Food in Medieval Times*, London: Greenwood Press, 2004.

Ashtor, E., *Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Baratta, L., *"A Marvellous and Strange Event": Racconti di Nascite Mostruose nell'Inghilterra della Prima Età Moderna*, Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2016.

Baratta, L., *The Age of Monsters: Nascite Prodigiose nell'Inghilterra della Prima Età Moderna: Storia, Testi, Immagini (1550-1715)*, Roma: Aracne Editrice, 2017.

Beagon, Mary, "Situating Nature's Wonders in Pliny's 'Natural History'", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement*, 100 (2007), pp. 19–40.

Borowski, Tomasz, and Gerrard, Christopher, "Constructing Identity in the Middle Ages: Relics, Religiosity, and the Military Orders", *Speculum*, 92 (2017), pp.1056–1100.

Braude, B., "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 54 (1997), pp.103–142.

Brotton, Jerry, *La Storia del Mondo in Dodici Mappe*, translation by Virginio B. Bala, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2012.

Bump, N. et al., *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.

Bynum, Caroline Walker, "Wonder", *The American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), pp.1–26

Cama, F. C., Feniello, A., Migliorini, L. M., *Storia del Mondo: dall'anno 1000 ai Giorni Nostri*, Bari: Laterza, 2019, pp.159-243.

Campbell, M. B., *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988.

De Rooy, Ronald, "On Anthropophagy in Dante's *Inferno*", *Lectura Dantis*, 8 (1991), pp.64–84.

Fabietti, Ugo, *Elementi di Antropologia Culturale*, Milano: Mondadori, 2015.

Fleck, A., "Here, There, and In Between: Representing Difference in the 'Travels' of Sir John Mandeville", *Studies in Philology*, 97 (2000), pp.379–400.

Franke, H., Twitchett, D., *Vol. 6.: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp.321–389.

Friedman, J. B., *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, London: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Gaunt, S., "Translating the Diversity of the Middle Ages: Marco Polo and John Mandeville as 'French' Writers", *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 46 (2009), pp.235–248.

Giardini, Marco, "'Ego, Presbiter Iohannes, Dominus Sum Dominantium': The Name of Prester John and the Origin of his Legend", *Viator*, 48 (2017), pp.195–230.

Giffney, N., "Monstrous Mongols", *Postmedieval: a Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 3 (2012), pp.227–245.

Godden, R. H. et al. eds., *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Godden, Richard H., "Neighboring Disability in Medieval Literature", *Exemplaria*, 32 (2020), pp.229–247.

Grabar, O., "Space and Holiness in Medieval Jerusalem." *Islamic Studies*, 40 (2001), pp.681–692.

Havsteen, S. R. et al. eds., *Creations: Medieval Rituals, the Arts, and the Concept of Creation*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007.

Helleiner, Karl F., “Prester John’s Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia”, *Phoenix*, 13 (1959), pp.47–57.

Heng, G., “Jews, Saracens, ‘Black Men’, Tartars: England in a World of Racial Difference.” *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture C.1350–c.1500*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp.247–269.

Higgins, I. M., *Writing East: the “Travels” of Sir John Mandeville*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

Higgins, I. M., “Defining the Earth's Center in a Medieval “Multi-Text”: Jerusalem in The Book of John Mandeville”, *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, pp.29-53.

Howard, Donald R., “The World of Mandeville’s Travels”, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1 (1971), pp.1–17.

Jakobsson, A. et al., “Disability before Disability: Mapping the Uncharted in the Medieval Sagas”, *Scandinavian Studies*, 92 (2020), pp.440–460.

Khalaf, Omar, “The Old English *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*: Monsters and *Hybris* in the Service of Exemplarity”, *English Studies*, 94 (2013), pp.659–667.

Lascelles, M. M., “Alexander and the Earthly Paradise in Mediæval English Writings (Continued)”, *Medium Ævum*, 5 (1936), pp.79–104.

Lascelles, M. M., “Alexander and the Earthly Paradise in Mediæval English Writings (Continued)”, *Medium Ævum*, 5 (1936), pp.173–188.

Lascelles, M. M., “Alexander and the Earthly Paradise in Mediæval English Writings”, *Medium Ævum*, 5 (1936), pp.31–48.

Lochrie, K., “Provincializing Medieval Europe: Mandeville’s Cosmopolitan Utopia.” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 124 (2009), pp.592–599.

Mameli, Beatrice, “Wylde and Wode. Wild Madness in Middle English Literature”, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Padua, 2013.

Montanari, Massimo, *Alimentazione e cultura nel Medioevo*, Roma: Laterza, 1988.

McCready, William D., "Isidore, the Antipodeans, and the Shape of the Earth", *Isis*, 87 (1996), pp.108–127.

Metzler, I., "Disability in the Middle Ages: Impairment at the Intersection of Historical Inquiry and Disability Studies", *History Compass*, 9 (2011), pp.45–60.

Minnis, A., *Phantom Pains and Prosthetic Narratives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Mittman, Asa Simon, and Kim, Susan M., "Monsters and the Exotic in Early Medieval England", *Literature Compass*, 6 (2009), pp.332–348.

Montalbano, Kathryn A., "Misunderstanding the Mongols: Intercultural Communication in Three Thirteenth Century Franciscan Travel Accounts", *Information & Culture*, 50 (2015), pp.588–610.

Moseley, C. W. R. D., "The Metamorphoses of Sir John Mandeville", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 4 (1974), pp.5–25.

Moseley, C. W. R. D., "Behaim's Globe and 'Mandeville's Travels'", *Imago Mundi*, 33 (1981), pp.89–91.

Moseley, C., "The Travels of Sir John Mandeville and the Moral Geography of the Medieval World", *Portal*, 12 (2015), pp.11–22.

Nowell, Charles E., "The Historical Prester John", *Speculum*, 28 (1953), pp.435–445.

O'Doherty, Marianne, "Imperial Fantasies: Imagining Christian Empire in Three Fourteenth-Century Versions of *The Book Of Sir John Mandeville*", *Medium Ævum*, 86 (2017), pp.323–349.

Orchard, Andy, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscrip*t, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995.

Orlemanski, J., "Literary Genre, Medieval Studies, and the Prosthesis of Disability", *Textual Practice*, 30 (2016), pp.1253–1272.

Patterson, Serina, “Reading the Medieval in Early Modern Monster Culture”, *Studies in Philology*, 111 (2014), pp.282– 311.

Perillo, Kate, “The Limits of *Ongietenisse*: Translating Global Imagination in the Old English *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*”, *Parergon*, 35 (2018), p. 67–89.

Phillips, K. M., *Before Orientalism: Asian Peoples and Cultures in European Travel Writing, 1245-1510*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.

Phillips, K. M., “Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages”, *History Compass*, 14 (2016), pp.81–92.

Ramey, Lynn, “Monstrous Alterity in Early Modern Travel Accounts: Lessons from the Ambiguous Medieval Discourse on Humanness”, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 48 (2008), pp.81–95.

Rawson, C., “Unspeakable Rites: Cultural Reticence and the Cannibal Question”, *Social Research*, 66 (1999), pp.166–193.

Retief, M., Letšosa, R., “Models of disability: A brief overview”, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies,* 74 (2018), pp.1–8.

Scafi, Alessandro, “Mapping the End: the Apocalypse in Medieval Cartography”, *Literature and Theology*, 26 (2012), pp.400–416.

Singer, J., “Toward a Transhuman Model of Medieval Disability”, *Postmedieval a Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 1 (2010), pp.173–179.

Skinner, P., *Living with Disfigurement in Early Medieval Europe*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Sobecki, S. I., “Mandeville’s Thought of the Limit: The Discourse of Similarity and Difference in the Travels of Sir John Mandeville”, *The Review of English Studies*, 53 (2002), pp.329–43.

Tattersall, Jill, “Anthropophagi and Eaters of Raw Flesh in French Literature of the Crusade Period: Myth, Tradition and Reality”, *Medium Ævum*, 57 (1988), pp.240–253.

Tinkle, T. L., "God's Chosen Peoples: Christians and Jews in The Book of John Mandeville", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 113 (2014), pp.443–471.

Tinkle, T. L., "Sir John Mandeville's God(s)", *ELH*, 82 (2015), pp.431–460.

Twitchett, Crispin, et al., *5.1: The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 907-1279*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Valtrovà, Jana, "Beyond the Horizons of Legend of Legends: Traditional Imagery and Direct Experience in Medieval Accounts of Asia", *Numen*, 57 (2010), pp.154–185.

Vignolo, Paolo, "Una Nación de Monstruos. Occidente, los Cinocéfalos y las Paradojas del Lenguaje", *Revista de estudios sociales*, 27 (2007), pp.140–149.

Wittkower, R., "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5 (1942), pp.159–197.

Woodward, David, "Reality, Symbolism, Time, and Space in Medieval World Maps", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 75 (1985), pp.510–521.

Woodward, David, "The Image of the Spherical Earth", *Perspecta*, 25 (1989), pp.2–15.

Zumthor, P., "The Medieval Travel Narrative", *New Literary History*, 25 (1994), pp.809–824.

Sitography

Oxford English Dictionary, https://www.oed.com/

Digital Mappa, https://sims2.digitalmappa.org/36

Rothschild Canticles, University of Yale, https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2002755

Perseus, https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0138