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Exploring Visual Monstrosity in the 'Beowulf' Manuscript: A Digital Edition of 'The Wonders of the East'

Relatore
Prof. Omar Khalaf

Correlatore
Prof. Gabriele Cocco

Laureanda
Andreea M. Toma
n° matr.2091638 / LMLLA

A tutte le persone meravigliose, che non posso menzionare singolarmente perché la lista sarebbe più lunga di quella dei debiti di Paperino, che mi hanno reso le giornate più belle con i loro piccoli (che piccoli non sono) gesti di gentilezza.

Alle mie fantastiche amiche, che mi supportano e mi sopportano, nonostante le mie bizzarrie, il disco rotto sull'Old English e i litri di caffè.

A mio fratello, che colora il mio mondo da quando eravamo bambini e su cui so di poter contare sempre.

Ai miei genitori, e che mi hanno trasmesso il valore del duro lavoro e l'amore per la conoscenza.

A Omar.
Non potrei chiedere una guida migliore nel mio percorso accademico; la sua dedizione per la filologia germanica e la precisione nel lavoro sono per me fonte di ispirazione.

Grazie, dal più profondo del mio cuore.

Contents

Introduction

The Wonders of the East is the Old English translation of a Latin text known as *De rebus in Oriente mirabilibus*. It is a teratological text, a *liber monstrorum*, also inscribed in the tradition of travel literature, containing descriptions of strange and unknown creatures found in Eastern regions, such as Babilonia and Egypt. The text had a wide circulation in early medieval England, and it survives in two witnesses – London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv (the so-called *Beowulf* manuscript) and London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.v, with the latter presenting the Latin version side by side with the English translation; another witness, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 614, only contains the Latin text. Interestingly, all three manuscripts are accompanied by illustrations of the creatures and monsters described in the text.

After investigated the complex textual tradition of the *Wonders* in the first chapter, the second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the iconographic apparatus accompanying the manuscripts, following more recent studies according to which verbal and textual elements both concur in conveying meaning. Although modern editions decided not to include the illustrations in their editions of the *Wonders*, there is a growing body of literature that recognises that the illustrations not only can provide a better understanding of the written text, but they also seem to interact with it, often reinforcing its meaning, or even telling something the written text does not, resulting in a double narrative layer. This is particularly true in the case of the *Beowulf* manuscript, which, as agreed by scholars, finds in the monstrous element the *fil rouge* connecting all the texts preserved therein.

Therefore, the present study discusses the usefulness of a scholarly digital edition of the *Wonders* preserved in that manuscript, with the purpose of offering a tool that allows the user to fully appreciate the communicative interplay established by the written text and the illustrations that characterises this witness. An overview of the textual tradition of the *Wonders* will be followed by a presentation of the editorial procedures, the encoding workflow, and a sample of the digital output.

Chapter 1

Origins and tradition of *The Wonders of the East*

1.1   Teratological lore in the classical world and beyond

The Wonders of the East, or *The Marvels of the East* (henceforth *Wonders*), is the title given to the Old English translation of a Latin teratological text known as *De rebus in Oriente mirabilibus*, which can be considered as one of the prototypes of travel literature in early medieval England.

Indeed, interest in monsters and marvels might be dated back to the classical period of ancient Greece, around the fifth century BC, when historian Herodotus wrote about India in Book IV of his *History*, probably inspired by reports of previous travellers and also by Sanskrit sources[1]. At the time, monstrous peoples and strange animals were believed to inhabit the furthest regions of the known world, traditionally located in the East. According to Rudolf Wittkower, the reasons behind the imaginative creation of these beings and their subsequent placing far away from the Western regions represented an attempt to cope with the inherently human fear of monsters[2]. The further they are from humans, the less frightening they appear to them; for in the *Wonders*, as Nicholas Howe argued, the East was considered the place where otherness dwelt[3]. Recently, several studies have suggested that the "quite fluid"[4] teratological tradition that has brought to the creation of the *Wonders* originates mainly from two sources, one

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[1] See, among others, Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942), 159 and Paul Allen Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*: A Critical Edition and Commentary" (unpubl. PhD diss., Duke University, 1977), 33.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 169.
[4] A. J. Ford, *Marvel and Artefact: The 'Wonders of the East' in its manuscript contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 7.

deriving from travel writings about India circulating in Greece and influencing later productions, and one stemming from a group of epistolary texts linked with Alexander the Great's campaign of conquest to the East.

The earliest treatise dealing with the East was probably written around the fourth century BC by Ctesias, a renowned physician in the court of Persia, where India is described as a land containing numerous marvels. This and other descriptions of India are found under the title *Indika,* and this work has come down to us thanks to Photius of Constantinople's excerpt and fragments of other writers[5]. A crucial moment in which the belief of India as a land populated by bizarre creatures was finally established occurred in the reign of Alexander the Great, who occupied a part of it during the years of his military campaigns in the Eastern regions (336-323 BC). The Macedonian king used to bring with him scientists, whose task was to describe the newly discovered territories. However, one of the most important works about India was written after the reign of Alexander, when diplomat Megasthenes was sent by Seleucus I to the court of the Indian king Chandragupta. Megasthenes' treatise was still indebted to the tradition of marvellous and monstrous races, although he probably had the chance to visit India[6]. Despite surviving mostly in fragmentary or abridged forms, the works of Ctesias and Megasthenes have been influential for later texts produced throughout the centuries[7]. In his analysis of the historical backgrounds of monster lore, Wittkower argues that the pseudo-scientific discoveries that were made from that period up to the later Middle Ages did not eradicate the idea of the East as a land of wondrous creatures mostly because direct contact between West and East was soon lost, impeding a direct knowledge of the Eastern lands[8].

Three centuries later, Strabo and Ptolemy wrote about marvellous races in a more sceptical way for their existence could not be proven. In the most remote regions of the Western medieval world the Greek language was known only by a few, thus for the most part works originally written in Greek were introduced to the early medieval culture through the intermediation of Latin translations. Therefore, it is plausible that

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[5] John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 5.

[6] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East", 162.

[7] Tim Flight, *Basilisks and 'Beowulf': Monsters in the Anglo-Saxon World* (London: Reaktion Books, 2021), 32-33.

[8] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East", 162.

the teratological tradition arrived in England in medieval times via Latin encyclopaedic texts, which drew upon these first writings from the ancient world[9]. The same point has also recently been made by Flight, who highlights that in writing his *Historia naturalis* around the year 77 AD, Pliny the Elder, who is considered the "first authority on wonders"[10], followed the perspective of Ctesias and Megasthenes, by placing the monstrous races in the uncivilised regions of the Roman Empire, thus adopting an approach typical of a *translatio studii*[11]. Another pre-Christian author, Pomponius Mela, wrote *De situ orbis* in the year 41, and there he incorporates the monstrous creatures among the other living beings inhabiting the earth. These these two encyclopaedias became a sort of model throughout the Middle Ages and their material was used as a starting point by a number of other writers, such as Solinus, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, Isidore of Seville, Hrabanus Maurus, and others. Pliny was so relevant in transmitting teratological knowledge to the medieval world that Friedman refers to the monstrous races as "Plinian races"[12].

As previously mentioned, another source of the *De rebus* was a group of texts linked to the expeditions of Alexander the Great. For the purposes of this study, only two of these texts will be taken into account, namely the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* and the *Letter of Pharasmanes to Hadrian*. The latter is not exactly a text about Alexander, but some scholars have hypothesised a possible influence on the later versions of *Historia de Preliis*, one of the main works through which the legends of Macedonian king arrived in and spread throughout the Middle Ages[13]. The Alexander romance mistakenly attributed to Callisthenes (hence Pseudo-Callisthenes) is the earliest writing about Alexander the Great, probably composed in Alexandria after 200 AD, inspired by literary sources as well as by the oral tradition circulating around the figure of the legendary king. In time, it has been amplified and enriched with more material, especially deriving from "letters supposed to have been written by Alexander and others"[14]. Around the year 950, the archpriest Leo of Naples was sent by the Duke John III of Campania to Constantinople, where he discovered a manuscript of the

[9] Ibid., 171.
[10] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 9.
[11] Flight, *Basilisks and 'Beowulf'*, 32.
[12] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, 5.
[13] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 11-12.
[14] George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, ed. D. J. A. Ross (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 9.

Pseudo-Callisthenes. After transcribing it, Leo brought this text to Naples and Duke John demanded it to be translated from Greek into Latin; Leo gave this translation the title *Nativitas et Victoria Alexandri Magni regis*, and it is considered the point of departure of the long tradition of recensions of the *Historia de Preliis*[15], by far the most significant text in shaping medieval thought about Alexander the Great. What is remarkable for the present study is that the *Letter of Pharasmanes* was one of the texts used for the accretion of the Alexander narrative, and because of this the two traditions tended to mingle together, exemplified by the fact that there is a significant concordance between the *Letter of Pharasmanes*, the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* (incorporated in the *Historia de Preliis*[16]), and the Pseudo-Callisthenes, relationship analysed in more detail by Claude Lecouteux[17]. Lecouteux also advanced the hypothesis that whoever wrote the *Letter of Pharasmanes* drew upon the Pseudo-Callisthenes' romance, and subsequently in later redactions of the *Historia de Preliis* some of the additions come from the *Letter of Pharasmanes*, which for the nature of its contents was thought to be another letter of the Macedonian king[18]. The *Letter of Pharasmanes* represents a "silent heir"[19] of the rich Greek culture, particularly the geographic knowledge about the Eastern regions of the world, even if the descriptions lean heavily towards unscientific data. This "fantastic" lore coming from Herodotus, Ctesias, and Megasthenes was indirectly known by the author of the letter, through writers such as Pliny, Pomponius Mela, Solinus, and Isidore of Seville[20]. Álvaro Ibáñez Chacón argues that a key factor for the spreading of this literature is to be found in the expansion of the known world caused by Alexander the Great's military conquest, which produced two different reactions: one the one hand, there were authors like Quintus Curtius who attempted to eliminate from the narrative the most fictitious elements, one the other hand there were authors focussed instead on the most unbelievable deeds, as is the case with the Greek Alexander Romance[21].

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[15] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 38.
[16] Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 15.
[17] Claude Lecouteux, *De rebus in Oriente mirabilibus (lettre de Farasmanes): édition synoptique accompagnée d'une introduction et de notes* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1979), XVIII.
[18] Ibid., XVII.
[19] Álvaro Ibáñez Chacón, "La epístola *De Rebvs in Oriente Miriabilibvs*: un falso tardoantiguo", 247.
[20] Ibid., 247.
[21] Ibid., 248.

The origins of the *Wonders* and its relationship with the *Letter of Pharasmanes* into Old English has been thoroughly investigated by Ann Knock, who attempted to reconstruct the entangled tradition of the Greek text and to compare the insular and the continental versions, in order to establish its development over time[22]. What Knock tried to offer was an all-encompassing approach, in opposition to the type of research carried out before, where "the study of *Mirabilia* and the Old English *Wonders* followed an independent line from the study of other version of the *Letter of Pharasmanes*"[23].

Mirabilia is another title used to identify the Latin versions of the *Wonders* also produced in England; both Latin and Old English versions are related to a group of continental texts, to which an Old Picard translation of the *Letter* must be added. In general, the textual tradition of the *Letter* can be divided into two strands, called, respectively, P-Group and F-Group. Both groups contain the report of a journey where the sender describes the marvels and monstrous races encountered along the way, although "the incipits do not tell us why the information is provided, nor do they tell us more about that writer than that he is a king"[24]. The sender in the P-Group version of the letter is spelled either 'Premo', 'Parmoenis', 'Premonis', 'Permonis', or 'Perimenis', and writes to Emperor Trajan (98-116 AD), while in the F-Group version he is spelled 'Fermes', 'Feramus, or 'Feramen', and addresses his letter to Emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD)[25]; the titles attributed to these versions are , respectively, *Epistola Premonis regis ad Traianum imperatorem* and *Diuo Adriano, Fermes diuo Adriano salutem*[26]. Andy Orchard has made an interesting point, when suggesting that the P-Group version might have been associated with Parmenion, a character found in the letter of Alexander the Great[27], for it further strengthens the link between the tradition of the *Wonders* and that of the Alexander material. One of the most agreed upon theories is that these different forms of the name of the sender are "progressive corruptions"[28] of Pharasmanes, king of Iberia (which corresponds to nowadays Georgia), however it is

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[22] Ann Elizabeth Knock, "*Wonders of the East*: A Synoptic Edition of *The Letter of Pharasamanes* and the Old English and Old Picard Translations" (unpubl. PhD diss., University of London, 1981).

[23] Ibid., 10.

[24] Ibid., 23.

[25] Ibid., pagina and Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 17.

[26] Marcello Ciccuto, "Figure dell'enciclopedia illustrata nel *De rebus in Oriente mirabilibus*", *Latomus* 52, no. 4 (1993), 867 and Claude Lecouteux, *De rebus in Oriente*, VI.

[27] Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the 'Beowulf' Manuscript* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 23.

[28] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 17.

difficult to assess the truth here because the kingdom of Iberia had four kings bearing this name. Although Pharasmanes was king of Iberia, he does not place any of the wonders described in the letter in that land, nor does he mention the Black Sea, with which Iberia confined; instead, he mentions the Red Sea and the places traditionally believed to be inhabited by monsters[29]. Nevertheless, it is true that Hadrian exchanged letters with a king of Iberia by this name, thus "a letter from Pharasmanes to Hadrian dealing with the monstrous and the marvellous"[30] does not collide with what is known regarding these two historical figures; furthermore in Aelius Spartianus' *Vita Hadriani* the emperor's "fondness for travel literature" is openly mentioned[31]. Whichever the case may be, the text of the *Letter* survived in a number of manuscripts, and Paul Allen Gibb has identified eight continental texts stemming from this tradition: the *Letter of Premonis* [or Premo] *to Trajan*, the *Letter of Parmoenis to Trajan*, the Old French *Lepistle le roy Parimenis a lempereur* (which probably shares the same Latin source of *De rebus* and *Wonders of the East*) are titles associated with the P-Group version, while part of the F-Group version are the *Letter of Fermes to Hadrian*, together with its reproduction in the *Otia Imperialia* (composed by Gervase of Tilbury), the *Letter of King Feramen to Hadrian* (witnessed in two manuscripts) and the *Letter of Feramen to Hadrian*[32].

Based on linguistic features, the *Letter of Pharasmanes* was presumably first written in Greek, even if no Greek copies have been found; for instance, one finds the use of the unit of measurement *stadia* sometimes converted to the Gallic leagues and sometimes removed altogether, or the name of Pharasmanes itself, since it is a Greek name and the two variants which led to the formation of the two groups "show a variation between *F* and *P* which implies derivation from *Ph* as the transliteration of Greek φ"[33]. Knock explains that the translation into Latin was made quite early and the division into P-Group and F-Group occurred in that moment. In addition to this, the marvellous races are given names of Greek origin and they also make their appearance in classical works dealing with geography, whilst it has been demonstrated that the small number of Latin names belong to later additions. However, it must be noted that

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[29] Knock, "*Wonders of the East*", 37.
[30] Ibid., 24.
[31] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 17.
[32] Ibid., 201-204.
[33] Knock, "*Wonders of the East*", 25.

Greek names do not necessarily imply a Greek origin of the text, since those names circulated among Latin writers as well[34] and the "Greek words could be a part of a pseudepigraphical guise"[35], inserted there only to allude at a Greek origin.

Knock concludes by stating that the first composition in Greek took place somewhere between the end of the second century and the fourth century AD. This theory is supported by the presence in a grammatical treatise composed around the fourth century, the *Catholica*, of the names of two rivers, Brixo and Gargarus, which are not found in any other text apart from the *Letter of Pharasmanes*, thus placing it with a remarkable degree of certainty before the fourth century (if the author of the *Catholica* happened to rely on the *Letter*). Gibb identifies the beginning of the second century as the earliest date of composition, basing on names such as Trajan, Hadrian, and Pharasmanes[36].

To conclude the discussion on the origin of the *Wonders*, it can be affirmed that two traditions concurred almost simultaneously in the spreading of teratological material in Anglo-Saxon England: the first is constituted by the early Greek writings of Ctesias and Megasthenes about India that influenced Latin medieval writers such as Pliny and Solinus, while the second is formed by the group of texts deriving from the *Letter of Pharasmanes*. However, the text was subjected to "a long and complex process of translation, redaction, and dissemination throughout Europe"[37], and the possibility to exactly establish the redaction used to produce the English versions is quite remote. Whatever the case, Wittkower suggests that the variations through which the *Letter* underwent as a source to the *Wonders* might depend on later interpolations from those encyclopaedic works inspired by Pliny, particularly from Isidore's *Etymologiae*, thus making this text a peculiar blend of the two traditions:

> Three other similar treatises, variants of the first one with modifications mainly
> taken from Isidore, originated between the 7th and the 10th centuries. Through the
> interest in geography fostered by Alfred the Great's Anglo-Saxon version of

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[34] Ibid., 25-27.

[35] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 25.

[36] Ibid., 17.

[37] Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 63.

Orosius these texts seem to have attracted a lay public in England and were therefore translated into the vernacular.[38]

From Howe's perspective the dynamic at work with the Old English texts is one that "uses the model of center and periphery to organize knowledge about places"[39], where the center became England, and consequently the content needed to undergo a process of adaptation to the new context. The process of textual transformation typical of classical and medieval texts in the case of *Wonders* was accelerated by two factors: the first lies in its being written in prose, thus allowing the scribe to depart from it without fear of disrupting any metrical pattern, while the second has to do with the lack of logic with which the material is presented, where any upheaval would probably go unnoticed[40].

What is even more peculiar and requires deeper understanding is the popularity this text enjoyed "for over ten centuries and from nearly one end of Europe to the other"[41], in spite of the textual corruptions and changes it underwent in the course of the centuries. The next section will attempt to provide some answers to this question, based on several studies concerning monsters and their appeal to the expected audiences of the abovementioned texts.

1.2   Boundaries and monstrous races

Before delving into the philological matter at the heart of this thesis, it is important to mention how the Anglo-Saxons perceived the natural world and the possible existence of monstrous races. This could shed light on the way in which the contents of *Wonders* were received in early medieval England, offering insights as to the possible reasons that led to its dissemination through copies and translations. As will be seen, the idea of boundaries was closely linked with the monstrous element, and the discourse encompasses the internal, conflicting situation as well as England's place in the known world.

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[38] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East", 172.
[39] Howe, *Writing the Map*, 3.
[40] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 22.
[41] Ibid., 31.

As for the sources where these ideas emerge, Adam's lament in *Genesis A* plays a remarkable role. In analysing this portion of the poem, characterised by a rather marked elegiac tone, Tim Flight notes that the natural world is represented as an antagonistic force to men, and finds a possible cause in the divinely ordained punishment imposed on mankind after the fall[42]. If this is how the Anglo-Saxons themselves perceived the natural world, it can be assumed that venturing outside of the cities protected by men and by buildings could have been quite dangerous, one of the reasons being the presence of animals living in the wilderness. This is further demonstrated by the charters used to legally organize space in early medieval England, of which a remarkable number (1,875 examples) survives[43]. These charters, mostly describing boundaries, served not only to establish private property but also, on a more general level, to preserve everything in its right place, preventing intruders from crossing the borders. This perceived hostility of the outside world is perhaps well represented also by Offa's Dyke, which divides Mercia from Wales and whose building was presumably ordered by the king to keep outsiders away from Mercia[44]. A certain fear of crossing boundaries also emerges from legal documents as, as for instance in the Laws of Ine, king of Wessex:

> If a man from afar or a foreigner goes through a wood apart from the highway and
> neither shouts nor blows a horn, because of this he is to be regarded as a thief, [and]
> either slain or held for ransom.[45]

Another essential element related to space and boundaries is that, for the Anglo-Saxons, their migration from the North and the subsequent settling in England "is remembered as a transit between two places, between a home that has been left behind and the one that has been found"[46], and migration also reminds them of their "hybrid" nature. It appears therefore that boundaries can acquire different meanings for the Anglo-Saxons, surrounded as they were by many different "others", as for instance the Celts who lived in England before their arrival, or the Vikings who represented a constant threat. Asa S. Mittman maintains that the Anglo-Saxon society was

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[42] Flight, *Basilisks and 'Beowulf'*, 14.
[43] Ibid., 22.
[44] Ibid., 24-25.
[45] Walter de Gray Birch, ed., *Cartularium Saxonicum*, Vol. III, (London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1885-93), Charter no. 1331, 666-667. Passage translated by Tim Flight, in *Basilisks and 'Beowulf'*, 23.
[46] Howe, *Writing the Map*, 50.

multilayered in that there can be found a sense of "cultural permeability" starting from Bede, when he brings together Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, a new group which "blends with both the native Britons and the even more remote Romans". According to Mittman, the most evident consequence of this blending of traditions is the Old English language itself, originally written in runes and, in the wake of the conversion, adapted to the Latin alphabet; still, since not all the phonemes could find a corresponding grapheme in the Latin alphabet, a few runic letters were incorporated in the written language, namely æ (ash), ð (eth) and þ (thorn)[47].

In this cultural context, it becomes evident how the Anglo-Saxons may have inherited a rich lore of monsters coming from classical writings, then the accounts of the miraculous events that characterise the Holy Scriptures, and the already mentioned marvels described in works coming from Antiquity. Among these, Flight alludes to "the bizarre creatures that were thought to roam Britannia long before [they] crossed the North Sea"[48]. Therefore, what the Anglo-Saxons could do, if unable to contrast the power of nature, was to create boundaries between civilisation and wilderness, both on a literal and abstract level; an effective way of dealing with the unknown lies in learning about it in order to make it more comprehensible and somehow less fearsome. As Flight argues, "Isidore saw language as the ultimate organising principle for the physical world"[49], and in the same guise early medieval people used word to organise knowledge. Not only did the Anglo-Saxons inherit a teratological tradition from the classical world, but also "the ability to catalogue and organise all things"; although there is no evidence for an Anglo-Saxon encyclopaedia similar to those of Latin medieval writers, there still can be found some instances of pseudoscientific works containing descriptions of monsters. As seen in the previous section, placing strange creatures in the East was one of the ways to rationalise the human fear of monsters, whilst in this case, people tried to make sense of the unknown by understanding and cataloguing the "hostile elements of the natural world"[50]. Flight is not the only one who investigated the concept of space in Anglo-Saxon England; in his analysis of the same subject, Howe states that traveling was not such a common activity at that point in time,

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[47] Asa Simon Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13..
[48] Flight, *Basilisks and 'Beowulf'*, 25.
[49] Ibid., 28.
[50] Ibid., 18.

for the same reasons suggested by Flight, highlighting a "general uncertainty about the nature and dimensions of the outside world"[51]. As discussed by Mittman, "the Anglo-Saxons were surrounded on all sides by the natural world"[52] and it was precisely at the margin of civilisation, where forests and wilderness began, that the Anglo-Saxons thought it reasonable for monstrous races to exist.

The *Wonders*, as will be seen in the following section, is a type of text configured as a travel literature presenting some encyclopaedic elements but lacking the visual representations of the Earth typical of medieval maps. Nevertheless, it can be considered a text concerned, at least partially, with geography, although it "cannot be read as a sequentially organized itinerary that follows a mappable or repeatable order"[53].

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[51] Howe, *Writing the Map*, 30.
[52] Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 23.
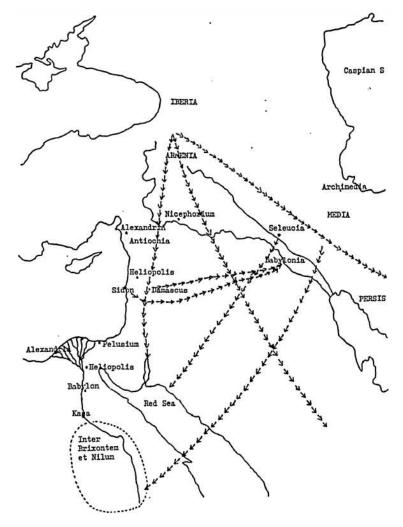[53] Howe, *Writing the Map*, 174.

Figure 1 Map of the itinerary in *Wonders*, places referred to in the text. Knock.[54]

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen states that in ancient times maps and travel narratives, which arrived in the Middle Ages, represented a "virtual reality, imaginary (wholly verbal) geographies accessible from anywhere"[55]. This reinforces the fact that, as discussed earlier, the Anglo-Saxons, as much as all medieval peoples, were not comfortable with leaving their homes and venturing into the unknown. Still, they had to know what was there, name it and describe it: as claimed by Howe, "the Anglo-Saxons learned about the world by writing about it"[56] and, as already mentioned, acquiring knowledge about different people and places gave Anglo-Saxons some sort of power over them[57], since "the act of naming is a controlling maneuver"[58].

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[54] Knock, "*Wonders of the East*", 47.
[55] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 18.
[56] Howe, *Writing the Map*, 177.
[57] Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, 102.

Apart from the dangers found within, which might have prevented mobility in early medieval England, boundaries were relevant for another reason: in Eviatar Zerubavel's words, "a particular obsession with boundaries usually characterises groups that perceive themselves as minorities"[59]. Rome and the Holy Land in medieval texts are represented as the centre of civilisation[60], thus England's position in the world brings the Anglo-Saxons closer to the monsters they were so interested in. Mittman explains that for Gerald of Wales the British Isles resemble "a sort of global marginalia, […] as images adorn the margins" of manuscripts[61]. Previously in this chapter, it has been advanced the hypothesis of a *translatio studii* through which new information from Greek culture arrived in the Western medieval world and was translated into Latin. The same can be advanced for the Latin culture coming to England through a process of adaptation, in a sort of genealogy where "Hebrew, Greek, and Latin culture culminate in Anglo-Saxon culture"[62]. This hypothesis, though, collides with the ubication of England at the margin of the world and, in a way, the English underlined the monstrous nature of these creatures "to make themselves seem less marginal"[63]. Their sense of living on a distant land can be found in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, whose main source of geographic information is Pliny's *Historia*[64]. Perhaps their inferiority ceased to be problematic as soon as they realised that other people could be on the edge but still understandable[65]; it also meant, from a religious point of view, that no matter how marginal and distant, God's salvation was still possible.

The edge was "a space for ejecting the undesirable"[66], what was perceived as uncivilised; exactly "like the medieval manuscript […], the world itself [had] a margin"[67], where monsters were free to roam. An interesting definition of monster hinting at the idea of abnormality comes from another travel narrative produced a few

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[58] Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 53.

[59] Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Thin Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 51.

[60] Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, 70.

[61] Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 23.

[62] Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, 111.

[63] Ibid., 90.

[64] Nicholas Howe, "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004), 150.

[65] Discenza, *Inhabited Spaces*, 101.

[66] Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 16.

[67] Campbell, *Witness*, 82.

centuries after the *Wonders*, namely *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. There, monsters are defined as "a Þing difformed aȝen kynde bothe of man or of best or of ony Þing elles", meaning that a monster is a creature "deformed against kind"[68]. Monsters have been thoroughly studied across the centuries, and even by modern scholars, mostly because of the cultural implications lying behind them and for what they can tell about a particular historical period and a society. Although it is not the purpose of this thesis to dive into the teratological studies conducted up until now, this section will provide an overview of the reasons why monstrosity is an interesting aspect when studying the Middle Ages. "Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself"[69], Cohen argues, and this might be the case also for the Anglo-Saxon perception of monsters. Therefore, it becomes crucial to understand why monsters were created and, in this case, adapted from another tradition. *Wonders* is not an isolated case displaying a peculiar interest in monsters, for monstrous beings belong to a literary tradition stretching from Homer to nowadays, even if perhaps with different purposes and in different modalities.

In Wittkower's article, the monster is seen "as a magical prodigy"[70], the bearer of a divine message. In fact, for medieval writers like Isidore and Saint Augustine of Hippo the existence of monstrous beings posed theological questions, with the intention to understand their purpose in God's plan. The very fact of viewing them as a part of the creation implied that "the boundary between man and monster was uncomfortably fluid"[71]. However, the allegorical reading typical of other wide-circulating bestiaries such as the *Physiologus*, lacks in *Wonders*: "in the bestiaries, animals and monsters are always explicitly moralized; the absence of moralization in *Wonders* is a notable anomaly"[72]. The world depicted in the *Wonders* can be more of "a conceptual need"[73], in which the need of a world where the existence of these monstrous creatures is possible prevails on the actual possibility of their existence. Such a conception is made obvious in the *mappae mundi* that started circulating in those times:

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[68] Lisa Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2005), 5.
[69] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 4-5.
[70] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East", 168.
[71] Flight, *Basilisks and 'Beowulf'*, 27.
[72] Campbell, *Witness*, 76.
[73] Ibid., 86.

> The creators of the *mappaemundi* were able to exclude their monstrous Others from their maps, as they did with their human Others, but they did not. On the contrary, the maps are overflowing with them. They were a vital portion of the medieval English world view, always present and never forgotten.[74]

Seeing monsters as divine omens can be linked to the symbolic interpretations of these creatures provided by the Fathers of the Church and other Christian writers, many of which included them in their own writings. Monsters were very much discussed in medieval times and their existence was rarely put into question; what was of greater relevance was their symbolic and exegetical meaning and whether they contradicted "the weight of theological opinion"[75]. For example, Isidore did not believe in the existence of the Antipodes, creatures with their feet "planted on the opposite side of the globe", not because he was able to demonstrate it but simply because it went against the common belief that the world was flat[76]. On a general level, many medieval writers who dealt with wonders were "fully aware that neither common sense nor empirical observation supported them in doing so"[77], as demonstrated by the author of another treatise concerning monsters which will be discussed in the next section, namely the *Liber monstrorum*. In the preface, the anonymous author states:

> For I compare this work with the dark sea, because there is no way of proving whether those things which Rumor has spread throughout the earth with gilded words of wonderful gossip are true or false. Of these things the writing of poets and philosophers, which always fosters lies, demonstrates the greatest part.[78]

In medieval times, the response to the understanding of the human limits was faith, as theorised also by Augustine in *De Civitate Dei*, where he insists on the power of belief over rational thinking[79]. According to Gibb, for the medieval mind wonders carried a "supraliteral meaning"[80], accessible to those who knew how to read them allegorically, and so this meaning contributed to sustain the belief on the concrete level.

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[74] Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 51.
[75] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 35.
[76] Ibid., 36.
[77] Ibid., 37.
[78] Gibb bases the translation on Douglas R. Butturff, "The Monsters and the Scholar: A Critical Edition of the *Liber Monstrorum*" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1968).and Leslie G. Whitbread, "The *Liber Monstrorum* and *Beowulf*", *Medieval Studies* 36 (1974).
[79] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 40.
[80] Ibid., 41-42.

After all, human reason cannot fully grasp the concept of God Himself as well and if the monstrous races are to be a part of His creation, believing in their existence equals to believing in the power of God. As for the allegorical interpretations of the wonders, Christian writers relied mostly on standard associations that originated from commentaries to the Bible[81]. Nevertheless, it must be noted that trying to apply this symbology to *Wonders* might prove problematic, given the pre-Christian nature of this text and because there is no evidence of Christian commentaries attached to it, although the possibility that medieval people tried to interpret them is not to be discarded *a priori*. One should keep in mind the origin of this work, that would highlight the strangeness of writing a text which lends itself to moral interpretation in the form of a latter between pre-Christian emperors[82]. As stressed by Gibb, this means that *Wonders* is a text "ideally suited to exegetical interpretation, not necessarily that it was written with such a purpose in mind"[83]. Several modern scholars have tried to see in *Wonders* a Christian message, specifically conveyed by each marvel described therein[84]. While Knock does not see any hidden purpose behind texts portraying monsters, maintaining that "the interest in far-off lands and their dream-created inhabitants is an ever-present theme in the human imagination"[85], there have been a few attempts at deciphering the meaning of the wondrous races that pervade classical and medieval texts. For example, according to some scholars, monsters may represent difficult moments that somehow disrupt "normality", as is the case with the Viking invasions in England intensifying after 793, culminating with Cnut's accession to the throne in 1016, when the Anglo-Saxons "found themselves overcome by the "other" they had tried to defeat or eradicate"[86]. In times of confusion, the presence of "others" represents a divine punishment because the Christian lore is being forgotten, and monsters – in this case, the Vikings – become a reminder to return to the righteous path. Brian McFadden ventures the hypothesis that the renewed Viking invasions of the tenth and eleventh centuries might have been interpreted as a sign of "the English state of enmity with

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[81] Ibid., 40-45.
[82] Knock, "*Wonders of the East*", 44.
[83] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 70.
[84] See Elisa Ramazzina, "Le *Meraviglie d'Oriente*: due versioni a confronto", *Medioevi Moderni – Modernità del Medioevo: Saggi per Maria Grazia Saibene* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2013).
[85] Knock, "*Wonders of the East*", 38.
[86] Brian McFadden, "The social context of narrative disruption in *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*", *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), 92.

God" and the production of texts dealing with the monstrous might have been a way to deal with the Viking attacks[87].

However, Lisa Verner has investigated whether the various Old English texts on monsters portray a pagan or a Christian point of view, coming to the conclusion that the *Wonders* embrace a pagan perspective, one more similar in tone to Pliny's text, stressing how information "is limited almost exclusively to physical description and shows a great preoccupation with quantification: direction, distance, length and height"[88], leaving aside any moral judgment. Despite the lack of any apparent moral teaching, in his study of the Old English *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, Omar Khalaf suggests a possible correspondence with Alfred's cultural programme, finding that "the hypothesis that the *Letter* might be one of the products of King Alfred's translational policy is not so remote";[89] since the *Letter* includes monsters in Alexander's narrative, perhaps this may be true for *Wonders* as well. In addition, always according to Khalaf, in the *Letter* it is precisely through the presence of monsters that Alexander can show his ability as a leader, further reinforcing the linking element with Alfred, who had to protect his kingdom from the incessant Viking attacks. The importance of acquiring knowledge about the enemies who could represent a threat to the stability of the kingdom, similar to the unknown of the wilderness, is also exemplified in the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, where the "narrative of conquest functions as a metaphor for containing the encountered world in thought, description and mental order"[90].

To summarise why monsters might have been culturally important for the Anglo-Saxons, based on previous studies, three dimensions can be identified. The first one is that of power through knowledge; once integrated into their cultural fabric, the East and its monstrous inhabitants were under the control of the Anglo-Saxons. The second dimension lies in the moral value monstrous beings carry within them, since several studies starting from the Middle Ages have attempted to read monsters through theological lens. While the last dimension has more to do with Anglo-Saxon's self-identity, defined by their position at the margins of the maps and by their complex status in England.

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[87] Ibid., 113.
[88] Verner, *Epistemology*, 67.
[89] Omar Khalaf, "The Old English *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*: Monsters and *Hybris* in the Service of Exemplarity", *English Studies* 94, no. 6 (2013), 666.
[90] Brian McFadden, "The social context", 91.

1.3   The Wonders of the East

After considering the reasons why a text dealing with monsters might have interested the Anglo-Saxon audience, the present work focusses on the textual tradition of *Wonders* in England, providing a philological description of the surviving manuscripts.

According to Knock, all the versions of the *Letter of Pharasmanes* "derive from a single translation into Latin", and Gibb suggests that the Latin version circulating in England, from which the insular copies descend, must be "exclusively the ancestor of these four extant copies", for they share the same unique corruptions and present the same way of organising materials[91]. The Latin text of the *Wonders* probably arrived in England around the end of the seventh century[92], in a version of the P-Group of the *Letter of Pharasmanes*. More precisely, from Gibb's point of view, *Wonders* derives from the Old Picard version, identifying some convergence with the Latin version from which this text was translated and what supposedly might have been the Latin ancestor of *Wonders*[93]. Gibb goes on explaining that such a hypothesis should not be ignored, given the type of relationship between England and France during the Carolingian era, "when English scholars like Alcuin were active on the Continent"[94]. To reinforce this idea, Gibb notes how the author of the *Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus*, which is more of a paraphrase of the *Letter of Pharasmanes*, consulted a source very similar to the ancestor of both the Old French and the insular version; quite telling is also the fact that the author of the *Liber monstrorum* lived in the Continent during the Carolingian era[95].

At a certain point during transmission, the order of the various sections underwent some changes; excluding the hypothesis of an incorrect folding, Gibb believes they might have been caused by the copyist's use of a dismembered

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[91] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 9.
[92] Patrizia Lendinara, "Le versioni anglosassoni delle *Meraviglie d'Oriente*: varianti e variazioni", in *Il fantastico nel Medioevo di area germanica: Atti del XXXI Convegno dell'Associazione Italiana di Filologia Germanica*, ed. Lucia Sinisi (Bari: Edipuglia, 2011), 45. The translation or paraphrasing into English from Italian of this and other texts written in Italian is mine.
[93] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 16-29.
[94] Ibid., 29.
[95] Ibid., 27.

manuscript that prevented him from deducing the original order. He argues, "if the stitching was not repaired the folios could have been rearranged several times simply by reinserting the leaves"[96]. Therefore, the *Wonders* and some of its continental counterparts present a sort of rearrangement of the sections. As already stated, the epistolary format as well was lost in the process of transmission, and this resulted in the transformation of the Wonders into a type of text resembling more a list or a catalogue containing descriptions of marvels, which is the main point of divergence from its continental versions[97]. This cannot be attributed to a presumed loss of the first folio, where the writer's reference to his addressee that normally appears at beginning of the text would normally reveal its epistolary nature, because the absence of this feature characterises the text in its entirety; as to the reason behind this choice, Gibb argues that the removal of the epistolary format meant that "the text did not require this kind of verisimilitude"[98] anymore.

The three insular manuscripts containing the *Wonders* are Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 614 (ff. 36r-51v), henceforth **B**, London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.v (ff. 78v-87v), henceforth **T**, and London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv (ff.98v-106v), henceforth **V**. They were presumably composed around the 11th century, "between 970 and about 1150 AD"[99], nevertheless Gibb conjectures that the actual translation must have occurred during the Alfredian period, characterised by a massive translation of Latin texts into Old English, thus 700-990 AD. He goes on explaining that before the time of king Alfred very few texts were translated into Old English. Although three it is not a remarkable number, it is telling if one considers the paucity of the Old English literary corpus. "The search for Anglo-Saxon encyclopedism leads us to manuscripts containing works by multiple hands on a single subject or closely related set of subjects"[100], meaning that there is no such text in Old English that could compare to the work of Pliny nor to those of other medieval writers. Each witness of the *Wonders* presents peculiar traits, according to the manuscriptal context in which it is found. All English manuscripts are characterised by the presence of illustrations

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[96] Ibid., 28.
[97] Simon C. Thomson, *Communal Creativity in the Making of the 'Beowulf' Manuscript: Towards a History of Reception for the Nowell Codex* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 21.
[98] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 29.
[99] Ibid., 1.
[100] Howe, *Writing the Map*, 151.

accompanying the written text; this subject will be dealt with in the following chapter, dedicated to the relationship between the visual and the written text.

Here follows a detailed description of the manuscripts.

B is entirely in Latin and it may be representative of what the twelfth century Renaissance, meaning a different way of exploring and understanding the natural world, based on logic and reason rather than on theological principles[101]. Very little is known of the history of the codex, only that in the sixteenth century it belonged to Ralph Hopwood and acquired by the Bodleian Library between 1605 and 1611[102]. In **B** can be found calendars, computistical texts and tables, astronomical texts, the majority of which designed to be accompanied by illustrations. One single folio contains information concerning rainbows and shooting stars taken from *De philosohia mundi* composed by William of Conches, while the last section contains *De rebus*, the Latin version of *Wonders*. As for its dating, it has been object of discussion for a long time and still remains an open question; on art-historical basis, the suggested date of composition is 1120-1140[103] and Fritz Saxl and Hans Meier as well propose the first half of the century[104], while Gibb and Knock have two different hypotheses, based this time on palaeography, the beginning of the twelfth century and the end of the twelfth century, respectively. David Dumville is in line with a period of composition leaning more towards the end of the century[105].

The parchment size is 143 × 100 mm, while the text block is around 115 × 75 mm, and it was assembled in six quires[106]. The black leather binding is ornated with gold and carries the initials 'W.H' on the front as well as on the back, typical of the sixteenth century[107]. The gatherings can be represented as follows: "1–2[8] 2 and 7 are half-sheets, 3[8], 4[10+1], 5–6[8]"[108]. From folio 17, the codex appears damaged by water and the parchment was cut during the sixteenth century binding process, which is visible on the margins[109]. Ford goes on listing a few characteristics of the manuscript that might

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[101] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 103.
[102] https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_1623.
[103] C.M. Kauffmann, *Romanesque Manuscripts, 1066-1190*, SMIBI 3 (London, 1975), 77.
[104] Fritz Saxl and Hans Meier, *Verzeichnis astrologischer und mythologischer illustrierter Handschriften des lateinischen Mittelalters*, III. *Handschriften in englischen Bibliotheken*, 2 vols. (London, 1953) I, 313.
[105] The complex situation of Bodley's dating is explained in Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*.
[106] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 105.
[107] https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_1623.
[108] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 155.
[109] Ibid., 155.

offer some insight as to its context of production and shed some light on the most probable, however conjectural, period of composition. For instance, he refers to the studies of Neil R. Ker when he mentions that the scribe of **B** writes above the top line throughout the text; from Ker's perspective, the shift from writing above the top line to writing below the top line happened around the end of the twelfth century[110]. This might be a small detail but it already weakens the possibility of placing this manuscript in the second half of the century[111]. The script of the scribe in **B** deserves to be analysed, for it can provide some useful knowledge which might be revealing for the dating of the codex. Ford identifies a Pregothic script, which, in Albert Derolez's words, is still a Carolingian writing presenting one or more features typical of a Pregothic script[112]. There are general features along with more specific ones concerning individual letters; for the purposes of this study only the former will be considered. First, there is a "lateral compression" of the letters, meaning that they appear less round, and Ford suggests that this might be due to the thickness of the nib compared to the size of the letter. However, both round and oval shapes are present throughout the manuscript. Then, there are a few instances of what is known as biting, which can be defined as the union of two letters, normally when double letters occur; in **B**, this happens with double *p*s and double *f*s (other letters that can be merged together are *b*s and *l*s, but they are not present in **B**). In the case of *pp*, "the vertical stroke of the second letter coincides with part of the bow of the first"[113], while in case of *ff*, "a single horizontal stroke"[114] forms the bar of the two letters. Continuing with the list of Pregothic features, there is also the shortening of ascenders and descenders, followed by a greater angularity of the letters, in **B** more clearly visible in *h* and *r*, to a lesser extent in *c* and *e*, and in the case of *o*, there is an alternation between angular and round shapes. Additionally, the letters appear heavier than in the Carolingian script but are not entirely Gothic; this heaviness is given by "the ratio between the size of the nib at the size of the letter", and in **B** the nib of the quill was probably wide. The last feature examined by Ford is how the feet of minims were

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[110] Neil R. Ker, "From 'Above the Top Line' to 'Below the Top Line': a Change in Scribal Practice", *Celtica* 5 (1960), 13-16.
[111] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 106.
[112] Albert Derolez, *The Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books: from the Twelfth to the Early Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge Stud. in Palaeography and Codicology 9 (Cambridge, 2003), 57.
[113] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 108.
[114] Ibid., 108.

written, and in this manuscript "the feet of minims and ascenders curve to the right"[115], the foot alternating between being angled or flat[116].
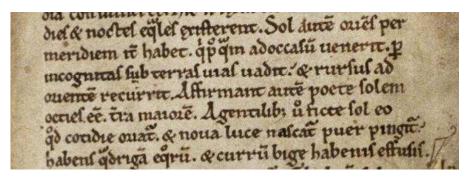
Erik Kwakkel, in a study of the incidence of biting in manuscripts from 1075 to 1225, discovered that biting made its appearance around the years 1139-1145, reaching its apex between 1210 and 1225; this, together with the Pregothic features previously described and which point to a period where scribes were learning new writing techniques, led Ford to place the possible dating after 1140[118]. Although this seems to clash with Kauffmann's dating around 1120 and 1140 based on artistic evidence, Ford advances two hypotheses; either one scribe alone worked on the manuscript and was more versed in writing than in drawing, or the scribe and the illustrator were two different people working in the same place[119]. The *P* in the word *Pistrix* shows that first the text was written, followed by rubrics and initials, subsequently followed by the images, making the latter theory not so remote[120].

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[115] Ibid., 107.

[116] The whole palaeographical description followed Ford's analysis in *Marvel and Artefact*. For specific details concerning individual letters in Pregothic script, see the full section, 107-110. It is quite telling that 11 out of 14 of the Pregothic characteristics of letters can be found in **B**.

[117] The images from Bodley 614, Tiberius B.v, and Vitellius A.xv can be found in the digitised manuscripts at the following links, respectively: https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/a43be554-c5b0-42f0-94e0-70222bb2a964/surfaces/fba11d03-63b7-4dc4-8d6b-60b2bf16c2d2/;
https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v!1;
https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_vitellius_a_xv.

[118] Ibid., 110.

[119] Ibid., 110-111.

[120] Ibid., 111.

Figure 3 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 614, fol.32r.

As for the place where it was written, Gibb explains that even though this cannot be determined with exactitude, the scriptorium probably was "not outside the South of England"[121]. What is interesting in **B**'s version of *Wonders* is that the text was copied from **T**, which preserved a bilingual version of the *Wonders*, in Latin and in Old English. According to Knock, **B**'s text derives directly from **T**, or from a *codex interpositus* descended from **T**; the illustrations as well have been copied from this codex[122]. Striking evidence of this descent is the numeral DCXXIII, part of it mistakenly covered by paint in **T**, resulting in the final III omitted in **B**.
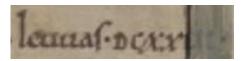
Figure 4 London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.v, fol. 79v, numeral DCXXIII.

Figure 5 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 614, fol. 38r, III missing from numeral.

This descent becomes interesting when put in relation to what has been previously argued about the dating of **B** because it has been demonstrated that before 1154-1155 **T** arrived at Battle Abbey (Battle, East Sussex). Ford discovered two entries in the annals of **T** that might coincide with the handwriting of **B**'s scribe; the years recorded are 1170 and 1171, which saw the crowning of Henry the Young King and the death of Thomas Becket and of the abbot Walter de Lucy. Both scripts share general features and aspects

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[121] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 8.
[122] Knock, "*Wonders of the East*", 91.

concerning individual letters that may point to the abovementioned Pregothic style, however this remains a speculation, for there is too little evidence to state that the scribe was the same. Interestingly, Sir Robert Cotton removed from **T** these annals linked to Battle Abbey and now they can be found in another manuscript[123]. Mittman argues that the absence of the Old English translation finds its reason in the inferior position of the Anglo-Saxons after the Norman Conquest, who "were being methodically eliminated from the secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies"[124].

Back to the presence of material coming from *De philosophia mundi*, a widely circulating work at those times, Ford maintains that the spelling of the name of one of Phoebus' horses, Ericteus, characterises mostly manuscripts coming from the Continent, suggesting that the place where **B** was produced could have been "connected to continental learning"[125]. The astronomical sections of the codex derive from a text known as *Opusculum de ratione spere*, the copying of which implied a considerable amount of reordering of materials, as demonstrated by Ford, highlighting an engagement on the part of the scribe in line with the emendations carried out when copying the *Wonders*[126]. This attention to the text points towards the new approach typical of the twelfth century Renaissance, during which the figure of the scribe started to be professionalised and the establishment of schools led to new modes of considering texts. For instance, in assembling manuscripts there was more attention in the selection of materials as well as in the rendering of the texts themselves, and a division took place between scribes and illuminators, who required different skills[127]. It was perhaps in this environment that the scribe of **B** decided to add new material to the *Wonders*, enriched with wonders taken from *Etymologiae* but also with a few narrative additions. These are the story of the fighting brothers belonging to the Germanic tradition and transposed to the East and the stories of the dancing women, which do not derive from Christian lore. However, the story of the cursed dancers of Colbeck can be also found in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, with some important changes. This story serves as a warning against disobedience, particularly in regard to how one should behave in sacred places, as for example the churchyard; in **B**, some women are dancing in spite of

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[123] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 113.
[124] Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 76.
[125] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 116-118.
[126] Ibid., 123.
[127] Ibid., 132-133.

the priest having forbidden them to do so, and God curses them to sing and dance for a year without stopping. In Malmesbury's version, the majority of the dancers are male, it is set during Christmas Eve, and the ending is positive because the curse is lifted after a year, while in **B** no reference to the moment of the year is made, there are mainly women and some of them die while others keep on dancing forever, representing some sort of wonders themselves[128]. An interesting theory advanced by Ford is that the tragic account of the dancers can be seen as "a metaphor for what is essentially the end of the *Wonders* tradition", meaning that **B** tried to place the text in a rational and logical environment, but since it was not possible, the text was either narrativized, as is the case of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, or highly moralised, as it happened in bestiaries and encylopaedias.

    T preserves a more complete version of the *Wonders*, with each Latin section followed by the Old English translation, usually accompanied by images. Like the other Cottonian manuscript that will be analysed, **T** as well suffered damage during the 1731 fire at Ashburnham House. The codex was rebound once in 1843 and a second time in 1969, when the parchment was set in paper mounts[129]. The parchment size is 260×218 mm, while the written text is approximately 220×165 mm, making it quite a large manuscript; in fact, it has been defined "certainly grand in scope, impressive in its general execution and heavy with the weight of the authors it preserves"[130]. The collation of the quires can be represented as follows: "1^8, [*n* missing quires beginning fols. 86–88], 2^8 missing 8, 3–4^8, 5^{4+1},6^4, 7–8^8, 9^{4+1}, 10–11^8, 12^4"[131]. Following Ker's analysis of the script, it emerges that Old English and Latin are written with clear, round and small letters. However, "typographical form should fit textual content"[132] and it was common practice during the eleventh century to reserve the round Insular minuscule for the Old English and the Caroline minuscule for Latin. In a few instances, insular characters are employed for the Latin portions of the text and the ascenders are tall, while the descenders curve to the left[133]. Moreover, each section begins with a

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[128] Ibid., 138-142.
[129] Ibid., 153
[130] Ibid., 67.
[131] Ibid., 153.
[132] Ford, 39.
[133] Neil R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 256.

rubricated capital letter either in red or green, in order to distinguish between the Latin text and the Old English translation.
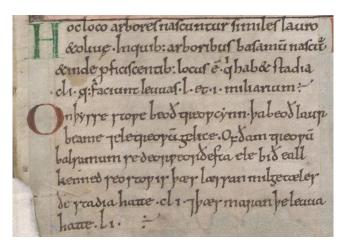
Figure 6 London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.v, fol. 83r.

T's date of composition can be placed somewhere around the eleventh century, and the scriptorium was perhaps at Winchester or Canterbury. Winchester has been hypothesised because the manuscript contains also lists of popes, abbots, bishops, emperors, and kings among whom there is the name of the bishop Swithun written in capitals[134]. If the dating is correct, **T** might have been produced during the tumultuous period preceding the Norman Conquest. Greta Austin gives an interesting insight, when asserting that if the date of composition of *Wonders* took place a century before, or not long after the Norman Conquest, this could imply that "the dual legacy of conquests and of missionary work sharpened the Anglo-Saxon eye to the varieties of peoples in the world"[135].

While Andy Orchard defines **T** as a "geographical miscellany"[136], Ford argues it can be seen as a computistical manuscript by referring to the studies of Faith Wallis on medieval manuscripts, who divides this category of manuscripts into two models, that are centrifugal – where there is a certain dispersion of the topics and the texts contained therein – and centripetal, where texts tend to revolve around similar topics. Apparently, **T** belongs to the latter category and what connects a good amount of the contents there

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[134] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 5.
[135] Greta Austin, "Marvelous People or Marvelous Races? Race and the Anglo-Saxon Wonders of the East", in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 2002), 49.
[136] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 20.

included would be an invitation to contemplate the natural, physical world, clearly confirmed also by the quantity of illustrations [137]. Gibb maintains that the contents in **T** might derive from Carolingian exemplars, further reinforcing the idea of close connection between England and France already illustrated[138]. Apart from the *Wonders*, the most relevant works contained in **T** are Ælfric's *De temporibus anni*, Cicero's *Aratea*, Priscian's *Periegesis*, and other texts concerning astronomy, geography, and sometimes religious matters. Ford attempted to understand the context in which it was produced in order to get an idea of how the audience might have used this codex; he begins with the Danish sack of Canterbury in 1011, in the aftermath of which the Christ Church library was damaged. In a few years, though, it soon recovered and under the patronage of Cnut many precious manuscripts were produced; however, there is no evidence of elements linking **T** with Cnut and Ford proposes two theories. The codex was produced at Christ Church for a monastic audience, or it was commissioned by a lay person, the latter suggested by the bilingualism of *Wonders* and by the importance attributed to the illustrations, which might have been useful in the case of a limited knowledge of Latin[139]. There are, however, several elements pointing to a more religious audience, as for instance the list of churchmen and the record of the pilgrimage to Rome undertaken by Sigeric, archbishop of Canterbury; therefore, it could be argued that **T** was simply atypical in a monastic context[140].

The *Wonders* in **T** contains four additional marvels together with the apocryphal story of Jamnes and Mambres, and a few of them will be object of discussion in the second chapter, where the relationship with the illustrations accompanying them is quite interesting. The accretion comprises the wonders are the land of vineyards and the ivory couch, the mountain called Adamans and the griffin dwelling there, the phoenix and its nest on cinnamon on Adamans, and an unnamed fiery mountain with its black inhabitants. Ford explains how these marvels are more open to exegetical interpretation than the ones preceding them, and the possibility for a Christian meaning to insinuate "into a tradition which had previously existed parallel to, and independently of, Christian discourse changes the function of the *Wonders*"[141]. In addition, this is

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[137] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 61-62.
[138] Gibb, "*The Wonders of the East*", 5.
[139] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 63-64.
[140] Ibid., 64.
[141] Ibid., 101.

apparently accomplished without disrupting the idea of East in Anglo-Saxon England, and the version of the East witnessed in **T** would function, according to Ford, to "consolidate an English community against its Viking attackers, precisely because the *Wonders* are open to Christian interpretation". Especially in the wake of the attack at Canterbury in 1011 and the subsequent Danish conquest, the composition of **T** could be regarded as a "a symbolic re-engagement with an idealised Anglo-Saxon past"[142]. Seen in this light, the production of **T** might have implied the work of a community seeking to "restore itself and a symbolic codification of the things it considered worth restoring"[143]. The means through which to achieve this purpose was, as highlighted by Nicholas Brooks, a sort of connection with Rome, demonstrating how the relationship with Rome as a fundamental element in the construction of Anglo-Saxon identity emerges also from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*[144]. It is indeed true that a number of elements in **T** seem to be oriented towards Rome, already shown in the present study, as for example Sigeric's pilgrimage to Rome and the lists of Roman emperors and popes. Providing further piece of evidence might be the importance given to the Roman culture as "a notable characteristic of Christ Church in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries"[145]. Moreover, this whole idea of restoring Anglo-Saxon values belonging to the past is testified also by the presence in the manuscript of royal genealogies of Wessex, Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent and Lindsey. However, what is puzzling in these genealogies is that by the time **T** was produced, "the world these lists sought to evoke was already over two hundred years past"[146] and they have not been updated with the inclusion of more recent kings. The answer provided by Ford to this omission strengthens the idea according to which the codex was compiled after the Danish attack:

> […] for a community such as Christ Church in the years after 1011 these
> genealogies, articulating the common Saxon foundation of each kingdom, conveyed
> an incipient concept of Englishness around which they might cohere. This identity
> could be contrasted with the Vikings, whose damage was painfully apparent, or the

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[142] Ibid., 83.
[143] Ibid., 102.
[144] Ibid., 84. Ford refers to Nicholas Brooks contribution: "Canterbury, Rome and the Construction of English Identity", in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough* (Leiden, 2000), 221-247.
[145] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 84.
[146] Ibid., 87.

> Danes, into whose kingdom England had been assimilated after 1016. The original ideological function of the genealogy is overwritten in the new manuscript context so that it might perform another ideological task.[147]

The last section is that of the apocryphal legend of Jamnes and Mambres, probably the only part of the text pointing towards a possible moral teaching; as previously seen, *Wonders* has no moralising material, thus the scribe could have inserted this story to "redirect his audience's perspective onto the true and proper path"[148]. Jamnes and Mambres are two figures from the Old Testament, "the Egyptian sorcerers"[149] who confronted Moses; according to the story, after Jamnes' death, Mambres summoned through a spell his brother's spirit, who described the torments of hell and warned Mambres against various sins, the most important of which was that of pride. Studies on the language used show that there can be found many similarities with homilies and other religious writings, such as opening the section with the formula *Her secð*, meaning 'It says here'; thus the text might have had the purpose of preaching by providing the example of the two brothers[150]. Dondald G. Scragg suggests, in fact, the possibility that this story already existed before the composition of **T** and was inserted by the scribe "because it seemed a fitting addition to the catalogue as part of the matter of Egypt"[151]. With the same function to shift the reader's attention towards more Christian themes, **B**'s scribe would have inserted in the *Wonders* the narratives previously mentioned[152]; it could be therefore argued that the process of Christianization of the *Wonders* started with **T** was taken up and continued in **B**.

V preserves solely the Old English translation of the *Wonders*. Before continuing with the codicological description, a distinction must be made, in order not to create any sort of confusion. Cotton Vitellius A.xv comprises two different codices, named after their supposed first owner. The first codex, from folio 4r to folio 93v belongs to the thirteenth century and it is known as the Southwick Codex because folio 5r bears an inscription showing that it belonged to the Southwick priory. The second codex is called the *Beowulf* manuscript for obvious reasons but it is also known as the Nowell Codex,

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[147] Ibid., 87.
[148] Verner, *Epistemology*, 74.
[149] Donald G. Scragg, "Secular Prose", in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 272.
[150] Ibid., 272.
[151] Ibid., 273.
[152] Verner, *Epistemology*, 75.

since the signature of Laurence Nowell can be found on the first page, folio 94r. "The Nowell Codex was most likely bound together with the Southwick Codex by Richard James, Cotton's librarian from 1628 to 1638"[153]. Apart from being bound together and being part of the same library in the seventeenth century, as far as studies have determined, there is nothing connecting the two codices. The texts contained in Southwick Codex are religious in the matter, comprising the *Soliloquies of St Augustine*, "attributed in a colophon to King Alfred"[154], the fragment of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the debate of *Solomon and Saturn*, and the fragment of a homily on *St. Quintin*. The measurements of the parchment are 200 × 130 mm., while the written space is about 157 × 100 mm. In the Southwick Codex there is no change of hand and the script was defined by Ker as "sometimes insular and sometimes caroline"[155].
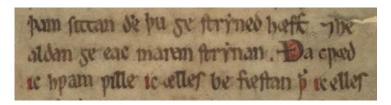
Figure 7 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 6r.

It is important in the present study to take into account the two codices in Cotton Vitellius A.xv because the initial **V** will be used throughout the whole study only referring to the *Beowulf* manuscript, where the *Wonders* is preserved. **V** is commonly believed to be composed around the year 1000; the parchment dimensions are about 195 × 115–30 mm. after fire damage, while the written space measures 175 × 105 mm[156]. As for the collation of its gatherings, it may be represented in the following manner: 1^{10}, 2^6, 3^8, 4^8, 5^8, 6^8, 7^8, $8–11^8$, $12–13^{10}$, 14^{8}[157]. Unlike the adjacent codex, in the *Beowulf* manuscript two scribes can be identified and the transition took place after the third line on folio 175v, which corresponds with *Beowulf*'s poetic line 1939b[158]:

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[153] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 81.

[154] Ker, *Catalogue*, 279.

[155] Ibid., 280. All the palaeographical information related to the Southwick Codex comes from Ker.

[156] Ker, *Catalogue*, 282.

[157] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 151.

[158] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 65.
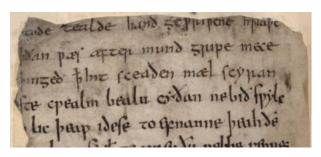
Figure 8 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, 175v.

Kevin Kiernan stresses the importance of the switch taking place in the last part of *Beowulf*, when the setting shifted from Denmark to Geatland, implying the existence of two distinct texts and the possibility that the second scribe (henceforth Scribe B) composed a section to bring them together[159]. Another possibility could have been the impossibility on the part of the first scribe (henceforth Scribe A) to complete the work, perhaps because he died[160]. Whichever the case may be, Simon C. Thomson explains that usually a sudden transition may point toward a "low standard of production", as opposed to codices where the copyists attempted to match the scripts thus making the transition almost imperceptible. A common practice was that of assigning scribes a given number of quires to copy and once the work was completed the different quires would be assembled together to produce the manuscript, in a sort of communal project[161].

As fort the scripts of the two scribes, Scribe A writes in Insular minuscule, a script heavily influenced by the Caroline minuscule, thus his writing has a delicate aspect due to the fine pen resulting in a smaller and more pointed script[162]. *A* and *æ* appear teardrop-shaped and Thomson maintains that in the early development of the script is quite odd, which might suggest that Scribe A was employing a pure Insular minuscule instead of learning it after being accustomed to another type of script. A few other characteristics of Scribe A include a round *e* with an extended tongue, an open *g*, *d* and *ð* which are almost undistinguishable, *y* often dotted and straight, round *s* alternated with high *ſ*, usually using the former at the beginning of words[163]. More attention has been reserved in the present study to Scribe A, since he worked on all the texts

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[159] Kevin S. Kiernan, *'Beowulf' and the 'Beowulf' Manuscript* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 257.
[160] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 66.
[161] Ibid., 67.
[162] Ker, *Catalogue*, 282.
[163] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 68.

contained in **V** (including the *Wonders*), apart from the last portion of *Beowulf*. Scribe B writes in a "late type of Square Anglo-Saxon minuscule"[164], a tenth-century script that enjoyed a wide circulation, only to be substituted by the Insular minuscule at the beginning of the next century[165]. When compared to the writing of Scribe A, that of Scribe B appears more rigid and less graceful, indeed "his pages are more crowded with ink, and ascenders and descenders frequently interfere with one another"[166]. Although it is a Square minuscule, there seems to be an influence from the Caroline minuscule, such as the presence of dotted *y* and some letter forms which may result from a certain degree of attention to the style of Scribe A[167].

For what concerns the dating of **V**, while Kiernan identifies the probable period of composition during the reign of Cnut on the basis of the adequateness of the *Beowulf* story in a Danish context, Dumville discards this hypothesis on palaeographic grounds, for the reason that 1016 would constitute an extremely late period for the Square minuscule[168]. Other texts written in these scripts, especially charters and chronicles, might prove helpful in determining with more precision the dating of the two scribes, and indeed they have revealed that the possible date for Scribe A can be located around the first quarter of the eleventh century, whilst that of Scribe B in the tenth century[169]. The place of composition has arisen similar issues due to the meagreness of elements offering significant piece of evidence, nonetheless Peter A. Stokes conjectured an association of Scribe A with scribal performances belonging to the sphere of influence of Archbishop Wulfstan[170], who worked in London, Worcester, and York. However, considering the nature of texts such as the *Wonders*, *Alexander's Letter*, and *Beowulf*, provided Stokes' theory was true, it is unlikely to imagine Wulfstan's direct engagement in the production of the manuscript[171]. One more relevant information related to **V** lies in the later ownership of Laurence Nowell, Dean of Lichfield, indicating some sort of

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[164] Ker, *Catalogue*, 282.
[165] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 68.
[166] Ibid., 69.
[167] Ibid., 69.
[168] Ibid., 70-71.
[169] Ibid., 71.
[170] Peter A. Stokes, *English Vernacular Minuscule from Æthelred to Cnut, circa 990 - circa 1035* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014).
[171] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 80.

connection with Mercia, which was already hinted at by the reference to Offa in *Beowulf*[172].

After a brief historical overview of the complex textual tradition characterising the *Wonders*, followed by the philological description of the three insular witnesses preserving the text, the next chapter will focus on the relationship between written text and illustration and particularly in **V**. Subsequently, the third chapter will move to the editorial procedure whose main purpose is to account for this communicative interplay characterising the manuscript, by including its iconographic apparatus along with the materiality. What can be argued about the *Wonders* in Anglo-Saxon England is that, despite the attitude of the first scholars who studied it and despite the presence of other Old English texts that have overshadowed it, it deserves further investigation because of the valuable information it might provide. In Scragg's words:

> Even more significant is the light shed on Anglo-Saxon culture by these texts. Their existence links late Anglo-Saxon England firmly into a European cultural tradition. The many Latin manuscripts and the number of translations into vernacular languages throughout the medieval period testify to a great appetite for such stories. But most of the Latin manuscripts are post-Conquest and continental, and the translations into the vernacular are of the thirteenth century onwards. What is distinctive about the Anglo-Saxon prose is that it is so early. The Old English translations, the earliest into any vernacular, are symptomatic of an insular tradition far ahead of European counterparts. […] Furthermore, both texts [Wonders and Alexander's Letter] exhibit unique adaptations which we should consider a distinctively English addition to the history of ideas.[173]

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[172] Ibid., 81.
[173] Scragg, "Secular Prose, 273.

Chapter 2

Visual monstrosity in the *Beowulf* manuscript

2.1   Criticism on the interaction between verbal and visual texts

The first chapter focused on the cultural value lying behind a work such as the *Wonders*, particularly for what concerns Old English literature. One exclusive key characteristic of the insular versions of the *Letter of Pharasmanes* is the presence of illustrations accompanying the text and they can be found in all three witnesses[1]. At the heart of this thesis lies the idea that both iconographic and textual elements concur in conveying meaning and that an edition of the *Wonders* should account for both; this latter point will be thoroughly discussed in the last chapter. The focal point of this chapter is the communication taking place between illustrations and words in the insular codices and whether the images might become indeed a useful resource when studying the text surrounding them. A fascinating definition of how illustration and written text work together can be find in Mary Carruthers; although her work is focused on the images the mind creates in front of a work of art, be it literary or visual, she employs the expression "movement within and through"[2] the work in question, exactly as it happens with music. Carruthers implies a choice on the part of the authors in how they embellish their work – in the case of *Wonders* with illustrations – and, more importantly, a choice on the part of the audience in how to move within the work. What emerges from this theory is that the presence of both the visual and the verbal might result in a continuous

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[1] Lendinara, "Di meraviglia in meraviglia, 180.
[2] Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, rhetoric, and the making of images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 117.

shifting between the two mediums. Although illustrated manuscripts constitute a rather "unlikely place to locate postmodern theories of text and image"[3], Stephen G. Nichols maintains that it is a consequence of having forgotten what a folio actually is, "a piece of dried animal flesh"[4] preserving the work of scribes and artists. Nichols further argues that in medieval codices four systems of representation can be identified, namely the work that is copied, the individual hand of the copyist, illustrations, and rubrications. Normally each of these systems exists independently, however they might communicate with each other or even convey something one about the other[5]. Seen in this light, an illustration within a codex can be considered a work of art in its own right but it can also represent the narrative "transposed from the verbal to the visual medium"[6].

The relationship between script and image is featured in all writing cultures. According to Kurt Weitzmann, "the desire to illustrate is almost as old as that to write, and for both arts the Egyptians were the first to use the form of scrolls made of papyrus"[7]. Subsequently this art was taken up by the Greeks culture, who "adapted and for centuries continued the Egyptian tradition of writing and illustrating their literature"[8]. However, towards the end of the first century AD, the papyrus roll began to be replaced by the codex made of parchment leaves, resulting in a revolutionary change in the production of texts. Interestingly, what W. J. Thomas Mitchell detected as a constant feature "in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself"[9] is a sort of tension between word and image. Indeed, "the history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs"[10], where each insisted on its own ability to access and provide meaning. Mitchell continues by recognising an interesting version of such tension, which he refers to as "the relationship of subversion"[11], where words and images find within themselves their nemesis, thus implying a sort of interrelationship between the two. It could be argued that perhaps, the result of this conflict lies in the understanding that:

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[3] Stephen G. Nichols, "The Image as Textual Unconscious: Medieval Manuscripts", *L'Esprit Créateur* 29, no. 1 (1989), 7.
[4] Ibid., 7.
[5] Ibid., 7
[6] Ibid., 7-8.
[7] Kurt Weitzmann, *Ancient Book Illumination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 1.
[8] Ibid., 2.
[9] W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 43.
[10] Ibid., 43.
[11] Ibid., 43.

we create much of our world out of the dialogue between verbal and pictorial representations, and that our task is not to renounce this dialogue in favour of a direct assault on nature but to see that nature already informs both sides of the conversation.[12]

When dealing with medieval manuscripts, a third dimension must be added to those of illustrations and written words, which is the materiality of the codex itself; apart from offering meanings in a similar manner as the verbal text does, images "remind us that the manuscript is first of all a *visual* experience"[13]. The names attributed by Nichols to these three fundamental aspects are manuscript matrix, scriptorial sign, and pictorial sign[14]. Given the impossibility to separate them without running the risk of losing valuable information, one should wonder what reasons have brought scholars to privilege the written form in the analysis of a text, particularly in the case of the *Wonders*. A possible answer may be found in the silent "superiority" of the verbal text, where the visual apparatus takes on the role of "an extension of the discourse register"[15]. In linguistic terms, this means that the illustration is nothing more than the signifier of the verbal element, and it is only read in its ability in (or lack of) portraying what is expressed through words[16]. Therefore, the underlying assumption seems to be that an illustration cannot convey meaning by itself. However, when one attempts to understand why in medieval texts images so frequently do accompany words, considering the amount of time manuscript production took, it becomes evident that the visual cannot be simply "ancillary" to the text. Indeed, Weitzmann suggests that:

illustrations are physically bound to the text whose content the illustrator wants to clarify by pictorial means, and their understanding, therefore, depends on a clear comprehension of this relationship to the written word.[17]

In conclusion, these first insights into the studies of the interaction between the verbal and visual elements highlight how the illustrations deserve a similar treatment reserved

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[12] Ibid., 46.
[13] Nichols, "The Image", 14.
[14] Ibid., 11.
[15] Ibid., 13.
[16] Ibid., 12.
[17] Weitzmann, *Ancient Book*, 1.

to the written word, for "images and texts are sign systems of equal primacy and importance"[18].

Therefore, it becomes necessary to investigate what Nichols defines the "double vision" of medieval manuscripts, meaning "scriptorial signs and iconic signs, and their interaction with one another"[19], since both witness the traces of the individuals who produced the codex. In the end, what characterises an art object, or an artefact, are the "recoverable traces of human interventions"[20] that can be found therein. Another useful theory for the present study concerning the *Wonders* is that of the three stages of meaning the illustrations can acquire; in the illustration phase, the image appears a direct representation of the verbal text; in the interrogative phase, a number of discrepancies can be identified between the visual and the verbal text; in the last stage, the phase of transgression, the image may become an allegory of the written text, or simply another meaning can be uncovered within the illustration, which goes against the text narrative. In this case, the illustration forces readers to reread the text from a new perspective, that of the image, producing a continuous interaction between the two mediums[21]. An illustrated codex causes an abrupt shift from reading to viewing, thus interrupting the verbal progression, which presupposes that "the manuscript matrix predicates syntactic or logical relations between linguistic and non-linguistic experiences"[22]. Debra Hassig explains that in some instances the meaning of the texts relies solely on illustrations, while in other cases the meaning of the illustrations is completely different from what the texts express[23].

Another possibility, apart from correctly representing the verbal narrative or not, is that the visual communicates something completely different, resulting in a double narrative level within the text. This hypothesis has been advanced by Nichols, who argues that illustrations often "portray novel elements of the story, aspects that might not have come to mind from reading alone, but which provide a new perspective on the narrative once illustrated"[24]. This double level of narrative has been defined as the

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[18] Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 18.
[19] Nichols, "The Image", 10.
[20] Ibid., 8
[21] Ibid., 17-20.
[22] Ibid., 14.
[23] Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 18.
[24] Nichols, "The Image", 13.

"textual unconscious"[25] within the image. This theory represents a novelty in how the images are perceived, moving from a supposedly "phenomenon of continuity with the verbal text"[26] to a rather evident disruption of the written element. The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the how the iconographic apparatus functions in the three insular witnesses of the *Wonders*, in order to discover the entangled relationship it might have with its written text. From there, the main focus will be on how to integrate the visual element in an edition of the *Wonders*, because:

> Images are readings, and the rewritings to which they give rise, through their ideological choices, function in the same way as sermons: not a re-telling of the text but a use of it; not an illustration but, ultimately, a new text. The image does not replace a text; it is one. Working through the visual, iconographic, and literary traditions that produced it, these images propose for the viewer's consideration a propositional content, an argument, an idea, inscribed in line and colour, by means of representation. By means, also, of an appeal to the already established knowledge that enables recognition of the scene depicted. Paradoxically, this recognition is an indispensable step in the communication of a new, alternative propositional content.[27]

2.2   Representing the marvelous

In the specific context of the *Wonders*, illustrations pose yet another issue, that is how to depict something never seen before, as it must be the case with all the wonders described in the English codices. According to Carruthers, a possible answer may be found in the eight book of St Augustine's *De trinitate* "for his idea that human beings must know things in terms of the images of what they have experienced"[28]. This means that the mind, whenever faced with the challenge of imagining the unknown, something never seen, recollects images of what it already knows. In the case of creating images of wondrous people and animals, it must be assumed that perhaps they result from the combination of recognisable parts of people and animals of which the mind has direct

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[25] Ibid., 13.
[26] Ibid., 14.
[27] Mieke Bal, "On Looking ad Reading: Word and Image, Visual Poetics, and Comparative Arts", *Semiotica* 76 (3-4), 1989, 291.
[28] Carruthers, *The Craft*, 120.

experience. She also points out, as Nichols, that images are far from being subservient to language and goes on by stressing how images and words are two pathways leading to the same mental activity, which she calls "invention"[29]. This is further reinforced by Mitchell when he states that perhaps underneath words and ideas "the ultimate reference in the mind is the image", almost as if it were slightly more evocative than words themselves. And if "pictures are constructions, fictions, like all ideas and thoughts"[30], at the same time they are not necessarily borne out *ex novo* of the imagination of the artist working on a manuscript. Indeed:

> Pictures, either individually or in cycles, easily migrate from one text into another so that the same set of animal pictures may appear in a scientific as well as in a literary text. This easy migration of pictures from one text into another is one of the basic principles one has to understand when dealing with book illumination.[31]

Wittkower states that pictures of the monstrous races were produced from antiquity and that one of the possible sources for the *Wonders* might have been an illustrated Solinus from the ninth century whose images share a number of features with those of the Vatican version of Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography*; among these common stylistic traits are the loose arrangement of images and the presence of frames on which the creatures are standing[32]. Interestingly, it has been discovered that those illustrations result from the transformation into framed images of strip compositions executed in Alexandria around the sixth century; further reinforcing the hypothesis of a common source for the images in Solinus is the presence of images displaying Egyptian stylistic features[33]. However, the illustrations in the *Wonders*, particularly those preserved in **T**, present more classical features, which is quite interesting since the text describes Eastern creatures[34]. Monster representations can be found also on medieval maps of the world, the great majority of which "depend directly or indirectly on the famous *mappa mundi* which Agrippa […] had had designed and which […] could only have been a link between Greece and the Middle Ages"[35].

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[29] Ibid., 142.
[30] Carruthers, *The Craft*, 201.
[31] Weitzmann, *Ancient Book*, 18.
[32] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East", 171.
[33] Ibid., 172.
[34] Ibid., 172-173.
[35] Ibid., 174-175.

Wittkower's conclusion concerning the pictorial tradition of the *Wonders* is that there must have been a remarkable stock of classical illustrations depicting monsters, which reached the Western Middle Ages through maps, teratological treatises, and, later, illustrated encyclopaedias[36]. Moreover, he believes that "it is this visual material which […] impressed itself on the minds of the people and proved so influential in many branches of medieval thought"[37].

As for the style with which the creatures have been represented in the *Wonders*, Campell argues that the illustrations, inserted into a flat landscape, are provided in the "unadorned, declarative mode proper to information". She advances the fascinating theory that, while the plainness of their representation gives them the status of fact, the absence of context surrounding each wonder enhances the reader's experience of the grotesque[38]. Campbell adapts Mikhail Bakhtin's categories of classical and grotesque to this text; from Bakhtin's perspective, a grotesque image is opposed to an idealised and more easily recognisable image[39]. The creatures represented in the *Wonders* do not fall into the latter category, leaning more towards the grotesque body, exuberant and provoking confusion in the reader. And due to the stark manner of describing as well as representing them, it appears that "to the author of *Wonders* [the East] is a museum of unnatural history"[40], presenting unintegrated data of which he could have had no experience of.

Returning to the insular *Wonders*, it has been already underscored the fact that they are the only illustrated texts belonging to the tradition of the *Letter of Pharasmanes*. This can be further exemplified by one of the wonders described in the text, that is the society of generous men which gifts each visitor with a woman. Probably the earlier stage of the text read the word *muneribus*, 'wealth', and it was mistakenly read *mulieribus* at some point during transmission[41]. This error is "firmly established" in the insular versions of the text and all three codices contain the illustration of a woman being carried away, which brought Thomson to consider the fact that the iconographic apparatus "may be a relatively late, perhaps even insular, addition

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[36] Ibid., 175-176.
[37] Ibid., 175-176.
[38] Campbell, *Witness*, 60.
[39] Ibid., 60.
[40] Ibid., 82.
[41] Ibid., 24

to the text"[42]. Back to the differences between the two illustrative traditions that developed in England, it must be noted that unlike in **V**, the text in **T** and **B** is arranged in columns and the illustrations are placed on top of each column, "a much clearer and more regular layout which presented fewer challenges to producers. The image schemes in these two manuscripts […] are more refined productions than Nowell"[43]. Before undertaking an analysis of a number of the images preserved in the three English manuscripts, in order to explore their relationship with the surrounding text, it is important to stress that:

> *Wonders* has a very special relevance to the paleographer, the textual critic, the art critic, the *Beowulf* student, the student of medieval monster lore, the student of classical-Christian and Continental-English literary relations, the scholar concerned with patristics and symbolic interpretation, and anyone else who wishes to understand the importance of portents and prodigies in the early Christian and medieval periods.[44]

It is for this reason that the present thesis aims at bringing the images to the spotlight and subsequently offer a solution on how to efficiently render them in an edition, so that their value does not remain unrecognised. The purpose is not to find something that it is not there and give them speculative interpretations, instead the goal is first and foremost acknowledging their presence.

2.3 *Tiberius B.v and Bodley 614 illustrated*

Having established the textual relationship between **T** and **B** in the previous chapter, this section will study them from an artistic perspective, since they share the same illustrative scheme. [45]. **V** and **T** belong to two different illustrative traditions, suggesting that "they developed separately at an early date"[46], while those in **B** are more simplified versions of the images in **T.** Whereas **T** contains thirty-eight images, **B** contains forty-eight, which can be explained by the presence of the additional marvels and of the narrative accretions discussed in the first chapter. Overall, the images in both

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[42] Ibid., 24.
[43] Ibid., 21.
[44] Gibb, "Wonders of the East", XI.
[45] Lendinara, "Di meraviglia in meraviglia", 184.
[46] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 23.

manuscripts follow a more refined tradition than the images in **V**. They are inserted in rectangular frames, their outlines and details of the figures are well defined with black ink, and, generally speaking, both **T** and **B** show a broader range of colours employed as compared to **V**, whose dominant colour of the illustrations is that of the parchment[47]. The figures, according to Lendinara, present classical features in the structure of the bodies as well as in the robes covering them, when they are not naked[48]. Another difference from **V**, which will be discussed more in detail in the following section, lies in the fact that all the illustrations can be attributed to the same artist throughout the whole manuscript[49]. In spite of belonging to the same iconographic tradition, both **B** and **T** can show interesting features when taken separately.

For what concerns **B**, it has been noted its inclusion in the more scholastic approach that characterised the twelfth century, centred around acquiring knowledge and a sense of responsibility towards manuscript production. This context, along with the structure of the text which lends itself to augmentation, offered fertile ground for the addition of more material. And the illustrations representing the final additional narratives can offer some interesting insight as for the interaction between text and image. The first story is that of the fighting brothers, rooted in the Germanic tradition, in this manuscript transposed from the Scandinavian settings to Asia, as claimed by Kemp Malone[50]. Thus there has been an attempt to transfer this traditional narrative to the East, in a sort of continuum with the previous wonders. The discourse about the East is seen by Ford as a consequence of the "social world of Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest England"[51]. However, Ford explains that the assimilation of the story was not fully complete and this is evident particularly in the illustration, where the two brothers are depicted wearing Scandinavian robes[52].

Continuing on the thread according to which the text of the *Wonders* started to be Christianised in **T**, a process continued in **B**, it is worth noting that the two brothers decide to stop fighting on Sundays, which can be seen as a Christian patina.

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[47] Lendinara, "Di meraviglia in meraviglia", 182.
[48] Ibid., 182.
[49] Ibid., 182.
[50] Kemp Malone, "An Anglo-Latin Version of the Hjaðningavíg", *Speculum* 39 (1964), 40.
[51] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 139.
[52] Ibid., 138.

Figure 9 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 614, fol. 49v.

Concerning the narrative of the dancing women, already examined from the point of view of the contents, it deserves to be studied graphically, for its illustration is the last image of the *Wonders* but it also closes the whole codex. The illustration constitutes "an admirable and ingenious meld of the last three stories into a single composition"[53]. Indeed, what is portrayed at the centre are the women such exhausted for having danced so long that they have consumed the lower part of their bodies into the ground. At their left is the brother from one of the three stories holding her sister's arm, while at the right of the picture the priest Odo is holding a book. As mentioned in the first chapter, Ford have interpreted this image as a metaphor expressing the destiny of the *Wonders* tradition; the compiler of **B** tried to insert the *Wonders* "within an intellectually acceptable discourse"[54], however it might have been quite ambitious for a text like the *Wonders*, therefore it took on different nuances depending on the context in which it was included. For instance, it acquired a political undertone in the works of Gerald of Wales and Gervase of Tilbury, or a moralistic shade in bestiaries and encyclopaedias[55].

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[53] Ibid., 142.
[54] Ibid., 142.
[55] Ibid., 142.

Figure 10 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 614, fol. 51v.

The discourse around **T** will concentrate on its *mise-en-page* for the *Wonders* and what this might imply for the text. First of all, the *Wonders* occupies a whole quire of eight plus two more folia of the next[56]. The Latin and Old English text is written in double columns and normally the text is followed by illustration. "The rulings on the outer sheet of the first quire are designed to accommodate illustrations", however in a few instances the space need for writing has been miscalculated, resulting in a smaller script[57]. It becomes clear the difference between the adaptation of the script to a limited amount of space (Fig. 11) if compared to the script when the space has been evaluated correctly (Fig. 12).
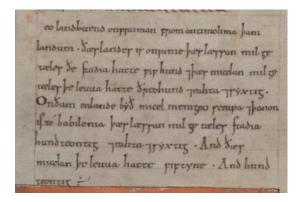
Figure 11 London, Cotton Tiberius B.v, fol. 78v.
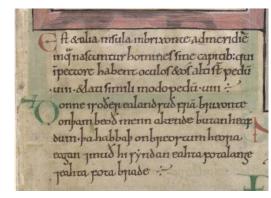
Figure 12 London, Cotton Tiberius B.v, fol. 82r.

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[56] Ibid., 70.
[57] Ibid., 70.

As for the *mise-en-page* of the illustrations, one can imagine that a scheme where image follows text will result at a certain point in the separation of the two elements, as is the case of the two-headed snake, whose description on folio 79r (Fig. 13) precedes the illustration, which is on folio 79v (Fig. 14)[58].

Figure 13 London, Cotton Tiberius B.v, fol. 79r.

Figure 14 London, Cotton Tiberius B.v, fol. 79v.

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[58] Ibid., 71.

Ford has counted a total of six pairs out of nine of facing pages where an image in the top left of the left page is separated from the text describing it, thus the image does not articulate the text as it regularly happens[59]. This seems to highlight to the "successive character of the text and the simultaneous, non-linear quality of image"[60], which brings the discussion once again to the Augustinian idea on the basis of which words or images express meaning to the reader when the latter recalls from their experience elements to combine in order to produce this meaning:

> the import of words – to state the most that can be said for them – consists in this: they serve merely to suggest that we look for realities. These they do not exhibit to us for our knowledge.[61]

Seen in this light, words may not be sufficient to express the natural world, even more so when describing "non-existent phenomena like [the marvels]"[62]. However, a manuscript image can be considered a visual sign on more than one level, providing a remarkable amount of information at the same time: it is in front of the reader, therefore there is no need to combine mental images, it is more specific than words alone, and it is non-linear[63]. As a consequence, a reader who looks at the image of a marvellous creature after having read about it is "forced to switch codes"[64]. In line with the theories with which this chapter opened, the image can show what words are not able to express fully. And through this setting of the page, the compiler of **T** seems to use the discrepancy between the verbal (abstract) and the visual (material) codes to give reality to a world that does not exist, by making it material[65].

Some monsters described in the *Wonders* can be also found in the Latin encyclopaedic works discussed in the first chapter, the most important among whom being Pliny. One of these creatures is the Blemmye, that in the *Wonders* it is unnamed and is described in the following terms:

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[59] Ibid., 71.
[60] Ibid., 71.
[61] J. M. Colleran, *St Augustine: The Greatness of the Soul; The Teacher* (Westminster, The Newman Press, 1964), 175.
[62] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 72.
[63] Ibid., 72.
[64] Ibid., 72.
[65] Ibid., 72.

Ðonne 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.[66]

Although no other detail is added, "the weirdness of the creature's body would have been particularly horrific"[67] to the readers. Apparently, this creature "stands in opposition to the world we know and the laws that govern it"[68], for even though there are recognisable human elements in the picture, their arrangement is very odd, with a human-like face on its breast. Flight defines the illustration in **T** as "disturbing, [with] its slightly conceited smirk almost inviting the disgust of the reader". Its hands are clasped around the back of the frame as if it would be possible for the Blemmye to cross the boundary represented by the frame and enter the human world. This illustration seems to point towards the impossibility to contain the monstrous threats, thus reducing the distance between the reader and the East. Perhaps this can be an instance of what Campbell has cleped the "subversive delightfulness"[69] of the *Wonders* and that emerges despite the "stark presentation of what is Other, Beyond, and Outside"[70].

Figure 15 London, Cotton Tiberius B.v, fol. 82r.

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[66] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 192. His translation: "Then there is another island, south of 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".
[67] Flight, *Basilisks and 'Beowulf'*, 39.
[68] Campbell, *Witness*, 82.
[69] Ibid., 84.
[70] Ibid., 84.

Before concluding the description of **T** from an artistic viewpoint, there is one more image that needs to be mentioned, for the meaning it might have for the whole manuscript, the one depicting the apocryphal story of Jamnes and Mambres. (100) Ford believes that the importance of this addition "is less in the text than in the full-page image"[71], since it is this illustration that closes the *Wonders*.

Figure 16 London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.v, fol. 87v.

According to Sarah Semple, this folio represents an image of hell based on motifs belonging to popular belief and practice[72]; she furthermore connects the images of manuscripts with the society that created them. Ford argues that "to end the *Wonders* with an image prioritises the specific and the material over the abstractions of text", which has been already discusses in regard to **T**. Ford ponders whether this image may

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[71] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 100.
[72] Sarah Semple, "Illustration of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003), 243.

be guiding "the reader into the rest of the book"[73]. Mambres is depicted on the top "holding an open codex with its contents visible", pointing his finger to the illegible text contained therein. Below, the spirit of Jamnes appears monstrous, with claws, red eyes, grey or green skin, and perhaps the orange lines drawn close to his mouth mean that he breathes fire. Ford's artistic analysis deserves to be quoted in full:

> The image pivots on a diagonal axis which runs from the bottom of Jamnes's spine in the lower left, up his outstretched arms, along the lines of Mambres's cloak (paralleled by the strap on his right leg) and through to the codex via his pointing finger. Despite this, the eye is drawn back to the left by the weight of the grey-green used to paint Jamnes's body, against which the inert red-orange of the rocks provides no counterbalance. In this motion our gaze becomes that of Mambres and we assume his stare with that fixity reserved only for horror. We are about to make use of a book and Jamnes warns us, as he does his brother, about the right use of knowledge.[74]

Another hypothesis is that maybe Mambres not only is pointing towards his book but also outside the image, "beyond the next page"[75], and in **T**'s original arrangement, the *Wonders* was followed by a blank page. Ford discovered by consulting the Lumley catalogue that the following work was *De laudibus sanctae crucis*, interestingly a poem characterised by a "programmatic combination of text and image"[76]. Hence, **T** may be regarded, if one considers the other texts comprised in the codex, as "a book designed with the right use of knowledge in mind"[77].

2.4   The peculiarity of the Beowulf manuscript

A good amount of scholarly attention has been concentrated on the *Beowulf* poem and one of the main consequences has been giving its name to the whole codex. *Beowulf* represents, in a way, the heart of the Nowell Codex; one could safely argue that, on a general level, the *Beowulf* poem may be considered the heart of Anglo-Saxon studies. However, the present study aims at a thorough investigation of the *Wonders* in **V** to

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[73] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 100.
[74] Ibid., 101.
[75] Ibid., 101.
[76] Ibid., 101.
[77] Ibid., 101.

better understand the whole codex and, more specifically, to take into analysis the artistic element that has recently started to be reconsidered among scholars. When discussing medieval geography, Natalia Lozovsky compares this discipline to the Ugly Duckling, explaining how "it often gets scolded and cannot find a place of its own, all because people almost invariably misunderstand its true nature"[78]. If one applies this metaphor to the *Beowulf* manuscript, it emerges that the other texts simply revolve around *Beowulf* and become peripheral to the centre. This is particularly true in the case of works dealing with monsters, that have received a dismissive treatment on the part of critics. For instance, Stanley Rypins referred to the *Wonders* in these terms:

> The fabulous element in classical literature was apparently seized upon, wherever found, by the author of *Wonders of the East*, and put together by him, in no very artistic fashion, to make what is rather a compilation than a work of literary merit.[79]

Montague R. James, in the same vein, defines the *Wonders* as a "collection of absurdities which I am rescuing from a perhaps merited oblivion"[80]. If it might be true that from an aesthetic perspective the *Wonders* do not have much to offer, it cannot be maintained the same from a philological perspective. Perhaps one should look beyond the aesthetic element and value instead its richness when it comes to manuscript crafting during the Middle Ages. Some of its characteristics make the *Wonders* of **V** a unique piece in the Anglo-Saxon cultural landscape, inasmuch it offers a window to the *geardagum* in which it was composed.

Thomson indeed argues that "mistakes and weaknesses in execution can be useful to scholars of manuscript production"[81]. Generally speaking, the images are not aesthetically pleasing, nor well executed, a few of them are "are puzzling and seem to bear little relation to the text"[82], while others require "a great deal of work from the reader to connect them with their respective textual sections"[83]. However, Thomson

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[78] Natalia Lozovsky, *"The Earth is Our Book": Geographical Knowledge in the Latin West ca. 400–1000* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 1.

[79] Stanley Rypins, *Three Old English Prose Texts: 'Letter of Alexander the Great', 'Wonders of the East', 'Life of St. Christopher'*, EETS 161 (London: Early English Texts Society, 1924), xlv.

[80] Montague R. James, *The 'Marvels of the East': A Full Reproduction of the Three Known Copies, with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Roxburghe Club, 1929), 9.

[81] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 104.

[82] Ibid., 105.

[83] Ibid., 107.

finds the first ten illustrations "executed to a reasonable standard"[84] and even when the artistry is not very refined, there is no need to see them as absurd. Of course, when compared to its lavishly coloured neighbours **T** and **B**, **V** appears less precious, but at the time of its composition, a "relative lack of colour was not in itself an indication of poor quality"[85]. This can be demonstrated by the minimalist use of colour in the frontispiece to New Minster's *Liber Vitae*, in an image portraying Cnut and Emma probably produced at Winchester around 1031[86]. Winchester being one of the richest houses of England, "there can be little doubt that reasons of aesthetic choice, not economic necessity"[87] lie behind this colouring style. In the execution of the *Liber Vitae* frontispiece, attention was place "on controlled use of colour, skilful execution of figures, possibly on interactions between images and their text and between the images and the external contexts in which they were placed"[88]. The manuscript containing the *Wonders* does not show any of the qualities of what might have been a precious volume, one to be displayed, however there is evidence that it shares some stylistics traits with works similar to the *Liber Vitae*, namely the limited use of colour, how it organises space and the manner in which text and images interact[89].

One of the most fascinating theories advanced by Thomson is that, on closer inspection, it is likely that two artists worked on the images of the *Wonders* and they were not equally skilled. If this might be the case, the overall negative weakness of the images must be the effect of the two hands juxtaposed, which can be seen when one compares the two Catinos illustrated on folio 106r, or the camels on folio 101v[90].

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84 Ibid., 107.
85 Ibid., 109.
86 Ibid., 109.
87 Ibid., 110.
88 Ibid., 110-111.
89 Ibid., 111.
90 Ibid., 112-113.

Figure 17 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 106r.

The two animals called Catinos look very different from one other, for the animal on the left presents elegant lines, many details and some sense of proportion, while the second animal – although partly lost because of fire damage – does not share the same characteristics. Indeed, there is "no variation in the weight and thickness of line used to draw it"[91] and the nose of the first creature in the second one resembles a beak.

Figure 18 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 101v.

In the illustration of the camels, the second appears like an attempt to copy a similar animal but it is drawn "more roughly, with less subtlety of line and sense of

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[91] Ibid., 113.

proportion"[92]. It is placed behind the first camel and apparently the artist did not realise that some parts of it should have been visible. These two examples seem to support the theory according to which there might have been two artists working together on the drawings. And if it is true that their ability is not on the same level, what emerges after looking at all the illustrations is that the first part was perhaps drawn by the more skilled artist, while the last images belong to the weaker hand. Taking into account the images portraying double animals, where the two hands emerge more clearly, Thomson suggests that this may be a case where one artist was learning the craft from a more skilled artist[93]. However, there is one illustration where there seems to be a third hand, for it is not comparable to either artist, due to the "extraneous and very poorly executed"[94] sketches. Moreover, this image is interesting for yet another reason, that is the fact of being completely frameless, blending with the written words. It is on folio 101r and it represents the episode of the gold-mining ants as big as dogs, where the illustration spreads on the whole page, "blocking the linear progression of the text, even reversing the semantic force of the text"[95].

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[92] Ibid., 112.
[93] Ibid., 113.
[94] Ibid., 115.
[95] Mittman and Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts,* 11.

Figure 19 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 101r.

At the top of the page, there is the sketch of what it might be an ant and it surrounds the word *fleogan* closing the first line of the page; it could be an imitation of the ants depicted under the line, but the front foot is not there, otherwise it would have crossed the word. Next to this illustration, there is the sketch of an animal's head; according to Thomson, "it was probably an imitation of the male camel's head, which has been lost to the 1731 fire"[96] and it was perhaps similar to the female camel on the left side of the image. What is striking in this illustration, which brought Thomson to hypothesise the presence of a third artist, is that, unlike the drawings of the less skilled artists, these are incomplete sketches. A remote possibility is that they were made by "a later reader who

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[96] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 115.

admired the drawings and sought to imitate them"[97] and Thomson cautiously linked them with the Middle English glosses on folio 102v, where there is an attempt to imitate the Old English words.

Figure 20 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 102v.

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[97] Ibid., 115.

The reasons as to why this particular page might have attracted the attention of the reader remain unknown, however it must be noted that the images are arranged in an unusual way, for normally there are two images per folio. Moreover, the illustration of the dragons crosses the full page, interrupting the linearity of the text. Interestingly, the three creatures – the Blemmye, the dragons, and the centaur – might mirror the tripartite structure in the *Liber Monstrorum* identified by Orchard, and, as a consequence, the three main monsters in *Beowulf*. Indeed, the numerous monsters described in the *Liber Monstrorum* are divided into three books, each dealing with a particular category of monsters, namely monstrous men, monstrous beasts, and monstrous serpents[98]. A further similarity between the *Wonders*' monsters and *Beowulf*'s monsters lies in their hostility towards human beings and in their placement in the most remote parts of the world, for Grendel, his mother, and the dragon dwell at the borders of the civilised world[99]. Nothing can be stated with certainty regarding the doodles and the Middle English glosses, however, if the camel's head imitates the camel now lost because of the 1731 fire, maybe the sketches have been done prior to this date; and if the sketches are linked to the glosses, the same dating could be advanced for the writing[100].

Framing may be another aspect highlighting the communal nature of the illustrations in the *Wonders* and the weaknesses can be considered the result of a project that was "more creatively challenging than its executors were equipped to handle, rather than purely a result of incompetence"[101]. It is however true that the artist responsible for framing was rather unskilled and does not seem concerned with how the material was presented. Thomson refers to his work as a mixture of "experimentation and ignorance"[102] probably due to the fact that text and images were produced with no preoccupation for the necessary space to include frames; and indeed in the seventeen folia of the *Wonders* there are attempts to decorate some frames, cases in which the frames are only partially closed and cases where the frames become part of the illustrations[103]. Most of them, however, were produced "after and in response to the

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[98] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 87.
[99] Ibid., 111.
[100] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 117.
[101] Ibid., 120.
[102] Ibid., 121.
[103] Ibid., 121.

space available between images and text"[104]. This can be exemplified by the seven-breasted giant on folio 102r, represented with a sceptre in his hand that is very close to the text.

Figure 21 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 102r.

The image suggests that a frame was supposed to be drawn around the whole figure since, at the base of the frame (on the left), it is clear that the artist started to do so, only to realise that it would have covered the text as well, thus deciding to make it smaller so that it contained only the marvel. Outside the frame, its hand looks disproportionately large and Thomson suggests it is an addition of the more skilled artist, given the finer and more elegant traits with which it was executed[105]. There is also a floreate detail decorating the sceptre, an ornament that embellished several drawings in the *Wonders*. A possible reason for this addition could be to resolve an issue created by having left to much space between the image and the text; the pulled back frame and the enlarged hand that almost touches the words make the image appear closer to the text[106]. Moreover, this giant creature "would be just a small and simple figure surrounded by space"[107] without the frame and the hand drawn in this manner. It becomes visible, therefore, the production process in the creation of the *Wonders*, responsive to the needs

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104 Ibid., 121.
105 Ibid., 130.
106 Ibid., 130.
107 Ibid., 130.

encountered along the way. According to Thomson, this proves that **V** did not have a clear model to follow[108], and the simple fact of drawing the images and the frames directly in ink indicates that there might have been an urge to finish the work in a certain amount of time. In Thomson's words:

> the overriding requirement here seems to have been to complete all frames with images, regardless of the quality of execution. This in turn invites speculation that Nowell was produced to a deadline, possibly even on commission; or that, while some aspects of the planned project were clear, others were less so and communication between the different people working on the codex was less than ideal.[109]

The lack preparation for the execution of the frames resulted in illustrations where very often there is a violation of the boundaries and the difficulty to contain the wonders, which might be interpreted in the same way as the Blemmye in **T**, that is "to suggest the wildness and danger of the marvels"[110]. Therefore, what could have simply been an attempt to simplify the artist's work led the way for some modern critics to creatively interpret those images. In comparison with both **T** and **B**, **V** lacks their "controlled, framed contexts"[111], producing pages where frames, figures, and even words permeate each other. In fact, "Some pictures impinge upon the textual space (or vice versa), so that words and pictures interpenetrate"[112].

Figure 22 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 99v.

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108 Ibid., 123.
109 Ibid., 123.
110 Ibid., 125.
111 Ibid., 125.
112 Mary C. Olson, *Fair and Varied Forms: Visual Textuality in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 133.

Although the general attitude of the scribe is to accommodate the drawings, sometimes at the expense of the text itself, thus abbreviating it or compressing it on the line[113], in other instances he did not shorten his text and on folio 99v there is a line at the top of the page which reduces the space for a possible frame for the two-headed snake. This illustration stretches across the page, disrupting the default layout Thomson identified for the *Wonders* in **V** and that can be represented as follows:
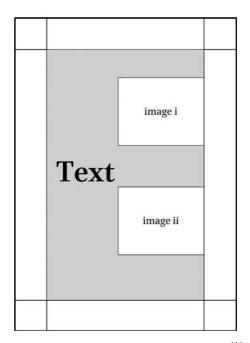
Figure 23 Default layout of the *Wonders* in **V**.[114]

The snake, as the dragons (Fig. 20) divides one section of the text from the following. What is fascinating about the two heads of the creatures is that they seem to point their tongues or breath of fire towards the word *deor*, which means 'beast'. Mittman and Susan M. Kim have interpreted this as a way of binding "the text to the body of the wonder"[115], implying that "as the wonders are familiarised, brought home, translated, the text is also made monstrous"[116].

From Mittman and Kim's perspective, the images seem to represent a sort of consciousness related to credibility of the creatures described, mirroring the text's use of the adjective *ungefrægelicu* accompanying the *deor*, which appears in no other Old

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[113] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 127.

[114] Ibid., 140.

[115] Mittman and Kim, "Ungefrægelicu deor: Truth and the 'Wonders of the East'", in *Different Vision: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 2, (2010) 17

[116] Ibid., 17.

English text. This adjective is used for the incendiary hens and for the two-headed beast with eight legs; here only the section concerning the hens will be analysed. Knock explains that the phrase *ungefrægelicu liblac* referring to the hens has no correspondence in the Latin version of the *Letter of Pharasmanes*[117] and the adjective means "unheard-of"[118]. Interestingly, if one considers the usefulness of adding images in order to make the text more comprehensible, particularly when extraordinary creatures are described, it might be surprising to see illustrations of an animal that would have been familiar to an Anglo-Saxon. However, Flight notes that the most interesting aspect of this image is the frame, which is black and showing a charred appearance, perhaps because the text reports that if someone tries to get close or touch these creatures, they will catch fire. Additionally, the frame is open on the left side, thus "the bird's glorious tail even brushes the text describing it, threating to burn that up, too"[119]. Read in this way, the hen challenges the visual and verbal borders that should delimit it.

Figure 24 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 99r.

Continuing the thread of image and text interaction, one illustration in particular shows the liminal state of these creatures, that is the Cynocephalus, part human and part animal. What makes him frightening is precisely its in-between nature, having a human

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[117] Knock, "Wonders of the East", 116
[118] Mittman and Kim, "Ungefrægelicu deor", 5-6.
[119] Flight, *Basilisks and 'Beowulf'*, 36.

body but the head of a dog. This ambiguous nature is further highlighted by his illustration, for here the Cynocephalus is "regally attired"[120]. Moreover, that of the Cynocephalus is a "well-executed and interesting image, where colours show different materials and distinguish between the inner and outer sides of a cloak"[121]. Among the traits that according to Friedman signal whether someone is monstrous – as for instance speech, diet, weapons, customs, and social organization – clothing plays an important role in distinguishing civilised men from monstrous men[122]. Not only the Cynocephalus is fully clothed and wears pointed shoes, but he also bears the traditional emblems of royalty: in its right hand a king's sceptre and in his left hand an orb, which symbolises dominion over the world. Mittman and Kim assert that the orb is a symbol connected to a number of medieval kings, including Charlemagne and Harold Godwinson[123]. Flight finds this image provoking since it would be there to remind the reader "not to be misled by appearances"[124]. The Cynocephalus in the *Wonders* is closely connected with the story of *St Christopher*, preserved in **V**. Flight's reading implies that the monstrous appearance of St Christopher does not prevent God from recognising his true faith, while the emperor Decius, human only in his appearance, is more monstrous in his deeds than St Christopher[125], which is in line with Mittman and Kim's interpretation:

> This attention to the clothing and ornamentation suggests that the image is one not of pure alterity. In fact, it reminds us that such pure alterity is never possible. The monstrosity of the Cynocephalus is monstrous civility, indeed, perhaps monstrous kingship.[126]

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[120] Mittman and Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts*, 17.
[121] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 131.
[122] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, 26.
[123] Mittman and Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts*, 18.
[124] Flight, *Basilisks and 'Beowulf'*, 57.
[125] Ibid., 56.
[126] Ibid., 18.

Figure 25 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 100r.

After having analysed some instances of image and text interaction, another aspect that needs to be taken into account is the iconographic tradition in which the illustrations of the *Beowulf* manuscript may be inscribed. It has been demonstrated that the three manuscripts' illustrations belong to two different traditions, where **T** and **B** can be placed in the same category. Until recently, scholars have been more concerned "with the aesthetic quality of the Vitellius drawings"[127] instead of attempting to investigate their content and the context which brought to their creation. What can be argued with a good amount of certainty is that these illustrations must have circulated in some form before arriving to the scribe(s) or artist(s) of the Nowell Codex. Luckily, there have been a few studies trying to establish their possible tradition and the results are worth mentioning. First of all, Carola Hicks discovered some common characteristics between the illustration of the Homodubius in **V** (Fig. n). and the representation of centaurs in the Bayeux Tapestry (Fig. n). According to Hicks, this way of depicting the centaurs and the Homodubius, with their arms wide open, is peculiar to the insular iconography of the centaur which contrasts with the predominant image of the Sagittarius holding a bow, or with the image of Chiron holding a branch[128].

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[127] Mary C. Olson, *Fair and Varied Forms*, 133.
[128] Carola Hicks, "The Borders of the Bayeux Tapestry", in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium* (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1992), 261.

Figure 26 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 102v.
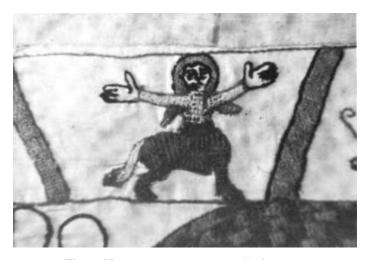
Figure 27 The Bayeux Tapestry, detail of centaur.

Interestingly, this position of the arms can be found in another work, namely the Icelandic *Physiologus*, which might provide useful information when studying the *Wonders* in **V**; this work is composed of two manuscript fragments of the thirteenth century preserved at Reykjavik and they are identified as "Physiologus A" (two folia) and "Physiologus B" (seven folia)[129]. However, in the *Physiologus* the figure often represented in a similar way is the mermaid, "always described in the same section as the centaurs"[130], thus perhaps their features were considered interchangeable.

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[129] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 19-20. This book is also the source of the following illustrations taken from Physiologus A and B

[130] Hicks, "Borders", 261.

Figure 28 (Physiologus A) MS 673a I, 4°, fol. 1v, detail of mermaid.

In "Physiologus A", the description of the siren is followed by the description of the centaur and, although no illustration has survived in this fragment, luckily the section of "Physiologus B" has preserved the image:
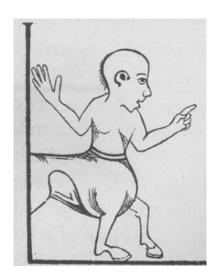
Figure 29 (Physiologus B) MS 673a II, 4°, fol. 4r, detail of onocentaur.

According to Ford, the images of the mermaid and of the open-armed centaur from the Icelandic *Physiologus* shows how this work might have shared the same "iconographic vocabulary"[131] as **V** and the Bayeux Tapestry. Another instance which reinforces this theory is the representation of the Donestre creature in **V** (Fig. n), where it is holding a severed leg next to a woman, a rather interesting detail since neither the woman nor the leg is mentioned in the Old English text. The more surprising, however, is the

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[131] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 21.

description itself of the Donestre creature, explaining that þær is mancyn þæt is mid us Donestre nemned, þa syndon geawexene swa frifteras fram þam heafde oð ðone nafolan, and se oðer dæl bið mennisce onlic. Ond hy cunnon mennisce gereord[132]. This can be translated: "there is a race of people we call Donestre, who have grown like soothsayers from the head to the navel, and the other part is human. And they know all human speech"[133]. Apparently, in this collection of monstrous peoples and animals, there is the figure of the Donestre, whose description is quite ambiguous. In Mittman and Kim's words, "it is unclear to us how a soothsayer ought to appear, or why this "soothsayerness" seems to be included as a non-human element in the text"[134]. The word *frifteras* has been analysed by Mittman and Kim and they arrived at the conclusion that perhaps there occurred a mistake in the spelling on the part of the scribe, for the correct form should have been *frihteras*. They also considered another possibility, namely the idea that it might be a *hapax legomenon* specifically created for this strange creature, a possibility suggested by the illustration. Indeed, the fact that the Donestre is represented with a leg in its hand may have carnivorous implications, and it might be remotely probable that *frifteras* derives from *frettan* 'to consume', or *frettol* 'voracious'[135]. Following along Orchard's translation of the passage about the Donestre, the text informs the readers that:

> When they see someone from a foreign country, they name him and his kinsmen
> with the names of acquaintances, and with lying words they beguile him and capture
> him, and after that eat him all up except for the head, and then sit and weep over the
> head.[136]

As a consequence, both from the text and from the image, the description is line with this reading of the word *frifteras*, however hypothetical. Some scholars have furthermore analysed this image, reading in it a sort of assimilation or incorporation of the East on the part of the reader, where the severed leg would represent the

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[132] The Old English text here follows **V** and presents a few emendations taken from **T** due to some difficulty in reading clearly from the manuscript, the whole editorial work will be presented in the next chapter.

[133] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 197.

[134] Asa S. Mittman and Susan M. Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts*, 18.

[135] Ibid. The analysis of the Donestre can be found here.

[136] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 197. From the Old English: Þonne hi fremdes kynnes mannan geseoð, ðonne nemnað hi hine and his magas cuðra manna naman, and mid leaslicum wordum hine beswicað, and him onfoð, and þænne æfter þan hi hine fretað ealne butan his heafde and þonne sittað and wepað ofer ðam heafde.

impossibility of fully integrated in the new Anglo-Saxon context[137]. Without digressing too much with these fascinating, yet out of the scope of this thesis, interpretations, what is more relevant for the present study is how the illustration accompanying the written text seems to concur in the expression of meaning. Since the narrative in the *Wonders* is far from being coherent, offering the reader only bits of knowledge without any linearity, "through a loose process of association"[138], reading text and image together may offer some clarification about something that is intrinsically unknowable. The illustrations of the same creature in **T** and **B** are more definite and their sharp lines are drawn with a darker ink, their colours are brighter and more varied than the crimson of the background in **V**[139]. Mittman and Kim compared this vague representation of the Donestre with the manner in which the *Beowulf* poet describes Grendel, never providing the reader detailed information as to what he looks like. And since *Beowulf* is not a poem lacking in precise descriptions, Mittman and Kim advance the hypothesis that perhaps the inability to fully describe Grendel, thus to contain its monstrosity, is what makes this creature horrifying[140].

Figure 30 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 103v.

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[137] Howe, *Writing the Map*, 173.
[138] Mittman and Kim, *Inconceivable*, 20.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., 21.

In fact, "the more carefully described or drawn in [a creature], the more it becomes a product of the author or artist's imagination and less a product of our own"[141], and thus the approach of the **V** artist becomes worthy of investigation.

The image of the Donestre is important for yet another reason, that is its link to the aforementioned Icelandic *Physiologus*, where a similar image can be found on a fully illustrated page with no text. Among several teratological races depicted here, there is what has been identified as a Cynocephalus holding an unidentified object, a woman with long hair whose legs are covered by some sort of material, perhaps rocks, and another woman holding a child in her arm – the first woman has been read by Carla del Zotto Tozzoli also as a Gorgon[142]. Ford's suggestion is that both images from **V** and Physiologus A were taken from an exemplar where a Cynocephalus was drawn next to a Gorgon, resulting in a confusion of the two creatures on the part of the artist[143]. And thus, the rocks which cover the Gorgon or woman's feet become the skirts held by the woman above her ankles in **V**, while the object the Cynocephalus is holding gets more definition becoming the starting point for depicting the severed leg in **V**.

Figure 31 (Physiologus A), MS 673a I, 4°, fol. 2r.

Vittoria Dolcetti Corazza has a firmer position when linking the English and the Icelandic cultures through the *Physiologus*, by arguing that "no doubt the Icelandic

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[141] Ibid.
[142] Carla Del Zotto Tozzoli, *Il 'Physiologus' in Islanda* (Giardini: Pisa, 1992), 35.
[143] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 28.

Physiologi derive from models whose origins lie in England"[144], apparently evidenced by textual as well as by iconographic characteristics. Another example is that of the Corsiae, whose illustration takes a different direction in regard to what it is written in the text; the creature on the left does not have horns like those of the ram, while the creature on the right does not have the appearance of a donkey. Apart from the horns, the rest of the body and the presence of claws makes it more similar to a "horned salamander", not very different from the salamander in the Icelandic *Physiologus*, drawn from an aerial perspective that was rather common for snake-like creatures[145].

Figure 32 London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 99v.

A further similarity between the two illustrations, according to Ford, lies in defining the head and the neck of the creature with a single line, similar to a collar, characteristic that perhaps the artist in **V** thought necessary, although there are no clothes[146]. One of the theories proposed connects this technique with sculpture and more importantly with embroidery, a craft where "figures constructed in this form were part of a conceptual schema". Taking once again the example of the Bayeux Tapestry, the heads of the soldiers are sewn using a different colour of the thread than in the rest of their bodies; when they are dressed, it makes sense. However, this schema of different colours of

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[144] Vittoria Dolcetti Corazza, "Crossing Paths in the Middle Ages: the *Physiologus* in Iceland", in *The Garden of Crossing Paths: the Manipulation and Rewriting of Medieval Texts* Atti 1 (Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2007), 228.
[145] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 28.
[146] Ibid., 28-31.

head and body appears also when the soldiers are naked and visually is makes less sense[147].

Figure 33 (Physiologus B) MS 673a II, 4°, fol. 3v.

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[147] Ibid., 31.

Chapter 3

An image-based scholarly digital edition

3.1 The Wonders *in the* Beowulf *manuscript: a neophilological approach*

The previous chapters were devoted to the presentation of the *Wonders* in its textual tradition and, subsequently, they provided an analysis of the iconographic apparatus characterising the three insular witnesses, by focussing particularly on the version preserved in the *Beowulf* manuscript, a codex oftentimes considered "not sufficiently high-grade"[1] to deserve closer inspection. From Gibb's perspective, the *Wonders* looks like "a random potpourri of monster lore assembled on the spot for the amusement of gullible audiences"[2]. The lack of interest in **V** on the part of scholars is attributable both to its weak illustrations and to the numerous textual issues. Everything seems to suggest that the codex was produced in a minor scriptorium[3]. As for the origin, use and transmission of the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts the majority of the studies point towards a monastic context[4]. Questions regarding the exact place of production or the reasons which brought together such diverse texts in themes and in structure remain open to debate; seeking a definite answer is not the scope of the present study, it aims instead at exploring the *Wonders* in **V** from a broader perspective. Since philology is not only interested in the written text, encompassing a whole range of disciplines that surround the study of words, recognising the presence of the images as an integral part of the text might help in a better understanding of the text itself. Moreover, it could provide a deeper knowledge of how manuscripts were produced and read in the eleventh century.

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[1] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 17.
[2] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", X.
[3] David N. Dumville, "*Beowulf* Come Lately: Some Notes on the Paleography of the Nowell Codex", *Archiv fur das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 225, no. 1 (1988), 55.
[4] Donald Scragg, "Secular Prose", 268.

From a linguistic point of view, **V** has been considered problematic for a number of reasons, among which figure the omission of nouns and verbs that are necessary for the understanding of the text itself, and also the omission of phrases, resulting in incomprehensible passages; where the other copies attempted to smooth corruptions and confusion, **V** did not venture into this undertaking[5]; **V** is on the most part incomplete, and apparently "all reasonable reconstruction of the original binding arrangement shows that *Wonders* ends within a gathering from which nothing is lost"[6], therefore a good amount of these errors must be attributed to the illegibility of the manuscript from which the text was copied, or to a lack of knowledge on the part of the scribe. In view of the presence of the Old English text in **V** and **T**, one may be tempted to think there must be some connection between the two. However, they show different omissions and independent corruptions, which prevents the hypothesis of descendance of one from the other; a more viable conjecture is the existence of a now lost translation into Old English from which both **V** and **T** were copied, a *codex interpositus* between the original translation and the text preserved in **V** and **T**[7]:
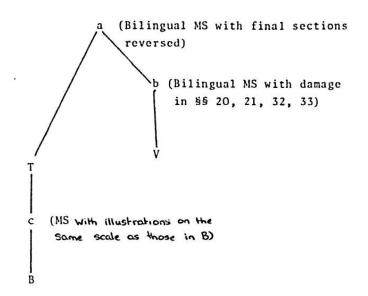
Figure 34 *Stemma* of *Wonders*, representing a possible relationship between the English manuscripts.[8]

Gibb provides the example of two words, probably in the original translated correctly from the Latin as *landbunes* and *unclennesse*, which in both **V** and **T** are rendered with *landbuend* and *micelnesse*; from his perspective, some of the corruptions occurred in a

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[5] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 3-4.
[6] Ibid., 4.
[7] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 11.
[8] Knock, "*Wonders of the East*", 57.

lost Latin copy, presumably a version made before the Old English translation[9]. Knock further explains that **V** probably derives from a bilingual manuscript like **T**, and the scribe producing **V** was interested solely in the Old English text[10]. It is very likely that the scribe was working backward from the pictures, with no particular interest in the written text; if one takes into account the structure of **T** (where each Latin section is followed by its Old English translation, each followed by an illustration), one might guess that whenever there were small passages in Old English inserted between two Latin portions of text, these lines might have been easily overlooked[11].

Although *recentiores non deteriores*, **V** can offer a fundamental picture of an earlier stage of the complex transmission of this text in Anglo-Saxon England and, indeed, Gibb underscores that it is "often an excellent witness to earlier readings"[12]. Thomson further stresses this point by asserting that the *Wonders* text in **V**:

> seem on the whole to show more dialectical and archaic linguistic features, and are probably closer to the source text in a number of places, though it is also more prone to errors and has clearly been subject to some alteration.[13]

Additionally, the findings in the previous chapter inserts its illustrations in an "iconographic continuum that precedes Vitellius A.xv and continues for approximately two hundred years after its production"[14]. While the association with the bestiary tradition is evident in the case of **B**, whose illustrations can be found in some bestiaries of the thirteenth century[15], linking the *Wonders* in **V** with the Icelandic *Physiologus* might offer the earliest evidence of a connection "between the *Wonders* and the bestiary traditions"[16]. According to Florence McCulloch, "the nature of the old *Physiologus* changes sometime during the twelfth century – not beyond recognition… but the transformation is still very great"[17]. Ford argues that the two fragments of the Icelandic *Physiologus* might be considered an intermediate stage between the old *Physiologus* and

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[9] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 11-12.
[10] Knock, "*Wonders of the East*", 105.
[11] Ibid., 104
[12] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 4.
[13] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 22.
[14] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 31.
[15] Ibid., 33.
[16] Ibid., 31.
[17] Florence McCulloh, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 34.

the medieval bestiaries hypothesised by M. R. James but that he could not demonstrate[18]. First, this might not be such a remote hypothesis given that these fragments derive the Latin *versio B*, however they differ from this manuscript tradition precisely because they are illustrated, quite in the same way as the Wonders differ from the Continental tradition[19]. Illustrations are non-existent also in the Germanic tradition of the *Physiologus* translated into vernacular. The *mise-en-page* of the Middle High German prose might point to the intention of adding illustrations, but these were not executed, while the poetic Middle High German version preserves the iconographic apparatus, however they do not originate from *versio B* of *Physiologus* but from the Latin *Dicta Chrysostomi*[20]. Another evidence of the transitional status of the Icelandic fragments is the subject matter, particularly the presence of teratological material, unusual in bestiaries, for very rarely bestiaries and marvels coexist in the same manuscript context. Thus, the "codicological integration" of marvellous creatures belonging to the *Wonders* tradition distinguishes the Icelandic *Physiologus* from later bestiaries[21]. From this perspective, the iconographic apparatus of the *Wonders* ceases to be unimportant and becomes an interesting witness that deserves further investigation. If this theory is correct, it implies that one of the insular witnesses of the *Wonders* might have influenced a culture which developed two hundred years after **V** and located at a remarkable distance from England. Additionally, the illustrations are also interesting witnesses of the textual transmission, since it has been demonstrated that a few errors have influenced the illustrative apparatus, meaning that it was produced after the Latin source of the *Wonders* separated from the continental versions and continued to develop in England[22].

In the specific context of **V**, the *Wonders* is fascinating because it is the only illustrated text in the manuscript. By the same token, if Thomsons' assumption related to production of the images is true, it means that **V** is "the first identified Anglo-Saxon instance of two artists working in the same quire, let alone the same page – and let alone again the same image"[23]. A work such as the *Wonders*, when studied in its codicological

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[18] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 33.
[19] Ford, 33.
[20] Ibid., 33-34.
[21] Ibid., 34.
[22] Knock, "*Wonders of the East*", 76.
[23] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 118.

context, and when, as suggested by Ford, is studied as an artefact, it "begins to exceed what we might expect from this rather eccentric and peripheral text"[24]. Peripheral like the marvels it contains and the England in which it is produced. In Campbell's words:

> *Wonders of the East* may be the black sheep of medieval travel literature, but it forms a crucial part of the picture available to medieval readers and writers of the world beyond their world.[25]

The study of the transmission of ancient texts shows that no two manuscripts containing the same work are identical. Differences may occur in spelling, word choice, changes in the sentence structure, which may result both from the scribes miscopying the text or from deliberate alterations on their part, either to fit the limited amount of space or for stylistic purposes. This process has been accelerated in the *Wonders*, as it has been argued in the first chapter, because it is written in prose and because the text in itself apparently lacks any logical consistency. Scribal variation can take place where confusion arises and Gibb has identified four common situations that might lead to textual variation, which are (a) (c) confusion caused by abbreviations, (b) confusion in the presence of ambiguous syntax, confusion due to grammatical issues, and (d) confusion of visually similar words[26]. An example of the latter in the *Wonders* are variations such as *wæstme* and *wæstene*, or *unclennesse* and *micelnesse*. Moreover, texts can be shortened, expanded – as evidenced by **T** and **B** – and even rewritten completely. In order to quiesce the chaotic complexities of textual transmission, philologists have resorted to the rigorous science of textual criticism, where the Lachmannian method is the most frequently used and it is also known as the "stemmatic", or "genealogical" method[27]. It owes its name to the German philologist Karl Lachmann (1793-1851). At the heart of this method lies the attempt to reconstruct "on the evidence of the surviving manuscripts the earliest recoverable form (or forms) of the text that lies behind them"[28], which might be achieved through the comparison of all the variant readings. When the relationships between the codices are established, the resulting *stemma codicum* takes

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[24] Ford, *Marvel and Artefact*, 6.
[25] Campbell, *Witness*, 80.
[26] Gibb, "*Wonders of the East*", 23-24.
[27] M. J. Driscoll, "The Words on the Page: Thoughts on Philology, Old and New", in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010), 89.

[28] Ibid., 89.

the shape of a family tree[29], as the one proposed by Knock which can be found at the beginning of the present chapter; at the top of the stemma there is one manuscript, the archetype, from which all other witnesses stem[30]. In this perspective, every deviation from the reconstructed text (the so-called "original"), is considered as a corruption in the transmission of the text; in this sense, all variants are indiscriminately treated as errors, and therefore relegated in the critical apparatus However, this method has some limitations when it comes to ancient and medieval textual tradition, which "does not produced variants, it is variance"[31]. In Matthew J. Driscoll's words:

> [the Lachmannian method] assumes, among other things, that no two scribes will ever independently make the same mistake, which they frequently do, that they will always work from a single exemplar, which they frequently do not, and that most scribes will tend to reproduce their exemplars exactly, which they almost never do, at least in the case of vernacular literature.[32]

In spite of being the most employed approach in philology, other schools of thought soon developed concerning how to reproduce ancient texts for a modern audience, challenging the reconstruction of a presumably lost Urtext. For instance, Joseph Bédier's approach consists in finding and using the "best text" and in providing an edition of it as conservative as possible, intervening editorially only when necessary[33]. The advantage of this method is that of preserving the text without disrupting it through the process of emendation, which tends to be subjective; the resulting text may not be the Urtext but is "at least a text which had actually existed"[34]. Instead of aiming at the construction of a text beyond the actual document, the focus shifts towards the historical context and the materiality of the document in question. It could be argued that, from this perspective, more than one variant may carry valuable information regarding the historical moment of its production, both on the literary and linguistic level. This approach can be referred to as "new" or "material" philology, which recognises textual *mouvance*[35], or variance, as the intrinsic quality of medieval texts. Driscoll identifies

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[29] Ibid., 89.
[30] Ibid., 89.
[31] Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), 111.
[32] Driscoll, "The Words on the Page", 89.
[33] Stephen G. Nichols, "Philology in a Manuscript Culture", in *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990), 6.
[34] Driscoll, "The Words on the Page", 90.
[35] Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 171.

three key principles of the neophilological approach; first, a text cannot be separated from its codicological context, thus it shall be explored in relation to form, illustrations, layout, and also in relation to the adjacent texts (in line with Thomson's idea that **V** should be studied as a whole); subsequently, the manuscript preserving the text is the result of a process involving more than one individual and it was produced in a specific historical moment, in a particular place and for reasons "socially, economically and intellectually determined"[36]; and ultimately, manuscripts "continue to exist through time, and are disseminated and consumed in ways which are also socially, economically and intellectually determined, and of which they bear traces"[37].

This method, called "New Philology" by its founder, Stephen G. Nichols[38], has not been immune to critiques and some scholars welcomed it with a dismissive attitude, claiming that it "rests on old philology"[39], without the contributions of which this new approach would not exist. Another objection lies in the idea that it cannot replace traditional philology because the "best manuscript" chosen arbitrarily could never be as good as the earliest form of the work. However, New Philology is not concerned with distinguishing between good or bad variants, nor it presupposes that each codex preserving a text can be placed on the same level; what this approach entails is that "all manuscripts of a given work are equally interesting, not for establishing the text […] but rather for what they can tell us about the processes of literary production, dissemination and reception to which they are witnesses"[40]. There is indeed nothing new in the neophilological approach, in that is it did not "spring fully formed *ex nihilo*"[41] but it gradually took shape from the ideas of Bédier, Cerquiglini, Nichols, and Zumthor, to name a few.

In order to better understand the implications of New Philology, it is necessary to distinguish between the notions of work, text, and the artefact (in other instances called "document"). For instance, the *Wonders* can be considered a work, intended an abstraction, meaning all the *Wonders* ever written and copied throughout the centuries.

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[36] Driscoll, "The Words on the Page", 91.

[37] Ibid., 91.

[38] Nichols, "Philology in a Manuscript Culture".

[39] Sverirr Tómasson "Er nýja textafrædin ný? Þankar um gamla fræðigrein", in *Gripla* 13 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 2002), 213. Translated by M. J. Driscoll, in "The Words on the Page: Thoughts on Philology, Old and New", 91.

[40] Driscoll, "The Words on the Page", 91-92.

[41] Ibid., 92.

Those preoccupied with the intention of the author would argue that *Wonders* is whatever the author wanted it to be; however, since this is quite an arduous task even when authors are known, the situation is extremely complex in the case of works "for which there is no author, or where the notion of authorship is highly problematic"[42]. The text is a series of words in a given order and it can be divided into real text and ideal text; the real text is how the text is presented on the page, while the ideal text is the actual wording, the meaning intended by the author, which is work oriented[43]. If the *Wonders* in all its variants is the work, the variant preserved in any of the three insular codices may be considered a text. Lastly, the artefact may be defined as "any text-bearing object"[44], which is by definition unique. To conclude with the example of the *Wonders*, a codex which preserves its unique version of this work can be considered an artefact. Whereas traditionally the focus has been on the work, the ideal text "of which one can […] be afforded a glimpse"[45], New Philology has shifted the attention towards artefacts and on the real text, with a particular interest in how the materiality preserving the text become part of its meaning as much as the wording[46].

The present study will attempt to offer an editorial solution in the specific case of the *Wonders*, where the digital dimension may indeed prove suitable for rendering the interplay established by written text and illustrations. It has been argued that **V** is incomplete and presents many issues, hence in most cases **T** has been the basis of modern editions of the *Wonders*, still a philologist may choose to edit a "demonstrably 'corrupt', yet sociologically and historically interesting"[47] text when it has the potential to become a useful resource for further studies. Scragg lamented the absence of an edition where both verbal and visual elements are included since the *Wonders* is a text "which out not to be read without reference to the illustrations"[48]. The modern editions Scragg mentions are those of Orchard[49], where the text preserved in **T** is collated with

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[42] Ibid., 94.
[43] Ibid., 94. Driscoll refers to W.W. Greg's division between "substantives" and "accidentals".
[44] Ibid., 94.
[45] Ibid., 95.
[46] Ibid., 95.
[47] M. J. Driscoll, "The Words on the Page: Thoughts on Philology, Old and New", in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010), 102.
[48] Scragg, "Secular Prose", 272.
[49] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*.

the version preserved in **V**, and of Rypins[50], where **V** is used as the main text and includes readings from **T**. Although both codices have been fully reproduced by Malone and McGurk for the *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile* series in 1963 and 1983, respectively, only recently there has been an attempt to unite the textual and the iconographic elements. In 2013, Mittman and Kim published a volume focussed specifically on the *Wonders* in **V**, providing the facsimile pages of the manuscript, a diplomatic edition of the text glossed by its word-by-word translation, and an idiomatic translation; given the scholars' different areas of expertise – Mittman being an art historian and Kim a scholar of Old English – they also offered their own interpretations of the illustrations accompanying the *Wonders*[51]. The following section will discuss the weaknesses of Mittman and Kim's edition and will attempt to offer an alternative solution for a more efficient inclusion of the iconographic apparatus. Since the notion of text cannot be split from the artefact preserving it, Thomson has considered the advantages of the digital dimension in the study of medieval manuscripts, in particular the possibility to make an edition of the whole *Beowulf* manuscript, given its uniqueness for a number of reasons[52]. Maybe for this same reason, Kevin Kiernan produced in 1999 an image-based digital edition of the whole **V** manuscript, with both Southwick and Nowell codices[53].

3.2   Challenges and advantages of a Scholarly Digital Ddition

The edition of the *Wonders* in *Inconceivable Beasts* presents a number of issues, the first being its placement within a chapter devoted also to the interpretation of the female figures in the *Wonders*.[54] Arrangement of the volume aside, the major problem concerns the presence of the illustrations, which is partly the reason that brought to this particular modern edition, given the interaction they evidently establish with the verbal element. For a better understanding of what Nichols defined the "double vision" of medieval codices, the text should be read alongside the illustrations, however, since the full-colour facsimile of the folia is separated from the diplomatic edition, Mittman and Kim

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[50] Rypins, *Three Old English Prose Texts*.
[51] Mittman and Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts*.
[52] Thomson, *Communal Creativity*, 7.
[53] **https://ebeowulf.uky.edu/ebeo4.0/CD/main.html**.
[54] Mittman and Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts*, 25.

decided to accompany the idiomatic translation with black and white replications of the illustrations. As for the editorial practice, they seem to follow a neophilological approach, providing a diplomatic transcription and altering the text only where letters or words appears illegible. The only editorial intervention consists of uniting or separating the letters, without running the risk of reproducing an incomprehensible text; in every other aspect – namely punctuation, abbreviations, capitalisation and word division – they follow the manuscript. Although it remains a valuable contribution to the studies on the *Wonders*, for representing the first serious attempt to account for the iconographic apparatus in **V**, thus allowing scholars an easier access to the manuscript as an artefact, there are a few questions to take into account. Opting for black and white images when they do accompany the text might not prove a fortunate decision, because one of the main features distinguishing **V** from **T** and **B** is precisely the use of colour, the former showing a limited set of colours. Additionally, analysing both colours and drawings can offer a more optimal fruition of the illustrations. The second problematic aspect is how these black and white images have been laid out on the pages for, unlike the transcription, they do not follow the manuscript, which might impede an ideal exploration of the communicative interplay between text and images. The last point brings the discussion to the focal point of the whole thesis, that is the advantages of an image-based digital edition of the *Wonders*; even though the transcription follows the pages of the codex, the different positioning of the various sections may prevent an optimal use of the edition. The potential behind their work must be recognised, along with the fact that perhaps print edition is not the right medium to effectively showcase all the important elements.

Given the complexity of the *Wonders*, the digital dimension might constitute the "natural medium where variation can be presented to the readers"[55] and, since it would offer them an interactive experience, they would be given the opportunity to determine "to a much greater extent the nature and scope of the content and how that content is presented"[56]. Digital scholarly editing differs from printing from several viewpoints and, among the advantages it can offer, the most relevant for the present study have been identified by Marina Buzzoni; first, the possibility to include quantities of data that

[55] Elena Pierazzo, "Modelling Digital Scholarly Editing: From Plato to Heraclitus", in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 45.
[56] Driscoll, "The Words on the Page", 104.

in a paper edition would not find its space and, in addition, the possibility to make connections between the various elements and to process them "at a speed, precision and complexity otherwise unattainable"[57], thus allowing the user to move through the edition and choose what to see and how. Indeed, a very important feature of digital editions lies in their ability to represent many levels of a given text, as for instance the manuscript facsimile, its transcription, along with a critical edition and even its translation; there are potentially limitless possibilities.

The practice of ecdotics originates from the "desire to uncover the cultural treasures of the past and to reconstitute important documents, texts and works in the most reliable way possible" [58]. One of the most accurate definitions of critical editing has been provided by Sahle, when he stated that "edition ist die erschließende Wiedergabe historischer Dokumente"[59], from which four important points emerge in delineating what a scholarly edition is. Roughly, the translation goes as follows: 'an edition is the critical representation of historic documents'. The first dimension this definition brings forth is that of representation, which implies transferring a work in a similar or a different kind of medium, for example the visual layer represents the replication of images, while the textual layer reproduces the transcription of a given text; according to Sahle, without this dimension, there can be no edition[60]. The second, fundamental aspect is the critical dimension, rendered by the German word *erschließen*, which "encompasses any activity that increases the amount of information concerning a specific object and thus enhances its accessibility and usability"[61]. Critical engagement may take various forms and in the specific case of philological work, it might have to do with the rules with which transcription, a representation process, is done; deciding which rules to follow and applying them is part of the critical process. In the case of an edited text, this process might a method according to which emendations are carried out. To the same dimension of critical thinking belongs evaluation on which contextual details to include in order to make the work more accessible to the audience. In the same way as criticism without representation is not an edition, neither is a

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representation without critical reasoning and essential information, which is only a facsimile replication. If one analyses the edition of the *Wonders* produced by Mittman and Kim, it emerges how the critical component is rather weak, by leaving the text almost exactly as it was found in the manuscript folia; it can be argued that for someone with less knowledge of the Old English language the presence of the transcription, without any regularisation, may be disorienting. To conclude with Sahle's definition of a critical edition, the next dimension is that of documents, which does not include textual content only for, in some instances there may be only the material component (as is the case of paintings), while in other cases "the notion of an abstract work behind its physical embodiments is not central to the edition"[62]. The last characteristic is the historic dimension, which is self-explanatory; since ecdotics deal with textual transmission across the centuries, philologists show what is not apparent for a modern reader, bridging "a distance in time, a historical difference"[63]. In Sahle's words:

> Texts that are created today do not need to be critically edited. They can speak for themselves. Only historic documents and texts need an editor to make them speak clearly.[64]

Before delving into the editorial principles and encoding workflow behind the digital scholarly edition of the *Wonders*, it might be useful to investigate what a digital scholarly edition is and what are its advantages and downsides. It is not the purpose of this work to assert that digital editions represent the best solution for any medieval text, instead it ponders when it might be an effective solution, on the basis of what the edition seeks to reproduce for a modern audience. Reflecting in advance on these issues is a necessary step for the reason that, as it will be explained in more detail, carrying out a digital edition is not a path without challenges. Firstly, a *digital* edition is not synonymous with a *digitised* edition, the latter simply implying the transfer of information from paper to a digital support (as is the case of eBooks or digitised articles) and the files can be read on a digital device. Instead, Patrick Sahle argues, "a digital edition cannot be given in print without significant loss of content and

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[62] Ibid., 25.
[63] Ibid., 26.
[64] Ibid., 26.

functionality"[65]. All the levels of text mentioned above that are potentially limitless originate from the same electronic code, which means that in a printed edition all the levels would be lost; moreover, in printed editions, there is no interactivity and there is no control over the layout of the page. When it comes to publication, Sahle refers to it as a "fluid publication"[66], meaning that although there is a first moment of release, a digital edition can always be modified, highlighting its being "a process rather than a product"[67]. However, a concept that needs to be underscored is that "doing things digitally is not simply doing the same old thing in a new medium" [68], for a philologist it means taking into consideration the scholarly knowledge concerning ecdotics and adapt the editorial practices to the new medium. Sahle explains that a digital scholarly edition needs to follow a digital paradigm in "theory, method and practice"[69], exactly like printed editions are guided by a paradigm resulting from the common practices and constraints of book printing[70]. Furthermore, while at the heart of printed editions lies the edited text and the information that serves to contextualise it is considered secondary, in digital editions the philological knowledge becomes visible and the edited text is "developed gradually from the material documents [and] from visual evidence"[71]. Considering the wide spectrum of elements a digital edition may reproduce, it becomes clear how it can serve more than one discipline and, in the case of the *Wonders* images, how it may provide a bridging tool between the editions of text only and the facsimile reproductions. Indeed, scholarly editing should not be concerned exclusively with literary texts, on the contrary it needs to "cover all cultural artefact from the past that need critical examination"[72]. There is a subtle difference, though, when deciding how to refer to the digital edition, between *scholarly digital* edition and *digital scholarly* edition, the former pointing towards the digital medium of the edition which will integrate the scholarly component, while the latter shifting the attention to the

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[65] Patrick Sahle, "What is a Scholarly Digital Edition?", in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 27.
[66] Ibid., 29.
[67] Ibid., 29.
[68] Matthew James Driscoll and Elena Pierazzo, "Introduction: Old Wine in New Bottles?", in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 9.
[69] Patrick Sahle, "What is a Scholarly Digital Edition?", 28.
[70] Ibid., 26.
[71] Ibid., 30-31.
[72] Ibid., 22.

philological tradition and praxis of a critical edition that will be transferred to the digital medium[73].

Furthermore, similarly to the *mouvance* of medieval texts, digital texts can be defined as "inherently variable"[74] on many levels. Apart from the fact that digital texts are subject to continuous modification, variation lies also in the possibility of showing readers multiple views of the same text at once. This finds a linking element with the neophilological approach discussed at the beginning of this chapter, characterised by a shift from the attempt to reproduce a text devoid of any error attributable to textual transmission to the desire to reconstruct a precise stage in the textual transmission, where the focus of ecdotics is providing an accurate image of the text from that particular historical context[75]. Therefore, "digital mutability may respond well to textual mutability but only if the latter is recognised and embraced, and if we make a feature of it rather than considering it a bug"[76].

Digital editing is far from being an easy process in the field of ecdotics and a few of the downsides when embarking on similar projects must be acknowledged. For instance, the absence of user-friendly production tools is a major problem, particularly when one considers that editors of text, given their area of expertise, may not be well-versed with the encoding workflow nor with the dimension of the technology. Moreover, there is no standard way, recognised by a whole scientific community, of producing a digital edition[77]. When compared to the tradition print edition, the workflow behind a digital edition is always more complex, it requires a great number of resources, and oftentimes "one has to start walking on an unfamiliar and possibly intimidating path, whose final destination may not be fully known in advance"[78]. Additionally, there is the problem related to quotability, meaning how a scholarly digital edition can be cited in the academic world. Unfortunately, web-pages are not usually reliable, and "citing a web page only to lead to a '404-Page not found' error because the site […] is not available anymore, is not an acceptable feature for a

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[73] Sahle, "What is a Scholarly Digital Edition?", 33.

[74] Pierazzo, "Modelling", 51.

[75] Ibid., 53.

[76] Ibid., 58.

[77] Roberto Rosselli Del Turco, "The Battle We Forgot to Fight: Should We Make a Case for Digital Editions?", in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 227.

[78] Ibid., 227.

scholarly-level publication"[79]. It can also happen that the visualisation tool employed during the production process is not compatible anymore with modern and updated browsers, which makes the edition obsolete after only a few years. Ironically, "while manuscripts may have lasted hundreds of years, it is discomforting to note how the life span of a digital facsimile/edition is sometimes less than 4–5 years"[80]. And last, according to Pierazzo, another problem posed by digital editions is related to the possibility of including a potentially limitless number of elements in a single resource, which may result in a "digital medium [providing] readers with an overload of unregulated data that struggles to become information[81]". This is where the work of a philologist becomes essential in the production of a digital edition, by making responsible and well-informed choices regarding what to present and how to do it.

3.3   Editorial principles for a Scholarly Digital Edition of the Wonders

Since digital editions share the same purpose as its printed counterpart of providing an accurate and useful reproduction of a given text, it means that the philologist deciding to produce such an edition must establish specific editorial rules and to apply them rigorously and in a recognisable way. Buzzoni argues that, since the digital medium allows scholars to identify the process by which the edition was produced, it follows the regular praxis of ecdotics, inasmuch:

> an edition can be called critical in a strict sense only if it furnishes the reader with all the documentation necessary to evaluate it and to produce another, maybe different edition that is nevertheless based on the same material.[82]

Until recently, the editorial procedures have attempted to offer a "clean" text, with almost no detectable editorial intervention, which gave readers "a false impression that stability, a 'trueness' of the texts, is an achievable goal, and that texts exist in a sort of pure […] state"[83]. Pierazzo explains this attitude by comparing it to Michelangelo who supposedly was able to "see" the figures of the sculptures by looking at the marble and

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[79] Ibid., 228.
[80] Ibid., 228.
[81] Pierazzo, "Modelling", 50.
[82] Buzzoni, "A Protocol", 59.
[83] Pierazzo, "Modelling", 47.

he only had to free them from the material through his craft. This metaphor suggests that in the same way, through the science of philology, editors aim at liberating the text "from the debris of transmission"[84], leading to the belief that this is achieved, the text becomes "so authoritative as to become unquestionable"[85]. However, as seen with New Philology, this is unthinkable, if one considers how intricate textual transmission is. Moreover, in Italy, scholars have been trained to see any edition as "a working hypothesis and that the original can only ever be approximated but never attained"[86]. In their attempt to produce an edition of the *Wonders*, Mittman and Kim must have embraced the neophilological approach by opting for the retention of most of the codicological characteristics of the text. However, such an unnoticeable intervention to the text has led to what Driscoll refers to as "level zero" of interpretation on the part of editors[87]. From Buzzoni's point of view, taking the neophilological approach to an extreme may bring to a historically accurate text, however, it will be "an inactive and almost frozen object, suffocated within the borders of its own materiality"[88].

A solution may be producing a digital edition, where readers can read a legible text but are also able to get back to the "level zero", if needed. Always according to Buzzoni, providing the text with a traditional apparatus may hide "most of the complex linguistic and textual features that a thorough scrutiny of the manuscripts has brought to the fore"[89]. The digital medium is ideal for representing both the historical text and the interpretative text, for which the philologist only is responsible. Any form of interpretation of the text should be indicated by the editor producing the edition. Indeed:

> The philologist should take full responsibility for his or her choices, which depend both on the theoretical framework to which he or she conforms, and on the peculiarities of the manuscript tradition he or she is dealing with.[90]

For the production of the image-based scholarly digital edition of the *Wonders* preserved in **V**, it presents both the diplomatic transcription and the critical interpretation of the text. The following editorial principles have been followed: (a) for

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[84] Ibid., 48.
[85] Ibid., 48.
[86] Ibid., 48.
[87] Driscoll, "The Words on the Page", 103.
[88] Buzzoni, "A Protocol", 63.
[89] Ibid., 67.
[90] Ibid., 81.

what concerns punctuation, capitalisation, numbers, lacunae, and word division, it relies heavily on the edition produced by Orchard and Rypins, however only when the text appears illegible because of fire damage, or when the sentence structure is ambiguous, (b) in order to provide a more authentic rendition of the Old English text, the following insular characters have been retained in the diplomatic edition: æ, þ, ð, ꝼ, ſ, ᵹ, ꞇ, �popular, ẏ, (c) the text follows the line division of the folia and whenever a line ends with a word that continues in the next line, a hyphen (-) has been added, (d) when portions of text which prove essential for its understanding are missing, they have been added from **T** by using the <note> element, which allows the reader to make them visible only by clicking on it.
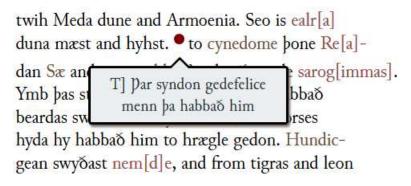
Figure 34 Editorial intervention with the <note> tag.

The decision to keep the original line division, although the *Wonders* is considered a prose text, is to be found in the possibility to examine it in this codicological context, which might be useful for further research. Precisely because this is the starting point, there is always the possibility to change it and adapt it according to the needs of whomever is consulting it. However, since the main issue of this study is understanding the relationship between illustrations and text and finding a manner of including them in an edition, the interpretation of the text and its layout on the page have been secondary.

3.4   *TEI-XML encoding workflow and results in EVT2*

After having explained how the project was carried out from a philological point of view, the following section will demonstrate the encoding workflow behind this edition and the current results. Without delving extensively in the most technical and complex matters in the production of a scholarly digital edition, it can be argued that two

categories of tools are fundamental for creating one, namely production tools and visualisation tools. As for the former, any kind of XML editor is an adequate production tool; the editor for the present digital edition has been Visual Studio. After having encoded the text, the next step is visualising the result through a software enabled to read the XML document. In this case, the software used is the opensource EVT2, initially created for the digitalisation of the Vercelli Book[91]. The production of the digital edition has followed the guidelines developed by TEI (Text Encoding Initiative Consortium)[92].

Encoding is a process through which a text is represented in a digital medium, where a shared language by both the editor and the computer will give instructions to the latter in order to obtain a given output. The majority of computer programs depend on the presence of explicit markers, or tags, to function properly. Without the tags, a digitized text appears to be a sequence of undifferentiated bits. In the case of XML-TEI, the process of inserting tags for implicit textual features is often called *markup*, or *encoding*. *Encoding scheme* or *markup language* refer to the set of rules associated with the use of markup in a given context. While *markup vocabulary* refers to the specific set of markers employed by a given encoding scheme.

The most widely-used markup language for digital resources is XML the (Extensible Markup Language). XML is frequently compared with HTML, the language in which web pages have generally been written, which shares with XML some characteristics. However, the TEI encoding scheme itself does not depend on this language; it was originally formulated as SGML (the ISO Standard Generalized Markup Language), which subsequently became XML. XML is a *metalanguage*, meaning a language used to describe other languages, in this case *markup languages*. Encoding a text for computer processing is a process of making explicit what is implicit, a process of directing the user as to how the content of the text should be (or has been) interpreted. *Markup language* indicates a set of markup conventions used together for encoding texts. Among the most important features of XML is that it is extensible, not consisting of a fixed set of tags, and that XML documents must be well-formed according to a defined syntax in order to function.

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[91] **http://vbd.humnet.unipi.it/beta2/**.

[92] **https://tei-c.org/guidelines/p5/**. All the information used in this section were taken from the TEI Guidelines, therefore, it will only be cited once.

Usually, the markup or other information needed to process a document will be maintained separately from the document itself, typically in a distinct document called a *stylesheet*. In this case, the stylesheet has been written with Visual Studio.

A basic design goal of XML is to ensure that encoded documents can move from one hardware and software environment to another without losing information. For this reason, all XML documents use the same underlying character encoding. This encoding is defined by an international standard, which is implemented by a universal character set maintained by an industry group called the Unicode Consortium, and known as Unicode. By the same token, editors can integrate in the digital edition external images of a textual source, hosted by an IIIF (International Image Interoperability Framework) image server, which is an open protocol for the integration of online resources[93].

The *element* in XML is a textual unit, viewed as a structural component; each element must be explicitly marked or tagged in some way, which can be done by inserting a tag at the beginning of the element and another at its end. The material between the start-tag and the end-tag is the *content* of the element. An element can be empty or it can contain a sequence of characters. Often, however, elements of one type will be *embedded* (contained entirely) within elements of a different type.

A well-formed XML document contains a single element enclosing the whole document, which is known as the root element, each element is completely contained by the root element, or by other elements, and a tag explicitly marks the start and end of each element. In the XML context, the word *attribute* is used to describe information that is in some sense descriptive of a specific element but not regarded as part of its content. For this edition, two attributes have been used, namely the identifier attribute (xml:id) which provides a unique identifier for the element bearing the attribute, and the number attribute (n), which gives a number to an element.

Every TEI text must contain a set of descriptions known as the TEI header; all elements whose names end with the suffix "Desc" contain a prose description. The set has five major parts, of which this edition used only three: the *file description* <fileDesc>, containing a full bibliographical description of the computer file itself, the *encoding description* <encodingDesc>, which describes the relationship between an electronic

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[93] Paolo Monella and Roberto Rosselli Del Turco, "Extending the DSE: LOD Support and TEI/IIIF Integration in EVT", in *Atti del IX Convegno Annuale AIUCD. La svolta inevitabile: sfide e prospettive per l'Informatica Umanistica* (Milano: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2020).

text and its source or sources, and a *text profile* <profileDesc>, containing contextual information about the text. The (TEI header) supplies descriptive and declarative metadata associated with a digital resource or set of resources. This can contain free prose, a series of paragraphs marked as a <p> element:


```
<TEI xmlns="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0">
  <teiHeader>
  <fileDesc>
    <titleStmt>
      <title>The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript</title>
    <respStmt>
      <resp></resp>
        <name>Andreea M. Toma</name>

    </respStmt>
    </titleStmt>
    <publicationStmt>
      <p>MA draft project</p>
    </publicationStmt>
    <sourceDesc>
      <msDesc>
        <msIdentifier>
          <settlement>London</settlement>
          <repository>British Library</repository>
          <idno>MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv</idno>
        </msIdentifier>
        <msContents>
          <msItem>
            <title xml:lang="oe">MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv</title>
          </msItem>
          <msItem><p><hi rend="italic">The Passion of Saint Christopher</hi>,
          </msItem></msContents>

        <physDesc>
          <objectDesc><p>Parchment manuscript, 118 folios. For further details,
            <p>Vitellius A. xv is written in two scribal stints. The two scrib
```

Figure 35 TEI header of the edition.

The information related to the project in the XML editor appears in the following manner on EVT2:
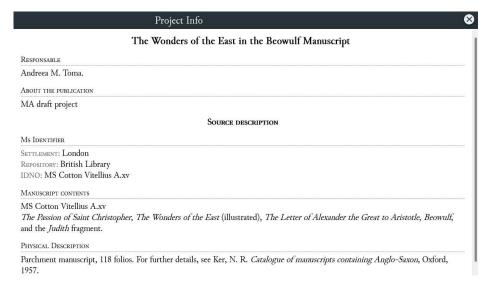
Figure 36 Project Info on EVT2.

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Figure 37 Code snippet of <editorialDecl>.

All elements whose names end with the suffix "Decl" enclose information about specific encoding practices applied in the electronic text. Since not all computer systems currently support this encoding directly, a special syntax is defined that can be used to represent individual characters from the Unicode character set. For instance, <charDecl> lists all the insular characters employed for the diplomatic edition, which will be recalled with the <g> element.

Figure 38 Code snippet of <charDecl> section.

A common approach in the TEI to representing pre-existing sources involves transcribing or otherwise converting sources into character form.. However, it is also a

common practice to make a different form of 'digital text' composed of digital images of the original source, typically one per page, which is a digital facsimile. A digital facsimile may of a collection of images, with some metadata to identify them and the source materials portrayed. It may also be complemented by a transcribed or encoded version of the original source, which may be linked to the page images or 'embedded'. Usually the transcription is presented parallel to the digital facsimile. In order to align a transcription of the page with particular zones, each relevant part of the facsimile will be given an identifier: <zone>, which defines any two-dimensional area within an element.

The <facsimile> element contains a representation of some written source in the form of a set of images rather than as transcribed or encoded text, while the <surface> element defines a written surface as a two-dimensional coordinate space, optionally grouping one or more graphic representations of that space, zones of interest within that space, and transcriptions of the writing within them. The element only defines an abstract coordinate space which may be used to address parts of the image. Four attributes are used to define this space: *ulx* gives the *x* coordinate value for the upper left corner of a rectangular space; *uly* gives the *y* coordinate value for the upper left corner of a rectangular space; *lrx* gives the *x* coordinate value for the lower right corner of a rectangular space; *lry* gives the *y* coordinate value for the lower right corner of a rectangular space. An element can contain one or more elements, each of which represents a region or bounding box defined in terms of the same coordinate space as that of its parent element. The <zone> has been used to link portions of the text with the corresponding space in the digital facsimile.

The portion of the diplomatic and critical edition goes under the <text> element, that contains the <l > line element. All editorial interventions are contained in the <choice> element and they can be of two types: with the <reg> element a word or a portion of text is normalised, while with the <corr> element a correction is made.
The following images show the encoding work at the basis of this edition, along with images of the results achieved.

```
<facsimile xml:id="fac_Wonders">
  <surface xml:id="WoE_surf_01" corresp="#WoE_01">
    <graphic height="787px" width="608px" url="data\images\single\Fol.1.jpg"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_01" ulx="85" uly="66" lrx="319" lry="102" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_01"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_02" ulx="105" uly="104" lrx="316" lry="136" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_02"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_03" ulx="105" uly="130" lrx="331" lry="162" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_03"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_04" ulx="108" uly="158" lrx="326" lry="191" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_04"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_05" ulx="107" uly="188" lrx="327" lry="222" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_05"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_06" ulx="115" uly="215" lrx="497" lry="250" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_06"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_07" ulx="117" uly="244" lrx="506" lry="278" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_07"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_08" ulx="116" uly="275" lrx="501" lry="311" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_08"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_09" ulx="113" uly="307" lrx="488" lry="339" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_09"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_10" ulx="113" uly="338" lrx="514" lry="373" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_10"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_11" ulx="111" uly="371" lrx="390" lry="404" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_11"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_12" ulx="89" uly="393" lrx="302" lry="433" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_12"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_13" ulx="112" uly="432" lrx="294" lry="459" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_13"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_14" ulx="108" uly="458" lrx="295" lry="492" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_14"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_15" ulx="107" uly="490" lrx="297" lry="521" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_15"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_16" ulx="109" uly="520" lrx="292" lry="555" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_16"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_17" ulx="106" uly="554" lrx="500" lry="587" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_17"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_18" ulx="109" uly="585" lrx="513" lry="623" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_18"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_19" ulx="108" uly="616" lrx="496" lry="652" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_19"/>
    <zone corresp="#WoE_lb_98v_20" ulx="110" uly="648" lrx="512" lry="682" rend="visible" rendition="line" xml:id="WoE_line_98v_20"/>
  </surface>
```

Figure 39 Code snippet of the <zone> tag.

```
<div>
  <pb facs="data/images/single/Fol.2.jpg" n="Folio 99r" xml:id="WoE_02"/>
  <l n="1"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_01" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_01" n="1"/><g ref="#
  <l n="2"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_02" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_02" n="2"/><choice><
  <l n="3"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_03" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_03" n="3"/><g ref="#
  <l n="4"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_04" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_04" n="4"/>þæ<g ref=
  <l n="5"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_05" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_05" n="5"/>ha<g ref=
  <l n="6"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_06" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_06" n="6"/>Sum <g r
  <l n="7"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_07" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_07" n="7"/>þæ<g ref=
  <l n="8"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_08" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_08" n="8"/>ha<g ref=
  <l n="9"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_09" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_09" n="9"/>beoð henr
  <l n="10"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_10" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_10" n="10"/>þonne þ
  <l n="11"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_11" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_11" n="11"/>heo<g r
  <l n="12"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_12" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_12" n="12"/><choice
  <l n="13"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_13" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_13" n="14"/>lic<g r
  <l n="14"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_14" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_14" n="14"/>Eac þor
  <l n="15"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_15" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_15" n="15"/>acenned
  <l n="16"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_16" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_16" n="16"/>h<g ref
  <l n="17"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_17" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_17" n="17"/><g ref=
  <l n="18"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_18" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_18" n="18"/><g ref=
  <l n="19"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_19" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_19" n="19"/>fe<g re
  <l n="20"><lb facs="#WoE_line_99r_20" xml:id="WoE_lb_99r_20" n="20"/>him h<g
  </div>
  <div>
```

Figure 40 Code snippet of linked <text> to <surface>.

Figure 41 Diplomatic edition on EVT2, fol. 99r.

Folio 99r | MS Desc

Wonders of the East | Folio 99r | Critical | Info

1 Þær syndon þa miclan mærða þæt syndon þa weor[c]
2 þe se micla macedonisca Alexsander het ge-
3 wyrcan. Þæt land is on lenge and on bræde ·cc·
4 þæs læssan milgetæles stadi and þæs miclan þe le[o]
5 hatte. ·c·xxx and healf mil.
6 Sum stow is mon fereð to
7 þære Readan Sæ, seo is
8 haten Lentibelsinea. Þæm
9 beoð henna acenned onlice
10 þonne þe mid us beoð reades
11 heowes. Gif hi hwylc man niman wile oþþe h[yra]
12 æthrineð þonne forbærnað hy sona ea[l his]
14 lic. Þæt syndon ungefrægelicu liblac.
14 Eac þonne þær beoð wildeor
15 acenned. Þa deor þonne
16 hy mannes stefne
17 rað, þonne fleoð hy feor.
18 Þa deor habbað eahta
19 fet, and wælcyrian eagan, and twa heafdu. Gif
20 him hwylc mon onfon wille, þonne hiera lichoman

Search | Create index

Figure 42 Critical edition on EVT2, fol. 99r.

Wonders of the East ▾ | Folio 99r ▾ | Diplomatic ▾ | Info ⓘ

1 þæɼ fyndon þamiclan mæɼða þ fyndon þa þeoþ
2 þeþe micla macedoniſca alexſandeþ het ge
3 þyþcan · þ land iſ onlenge ·] onbþþæde ·cc ·
4 þæt læfſan mil ge tælef ſeadi] þæt miclan þel
5 hatte ·c·xxx] healf mil
6 Sum ftop iſ mon feþeð to
7 þæþe þeadan fæ feo if
8 haten lenþibel ſinea þæm
9 beoð henna acenned onlice
10 þonne þe mid uf beoð þea def
11 heopef· gif hi hþylc man niman pile oþþe hi
12 æþ hþineð þonne foþ bæþnað hþ ſona ea h
14 lic þ fyndon unge fþægelicu liblac ·
14 Eac þonne þæþ beoð pildeoþ
15 acenned· þa deoþ þonne
16 hy manneſ ſcefne gehy-
17 það þonne fleoð hy feoþ·
18 þa deoþ habbað eahca
19 fet ·] þæl cyþian eagan ·] cþa heafdu gif
20 him hþylc mon onfon pille þonne hieþa lichoman

Wonders of the East ▾ | Folio 99r ▾ | Critical ▾ | Info ⓘ

1 Þær syndon þa miclan mærða þæt syndon þa weor[c]
2 þe se micla macedonisca Alexsander het ge-
3 wyrcan. Þæt land is on lenge and on bræde ·cc·
4 þæs læssan milgetæles stadi and þæs miclan þe le[o]
5 hatte. ·c·xxx and healf mil.
6 Sum stow is mon fereð to
7 þære Readan Sæ, seo is
8 haten Lentibelsinea. Þæm
9 beoð henna acenned onlice
10 þonne þe mid us beoð reades
11 heowes. Gif hi hwylc man niman wile oþþe h[yra]
12 æthrineð þonne forbærnað hy sona ea[l] his
14 lic. Þæt syndon ungefrægelicu liblac.
14 Eac þonne þær beoð wildeor
15 acenned. Þa deor þonne
16 hy mannes stefne
17 rað, þonne fleoð hy feor.
18 Þa deor habbað eahta
19 fet, and wælcyrian eagan, and twa heafdu. Gif
20 him hwylc mon onfon wille, þonne hiera lichoman
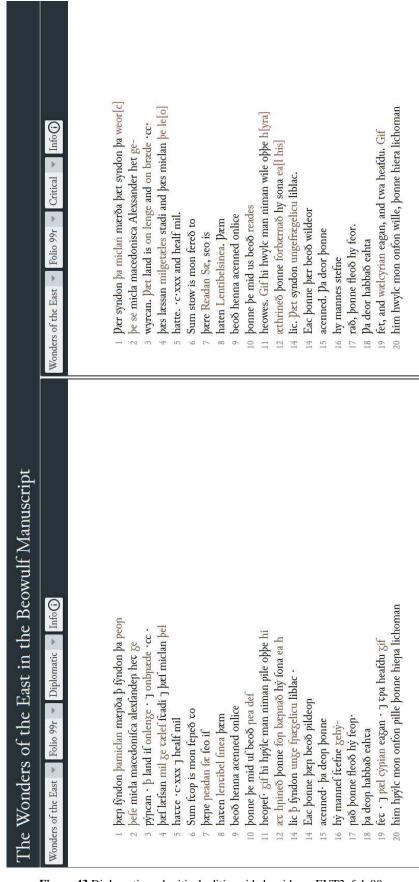
Figure 43 Diplomatic and critical edition side by side on EVT2, fol. 99r.

Figure 44 Linking tool image and text, fol. 99v.

Figure 45 Critical view on diplomatic edition, fol. 99v.

Figure 46 Diplomatic view on critical edition, fol. 99v.

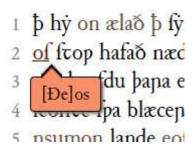**Figure 47** Diplomatic view on editorial intervention, fol. 99v.

Figure 48 Editorial intervention on diplomatic edition, fol. 99v.

Conclusions

The Wonders of the East is the Old English translation of a Latin text known as *De rebus in Oriente mirabilibus*. It is a teratological text, a *liber monstrorum*, also inscribed in the tradition of travel literature, containing descriptions of strange and unknown creatures found in Eastern regions, such as Babilonia and Egypt. The text had a wide circulation in early medieval England, and it survives in two witnesses – London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv (the so-called *Beowulf* manuscript) and London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.v, with the latter presenting the Latin version side by side with the English translation; another witness, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 614, only contains the Latin text. Interestingly, all three manuscripts are accompanied by illustrations of the creatures and monsters described in the text.

Although Rypins and Orchard decided not to include the illustrations in their editions of the *Wonders*, there is a growing body of literature that recognises that the illustrations not only can provide a better understanding of the written text, but they also seem to interact with it, often reinforcing its meaning, or even telling something the written text does not, resulting in a double narrative layer. This is particularly true in the case of the *Beowulf* manuscript, which, as agreed by scholars, finds in the monstrous element the *fil rouge* connecting all the texts preserved therein. Attempts to include the iconographic apparatus have recently been made, however the result was not successful for a number of reasons.

Therefore, the present study discusses the usefulness of a scholarly digital edition of the *Wonders* preserved in that manuscript, with the purpose of offering a tool that allows the user to fully appreciate the communicative interplay established by the written text and the illustrations that characterises this witness. An overview of the textual tradition of the *Wonders* will be followed by a presentation of the editorial procedures, the encoding workflow, and a sample of the digital output.

Riassunto

Il testo teratologico conosciuto con il titolo *De rebus in Oriente mirabilibus* arriva in Inghilterra intorno al VII secolo d.C. in una delle molte sue versioni dell'opera, nota come *Lettera di Farasmane ad Adriano*, la quale ebbe una vasta fortuna nel medioevo mediterraneo. Il testo riporta la lettera che Farasmane avrebbe inviato all'imperatore Adriano, per narrargli di un suo viaggio in Oriente e delle stranezze incontrate sul suo cammino. Nel corso del tempo e già nelle prime fasi della trasmissione testuale, il *De rebus* ha abbandonato la forma epistolare, evolvendosi in un testo molto più simile ad un breve catalogo di mostri privo di una cornice narrativa. Questa recensione ebbe una circolazione relativamente ampia nell'Inghilterra anglosassone, tanto che a un testimone della versione latina – Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 614 (**B**) – si aggiungono due testimoni della traduzione in antico inglese, traditi rispettivamente in Londra, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv (**V**) e Londra, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius B.v (**T**). Il contesto codicologico e il periodo storico in cui le *Meraviglie* si collocano ne influenzano la lettura e l'interpretazione dell'opera stessa. La datazione del Bodley si colloca tra il 1120 e il 1140 e qui il testo teratologico si trova insieme a un calendario e a un trattato di astronomia. Per quanto concerne il Tiberius, realizzato probabilmente nel XI secolo, anch'esso è caratterizzato da una scelta testuale rivolta verso contenuti di natura pseudo-scientifica (ma anche ecclesiastica). Tanto in **T** quanto in **V**, alle *Meraviglie* venne quindi attribuito un certo grado di "scientificità". Diversi studi si sono focalizzati sul rapporto tra **T** e **B**, giungendo alla conclusione che molto probabilmente, sulla base del testo in latino che è praticamente identico in entrambi i manoscritti, **T** abbia funto da antigrafo per **B**. Questa ipotesi è ulteriormente corroborata dall'apparato iconografico che accompagna le descrizioni dei mostri, molto simile in entrambi i codici. **V**, il più antico dei tre testimoni, si presume sia stato realizzato intorno all'anno 1000; benché le versioni delle *Meraviglie* antico inglesi discendano presumibilmente tutte da un antenato comune, questo manoscritto presenta una variazione testuale molto più marcata rispetto agli altri due codici. Inoltre, la collocazione delle *Meraviglie* nel contesto del manoscritto è assai particolare, in quanto alterna al suo interno materiale in prosa e opere poetiche, così come materiale di tipo

religioso accanto a opere derivanti dalla classicità greca, fino a includere *Beowulf*. Uno dei primi studiosi a essersi occupato del manoscritto è stato Kenneth Sisam, che ne ha individuato un'unitarietà tematica nel meraviglioso e nel mostruoso. Sulla scia di questa teoria, Andy Orchard ha approfondito l'argomento nella sua analisi dell'elemento teratologico in questo testimone, seguita da uno studio comparativo con altre opere anglosassoni e scandinave e da un'edizione dei testi presi in considerazione nello studio, tra cui quello delle *Meraviglie*. A differenza delle versioni continentali originate dalla *Lettera di Farasmane*, tutti e tre i manoscritti insulari sono arricchiti con le illustrazioni di alcune delle creature mostruose ivi descritte e questa particolare caratteristica costituisce il punto di partenza del presente lavoro di ricerca.

Ogni variante di un testo è portatrice di significato e prevede il riconoscimento della pluralità come tratto caratteristico della cultura medievale, in quanto "l'écriture médiévale ne produit pas des variantes, elle est variance". Pertanto, questo progetto si pone come obiettivo quello di valorizzare **V** che, come accennato in precedenza, costituisce una redazione a sé stante in confronto agli altri due testimoni e la sua complessità lo rende un interessante oggetto di studio. Qui le *Meraviglie* riportano un testo corrotto rispetto a **T**, in quanto il manoscritto presenta un numero rilevante di *folia* danneggiati dall'incendio che nel 1731 ha colpito la biblioteca di Sir Rober Cotton. Per questo motivo, nelle edizioni critiche si è sempre preferito **T** a quest'ultimo. Inoltre, i primi studiosi delle *Meraviglie* hanno dato poca rilevanza all'apparato iconografico di **V**, definendolo come un lavoro alquanto sommario e poco raffinato nel suo insieme. Ciononostante, dagli studi più recenti emerge un interesse sempre crescente per l'elemento mostruoso nel manoscritto e, nello specifico delle *Meraviglie*, per la rilevanza che l'apparato iconografico riveste nell'interpretazione del testo. Ciò che ancora manca, tuttavia, è un approccio ecdotico che consideri questo testimone nella sua pluralità di significati, i quali vengono espressi tanto dal testo scritto, quanto dalle immagini. Al di là delle riproduzioni in facsimile delle pagine del manoscritto, risulta evidente come le edizioni standard del testo non contemplino la possibilità di integrare l'elemento visuale; quando invece lo scopo è di spostare l'attenzione sulle immagini, il testo trascritto e/o edito manca, come se si trattasse di due livelli paralleli da analizzare separatamente. Nell'edizione più recente di **V**, la presenza tanto del testo quanto delle illustrazioni non sembra rispondere a criteri ecdotici fondati: le immagini si trovano

assieme alla traduzione idiomatica, sono in bianco e nero e la loro collocazione nelle pagine non è fedele a quella del manoscritto, privandole del collegamento a livello semiotico con il testo verbale.

Sulla base di queste osservazioni, si rende evidente l'importanza di offrire uno strumento che permetta di rendere conto in modo preciso e metodologicamente fondato del doppio livello di lettura e interpretazione che sottende alla realizzazione di **V**, il quale realizza pienamente ciò che Marcello Ciccuto definisce una "stratificazione dei piani di lettura".

Alla luce delle considerazioni appena esposte, lo strumento digitale si configura come la soluzione più efficace per la realizzazione di un'edizione che tenga debito conto dell'apparato verbale e di quello iconografico, in quanto permette all'utente di accedere ad un livello di interattività e metatestualità che le edizioni cartacee non sono in grado di offrire. L'edizione che si intende sviluppare nel presente progetto verrà realizzata attraverso EVT 2. La scelta di utilizzare questo software è motivata da molteplici fattori, tra cui: la possibilità di realizzare un'edizione *image-based*; la semplicità di utilizzo; l'aderenza a protocolli di codifica standard; l'interattività del prodotto finale; la disponibilità del prodotto in modalità *open source*.

Tutti questi aspetti rendono EVT 2 lo strumento ideale per la realizzazione di un'edizione di **V** che permetta la presenza simultanea sullo schermo del computer della riproduzione del manoscritto e della trascrizione-edizione del testo; così progettato, il lavoro offre all'utente uno strumento interattivo che permette uno studio completo del testimone, a partire dalle caratteristiche paleografiche per arrivare a quelle paratestuali, oltre ad offrire vari livelli di lettura del testo scritto, a seconda degli interessi di ricerca.

La sezione successiva illustra più nel dettaglio il *workflow* della codifica e le caratteristiche di EVT 2 che sono state utilizzate nell'edizione.

Poiché l'obiettivo del progetto è l'edizione *image-based* di **V**, la codifica del testo si basa sulla modalità "Parallel Transcription" come dettato dal protocollo TEI P5[94] per le edizioni diplomatiche e/o semidiplomatiche che includono riproduzioni in facsimile. La trascrizione diplomatica riprodurrà per quanto possibile le caratteristiche grafematiche del testo, come le varianti insulari per <g> (ᵹ), <r> (ꞃ), <s> (ſ) e <t> (ꞇ), e le abbreviazioni, come quella per la congiunzione *and* (⁊) e per il pronome

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[94] **https://tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/ST.html#STGAre**.

dimostrativo/ relativo *þæt* (þ); la codifica prevede la loro identificazione attraverso l'elemento <glyph> nella <charDecl>, al quale corrisponde la versione normalizzata, visibile nel livello critico.

Questa edizione si pone come ulteriore obiettivo la resa di un testo linguisticamente corretto. Dato che, come accennato in precedenza, **V** riporta una redazione corrotta, le parti mancanti (che si sostanziano prevalentemente in piccole porzioni di parola) sono stati ricostruite sulla base della collazione con **T**, così come gli sporadici errori meccanici di copiatura. Questa operazione avvicina il secondo livello di codifica più a un'edizione critica che ad una interpretativa; inoltre, questo livello contiene tutti quegli interventi di standardizzazione tipici di un'edizione, come, ad esempio, la corretta separazione degli elementi lessicali. Si riporta come esempio la codifica dei primi due righi del fol. 98v, che aprono le *Meraviglie*: il primo presenta l'omissione del verbo "is", che rende la frase grammaticalmente incorretta[95], la separazione piuttosto marcata dell'iniziale maiuscola del determinante "seo" per segnalare l'inizio del testo e la divisione grafica del composto "landbuend" ("territorio") nei suoi due elementi lessicali; il secondo è caratterizzato dall'assenza del grafo <f> di "from" a causa della bruciatura sul margine esterno del foglio, oltre alla presenza del toponimo "Antimolime" (dat. sing.), che presenta l'iniziale minuscola. Le emendazioni, per le quali si è fatto ricorso alla collazione con **T**, sono state codificate attraverso l'elemento <corr>, mentre si è fatto ricorso a <reg> per tutti gli interventi di standardizzazione del testo originale, codificato a sua volta con <orig>.

La progettazione della codifica ha riguardato anche l'individuazione di possibili soluzioni a problemi non contemplati nel contesto di edizioni diplomatiche o semidiplomatiche, ma che si rivelano fondamentali nella realizzazione di edizioni critiche. Tra queste si segnalano gli interventi per unire le parole che nel manoscritto compaiono divise dalla fine del rigo e l'inizio di quello nuovo e l'inclusione dei segni interpuntivi moderni. Per quanto riguarda il primo aspetto, si riporta un esempio tratto ancora dal primo foglio di **V**, dove il copista ha separato la parola "acenned" ("nato") trascrivendo il prefisso *acen* nel rigo 14 e *-ned* in quello successivo. Al fine di segnalare l'unione tra questi due elementi, si è deciso di aggiungere a livello di codifica un

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[95] L'intera frase, attestata ai primi tre righi, recita "Seo landbuend [is] on fruman from Antimolime þæm lande".

trattino (*dash*) dopo <acen>; tale indicazione ricalca la prassi moderna ed è pertanto facilmente riconoscibile nella fase di lettura del livello critico.

La codifica esemplificata sopra evidenzia anche alcune scelte che si sono imposte nella decisione di inserire la punteggiatura moderna. A tal fine, si è reso necessario l'utilizzo di strategie di codifica che possano rendere possibile la visualizzazione dei segni interpuntivi aggiunti nel livello critico, senza intaccare quello diplomatico ed evitando che EVT 2 li segnalasse alla stregua di interventi critici. Si è deciso quindi di ricorrere alla <charDecl> con la creazione di sequenze di segni interpuntivi marcati con <reg> che realizzino elementi nulli in <orig>; lo stesso criterio è stato utilizzato per l'indicazione dell'iniziale maiuscola dopo il punto. Le soluzioni qui illustrate hanno carattere non definitivo e potranno senz'altro essere rimpiazzate da opzioni di codifica più efficaci; tuttavia, nel contesto sperimentale di questa edizione esse risultano abbastanza soddisfacenti e rispondenti agli obiettivi del progetto. La visualizzazione delle immagini del manoscritto, disponibili sul sito della British Library, è possibile grazie all'applicazione del protocollo IIIF supportato da EVT 2; al momento però, dati i noti problemi legati all'attacco informatico subito dal sito della biblioteca, in fase preliminare verranno utilizzate riproduzioni in .jpg. Si è inoltre deciso di sfruttare la modalità "Image-Text Linking" offerta dal software per una rapida e comoda individuazione della corrispondenza tra testo edito e facsimile.

Per concludere, questo tipo di edizione si dimostra una soluzione efficace ai fini di una ricerca su più fronti di **V** e offre uno strumento versatile e interattivo, ideale per un testo, come dimostrato in precedenza, di non facile categorizzazione ma estremamente interessante per la ricchezza semantica che esprime attraverso le parole e le immagini.

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