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Cities of God? Medieval urban forms and their Christian symbolism

Keith D Lilley

Situated in the context of recent geographical engagements with 'landscape', this paper combines 'morphological' and 'iconographic' landscape interpretations to examine how urban forms were perceived in late medieval Europe. To date, morphological studies have mapped the medieval city either by classifying urban layouts according to particular types, or by analysing plan forms of particular towns and cities to reveal their spatial evolution. This paper outlines a third way, an 'iconographic' approach, which shows how urban forms in the Middle Ages conveyed Christian symbolism. Three such 'mappings' explore this thesis: the first uses textual and visual representations which show that the city was understood as a scaled-down world – a microcosm – linking city and cosmos in the medieval mind; the second 'mapping' develops this theme further and suggests that urban landscapes were inscribed with symbolic form through their layout on the ground; while the third looks at how Christian symbolism of urban forms was performed through the urban landscape in perennial religious processions. Each of these 'mappings' points to the symbolic, mystical significance urban form had in the Middle Ages, based on religious faith, and they thus offer a deepened appreciation of how urban landscapes were represented, constructed and experienced at the time.

key words urban morphology medieval Europe landscape iconography

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Introduction

This paper considers how those of Christian faith understood urban forms symbolically in later medieval Europe, specifically from the ninth to the fifteenth century. In so doing, the paper offers a different approach to mapping medieval urban landscapes to that prevalent in current studies of urban form, in the field of urban morphology. Outlined here are medieval 'mappings' of the city that reveal the symbolic, Christian significance of urban forms, an iconography which in the medieval mind inscribed the city and its landscape with religious meaning. In a broader context, this paper seeks to address two issues raised by recent landscape studies in human geography. The first is that recent epistemological challenges laid down by the so-called 'cultural turn' in arts and humanities disciplines

have hardly affected studies of urban form in geography and, with few exceptions, there has been little engagement in Anglophone urban morphology with current theoretical shifts in how landscapes may be interpreted iconographically, symbolically. The second is that, despite a great deal of interest in landscape iconography, historical and cultural geographers have tended to focus more on those of later periods, particularly of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and have by and large overlooked landscapes of the Middle Ages. To address both concerns this paper uses medieval – Latin Christian – interpretations of urban form as a means of trying to recognize how urban landscapes were symbolically represented, constructed and experienced in the Middle Ages. It does so by looking at how the city stood as a 'map' of Christian belief and meaning.

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'Mapping' urban morphologies

Mapping medieval urban landscapes morphologically is a long geographical tradition, deriving largely, but by no means exclusively, from European historical and geographical studies of the early to mid twentieth century of settlement patterns and forms (*Siedlungsgeographie*) (Whitehand 1981 1992). These studies, of the evolution of particular settlements or regional surveys of settlement types, attempted to reveal the presence and persistence of medieval urban forms in the landscapes of Europe's modern towns and cities. For UK geography much of this work was 'imported' via the activities of R E Dickinson and latterly M R G Conzen, in the middle years of the last century (Dickinson 1934 1945 1951; Conzen 1960 1962 1968). As Whitehand (1981) has shown, their two approaches were quite different, with Dickinson adopting a taxonomic method of classifying the layouts of medieval towns and cities according to the characteristics of their street layout, and Conzen preferring instead to recognize that fossilized within the composite forms of European towns and cities were the medieval stages of evolution, their medieval morphogenesis. It is this latter, 'Conzenian' approach (Whitehand and Larkham 1992, 5–8, 10–11) that has since held dominance in the mapping of medieval urban landscapes in Anglophone human geography (Simms 1979; Slater 1987; Lilley 2000a), providing historical geographers, urban archaeologists and medieval historians with opportunities to piece together what urban landscapes physically looked like, on the ground, and how and when they were formed and transformed during the Middle Ages (Brooks and Whittington 1977; Baker and Slater 1992). For the most part this involves using nineteenth-century cartography, particularly large-scale (1:500 and 1:2500) town-plans, as a basis for analysing the forms of streets and plots, creating maps of the discrete morphological areas ('plan units') and then linking these expressions of the physical form of a particular town or city with documentary and archaeological evidence to reveal its sequence of medieval morphogenesis, and thus perhaps account for particular reasons why an urban landscape took the particular form that it did (Slater 1987 1996; Lilley 1999 2000b). While intrinsically very revealing of the otherwise rather hidden spatial histories of medieval urban landscapes, this kind of 'morphogenetic' mapping of medieval towns and cities has faced empirical and theoretical criticisms.

From an empirical and methodological viewpoint, some historians have raised questions about using post-medieval cartographic sources as a basis for revealing the evolving forms of medieval urban landscapes (see especially Keene 1985). However, archaeological excavations in urban areas have shown that medieval plot and street patterns can, and indeed do, survive for very long periods of time in the urban landscape, sometimes for over a thousand years, even in places where redevelopment pressure on urban property has been high (Ottaway 1992, 173). To address these empirical concerns, 'morphogenetic' urban morphologists mapping medieval urban landscapes – myself included – have dealt more and more with historical (i.e. medieval) material, integrating the results of excavation work and documentary analyses with later, cartographically derived maps of urban form, continually seeking to improve and revise our approach and make our methods much more rigorous (see Conzen 1968; Baker and Slater 1992; Lilley 2000a). During the last few decades, then, a key concern within urban morphology has been the creation of more 'accurate' maps of medieval urban landscapes in order to demonstrate with more confidence what physical changes had taken place in towns and cities in the Middle Ages and thus ensure that research findings would meet more with the approval of those who were sceptical about this kind of work. However, these improvements in morphogenetic techniques have so far largely escaped theoretical and epistemological reflection.

To me, from having worked for a number of years on mapping morphologies of medieval towns and cities (within the morphogenetic tradition of 'Conzenian' urban morphology), it has become increasingly evident that there is a need to reflect more critically on the conceptual assumptions employed in this kind of work, and connect morphological mappings of landscape study to broader, theorized debates in geography on mapping and landscape (see Lilley 2000c). The conceptual condition of current Anglophone urban morphology is comparable to that of cartographic history prior to the so-called 'cultural turn' of the 1980s and 1990s, a time of rising post-structural criticism in human geography in general (see Philo 2000). Through the work of Harley (1988 1989 1992) in particular, theoretically driven questions were being voiced by geographers over the politics of mapping and map-making, and criticisms began to

be made of the largely unreflective (in Harley's view) practices of cartographers and cartographic historians. Harley (1992, 231) was arguing that for too long 'epistemic time' had stood still in the 'history of cartography' and that cartographers' claims that theirs was a 'progressive science', providing ever more accurate and truthful depictions of the earth's surface, had been accepted largely uncritically. In his mind there was a need to seek an 'alternative epistemology, rooted in social theory rather than scientific positivism', and in enlisting the work of Derrida and Foucault he sought to 'deconstruct the map' (Harley 1992, 232). While Harley may have somewhat over-stated his case (Belyea 1992; Andrews 2001), the challenge that he laid before cartographic history is, I think, much the same as that which now lies before us in UK urban morphology: to 'read our maps for alternative and sometimes competing discourses' (Harley 1992, 247). Thus morphological maps of medieval urban landscapes might be read more reflectively, and critically, to take into account that they are after all subjective mappings that reflect, at least in part, the ideas and values of those who produce them (see Lilley 2000a 2000c).

There is also the matter, as some have argued, that the studies of urban landscapes by urban morphologists do not engage sufficiently with recent work done by cultural geographers and others on the contested and contextual nature of 'landscape', and 'do not adequately reflect the variety of approaches to the study of the urban landscape currently on offer' (Driver 1995, 769–70). Urban morphologists, in the UK at least, have indeed taken a different conceptual tack in their approach to landscapes compared with those historical and cultural geographers whose work has opened up an 'iconography of landscape'; yet there is some common ground between them – a mutual study of form.

Landscape iconographies and 'symbolic form'

For the last decade or so, historical and cultural geographers have increasingly employed 'iconography' to understand how landscapes convey and construct cultural meaning, particularly in studies of represented landscapes (Duncan and Ley 1995; Seymour 2000). Many are inspired by a volume of papers brought together by Cosgrove and Daniels (1988) under the title, *The iconography of landscape*,

in which the editors, in their introductory essay (Daniels and Cosgrove 1988, 3–4), set out a conceptualization of 'landscape' based on *iconography* and *iconology*, drawing upon the thinking of Erwin Panofsky (1970), which in turn was influenced by Ernst Cassirer's (1953 1955) *Philosophy of symbolic form*. For Cassirer, 'symbolic form' 'is a condition of the knowledge of meaning or of the human expression of meaning' (1953, 53) whereby material forms (such as landscapes) are earthly realizations of mythical forms (such as cosmologies). Using Panofsky and Cassirer as their guide, Daniels and Cosgrove suggest that interpreting iconographically requires us 'to probe meaning in a work of art by setting it in its historical context and, in particular, to analyse the ideas implicated in its imagery' (1988, 2). Panofsky (1957) did this in his study of medieval religious architecture, *Gothic architecture and Scholasticism*, in which he read the 'structure' of contemporary Scholastic thought in the material structures of French Gothic buildings – reading in one the meanings of the other. Since an understanding of 'form' is the basis for inquiry in both morphological and iconographic study, there is potential to align – conceptually – urban morphology with the landscape iconography approach currently favoured among geographers (see Lilley 2000c, 377–81). It is, after all, an approach that also has particular suitability for studying medieval urban forms, for the Middle Ages was a period when life was rooted in a Christian view of the world, where 'material things signified spiritual things, even God himself' (Ladner 1979, 226).

Iconography derives from interpreting the meanings and symbolism of Christian art and architecture (see Didron 1965; Grabar 1968). In interpreting the religious meaning of medieval buildings, particularly churches and cathedrals, their architecture is studied in the same way that medieval Christians read Holy Scripture. Mâle makes this point in his *Religious art in France*, where in his discussion of the iconography of Gothic architecture he draws upon the contemporary writings of William Durandus, Bishop of Mende, who in the later thirteenth century commented on the different ways that the word 'Jerusalem' can be interpreted:

in the historical sense Jerusalem is the town in Palestine where pilgrims go; in the allegorical sense, it is the Church Militant; in the tropological sense it is the Christian soul; and in the sense anagogical it is the Heavenly Jerusalem, the heavenly home. (Mâle 1984, 145)

Mâle uses this exegetical schema to read the Christian meanings of religious architectural forms because this was how art and architecture were understood in the Middle Ages. Thus, Abbot Suger of St Denis, in describing the building of the abbey church in the middle decades of the twelfth century, reflected on his 'delight in the beauty of the house of God', and how through 'transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial' he felt 'transported from this inferior to that higher world in an analogical manner' (Suger cited in Panofsky 1979, 63–5). For Thomas Aquinas, writing also in the late 1200s in his *Summa Theologica*, these different readings of Scripture could be simplified into just two: the 'literal sense' (historical, etiological and analogical) and 'mystical sense' (moral or tropological, analogical and allegorical) (Brown 1999, 22–4). To contemporaries, the religious architecture of the Middle Ages conveyed both literal and mystical meanings (Wallis 1973, 224–31), allowing 'the divine mysteries to be conveyed to an uncultured people' (Aquinas cited in Eco 1988, 156).

With Christian architecture, then, 'all forms are endowed with spirit' (Mâle 1984, 16), but what of the medieval urban landscape? Was it also being read 'literally' and 'mystically' as buildings were? Certainly, towns like religious buildings had their founders, their 'patrons', while in some cases architects are known to have designed towns as well as cathedrals (see Friedman 1988). So the potential does exist for reading built forms like architectural forms, in a mystical and literal sense. Indeed, writing in the middle part of the thirteenth century in Cologne in his *Questiones* on Aristotle's *Nicomachean ethics*, the Scholastic theologian Albert the Great describes the city 'materially' as 'a collection of humans and a set of buildings' (cited in McGrade *et al.* 2001, 107). Clearly this is the city seen in the literal sense – a physical city. The remainder of this paper is concerned with how the medieval city was understood in a mystical sense, interpreting urban landscapes through their 'symbolic form'. Rather than mapping the medieval urban landscape in its literal sense, morphogenetically, as urban morphologists have done previously, here I attempt to show that, in the medieval mind, urban landscapes were symbolic, and that mystical meanings of the city were constructed and conveyed through its *form*. Not only does this then help to align urban morphology – the study of urban form – with approaches to landscape more

recently set out by historical and cultural geographers, it also begins to reveal some of the Christian meanings and symbolism that urban forms had for those living in the Middle Ages.

Medieval landscape iconographies have been altogether absent from UK geography, and despite so many studies of landscape *iconography*, geographers rarely seem to deal with their possible *Christian* meanings. Geographers who have worked on the religious meaning and symbolism of urban forms have done so mainly in non-European contexts, notably Wheatley (1971 1983; Wheatley and See 1978) in the case of cities in south and east Asia, as well as Duncan (1990 1993) and Nitz (1992), while medieval cities have instead been studied iconographically by art and architectural historians, some of whom have dealt with particular 'images of urban experience' (Frugoni 1991), and others with the meanings of buildings and their urban contexts (see Wittkower 1956; Krautheimer 1983). What these studies collectively demonstrate is that for various cultures around the world urban landscapes have long held symbolic meanings, and that forms convey and construct this symbolism. Interpreting such symbolism requires looking at the cultural values and belief systems of those societies to which the cities belonged, and for the Middle Ages, for Latin Christian Europe, this means bringing 'imagined' and 'material' urban landscapes into dialogue with the thinking that underpinned them, taking a leaf out of Panofsky's book, as it were, and seeing the city with medieval, Christian eyes. What follows is such a *remapping* of the medieval city, addressing some of the theoretical issues outlined above. It is not meant to supplant conventional morphological mappings but rather simply put on offer an iconography of medieval urban landscapes that tries to connect the 'medieval' and the 'modern' imagination.

Three iconographic 'mappings' of the medieval city are discussed here, interpreting medieval urban landscapes in a 'mystical sense' (of Aquinas' scheme). The first shows how urban form was used in contemporary textual and visual images to make the city a microcosm symbolic of the wider Christian cosmos; the second examines how, through the use of sacred geometry in design and planning, this cosmic symbolism was also materially expressed in the layout and physical form of medieval urban landscapes; while the third 'mapping' looks at how these same symbolic forms were embodied by being traced out in performances of

religious processions through the urban landscape. All three of these ‘mappings’ not only point to the symbolic significance of medieval urban forms, but reveal a shared Christian symbolism in how urban landscapes were represented, constructed and experienced during the later Middle Ages.

The microcosmic city: text and image

There are, as Hyde (1966) recognized, few textual descriptions of cities surviving from the Middle Ages, but there are two that help to give some insight on the mystical symbolism that urban forms had in the medieval mind. The first of these comes from Italy and is a description of Padua of c.1318. Written by a local judge, Giovanni da Nono, it ‘comes in the form of a vision given by an angel to comfort Egidius, the defeated legendary king of ancient Padua’ (Dean 2000, 17). This is his vision:

I asked the angel in what form the city of Padua would be built. He told me: ‘The fine wall of the city built by your Paduans will . . . curve round for a mile like a horse-shoe . . . and the water of the Bacchiglione and “Tusena” rivers will flow around it . . . The Paduans will place four royal gates in the wall . . .’ (cited in Dean 2000, 17)

And so he goes on, describing each of these in turn and their attributes. The city’s four gates were each placed at cardinal points, as Scripture relates in descriptions of the holy Jerusalem (e.g. Ezekiel 48: 16–35; Revelation 21: 13). Giovanni’s description thus reveals something of the imagined Christian significance of Padua’s urban form, as seen by one of its citizens. It places emphasis on the outline of the city’s walls and the locations of the gates. According to the passage, these were ordained from on high, by an angel. They were, then, divinely sanctioned: the city’s creation – through its symbolic form – connected it with the Creator of all things, God Himself.

The second description comes from England, from c.1195. Written by a local monk called Lucian for the purposes of a sermon, it praises his city of Chester (see Hyde 1966, 325). Lucian’s description again provides somewhat rare access to the thoughts of how urban form was symbolically understood in the medieval mind. Lucian writes that the city has ‘four gates to the four winds’, that

there are also two excellent straight streets in the form of the blessed Cross, which through their meeting and crossing themselves, then make four out of two, their heads ending in four gates . . . [and] in the middle of

the city, in a position equal for all, [God] willed there to be a market for the sale of goods . . . Now if anyone standing in the middle of the market turns his face to the East, according to the positions of the Churches, he finds John the forerunner of the lord to the East, Peter the Apostle to the West, Werburgh the Virgin to the North, and Archangel Michael to the south. Nothing is more true than that Scripture, ‘I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem’ [Isaiah 62: 6]. . . . So behold our city, as it was predicted, entrusted to the holy guardians as it were in fourfold manner. From the East the mercy of the forerunner of the Lord supports it, from the West the power of the doorkeeper of Heaven, to the North the watchful beauty of the virgin, and to the South the wonderful splendour of the angel. (Cited in Palliser 1980, 6–7)

Here again Lucian invokes the role of God’s intervention in the layout of the city, in prescribing its form of streets and walls and gates, in imitation of the celestial city itself, the heavenly Jerusalem, and imagining it thus. Through his allegorical, mystical reading of Chester’s twelfth-century urban landscape, Lucian reveals symbolic meanings of the city’s form, as da Nono had done in describing Padua. Both show that the shape of a town or city conveyed Christian symbolism, connecting the earthly and heavenly worlds; indeed the ‘city’ represented a microcosm of the wider ‘cosmos’ – each being divinely ordained and ordered. This microcosmicism is evident also in surviving visual representations of medieval cities.

With its stylized circle of walls and opposing gates, images of Jerusalem represented the city as a scaled-down cosmos, the wider Christian world (Kühnel 1998, xxiv). In a ninth-century Carolingian depiction of the heavenly Jerusalem, Christ as the Lamb of God is shown in the centre of the celestial city, protected by a circle of walls (12 concentric rings representing the disciples of Christ) and four gates (for the evangelists) at each cardinal point (Frugoni 1991, 21–2). Symbolically, Jerusalem represented the history of the world, its past, present and future, and its cardinal-orientated circular form signified the cosmic order (Kühnel 1998, xxiii). This same symbolic form (and divine history and hierarchy) is repeated in *mappaemundi* such as the Ebstorf map of the thirteenth century, where the world is superimposed upon the body of Christ, with Jerusalem at his navel – the *axis mundi* – and orientated to the four cardinal points, cross-shaped (Woodward 1987; Obrist 1997). Of course, a circular-shaped heavenly Jerusalem did not tally with Scripture. Revelation (21: 16) clearly states the

city lies 'four-square', so in some images of the celestial city it is shown as such (see Brieger 1967). One ninth-century apocalypse manuscript has an image of the angel showing the 'new Jerusalem' to St John in which four of the towers in the wall of the circular-shaped city are differently coloured so as to mark out the city as a square, squaring the circle as it were (Frugoni 1991, 22–3). Earthly cities were also widely represented in medieval imagery as a circle of walls and a cross of streets. For instance, images of Bristol (c.1480) and Talamone (c.1306) both show circular forms, cross-shaped streets and opposing gateways (see Ralph 1986; Harvey 1987), and in this way imitate depictions of the heavenly and earthly Jerusalem (see Laveden 1954), while the same motifs appear on city seals as well as on itinerary maps and portolan charts (see Campbell 1987; Harvey 1987).

The textual descriptions and visual images of Jerusalem and other cities both reveal how city and cosmos were symbolically connected in the medieval mind. Their shared forms – the circle and the square – pointing to shared meanings. That the microcosmic city was a pervasive motif in medieval Christian thinking has long been recognized (see Allers 1944), but only relatively recently has it received much specific attention, particularly by Dutton (1983, 80), who has demonstrated how Plato's idea of the city-state as sketched in the prologue to the *Timaeus* came to be transmitted subsequently through medieval texts, culminating with the 'fairly widespread circulation of the idea among learned men generally linked with [the School of] Chartres' in the twelfth century, men such as William of Conches and Alan of Lille. This process was long and protracted, as Dutton (1983, 83, 84) shows, and hinged on Latin glosses and commentaries based on a translation of the *Timaeus* by Calcidius, writing in the fourth century, who had 'followed the lead of Plato in employing terms derived from a city-state to describe the parts and functions of the [human] body', drawing 'a comparison between the cosmos and the human body, since, of course, the parts of man [*sic*] follow the arrangement of the cosmic body'. It is this schema that was adopted and adapted subsequently through the Middle Ages, providing a conceptual link in the Christian mind between city and the cosmos. Some of the more explicit examples of this come from the twelfth century in particular, a time when European urban life was expanding rapidly (Lilley 2002), and a time too when the Platonic

inheritance, with its emphasis on the relationship between the *megacosmos* and *microcosmos*, was reaching its influential height in Christian thought (see Gregory 1988).

For William of Conches, writing in the 1120s and 1130s in his gloss on Macrobius' *Commentary on the dream of Scipio* – a neoplatonic discussion on Plato's and Cicero's *Republics* – the city 'imitated the divine arrangement' of the human body:

The head holds the highest place . . . [and thus] just as wisdom is located in the head and oversees the remaining members of the body, so the senators being in the highest place, that is in the citadel of the city, oversee the lower classes and regulate their movements and actions. Under the head are hands which are disposed to act and the heart where the abode of courage is located; so under men from the senatorial order are soldiers who are disposed to endure hardship and are courageous in defence of the state. The kidneys, in which human desire flourishes, are located under the heart and so under the soldiers are found confectioners, cobblers, skimmers and other craftsmen. At the remotest part of the body feet are found, so outside the walls on the outskirts of the city are farmers to cultivate the fields. (Cited in Dutton 1983, 91)

In the twelfth century, there was, then, in natural philosophy a likeness deduced between the world, the city and the human body – a likeness that pointed to the same hand in their creation (cf. Eliade 1959, 165, 172–9). Others, too, followed this line of thinking, including Bernard Silvester, Alan of Lille and Thierry of Chartres (Stock 1972; Sheridan 1980; Haring 1955), while the theme recurs in twelfth-century anonymous glosses on the *Timaeus*, including one in which 'the city is called a world . . . having as its senate an order of superior spirits, as soldiers ministering spirits, and as dwellers on the outskirts of man' (cited in Dutton 1983, 105). Such conceptions of the city-cosmos were present also in the political philosophy of the period, most notably in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, where he espouses an idealized city-republic 'arranged according to its resemblance with nature' and where 'civil life should imitate nature' (cited in Nederman 1990, 127). 'Ideal' cities were not confined to the works of the twelfth-century neoplatonists either, for they recur later, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, inspired by a model provided by Aristotle's *Politics*, as is clear from the translations and commentaries, such as those by Thomas Aquinas (d'Entrèves 1970; Dunbabin 1982), who

philosophically 'accepts essentially the universe of Aristotle' (Gilson 1956, 175), and also Guido Vernani of Rimini, whose early fourteenth-century commentary on the *Politics* was written, it has been argued, for a local mercantile elite (Dunbabin 1988). In all these works, the city reflected universal order, both literally and mystically: 'in essence, it was a way of connecting the worlds in which man [*sic*] lives' (Dutton 1983, 116).

Through its form, then, the city was being thought of microcosmically by medieval Christians, connecting symbolically the earthly (human) body with the heavenly (cosmic) 'body'. As an idea, the microcosmic 'city' circulated widely around Europe in the later Middle Ages, among scholars and clergymen, and citizens and nobles of those very cities where much of this knowledge was being produced and consumed, particularly but by no means exclusively in the university towns and cathedral cities where teaching and learning took place (see Southern 1995). Represented in contemporary textual and visual images, and reflecting the mystical meanings urban forms had in Christian thinking, this imagined 'city-cosmos' formed a link between heaven and earth, a crossing place offering the 'possibility of transcendence' (Eliade 1959, 26, 37, 63).

Sacred geometries: design and planning

Thinking about mystical meanings of urban forms is one thing, but were they also being put to use in the formation of medieval towns and cities, in their design and planning? Compared with later periods, relatively little is recorded of the cultural processes that formed urban landscapes in the Middle Ages, but specialist individuals who measured and surveyed new urban landscapes are mentioned occasionally in contemporary sources. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries certain town councils in Flanders and Italy employed *mensores* (measurers, surveyors), for example (de Smet 1949; Schulz 1978), while an account of the laying out of the town defences of Ardres in c.1200 records Simon the Dyker, 'so learned in geometrical work, pacing with rod in hand' (cited in Frayling 1995, 64). If urban landscapes were being deliberately inscribed with symbolism, most likely it would have occurred through the activities of such individuals, shadowy though they are. The practices and knowledge of these *mensores* is evident in part through the physical layouts of the urban landscapes they

left behind, and in part through the texts used to explain and teach methods of drawing and surveying. In both, geometry is key, and it is through geometry that medieval urban landscapes were inscribed materially with symbolic form and mystical meaning.

Written evidence that geometrical knowledge is being used in medieval urban planning is to be found in texts known as 'practical geometries', *practica geometriae*. Both theorists and practitioners of geometry produced these in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries for didactic purposes (for instance, Hugh of St Victor, Leonardo Fibonacci and Villard de Honnecourt) (Homann 1991; Victor 1979). One such text, of 1193 (anonymously written but known by the incipit *artis cuiuslibet consummatio*, and originating from northern France), contains a procedure 'to infer the number of houses in a round city' using geometry, for example (Victor 1979, 219). This same text also gives instruction on more general surveying problems: how to find the surface of a slope-sided field; how to count the number of small rectangles in a known surface; and how to count the number of houses to be obtained from a known surface, all of which were applicable to urban planning (Victor 1979, 205, 207, 213). The practical use of geometry to lay out new urban landscapes is thus clear. There is evidence that it was used to design them, too. A plan of Talamone (1306) in Italy is a case in point, since it seems to have been drawn to facilitate the foundation of the new town (Harvey 1987, 491), while Roger Bacon in his *Communia mathematica* of the end of the thirteenth century noted that one of the uses of practical geometry was 'to draw cities' (*in figuracione civitatum*) (cited in Steele 1940, 43). But geometry not only had practical purposes in creating urban landscapes – it had also symbolic meaning. The circle and square were used to represent city and cosmos, fused together in images of the heavenly Jerusalem and the wider world (see above). Architects meanwhile were arranging 'Gothic' cathedrals of medieval Europe according to geometrical designs in order to convey mystical meaning (see Lesser 1957; Wallis 1973; Hiscock 2000), as well as designing new towns (see Friedman 1988). While in the period from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, God Himself – *artifex principalis* – was widely depicted as a geometer, compass in hand, fashioning and shaping the cosmos to His design as would a 'trained architect' with a city, as Philo of Alexander had made clear in his observation that

When a city is being founded to satisfy the soaring ambition of some king ... there comes forward now and again some trained architect who ... first sketches in his own mind well nigh all the parts of the city that is to be wrought out ... and like a good craftsman he begins to build the city of stones and timber, keeping his eye upon his pattern and making the visible and tangible objects correspond in each case to the incorporeal ideas. Just such must be our thoughts about God. We must suppose that, when He was minded to found the one great city, He conceived beforehand the model of its parts, and that out of these ... He brought to completion a world discernible only by the mind, and then, with that for a pattern, the world which our sense can perceive. (Cited in Friedman 1974, 425)

There is no doubt, then, that in the Middle Ages geometry was seen to be symbolic, but was it also being used to inscribe urban landscapes with mystical meanings? It would seem so, if the layouts of urban landscapes are examined, and if the significance of the geometries that made them is also considered.

During the twelfth and more particularly the thirteenth centuries, there was a general straightening up of urban layouts, evident in street and plot patterns, paralleled it seems by a straightening in layouts of religious buildings (Bulmer-Thomas 1979; Lilley 1998). While this change is probably connected to using better surveying techniques and instruments (as witnessed by the *practica geometriae* texts), it also has to do with the aesthetic beauty associated with harmony, proportion and order; an aesthetics of the material world that was seen to reflect God's 'immaterial' beauty (Eco 1986). Geometrical forms were more beautiful and harmonious in themselves according to the aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas and others such as Alexander of Hales (Eco 1988). There was symbolic meaning in having straight lines. Thus in likening scriptural study to constructing a new building (a recurrent architectural metaphor in medieval exegesis), Hugh of St Victor noted in his *Didascalicon* that 'the taut cord shows the path of the true faith' (cited in Taylor 1961, 141–2). The Bible itself taught the faithful to 'make the crooked places straight' (Isaiah 41: 4, 45: 2) and to 'make straight in the desert a highway for our God' (Isaiah 41: 3), while we have already noted Lucian's remarks on the straightness of Chester's streets and their cross-shape (correcting, in his mind, their actual imperfections), and the cross-plan of Bristol's streets shown on the 'map' of 1480 (probably an image made to convey the imagined mythical origins of

the city) (see Palliser 1980; Ralph 1986). Meanwhile, urban streets were physically being made straight, in Florence, for example, with regard to civic improvements carried out there in the 1280s and 1290s 'to enhance decorum' (Friedman 1988, 207). More generally, throughout Europe at this time, many new urban landscapes – though of course not all – were being created with highly regular, indeed sometimes orthogonal, layouts of streets and plots, evident in some of the 'bastide' new towns of south-west France, such as Grenade-sur-Garonne, Monpazier and Vianne (see Divorve *et al.* 1985; Lauret *et al.* 1988; Randolph 1995), and also in the Florentine 'new towns' in Italy (Guidoni 1970; Friedman 1988). Some of these new towns were arranged aesthetically, their streets and plots set out to harmonious proportions, as with Grenade (see Bucher 1972). Terranuova, a new town founded in the Florentine city-republic in 1337, was laid out with a proportioned quadrangle-plan derived from a circle divided into chords (Friedman 1988, 129), its geometrical design thus imitating the represented form of the heavenly Jerusalem (see above). The contemporaneous plan of the new town of Talamone likewise combined circle with square (see Harvey 1987, figure 20.27). These perfectly formed geometrical urban landscapes served no real pragmatic purpose (cf. Boerefijn 2000). Instead they indicate a mystical, symbolic intention on the part of their designers and planners.

Secondly, the symbolism of geometry was physically written into the forms of urban landscapes through the practices that were creating them; not least through the use of those same instruments that God had Himself used to fashion and shape the world at large. 'The science of lines, angles and figures', wrote Robert Grosseteste in his *Praxis geometriae*, 'serves to explain to us the very nature of physical things, of the universe as a whole, and of each part of it' (cited in Callus 1955, 26). At a basic level, cords were needed to lay out streets and plots, as is recorded in the case of surveying the new town of Baa near Bordeaux in 1287 (Trabut Cussac 1961, 142–3); cords that to Hugh of St Victor had revealed 'the path of the true faith'. Compass or dividers would be needed to draft a plan of a new town, as with Talamone again, to trace out its circle of walls on parchment, or to establish the complex geometrical design of Terranuova. Biblical passages gave cosmic significance to the shape drawn by the compass (Proverbs 8: 27), as well as measuring rods and reeds used to fashion the

orderly arrangement of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40: 3–5; 43: 1–17; Revelation 21: 15–17). Thus Lambert, the parish priest of Ardres, recalls Simon the Dyker laying out ‘with rod in hand’ the town defences in c.1200, ‘not so much with that actual rod as with the spiritual rod of his mind, the work which in imagination he had already conceived’ (cited in Frayling 1995, 64). Other more sophisticated instruments, particularly the quadrant and the astrolabe, helped to measure distances accurately over open ground, necessary for surveying work, while its symbolic significance lay in the fact that the astrolabe itself is round, like the created world, and through its astrological functions and astronomical uses made this wider world observable and measurable (see Kiely 1947). That these instruments were known and used is revealed in practical geometries, such as Hugh of St Victor’s, which explained the astrolabe’s uses in planimetry, in measuring ground-surfaces (Homann 1991), and by the *artis* text, based on Hugh of St Victor’s earlier exposition, which specifically concerns the application of the astrolabe ‘to measure the quantity of a straight line’ (cited in Victor 1979, 115). Surveyors worked in different ways. Dominicus de Clavasio, in his *practica geometriae* of 1346, notes ‘the difference between the geometric and the lay measurer’ lies in

that what the lay measurer knows how to measure by going and dashing around the sides of a field with his rods and cords, the geometric measurer will know standing still by mental reflection or by drawing lines. (Cited in Victor 1979, 52)

In c.1220, Leonardo Fibonacci had noted a similar distinction in his *practica geometriae* (Friedman 1988, 125). Certain, more learned surveyors thus perhaps worked with their heads and with calculations, presumably based on observations derived from instruments, but while these may have led to the creation of different forms of urban landscapes (some more sophisticated in design than others), the symbolic significance of the geometer’s instruments was clearly broad, meaning that newly made urban landscapes of *whatever shape* could be inscribed with a common, cosmic symbolism.

So geometry is not only to be found in the layout of medieval urban landscapes but also in their laying-out, both on the ground and on parchment, in both urban design and planning. It is surely significant that geographically separate places such as

Padua and Chester had forms that were being interpreted similarly symbolically, with reference to the hand of God both in their making and also in their resultant form, and that such ideas were circulating concurrently with the spatial formation of new urban landscapes. The shared geometrical forms of both city and cosmos not only gave mystical meaning to the material layouts of new urban landscapes, through their geometric-shaped streets and plots, so too did the sacred geometry used by some *mensores* and architects in urban design and planning, imitating that used by God in cosmic design and planning.

Performed landscapes: embodied symbolism

On parchment, then, in texts and images, are the symbolic forms of the medieval city, forms that were also laid out on the ground in the layouts of new urban landscapes; the material and the imagined urban landscapes each having shared Christian symbolism and meaning revealing mystical connections between city and cosmos, the earthly and heavenly worlds of medieval Christianity. If this were all, then the medieval ‘mappings’ of the city considered so far could simply be regarded as just intellectual exercises that preoccupied a literate and learned minority of medieval society. The symbolism of urban forms had wider appreciation however, and reached more general audiences than just scholars and clergymen. They entered everyday life in towns and cities through people participating in processions that punctuate the Christian calendar in honour of Christ and his saints. The ritual geographies of these holy processions traced through the urban landscape, and traced out in the minds of the participants themselves, the mystical symbolism of urban forms, giving them a wider circulation within medieval society beyond the confines of cloister and court, touching the lives of the many.

Religious processions were widely held in medieval towns and cities, and particularly towards the later Middle Ages are reasonably well documented in municipal records as they became more of a feature of civic festivity and ceremony. In Siena, for example, the festival and procession of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, held from the late twelfth century, was a show of corporate display and civic pride as well as religious devotion, as Bowsky (1981, 276) notes. The same was true for

other European towns and cities, too (see James 1983; Rubin 1991). The roots of these devotional processions lay at least in part in earlier Christian rites. In Jerusalem, Rome and Constantinople, for example, liturgies were conducted in urban settings and processions interweaved between churches in the townscape at key times in the holy year, both being 'an expression of the religious faith of Christians as the "common-sense" foundation of the life of the city' (Baldovin 1987, 251). The stations of Christ's Passion in Jerusalem are still imitated, placed in urban settings in Roman Catholic towns and cities of Europe during Easter for the Christian faithful to perform pilgrimages in the image of Christ's own journey to the cross (Sumption 1975, 93). Such traces through the urban landscape no doubt inscribed it with symbolic, Christian meanings to those who were there, but what is perhaps of more significance here is how these perennial religious processions traced out, in the minds of participants, the mystical, symbolic forms of city and cosmos – the micro- and macro-cosm – connecting themselves, spiritually and bodily, to the broader social 'body' of the city and to the 'cosmic body' overall.

The idea that the city was itself a body had wide currency in political philosophy of the Middle Ages, as is evident in the twelfth-century writings of John of Salisbury and Alan of Lille (Nederman 1990, 127–31; Sheridan 1980, 120–2), as well as later, in sermons such as those written by Giordano da Pisa, a Dominican friar of the early fourteenth century (Frugoni 1991, 186–7). This view had neo-platonic roots, as discussed by Dutton (1983), that saw the city as a scaled-down world. Like the wider cosmos, the city was a 'body' made up of parts, each performing particular functions to benefit the overall order and structure of the whole (see above). The city was a 'body' metaphorically, then, but also in many cases in medieval Europe it was *corporal* in a literal sense: a political entity made up of citizens and ratified in a charter of incorporation made a city 'corporate' – a 'body' of constitutional status – representing, however unequally, the citizens that were of its making (Weinbaum 1937; Luscombe 1992). The religious processions of some later medieval towns and cities have been interpreted in this context, of the civic body performing bodily not only to promote civic identity but also to instil social order and local control, and so enhance social cohesion and legitimate internal differences (see Phythian Adams

1972; James 1983; Rubin 1991). The religious and civic processions thus embodied both collective (civic) and individual (citizen) performance, bonding the two. However, despite an ever growing literature in medieval studies on the religious, social, literary and dramaturgical aspects of these urban processions (see Hanawalt and Reyerson 1994; Twycross 1996; Ashby and Hüskün 2001), and increasing awareness of their Christian symbolism and cultural meanings (Nijsten 1997; Boogaart 2001), the significance of their *spatial* dimensions remains largely overlooked, despite successive anthropological studies that stress the interrelatedness of ritual and geography, and their mutual constitutive role in conveying ideas of sacred space and time (Eliade 1959; Wheatley 1969); in this case the cosmologies and cosmogonies of the medieval Christian world.

Urban processions in the Middle Ages might be held to venerate a local saint on their feast day, or to celebrate a more universal holy day, in favour of say the Blessed Virgin Mary or one of the apostles, or a date in celebration of the life of Christ himself, notably at Easter, the most important time in the Christian calendar (Tydeman 1978, 96). There would be processions of different kinds too, from processions that carried forth around a town the relics of a particular saint, the local patron saint especially, or those that involved solemn procession following Christ's Passion and the Stations of the Cross, as Margery Kempe records in her pilgrimage visit to Jerusalem (Atkinson 1983), or the mystery or 'miracle' plays that were held in many European towns and cities in the later Middle Ages involving local townspeople and guild organizations who, on either specially set-up temporary stages or on moving carts, enacted particular episodes from Scripture (the Creation, the Flood, Judgement Day and so forth), as well as other sorts of procession exalting the arrival of royalty in a city, or the appointment to civic office of a new mayor, in each case linked to and symbolically imitating Christ's advent and religious investiture (see Twycross 1996; Nijsten 1997; Attreed 1994). The routes that processions took, the patterns they traced out through the urban landscape, give some indications of how the ritual performances of the individual (citizen) and collective (civic) bodies replicated and reinforced the mystical symbolic form of the city.

Of these urban processions, those which had Eucharistic dimensions, memorializing and

commemorating the body of Christ (*corpus christi*), are especially significant, for through celebrating Christ's own body the social 'body' of the city was mystically and symbolically conjoined with that of the wider 'cosmic body' (Nijsten 1997; Boogaart 2001). Corpus Christi processions became widespread in towns and cities from the thirteenth century onwards, arising from earlier Eucharistic practices (Nelson 1974; Rubin 1991). The feast of Corpus Christi was celebrated every year between late May and late June, its actual date depending on when Easter fell, and 'came to occupy a particularly prominent place in the townsman's [sic] liturgical calendar' during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (James 1983, 4). After mass, a communal procession led by the clergy carried the consecrated host, the body of Christ,

through the principal thoroughfare of the place ... to some other church at the other end of the processional route, where the host was deposited, and the religious side of the celebrations ... completed. (James 1983, 5)

In England, Rubin (1991, 267–8) points out that the most common processional routes in the towns linked 'the periphery to the centre', forming a linear trace through the urban landscape, a symbolic axis, as was the case at Beverley, York and, seemingly, Coventry (see Phythian-Adams 1972). The urban focus of Eucharistic procession routes was usually a cathedral or main church of the town, or the market place (Rubin 1991, 268), and it too symbolized an axis, an *axis mundi* around which the heavens revolved (cf. Wheatley 1971), the city as a whole thus representing, micro-cosmically, the wider world where Jerusalem stood at its symbolic centre.

In addition to the procession of the consecrated host through the urban landscape, Corpus Christi Day was celebrated through the staging of plays in the streets, so-called mystery plays, well-documented examples in England being Coventry, York, Wakefield and Chester, in Ireland in Dublin, but paralleled also in towns and cities in continental Europe (Nelson 1974; Rubin 1991; Muir 1995). The plays comprised dialogues or *tableaux vivants* performed in the street, sometimes on mobile wagons (*pageants*), the whole ensemble passing through the townscape, stopping at certain locations for the performances to take place (Tydeman 1978, 97–120; Craig 1957, viii–ix). Because the plays enacted, usually, the whole of time from Creation to Judgement Day (Johnston 1997), as told by the Bible (including

the life of Christ, see Rubin 1991), they collectively represented the linearity of Judeo-Christian cosmogony, where time definitely begins and ends (distinct, therefore, from those cosmogonies, deriving for example from Plato, that present a cyclical view of world history) (see Grierson 1975). The body of Christ was, of course, the embodiment of this world history, for in Him was the past, present and future of the world, its Creation, Fall and Salvation, as depicted visually by *mappaemundi* such as the Ebstorf and Psalter 'maps' (showing Christ's body superimposed upon the disc of the world; see above and Kühnel 1998). So with the Corpus Christi Day procession the civic body was not just performing Christ's body as 'a central symbol of social wholeness' (James 1983, 11), it also represented all that Christ's body stood for cosmologically and cosmogenically: the town as a social body performed His body as the embodiment of the whole world, tracing through the town's centre an axis symbolizing the course of the world's linear history, as foretold by Holy Scripture.

The idea that cosmogony and cosmology were represented by the form of processional routes – in their traces – is further borne out by the ritual geographies and mythologies associated with the Eucharistic procession of the Holy Blood, as Boogaart (2001) has recently demonstrated for the case of Bruges, where a phial of Christ's blood was carried through the city every May 3, on the feast of the Holy Cross. Boogaart maps out the route taken by the procession, which began in the centre of the city and from there moved out south-westwards to the circuit of the city's outer defences, from where it proceeded clockwise, as it were, around the walls, passing in and out of certain gates along the way (where psalms were recited) until the city's circumference had been completely circumnavigated, returning back through the streets by which the procession had first come, back to the city's centre and the resting place of the holy relic. The procession thus traces out a symbolic form, connecting centre with edge, and encompassing the whole city, socially and spatially. The circle traced by the procession is, Boogaart (2001, 89–90) points out, symbolic of the wider cosmos, itself conceived of as a circle, sacralizing the space of the city through circumscribing it with Christ's own blood (see also Rubin 1991, 267–9). The circular movement also imitated cosmic time as well as space, for the later Middle Ages saw a fusion of neoplatonic cosmology, and its cyclical notion of world history,

with the Judeo-Christian tradition of cosmogony (see Grierson 1975). Indeed the procession at Bruges had similarities to rogational patterns performed widely in medieval Europe (see Metford 1991, 120; Rubin 1991, 247), where the communal beating of the bounds of the parish not only ceremonially sanctified its territory and inhabitants but also celebrated the annual cycle and the earth's regeneration (Boogaart 2001, 76). The Eucharist, too, was a celebration of regeneration.

The whole 'procession of the Holy Blood bridged cosmic and civic history at different levels, implicitly associating community and cosmos, world salvation and the restoration of justice during historical time' (Boogaart 2001, 90). Through Eucharistic processions, the city (spatially and socially) thus became a symbol of the wider Christian cosmos, the circular trace of the procession around the walls marking out its circumference, and the start and end points at the ceremonial centre of the city marking the *axis mundi*, paralleling contemporary images of the city and cosmos, in *mappaemundi* and depictions of the heavenly Jerusalem. Eucharistic processions, such as those at Bruges and elsewhere in medieval Europe, embodied the cosmogony and cosmology of the Christian universe, conjoining civic (citizen) and cosmic (Christ's) bodies in the minds of the local townspeople, and performing through them symbolic urban forms. These performed urban forms, moreover, shared the same symbolism that was known and used by those who were making material urban landscapes, and those who were representing them, in text and in image, connecting once again both city and cosmos in the minds of those who were there.

Cities of God?

Augustine's *De civitate Dei* had a long-standing influence on Christian thinking in the Latin West throughout the Middle Ages, numerous copies being made of it, some exquisitely illustrated with illuminations showing a perfect and ideal city looking like contemporary images of the heavenly Jerusalem (Stone 2001; Rosenau 1983). For Augustine there were two 'cities', the 'city of this world' and the 'city of God' (Augustine 1984, 595, 762). But Augustine's 'city' was not an urban place in a literal sense; it was an idea, a metaphorical, mystical city that encompassed all those who were to be saved at the Final Judgement – the world to come; a 'city' conceived in neoplatonic

terms, therefore, as in Cicero's *de re publica*, a body of people (see Figgis 1921; Barrow 1950; Hoffman 1975). The medieval city dealt with above, in each of the three 'mappings', is also a mystical one, likewise a combination of Christian and neoplatonic ideas of sacred space and time, about God and the world, about cosmology and cosmogony. Through each of them we can begin to understand more deeply the ways in which urban landscapes were symbolically represented, constructed and experienced during the Middle Ages.

'A symbol', so writes Visser, 'is a resonating thing, making suggestions and connections, pointing in many directions at once; it can never be captured entirely' (2000, 221). To medieval Christians the city was a symbol that pointed in many directions at once. As we have seen, at one and the same time it stood for the world, the body, the cosmos, the earth, for Christ and for God. Eliade (1959, 52–8, 166) calls this kind of conceptual connectivity 'homology', and he considers it fundamental to human existence and experience in a sacralized world. Through it religious meaning is given to those 'ordinary', tangible objects and things, such as stones, houses, trees, and also, of course, cities. Such worldly things, he says, manifest the sacred, a *hierophany* whereby 'for those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality' (Eliade 1959, 11–12). For Christians of the Middle Ages, the city connected the otherworldly world (of God) with the worldly world of everyday (human) existence. In contemporary visual and textual representations of medieval cities – both heavenly and earthly – this homology was demonstrated by shared forms, especially urban forms based on the circle and square, quartered to make the sign of the cross. These particular symbolic forms relate to Christian (Scriptural and neoplatonic) conceptions of cosmogony and cosmology, giving the cities – and their forms – cosmic dimensions. Urban forms of the Middle Ages thus manifested the sacred, and through contemporary imagery, urban landscapes on the ground and performances of civic and religious rituals, they constructed and conveyed Christian ideas and beliefs.

Right from the earliest days, a special relationship existed between Christians and the urban environment (Baldovin 1987, 254–62). Symbolically, the city, it seems, not only brought the faithful spiritually closer to God, but actually was itself imagined to be higher and therefore 'anagogically' nearer to heaven, and God 'most high' (Eliade

1959, 118). In the divine hierarchy of the Christian cosmos, then, the city literally and mystically stood between 'man' and God, connecting earthly and heavenly worlds, as evidenced by the idea that the city was a small 'world', a microcosm, and also in the way that the city was understood as a 'body', homologizing the city with the human body, the social body, the cosmic body – and the body of Christ. The city was mystical, therefore, because it was being interpreted in a 'mystical sense' (morally, allegorically and anagogically, according to Aquinas). Such symbolism is of course recursive, and so the mystical 'city' – the 'city-cosmos', the city as a 'body', the 'city of God' – creates cities with mystical meaning. The imagined and material cities conjoined in Lucian's allegorical description of Chester (for example), the urban landscapes laid out geometrically by *mensores*, or ritually circumscribed in the religious performances by local inhabitants, are to those who were there all inscribed with Christian meaning: the 'city' in a mystical sense thus pointed to the city's mystical meaning, a 'city' of God.

These medieval Christian 'cities of God' are by no means unique, however. Parallels exist elsewhere. For religious cultures around the world, both past and present, certain characteristics are common to what Wheatley (1969) describes as the 'city as symbol'; in particular how the forms of both imagined and material cities mirror the perceived form of the wider cosmos (its cosmology), and how a ritual founding of a new city was seen to equate with the world's creation (its cosmogony). Likewise, with the *mandala* for instance, urban landscapes are represented in ways that connect city with cosmos, constructed by using a sacred geometry of conjoined abstract shapes, and experienced through embodied religious performance in cyclical and linear forms of urban ritual (see Wheatley 1971; Nitz 1992). In this context, then, medieval Christians were not alone in seeing the city as a 'map' of religious beliefs and symbolic meanings.

Re/mapping the medieval city

The three mappings of medieval urban landscapes offered here serve to show how it is possible to begin to contextualize their forms and so interpret them more in terms of how they were seen in the Middle Ages, through the beliefs and practices of Christian faith. Doing so shows that urban forms

had meanings at the time, a symbolism that connected the city – as a conceived, built and lived space – with the wider cosmos, the Christian world. This should not be surprising if it is accepted – as it was in the Middle Ages – that 'all forms are endowed with spirit', but so often it is the case that medieval urban landscapes are mapped by geographers (and others) in a 'literal' rather than a 'mystical' sense, even though both means were used by medieval Christians to make sense of the world around them. What this paper suggests is that for those concerned with interpreting urban landscapes of the Middle Ages, an approach that combines both morphological and iconographic study – that is, a literal and mystical 'mapping' of landscape – allows us to look at medieval urban landscapes more from the point of view of those who were there at the time, to see them through medieval Christian eyes. In ending this paper some attempt will be made here to indicate how this 'remapping' of the medieval city could have broader implications for current geographical enquiry.

One of the purposes of this paper was to address the apparent twin-track approach to landscape taken by geographers in recent years. As Muir (1999) and Seymour (2000) and others have pointed out, there are two main traditions of landscape study in UK geography, one owing more to the landscape history work of Hoskins (1955) and Conzen (1960) that has continued throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (see Hooke 2001), and remains largely unaffected by the development of the second of the two traditions, which instead owes more to the emergence of humanistic geography in the late 1970s and early 1980s, represented for example by the work of Cosgrove (1984), among many others. The first of these two 'schools' is decidedly more positivist in its orientation, with a concern for mapping out, literally, how landscapes change over time, while the second is more 'critical', in a theoretical sense, and concerned with understanding landscape meanings, a metaphorical 'mapping' of landscape. The two 'schools', it seems, are thus on quite different trajectories. Yet approaching medieval urban landscapes from both traditions, as this paper has, it is clear that an interpretation based on form (*morphe*) is common to each. Whether studying landscapes on the ground or as representations, recognition of this mutual focus on form might help to bring the two 'schools' closer together in such a way that actually

strengthens generally the place of landscape in geography.

The second broad concern this paper has addressed relates to where the Middle Ages stand in contemporary geographical discourse. The point has already been made that in recent historical and cultural geographies more often than not it is the 'modern' period that is under scrutiny, with the Middle Ages usually under-represented or even absent altogether (see, for example, Graham and Nash 2000). This absence is especially evident in recent critical perspectives of the city. In Hall's (1998) magisterial survey of cities and civilization, for example, there is a conspicuous gap of more than a millennium, between 'Imperial Rome' and 'the rediscovery of life' in Renaissance Florence – the medieval city is not mentioned at all. So too with Soja's 'remapping of the geohistory of city-space', which is likewise ambitious in its treatment of past urban life, and manages to condense down the subsequent '3000 years following the decline of Ur' to one short paragraph, a brief interlude between the 'first' and 'second urban revolution' (2000, 69). To write geographies that silence the Middle Ages in general, and the medieval city in particular, would seem to me to be mistaken, for it presents a particularly skewed view of the past, and therefore also of the present.

How, then, should the Middle Ages be brought into current geographical discourse? Placing the medieval city within theorized debates on mapping and landscape, the approach taken in this paper, offers one possible route. However, rather than simply taking (post-)modern ideas and theories and 'applying' them to the medieval city, this paper has used ways of seeing which were current in the Middle Ages – for example, the microcosmic city – the 'mystical' city – to try to make sense of the medieval city through the eyes of those who were there (see also Lilley forthcoming). In doing this it has emerged that the 'iconography of landscape' of contemporary historical and cultural geography practice seems to equate with how landscapes were interpreted during the Middle Ages, between the ninth and fifteenth centuries let us say, and so conceptually the 'medieval' and (post-)modern approaches to 'mapping' landscape would appear to have more in common than one might have expected, both being concerned with a landscape's 'literal' and 'mystical' meaning. By acknowledging such connections between past and present, there is scope to take a less compartment-

alized view of the past – avoiding particularly the tendency geographers have had of adopting Marxian historical periods – and try to recognize continuities and discontinuities in time and space that may in turn challenge our assumptions about the Middle Ages, as well as later periods, the 'modern' and 'post-modern' included. In sum, then, if the apparent silence of the Middle Ages is to be redressed in contemporary geographical discourse, as I suggest it needs to be, then one issue that requires rethinking, perhaps most fundamentally of all, is what especially separates the 'medieval' from the 'modern'? For a start, the city of the Middle Ages is not as far away as we might imagine. Let us not forget that its Christian symbolism still lives on in present day life, for example in studies of Augustine's *City of God*, which remains a foundational text in both Roman Catholic and Anglican theology, and in numerous towns and cities where Christians of various traditions throughout the world continue to perform Christ's Passion and his journey to the cross.

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