



The Beatus Maps The Revelation of the World in the Middle Ages

By

Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez

About the book

Towards the end of the eighth century, Beatus of Liébana composed the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* in the monastery of San Martín de Turieno. Although it has not come down to us in its original state, this work is well known thanks to the numerous copies of it that were made in succeeding centuries, and which have led to its status as one of the great creations of mediaeval art. The Beatus manuscripts are especially acclaimed on account of their expressive illustrations. Among them stands out the marvellous *mappa mundi* that displays the evangelization of the world by the apostles. This image, already present in the archetype manuscript, experienced an interesting evolution as the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* was copied and edited between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. Today fourteen of these *mappae mundi* are conserved, to which we may add other works of cartography derived from or related to them. All of these maps constitute the object of the scrutiny of this book, which studies their evolution attending not only to the manuscript context in which they appear, but also to the European cartographic context, so as to arrive duly at a reconstruction of the original eighth century Beatus map. Finally, the author focuses on the details that make up these images to help us to know how the world was conceived in the Middle Ages, and what scientific, historical, symbolic and religious parameters were used in its representation.

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About the author

Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez obtained her doctorate in History of Art at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid in 2007 with a Doctoral Thesis on medieval cartography, for which she was awarded the Special Doctoral Prize. Between 2009 and 2011 she obtained a contract for post-doctoral research from the Ministry of Science and Innovation, which enabled her to continue her study of historical cartography at the GAHOM (EHESS-CNRS) in Paris and at the Warburg Institute in London, and since 2011 she has been contracted as research doctor JAE-Doc in the History Institute at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). She has focused the greater part of her research on maps that were produced throughout the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the Modern Era, and she has been published in journals such as *Word & Image*, *Archivo Español de Arte* and *Imago Mundi: The International Journal for the History of Cartography*, of which she forms part of the editorial board. In 2013 she was awarded the “David Woodward Memorial Fellowship in the History of Cartography” to be the commissary of the exhibition *Marginalia in cARTography* in the Chazen Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA) in 2014.

Praise for the book

“This book by Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez about *The Beatus Maps* concerns a very important sub-theme of medieval miniatures and cartography, which has already attracted the interest of numerous scholars. Sáenz-López Pérez, however, manages to surpass the previous studies thanks to her systematic and detailed analysis of all the aspects and minutiae of these maps: their shape, their toponymy and legends, their seas, rivers, mountains, and cities, as well as their other geographic and figurative elements. The author digs deeply into what is known about medieval cartography, and she analyses with new insights the origin and evolution of the Beatus maps. Her interpretation of these maps is that of a fascinating reflection of the vision of the world in the Middle Ages in Spain. To sum up: this book is a very important contribution to the ample bibliography concerning the famous Beatus manuscripts.”

Peter K. Klein
Emeritus Professor at Universität Tübingen

“The world maps which accompany a series of medieval Spanish manuscripts of Beatus’s *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, are studied here in their historic, artistic, and cartographic context by Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez, who demonstrates impressive mastery of the many scholarly works that have been devoted to them. Her study is the most complete and painstaking examination of the corpus of maps as a whole, and her colleagues will turn again and again to her excellent descriptions, analysis, and conclusions. She connects the original Beatus map of the 8th century to a series of maps made in Spain to illustrate the work of St. Isidore of Seville, which in turn handed down a rare survivor of Roman antiquity. As the Spanish Christians were besieged in a small corner of northern Spain, they preserved, through these maps, a valuable remnant of classical culture. The final version of the world map she describes as “a utopian image, where Christianity triumphs and the Islamic presence is censured.”

Evelyn Edson
Emeritus Professor at Piedmont Virginia Community College