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Learning and Authority in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's Cosmography

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Overview

The significance -- despite its brevity, just 352 lines— of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's proemium to his *Chronique des ducs de Normandie* is not to be underestimated. The earliest known cosmographical text in Old French,¹ it gives an insight into the 'image' of the world that was generally accepted by, or at least acceptable to, twelfth-century courtly audiences, rather than the more scholarly construct articulated in Latin treatises. Yet as a brief account of the world as known, it is by no means primitive; the modern reader would, I think, be struck by the remarkably sophisticated level of philosophical and geographical learning with which Benoît considers his audience to be familiar — or at least that he considers them capable of understanding.

Benoît makes no reference to the novelty of his procedure. There is neither apology or self-praise, implicit or explicit, in his proemium; he gives, indeed, no indication that he might have been attempting something untoward, although one would have expected him to give some *justificatio* if he had thought it likely to surprise his audience.² The idea of prefixing a geographical proemium to a work of historiography had a long and distinguished pedigree in Latin literature, stretching back at least as far as Orosius's *Historia contra paganos*.³ Closer to home, Bede began his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* with a geographical sketch of England — an idea repeated by a number of Latin historians of the Anglo-Norman *regnum*.⁴ Nevertheless, no author before Benoît had included such a geographical overview in a vernacular work of any sort. In addition, Benoît's proemium has a wider range than most, embracing not only geographical but also more strictly 'cosmographical' material with discussions of the creation of the world, the heavens, the four cardinal points, the four elements and their various qualities, and the harmony of creation. Even his geographical presentation (which comprises less

than half of the total) is more grandiose than that to be found in Latin historians such as Henry of Huntingdon or William of Malmesbury, and contains a wider range of material.

Structure

Unlike the main body of the *Chronique des ducs de Normandie*, which is based — and structured — largely on prior Latin sources,⁵ the proemium is an independent composition.⁶ Benoît places it within the context of the trio of learned authorities Isidore (v. 50), Pliny the Elder (vv. 41, 184) and Augustine (v. 184), which he implicitly indicates as his sources. His text does indeed contain much material from the first two authors, but it is in fact a mosaic of citations (mostly unattributed) from other works, not all of them cosmographical texts. Many of these citations are hard to attribute to individual sources, as the material of the (mostly Latin) originals often appears in a very different guise in the vernacular, and much of it belongs in any case to the common pool of geographical learning of the period. Benoît probably mentions Isidore and Pliny not so much because they were his sources but because they were the accepted *auctoritates* in geography. Isidore's reputation rested largely on his *Etymologiae*,⁷ although his *De natura rerum*⁸ has more information of a strictly geographical nature; other works, including the anonymous geographical text known as the *Liber de ordine creaturarum*,⁹ were also attributed to him in the period. Pliny's *Historiae naturalis*,¹⁰ like Isidore's *Etymologiae* a vast compendium of obscure information of all kinds, was also much used by geographers throughout the Middle Ages.

Benoît's reference to Augustine as a third authority is more problematic, as he was not generally cited as an *auctoritas* on geography; nor, indeed, can any of Benoît's material be identified with any certainty as derived from Augustine.¹¹ The presentation of Augustine as one of his *auctores* is actually a signal of Benoît's own intentions; he is suggesting a conceptual framework for his cosmography. Augustine's major works on cosmographical subjects were his two commentaries (*ad litteram* and *contra Manichæos*) on the Book of Genesis,¹² and Benoît thus indicates that his work (which begins with a direct reference to the creation) should be read, like Augustine's, as a commentary or *enarratio* of Genesis.¹³ Such a presentation, in terms of a commonplace context well known to any potential audience, may have been a deliberate way of introducing the

learned material which the proemium does in fact contain in a non-controversial fashion; this reading would be supported by Benoît's close interweaving of 'learned' and Biblical elements throughout the text.

Benoît structures his proemium with care, distributing his material on the basis of a three-fold division with each of the three sections bound together by means of his literary procedure of expansion by restatement and *expositio* to develop his themes. The first two sections correspond closely to the two stages of the creation account as presented in Genesis: first, the creation and *dispositio* of the material world (1-72), and secondly its adornment (a much longer section, 73-206). The third section (207-352), which is the more properly geographical, is marginally longer than the second and describes the division of the continents. This is developed into a detailed description of Europe, particularly of the areas and peoples of Europe which form the background to the early part of the historical narrative. It thus forms a natural link between the first two sections of the proemium and the rest of the poem.

Both the 'creation' and the 'adornment' sections begin with references to God as the creator and orderer of the world: 'Damledex oct departiz / les elemenz chascun par sei' ('the Lord God had divided up the elements, each on its own'; 2-3); 'Si fist Dex ses formations, / ses rennes, ses creations' ('In such a way did God do his forming, his realms, his creatures'; 73-74). An similar affirmation of God as creator also occurs at the start of the second part of the 'adornment' section: 'Veez com Dex l'a ordené' ('See how God has ordered it'; 111). The sections end, too, with affirmations of God's sole power over the world: 'Sou Dex en est saichanz e mestre' ('God alone knows it and is master of it'; 59), 'n'est c'un Dex, c'un criator' ('there is only one God, one creator'; 203). All this reinforces the idea of the first two sections of the proemium being a commentary on Genesis 1:1-10.

Creation

The first few verses of the proemium, in which Benoît mentions the creation itself and the 'departiz' or *dispositio* of the world, resemble the beginning of Aethicus Ister's *Cosmographia*, a work with which Benoît is known to have used in his *Roman de Troie*.¹⁴ Verses 1-4 introduce the theme of creation:

Quant li mundes fu establiz

When the world was established,

e Damledex oct departiz
 les elemenz chascun par sei
 od le conseil de son segrei
 (...)

and the Lord God had divided up
 the elements, each on its own,
 according to his secret counsel

This first statement corresponds to Genesis 1:1, 'In principium creauit Dominus cælum et terra'; but with the addition of direct reference to the four elements, a major theme linking different sections of the proemium.¹⁵ The naming of earth, air, fire and water occurs in 10-14, 85-87, 99-107 and 113-118, while Benoît's discussion of the harmony and disharmony between the elements in 81-94, 119-30 and 131-206 forms the basic structure of the second section of the proemium.¹⁶

The echo of Genesis together with the mention of the elements in 1-4 serves to prepare the audience for the following verses, in which the general outlines of Gn 1:3-10, the first three days, are sketched out within the framework of the elements. Verses 6-8 introduces 'clartez e enluminemenz', the 'lux' of Gn 1:3 (the first day). Verses 9-12 describe the 'firmamenz', the 'firmamentum' of Gn 1:6 (the second day). But verse 5 already refers to the firmament as the place to which light is proper; this idea is developed in the verses that follow, by *consociatio* between the 'clartez' of illumination (6) and the 'clartez' of heat and fire (10): the firmament is

clartez e enluminemenz
 au monde e as creacions.
 (...)

light and brightness
 for the world and for created things
 (...)

Li firmamenz ceus est nonmez;
 c'est feus e chalors e clartez
 (6-7, 9-10).

This is called the firmament;
 it is fire and heat and light

Thus the 'firmamenz' in verse 5 is also linked not only with (Biblical) light but also with the element proper to it, fire, in verse 10. This threefold relation is implicitly stated in *Æthicus*,¹⁷ and the description of the heavens as the 'natural home' of fire can be traced back as far as the *Timæus* and is typical of the Aristotelian hierarchy; it occurs in the twelfth-century *Imago Mundi* of Honorius of Autun which appears as a probable source at other points, as well as (perhaps significantly) in Augustine.¹⁸

The rest of the 'creation' section revolves around the nature of the world as a globe and the earth surrounded by water. Benoît exploits a

series of motifs, repeating and interweaving them: the division of world into heaven, earth, sea (13-14), or into North, South, East and West (47-54); the motion of the world (15-18), or of the Ocean (41-46); no-one except God can know the world (19-28 and 55-59), as no-one can know the Ocean (34); the world is round, and all equal (29-30), as is the Ocean (37-40). The Ocean surrounds the world (31-33), that is, the earth (35-36 and 60-72).¹⁹

The description of the firmament is followed almost immediately by a reference to the other three elements: 'qui le munt velt dreit nonmer, / c'est cel ensemble od terre e mer' ('whoever wants to name the world correctly, it is heaven [air] together with earth and sea [water]'; 13-14). The order of the parts of the world in this is identical to that in Isidore's *Etymologiae*,²⁰ but the division of the sea and the dry land is also a reminiscence of Gn 1:9-10 (the third day); Benoît thus combines Genesis with the three other elements of air, earth and water.

Benoît then specifies that the world is called 'monz' rightly, 'que toz jorz est en movement' ('because it is always in motion'; 16). The incessant motion of the world is an idea that appears in both Isidore and Pliny,²¹ but the explicit note of explanation, linking its name directly with the fact that it is in motion, is absent from both and Benoît seems to have taken his information from another source, probably Honorius.²² Next (19-28) Benoît stresses the impossibility for humans of knowing the earth because of its size and age: 'Deu mont ne de tant com il dure / n'a nus ne nonbre ne mesure' ('For the world or for its duration no-one has either number or measure'; 19-20). This is echoed in the next passage, in which the Ocean is referred to as unsoundable: 'dum nus ne set sa parfondece' (34). This too appears in both Pliny and Honorius,²³ though the description of the world as unknowable by humans is also a biblical commonplace.

The next passage introduces a possible confusion between *munt* and *terre*. Benoît states first that the world is a sphere — 'li munz / est toz igaus e toz roonz' ('the world is all equal and entirely round'; 29-30)²⁴ — but then adds, puzzlingly, that it is surrounded by the Ocean (31). He then develops the thought by *expolitio* (31-39) to indicate the difference between the earth and dry land in the commonplace 'enmi le monde set la terre / que l'Ocean aclot e serre' ('in the middle of the world sits the earth, which the Ocean encloses and surrounds'; 35-36). This appears to be taken from Pliny (where, incidentally, there is a similar lack of distinction between *mundus* and *tellus*),²⁵ and it is

possible that it is to this, rather than the following passage, that the rubric 'ce dit Plines' (41) refers; particularly as it is by no means clear that the explanation of the tides ('movemenz') which follows is taken from Pliny.

The description of the causes of the tides shares with a number of Benoît's other descriptions the characteristic of appearing commonplace in its general outlines but being in fact very hard to trace from any of his likely sources. The causes of tides are frequently discussed in Latin cosmography: the most widely used explanations are that the tides come from winds in caves deep beneath the Ocean; or from the moon's attraction; or from water being drawn from the Ocean by the stars and the sun.²⁶ Benoît, however, attributes the tides to 'l'enbrive des granz venz / qui es cavernes sunt parfondes' ('the impetuous movement of the great winds which are in deep caverns'; 42-3); to 'tonnerre'; or to the 'granz undes / de l'Ocean qui la sostient' ('great waves of the Ocean which lies beneath'; 44-5). Only the first of these corresponds at all closely to any standard cause.²⁷ Pliny does refer to thunder in the context of tides, but only indirectly,²⁸ and Benoît's 'tonnerre' could as easily be taken from a similar reference in Æthicus,²⁹ or even from Honorius;³⁰ there are also reminiscences of Benoît's 'granz undes' in both Æthicus³¹ and Honorius.³² In neither case do the Latin texts greatly resemble Benoît's own expressions, but there are no obvious close sources; it is possible that Benoît may be reflecting popular traditions.

It is at this point that Benoît gives his audience the first of his two schemas of the divisions of the world. Isidore is evoked as the *auctor* for the division of the world into the four cardinal points:

Itex est la formations deu monde e la divisions que quatre parz i a, non plus,	Such is the formation of the world and its dividing that there are four parts and no more,
ce nos retraits Ysidorus: c'est orient, meridies, e occident qui vient enpres; septentrien (...) (47-53)	as Isidore tells us: they are the east, the south, and then next the west and the north (...)

Benoît's bold assurance that 'ce nos retraits Ysidorus' (50) appears to be justified, as the four points are twice given, in the same order as Benoît, in Isidore's *De natura rerum*, Benoît's 'orient', 'meridies',

'occident' and 'septentrion' corresponding closely to Isidore's forms of the words.³³ Benoît's precision that 'en ce s'estent / toz li cercles deu firmament' ('in this way extend all the circles of the firmament'; 53-54) is perplexing in the light of Isidore's categorical statement in the *De natura rerum* that 'quinque tenent cælum zonæ';³⁴ he appears to be conflating here with the *Etymologiae* which does indeed refer to the four parts of the heavens.³⁵

Here the 'creation' section of the proemium draws to a close, referring back again to Genesis (and possibly other biblical texts)³⁶ with a statement reiterating the difficulty of understanding how these things come to be, 'com faitement cez choses sunt', and an acknowledgement that 'Sou Dex en est saichanz e mestre' ('God alone knows it and is master of it'; 59). This statement, linking God's knowledge of the world with his power over it, may be drawn from a similar remark by Isidore in his *De natura rerum*.³⁷

The bridging passage between the 'creation' and 'adornment' sections contain references in both anticipation and recall. Benoît refers to the seas which issue from, and return to, the Ocean so that they (seas and Ocean) 'diversés sunt e totes un' (67). The seas divide the lands or 'regions' (66): this is an anticipation of the later division of the earth into continents divided by seas. Benoît also mentions the great rivers which 'renaissent' (68) in their turn from the seas, as the seas do from the Ocean, and which likewise surround 'les contrees / e les provinces' (69-70). Here Benoît also introduces for the first time the mention of human handiwork, 'les granz navies / dum les terres sunt replenies' ('the great navies by which lands are filled'; 71-2).

Adornment

The 'adornment' section of the proemium, like the 'creation' section, follows a logical pattern. Benoît first (vv. 73-110) expounds the contrary nature of the four elements. He then contrasts this disharmony with the order proper to nature (vv. 111-206), making use of the generally accepted idea of the natural 'homes' for elements and creatures. He explains that a disorder or excess of any of the elements in a place is accompanied by disorder — wildness, ferocity — in the inhabitants of the place, illustrating this by reference to inhabitants of the torrid zone of the world (131-150), and of the frigid zone (151-168). In the temperate zone, conversely, the reasonable climate is matched (as might be expected) by reasonable and civilised inhabitants (185-206).

The section begins with an invocation of God and a reference to the elements, in terms so similar to the beginning of the 'creation' section as to form a *reprise*:

Si fist Dex ses formations,	In such a way did God do his
	forming,
ses rennes, ses creations,	his realms, his creatures,
qu'entr'eus eüst varietez	that there should be variety among
(73-75)	them.

Despite the echo of lines 1-3, Benoît's emphasis is not here (as it was previously) on the order of God's creation, as evidenced by the words 'establiz', 'departiz' and 'chascun par sei', but rather on the disharmony between different creatures, caused largely by the different elements; this is the main motif of the 'adornment' section. The 'varietez, / desestances, diversitez' ('variety, inequality and diversity'; 75-6) of creatures are explained in somewhat confusing and apparently contradictory detail. All living beings 'unt des elemenz lor creance / e lor nature e lor substance' ('are created out of the elements, and take their nature and their substance from them'; 83-84); but here Benoît appears to express the disharmony between the elements exclusively in binary terms, contrasting water (linked with cold) and air (linked with heat): living beings are different from each other because they have

l'un plus de l'eue e de freidor,	one more of water and of cold,
l'autre de l'air e de cholor	another more of air and heat
— ausi de la terre ensemment	— and likewise of the earth, too
(85-7)	

This presentation has no backing in any of the Latin authorities, and Benoît appears at first glance to be rejecting the framework of the qualities by which the four elements were usually distinguished. According to this schema, there are two sets of opposite qualities, hot/cold and wet/dry, each of the elements having two qualities, one from each set; this is, for example, Isidore's explanation in the *De natura rerum*.³⁸ Although other writers occasionally ascribe a single quality as proper to each element (which is what Benoît appears to be doing),³⁹ the description of water as cold and air as hot does not appear in Eriugena, Honorius or indeed any other Latin writer.⁴⁰

The apparently gratuitous mention of 'terre' in 87 should alert us to the fact that Benoît is again introducing his schema of all four elements; he confirms this by then explicitly attributing the disharmony of creatures to *all* the elements, 'por ce que li element / sunt trestuit quatre entr'eus contraire' (88-89). The passage in fact follows the standard schema of two qualities for each element: water is cold and wet, and so 85 is a single reference; but heat is found in both air (hot and wet) and fire (hot and dry), and 86 is thus a dual reference ('chaleur' stands for fire, with which it was linked in verse 10). The earth, which has no direct relevance here, appears to be mentioned simply in order to include the fourth element. Benoît's apparent confusion is in fact a result of his conflation of two entirely separate questions, attempting to fit the qualities of the elements (probably derived from Isidore) into his introduction of the frigid and torrid climatic zones (almost certainly derived from Pliny),⁴¹ which will form the basis for the rest of the 'adornment' section.

The final remarks in this part of the 'adornment' section stress once again the difference between the elements. Air, because of its natural place between the elements of earth and fire (101), acts as an intermediary 'que la terre n'alunt ne arde; / sou l'air en est destoute e garde' ('that it does not set alight or burn the earth; the air alone prevents and protects against it'; 103-4) — but this presentation of the air as protecting the earth from the fire of the heavens cannot be found explicitly in any Latin writer. This is followed by remarks concerning water (perhaps, like the earlier reference to earth, included to complete the quartet of the elements). Making use of current ideas about the continuity between the elements and the 'condensing' of air into water (as of the 'solidifying' of water into earth),⁴² Benoît notes — somewhat bafflingly — that the air 'por l'eue respesise tant / que sovent reste de lé portant' ('because of the water it thickens so much that it often remains heavily charged with it'; 105-6). He seems to suggest a similarly protective position of the air between earth and water, protecting the earth from water as 'quant l'eue en la terre s'abaisse / tant i defait, tant s'i rengresse / qu'a neient vient tote, a sechee' ('when the water falls to the earth it comes so violently and destroys so much that it all runs away and dries up'; 107-9). These statements, which may be a reminiscence of similar remarks by Pliny or even Augustine,⁴³ appear to refer once again to his somewhat idiosyncratic characterization of the elements based on the distinction

between heat/fire and cold/water, which will form the basis of the frigid and torrid climatic zones in the next section.

Benoît returns to the line of his proemium with another reference to God, which introduces the second part of the 'adornment' section. To this he adds a schematic representation giving the order of the places for the elements and at the same time assigning the correct place for each type of inhabitant: angels; birds; fish; men and animals.

Veez com Dex l'a ordené, qui deu tot a la poesté: as angres li clers ceus, li beaus,	See how God has ordained it, he who has power over all: for angels the bright and beautiful heaven,
e l'air desoz as oiseaus; la mer, les eues, as peisons; la terre est abitacions as poples des humains lignages,	and the air below for the birds; the sea, the waters, for the fish; the earth is the dwelling-place for the people of human lineage,
as vers e as bestes sauvages. (111-18)	for the reptiles and the wild beasts.

Benoît's order of heaven, air, sea and land follows the Aristotelian linear disposition of the places of the elements according to their natural weight and velocity; the inclusion of a list of inhabitants (including angels in the heavens) indicates that it is taken directly from Isidore's *Etymologiae*.⁴⁴ The schema acts as a bridging passage between two sections, linking the elements with the living creatures to which Benoît is again turning his attention.

Verses 119-84 are almost certainly a gloss on Pliny's discussion of the inhabitants of the frigid, temperate and torrid climatic regions of the earth; not only does Benoît mention Pliny by name at the end of the passage (184), but he also refers in remarkably similar terms to Pliny's to the differences of the races with reference to fire and water, and to the superior qualities of the inhabitants of the temperate region.⁴⁵ His explanation, in terms of the harmony of the elements which he has already stressed, presents the differences between races as a terrible consequence of the lack of harmony among the elements. Here Benoît draws on the concept of 'man as microcosm' found in Isidore and other writers,⁴⁶ applying it in a wider fashion to other living beings as well and stressing the link between living beings and the elements of their environment (as he has already done in 81-94). It is the fact that 'la chose quin prent naissance, / sun element i a

puissance / e poesté e maorie' ('that thing from which it takes its birth, its element has power over it and strength and dominion'; 119-21) which explains why creatures living where the elements are not in harmony do not themselves have a harmonious existence. Benoît gives examples from the torrid and frigid regions of the earth, following Pliny in his explanation that the first has an excess of the element of fire, the second an excess of water. In both cases, the wild animals are fierce and dangerous, while the humans are closely equated with savage beasts who do not have the power of understanding.

Benoît uses a series of emotive words to express the disharmony: in the torrid regions the animals are 'vermines venimoses / pesmes, cruas e hainoses / (...) mortaus e fieres' ('poisonous vermin, horrible, cruel and hateful'; 133-5), and humans 'nen unt lei, sen ne raison, / dreiture ne discretion / (...) ne sevent qu'est maus ne biens / e (...) plus sunt felons que chiens' ('have no law, understanding or reason, uprightness or sense; do not know what is bad or good, and are worse than dogs'; 137-40). He also draws on the tradition of the monstrous races (typically portrayed as inhabitants of India, though sometimes attached to Ethiopia)⁴⁷ for his description of the inhabitants of the torrid region. Although the general picture is traditional, the precise terms of Benoît's description are again quite distinct from the normal ones. A number of the monstrous peoples are easily identifiable: those referred to as 'neirs' (141) are clearly the Nigritæ, who appear in a number of descriptions;⁴⁸ those with 'pendanz oreilles' (143) are the Panoti, who have large ears with which they can cover their entire bodies;⁴⁹ and those who are described as having 'moct plus lez les piez d'un es' ('feet much wider than a plank'; 144) are presumably the Himantopodes or Skiapodes, who have one monstrous foot which also serves as a shade against the sun.⁵⁰

Others are less clear: those 'plus (...) felons que chiens' (140) may be a reminiscence of the Cynocephales or the Cynamolges, who have the heads of dogs and who are, furthermore, 'jusqu'en la terre veluz' ('hairy down to the ground'; 142), at least according to some sources.⁵¹ The 'sanz mentons' (141) or chinless is probably a reference to the Blemmyæ, who have their faces in their chests, though the identification is uncertain.⁵² The 'granz' (141), if they are not simply giants, may be the Serbotæ or Macrobii.⁵³ Several of Benoît's monstrous races have no clear source at all: the 'cornuz' (141) or horned men are traceable only to a couple of more obscure authors,⁵⁴ while the nearest known equivalent to those 'od lons bes' (143) is the

stork-men, who are depicted with storks' heads but who appear in the twelfth century in only a single obscure text which Benoît seems unlikely to have known.⁵⁵ It seems more likely that Benoît is simply using his imagination, or reminiscences (rather than research), in giving these monstrous examples.

There is a similar depiction of savagery arising from lack of harmony in the frigid region. 'N'i a humanité' ('there is no humanity there'; 160), for the inhabitants 'ne seivent que est leis / ne que est jorz ne anz ne meis' ('they do not know what law is, nor what is day or year or month'; 161-62). There being no tradition of exotic inhabitants of the far north,⁵⁶ Benoît's description of the inhabitants of the frigid region is simpler, and appears to be taken from remarks by Isidore or Æthicus about Germanic tribes,⁵⁷ although there are definite echoes of descriptions of the vikings in Benoît's description of the northerners as savages who do not fear death (165-6) and who 'd'eus detrencher ne d'eus ocire / ne cuide estre neguns d'eus pire' ('if they cut each other to pieces or kill each other, no-one thinks any the worse of them for it'; 167-68).

At this point Benoît inserts a disclaimer in reply to possible queries as to why the regions are so different, using the 'lack of time' motif: 'e si i avreit trop a dire / e mei n'i list pas demorer, / quer moct i a d'el a parler' ('and there would indeed be much to say, and I do not care to stop, for there is much else to speak about'; 180-82), for the matter is a very difficult one ('haute est moct l'ovre e la matire', 179). He adds that he is not the *assertor* of his statements but only their *editor vel compiler*, and refers his audience to his *auctoritates*, Pliny and Augustine: 'mais quin voudra saveir la fin, / si lise Pline ou Augustin'.⁵⁸

The third description (185-206), that those dwelling 'entre cez contrarietez' (185), is clearly based on Pliny's description of the temperate region.⁵⁹ The land is fertile, 'plentaif e abondos' (193); the people are of reasonable size, 'trop grant ne sunt en trop menu' (198), and they are handsome: 'de beles formes i sunt les genz' (195). Their behaviour is reasonable and their judgement clear, as they are 'de saiges contenemenz / discret, raisnable' (196-97); Benoît endows them, indeed, with all the appurtenances of Pliny's 'sensu liquidos, engenia fecunda', clear judgement and fruitful intellect:⁶⁰ skills, arts, and laws: 'cist seivent les afaitemenz, / les ars, les leis, les jugemenz' (199-200). Even more important a demonstration of their clarity of judgement,

Cist sevent connoistre e veer	They understand how to know
	and see
e entendre e aperceveir	and comprehend and perceive
qu'eu n'est c'un Dex, c'un criator	that there is only one God, one
(201-3)	creator

It is thus with a mention of God, recalling yet again the nature of the text as an *enarratio* of Genesis, that the 'adornment' section of the proemium finishes — as it began.

Geography

Benoît's discussion of the different zones of the world (torrid, frigid, and temperate) in the context of the elements prepares the way for a natural transition into the 'geographical' section of the proemium, which opens with the division of the earth into the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe (207-256); this is followed by a general overview of the different parts of Europe (257-352). It is quite different in style, with no obvious echoes of Biblical terminology or references to the elements; the glance at the countries and peoples of Europe is extremely rapid, no more than a few verses being devoted to any one people. The heavy emphasis on central and eastern Europe, particularly Germany and Denmark, is explained by the importance these two countries have in the first part of the historical narrative, which concerns the origin of Rou/Rollo (the viking Hrolfr), the first duke of Normandy.

The section begins with an expression indicating a new departure: 'Or vos dei ce briement mostrer / por que m'estuet de ce parler' ('Now I must briefly show you why I ought to speak of this'; 207-8). The cardinal points established in Benoît's first division of the world are used to give precision to the second division, into the three continents (217-38), according to the general authority of 'li filosofe e li parfit, / li plus saige e li plus eslit' ('the philosophers and the fully informed, the wisest and most distinguished'; 209-10):

Treis parties i asignerent	they assign three parts to it
dum la premere Aise apelerent,	the first of which they call Asia,
Africque, Europe; tot le monde	[then] Africa, Europe; the whole
	world
que clot e aceint mer profonde	which the deep sea surrounds and
	encircles

est en icez treis pars devis. it divided into these three parts.
(217-21)

This division, which is based on Isidore's description,⁶¹ appears to be chosen for its logical connection with the section of the proemium in which it occurs. The previous division into 'orient', 'meridiēs', 'occident' and 'septentrien' was part of the most fundamental *dispositio* of the world, while the division into 'Aise', 'Africque' and 'Europe', a division which the audience are informed is 'discretement e od raison' (214), is of more importance for the living creatures — specifically, the human beings — who form part of the adornment already discussed and who will, in addition, be the subject matter of the rest of the poem. The mention of the three continents also leads naturally on to the more detailed description of parts of Europe.

The description of the continents according to the points of the compass is a close rendering of Isidore's explanation: Asia stretches 'des midi jusqu'en orient / (...) e en septentrien s'afine' ('from the south to the east and ends in the north'; 226, 228); Europe extends 'des septentrien (...) vers occident' ('from the north towards the west'; 229-30) and Africa 'des occident jusqu'en midi' ('from the west as far as the south'; 233).⁶² Benoît even renders Isidore's slightly awkward explanation of the continents' relative proportions, based on a division into four of the total landmass of which Asia comprises half, 'les dous parties d'icest mont' (236), while the other continents comprise a quarter each, 'les deus parties / que vos avez ici oïes' (237-38).⁶³

Benoît completes his brief geographical sketch of the world with a second disclaimer (239-56) which takes up, in greater detail, the terms of his previous one (173-84). Here it is not so much explanations as information which he refers to his *auctoritates*, not here named but referred to in general terms:

Qui ci sereit par tot saichanz	whoever would know all about it
mocht li fereit bien demander,	would do very well to ask,
buen aprendre, buen escoter.	to learn well, to listen well.
(254-6)	

Benoît's inclusion of 'quex bestes' and 'quex serpenz' (246), together with 'les pierres principaus' (249), suggests that bestiaries and lapidaries may have formed part of the proposed material available in

the vernacular to answer the 'grejos enqueremenz' (240) of his audience.⁶⁴

The second part of the geographical section is a more detailed description (mainly a gazetteer) of Europe itself. Benoît begins with a new opening phrase reminiscent of the introduction to the geographical section as a whole:

A ceste ovre que j'ai a faire
me besoigne un poi retraire
comment Europe est assise (257-59).

For this task I have to do
I must describe a little
how Europe is situated.

The order of listing of the countries of Europe shows some affinities with Isidore's; both start with Lower Scythia the first country, followed by the 'paluz Meotidienes' between the Danube and the Ocean (269-71) and 'Jermaine' (275).⁶⁵ But this is followed by a list of the wild tribes of the area which is apparently not from Isidore: while the Goths, Alani, Gepidii and Huns appear in Isidore, they are in a different order;⁶⁶ many other tribes and peoples — the Scythians, Hungarians, Bulgars and Danes, the 'Roge' or Rugii (a Germanic tribe mentioned by Tacitus)⁶⁷ and the Illyrians ('cil d'Esclavunnie') — do not appear in Isidore at all.⁶⁸ Benoît's source for these peoples is not obvious, though it may be noted that most of them, including the Illyrians, appear in the *Roman d'Alexandre*.⁶⁹ In most cases Benoît appends a brief description to the tribe in question, generally suggestive of the primitive nature of the people.⁷⁰

After next briefly mentioning a few of the countries of western Europe ('Alemaigne, / France, Aquitaine, Espaigne en sus', 302-3), Benoît uses the 'lack of time' motif ('dum n'iert ci faite mention / quer n'est or leus ne ne poon': 'of which no mention is made here, because this si not the place, nor are we able to [talk about it now]'; 305-6) to cut short the list and concentrate on Germany, which is described in hyperbolic terms; but Benoît prepares his audience, as he has already done at several other points, by referring to matters which will appear later in the narrative, mentioning at this point (311-14) the problem of overpopulation which will later be the determining factor in the coming of Rollo to Normandy.

Within Germany Benoît next describes the mountain of Adnoé (Athos), the putative source of the Danube, adding the formulaic source reference 'si com j'es livres ai trové' (318). Which books he does not, unfortunately, say; the information does not appear in

Isidore, and seems to be derived from Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, which contains the same details as Benoît's description, and in the same order.⁷¹

D'en sum amont un fluive sort	From the top a river springs
qui dreit vers orient s'en cort.	which flows straight towards the
	east.
Seixante eues granz e nonmees	sixty great and famous waters
(...)	(...)
s'i asemblerent, ce truis lisant	are gathered there, as I find by
(319-21, 323)	reading

The same may be true of Benoît's description of the wild peoples between the Danube and the Ocean in vv. 327-30,⁷² though the match is not as close and similar information may be found in Pliny. After mentioning the Alani (328), Benoît then refers to the island of 'Cancie, / e si crei bien que c'est Rosie' ('Scandia, and I do believe it is Rus'; 331-2), an island whose inhabitants (like bees, 335-6) swarm out 'por les granz rennes envair / e por faire les granz ocises, / les granz gaainz e les conquises' ('to invade great kingdoms and to make great slaughter, plunder and conquests'; 344-6). Benoît is again preparing his audience, as Cancie is the island of Scandia or Skåne which he later describes as the home of the Goths, who are to play an important role in the early part of the narrative.⁷³ The section finishes with a final anticipatory reference, to the 'Danemarche' to which the Goths migrated before becoming the Northmen (455-66).

Benoît then turns to his major source, the *Gesta Normannorum ducum*, and continues his narrative at the starting point of the Latin text.⁷⁴ This he begins with a double reference to source *auctoritas*, stating first what 'ce dit li letre e li escriz' ('the letter and the writing says this'; 353), and then adding a reference to one of his named authorities, 'si com retrait Ysidorus' ('as Isidore recounts'; 356), in connection with the division of the world into three parts and their distribution among Noah's three sons.

The proemium does not have a clear or dramatic ending, and there is little doubt that this is a deliberate decision of Benoît's. Although the historical narrative has no direct connection with the proemium, yet Benoît creates the illusion of continuity and familiarity within the early part of the narrative by means of a further mention of Isidore, of a more general reference to sources already mentioned, and of a *reprise*

of the three continents in terms very similar to his first description ('les treis parties de cest monde, / que clot e açaint mer profonde': 'the three parts of this world, which the deep sea encloses and surrounds'; 357-8). This effect is extended by numerous *reprises* over the two hundred or so verses following the end of the proemium: the Goths and Scandia are mentioned again in 369-88 and 455-59,⁷⁵ the 'Paluz Meotidieanes' in 462 and 569, 'Danemarche' in 465 (the Goths are consistently named Danes from 505 onwards), and Isidore in 356, 501 and 531. In no case is Benoît simply copying slavishly the Latin of the *Gesta*, but rather adding these *reprises* apparently in order to bind the proemium more closely to the narrative; this is particularly noticeable in the case of the references to Isidore, which appear to be otherwise functionally redundant, as they do not provide authoritative support for either important or potentially contentious statements.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Benoît's geographical proemium to his *Chronique des ducs de Normandie* is by no means a typical historiographical prologue. At first glance, there seems little purpose for most of the material Benoît includes: only one section, the last (207-352), actually contains the geographical background expected for a historical work; and even the first fifty verses of this section are not strictly relevant, as Benoît himself implicitly indicates in verses 257-9. He goes to considerable trouble to link the proemium to the narrative by means of a complex series of *reprises*, precisely in order to disguise the fact that the two have in fact almost nothing directly in common. In purely utilitarian terms his description of the three continents and the monstrous races is no less otiose than his earlier descriptions of the elements and the form of the world, neither of which are ever mentioned again in the entire poem.⁷⁷ It might be argued that Benoît has no purpose at all in introducing this extraneous material into his work, other than a desire to impress with his learning or a simple inability to stick to what is relevant.

It does seem to be the case that one of Benoît's reasons for including this material was indeed to impress; or rather to present his credentials as a learned scholar who is well able to compile and translate a variety of sources in order to make them accessible to his courtly audience.⁷⁸ This 'authorising' function of the proemium is an essential element of Benoît's self-presentation and his presentation of his text.

But Benoît has more reasons than this for his choice of material. By beginning his work with an *enarratio* of Biblical material, he is implicitly laying claim to the highest possible *auctoritas*. By introducing God as the 'primary character' around which the proemium is constructed, he is indicating that his history is to be read as the story of divine providence; this view he confirms by numerous references in the narrative to events happening (or being averted) by God's design. There appears to have been debate about the two possible justifications (providential and exemplary) for writing history during the period in which Benoît was composing the *Chronique*,⁷⁹ and he is careful to indicate explicitly at other points in the text that the exemplary value of his history is also an important reason for its composition.

The considerable scientific learning that Benoît shows also has a structural function within the text. One of the clearest messages he includes within his description of the harmony and disharmony of the elements is that harmony is a natural state for man and that disharmony is a 'bad thing'; those who are 'desatempéré' (159) are described as the equivalent of wild beasts. Benoît's Norman dukes and kings are depicted almost exclusively as responding to the conflicts that others unjustly stir up against them, and wishing to live at harmony with others according to their just rights.

Despite its apparent lack of connection with the history to which it forms the proemium, then, Benoît's cosmographical introduction provides a form of *enarratio* for the rest of the text. In it the author sets forth his learning and the authority of his work (matters to which he refers incessantly throughout the poem); he indicates the literary form into which his work fits, that of the scholarly history,⁸⁰ and value and significance of that form; and he provides a basic interpretative framework within which his historical characters are to be viewed. Benoît's cosmographical sweep, besides, is impressive; he shows a far more confident handling of his material than does his putative rival Perot de Garbelei in his *Divisiuns del mund*, a bald and pedestrian translation of Honorius's *Imago mundi*.⁸¹ Gleaning material from a wide variety of cosmographical texts and binding it together under the signs of God's wisdom and omnipotence, the divine providence which will form so important an element of his narrative, Benoît draws a picture of considerable poetic power, a fitting vernacular *enarratio* of the powerful creation account of Genesis — if

almost too elevated a prologue to the 'register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind'⁸² to which it is prefixed.

NOTES

¹ The only similar vernacular text with any claim to being earlier than Benoît's proemium is the Anglo-Norman *Divisiuns del mund* or 'Divisiones Mundi', ed. O.H. Prior, *Poem on the Assumption, Poem on the Day of Judgement, Divisiones Mundi*, Cambridge Anglo-Norman Texts 1, Cambridge, 1924, 34-62. This poem was dated by its editor on linguistic and phonological grounds to the early fourteenth century (36). More recently Hugh Shields, in 'More poems by Philippe de Thaon?', *Anglo-Norman Anniversary Essays*, ed. Ian Short, Anglo-Norman Text Society Occasional Publications Series 2, London, 1993, 337-59 (338-9, 354-8), argues for attributing the text not to Perot de Garbelei, who is named as the author in v. 20 of the poem, but to the early twelfth-century poet Philippe de Thaon. The poem is in any case a geographical rather than a cosmographical text, and survives in just a single MS.

² This seems to have been deliberate. Cf. Ian Short, 'Gaimar et les débuts de l'historiographie en langue française', *Chroniques nationales et chroniques universelles*, ed. D. Buschinger, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 508, Göppingen, Kümmerle, 1990, 155-63.

³ Orosius, *Historia contra paganos (Histoires contre les païens)*, ed. M.P. Arnaud-Lindet, 3 vols, Paris, CUF, 1990-91.

⁴ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. B. Colgrave & R.A. Mynors, Oxford, OMT, 1969), Bk I. For twelfth-century historians and chroniclers see, e.g., the prologues to Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, ed. D. Greenway, Oxford, OMT, 1996), Bk I; Ralph Diceto's *Abbreviationes chronicorum*, and Robert of Torigni, ed. R. Howlett, RS 82, 1884-9, vol. 4. Other historians, even important ones, omit a geographical proemium or reduce it to a bare few lines: see, e.g., Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. M. Chibnall, Oxford, OMT, 1969-80, Bk I (vol. 1, p. 134).

⁵ The *Chronique* is structured on, and uses material from, William of Jumièges' *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* (ed. E. van Houts, 2 vols., Oxford, OMT, 1992-5), but Benoît also includes a large amount of material from the *Gesta Guillelmi* of William of Poitiers (ed. R.H.C. Davis and M. Chibnall, Oxford, OMT, 1998) as well as some from Orderic Vitalis' *Historia Ecclesiastica* and other sources, probably including Wace's vernacular *Roman de Rou* (ed. A.J. Holden, 3 vols, Paris, Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1970-73).

⁶ The proemium was generally considered a privileged *locus* of literary creation, often the part of the narrative into which the authors put their greatest effort. See Martin Stephens, 'The performing self in twelfth-century culture', *Viator* 9 (1978), 193-212 (199); see also Gransden, 'Prologues in historiography'; Bernard Guenée, 'L'histoire entre l'éloquence et la science: quelques remarques sur le prologue de Guillaume de Malmesbury à ses *Gesta Regum Anglorum*', *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1982), 357-70; J.O. Ward, 'Some principles of rhetorical historiography in the twelfth century', *Classical Rhetoric and Medieval Historiography*, ed. E. Breisach, Studies in Medieval Culture 19, Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 1985; Gertrud Simon, 'Untersuchungen zur Topik der Widmungsbriege mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreiber bis zum Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts', *Archiv für Diplomatik* 4 (1958) 52-119 (52-4); P. Damian-Grint, 'Vernacular history in the making: Anglo-Norman verse historiography in the twelfth century', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (London, 1994), Chapter 4.

⁷ *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum siue originum*, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols, Oxford, OUP, 1911.

⁸ Isidore of Seville, *de natura rerum* (*Traité de la nature*), ed. Jacques Fontaine, Bibliothèque de l'école des hautes études hispaniques 28, Bordeaux, Féret et fils, 1960.

⁹ *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, ed. M. Diaz, Monografias de la Universidad de Santiago de Compostela 10, Santiago de Compostela, 1972. According to the editor, the work was actually composed by an Irish writer of the seventh century AD.

¹⁰ C. Plini Secundi naturalis historiae (Histoire naturelle), ed. J. Beaujeu, 37 vols, Paris, CUF, 1950-72.

¹¹ There is no evidence of direct borrowing from Augustine's commentaries in Benoît's work, and nothing peculiar to Augustine in the text; however, much of what Augustine says can also be found in Pliny and Isidore, and a *florilegium* cannot be ruled out.

¹² Sancti Aureli Augustini, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, ed. J. Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 28, Vienna, 1894, 3/2; *In Genesim contra Manichæos, Opera Omnia* III/1, ML 34, Paris, 1861, cols 173-219.

¹³ In much the same way as the text of Genesis itself was seen as an *enarratio* of the act of creation.

¹⁴ Æthicus Ister, *Cosmographia* (*Die Kosmographie des Aethicus*), ed. O. Prinz, Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 14, Munich,

Monumenta Germaniæ Historica, 1993, 88-9. For Benoît's use of Æthicus' work, see Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Roman de Troie*, ed. L. Constans, Paris, Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1904-12, vi.252; Carin Fahlin, *Étude sur le manuscrit de Tours de la Chronique des ducs de Normandie par Benoît*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksells, 1937, 152-3. Other Latin historians sometimes mention God as creator in their proemia: see, e.g., Orderic, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bks I (vol. 2, p. 2) and III (vol. 1, p. 134; Bk III was Orderic's original Bk I).

¹⁵ See also Æthicus, *Cosmographia* 88-9.

¹⁶ Although Benoît mentions and names the elements, at no point does he give a bald list in the didactic fashion of the *Divisiuns del mund*: 'Sachet certainement / ke sunt .iiii. element. / Li primer est li feus; / l'autre est l'air ça jus; / li tierce, (...) ceo est l'ewe, ceo sachez; / e li quars, c'est tere' ('Know certainly that there are four elements. The first is fire; the second is the air below it; the third, this is water, as you know; and the fourth, this is earth'; 109-15).

¹⁷ Æthicus, *Cosmographia* 94-5 and 90 (where *paradisus* is used to mean the firmament, the term *cælum* in 93 indicating the 'ærea massa'). The description of the sun (or possibly the firmament) as 'resplendissables e vermeiz' in line 12 is probably traceable to the *Cosmographia* 105.

¹⁸ See Plato, *Timæus*, ed. R.G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library 7, Harvard, Harvard U.P., 1952, 32b-c; Honorius Augustodunensis, *De imagine mundi*, ML 172, Paris, 1854, cols 115-188, I.84; Augustine, *de Genesi ad litteram* II.3-4; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* VI.5. See also Jacques Viret, 'Le quaternaire des éléments et l'harmonie cosmique d'après Isidore de Séville', in *Les Quatre éléments dans la culture médiévale*, ed. D. Buschinger et A. Crépin, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 386, Göppingen, Kümmerle, 1983, pp. 7-25 (9-10, 18-19).', pp. 9-10, 18-19.

¹⁹ The themes in the 'creation' section can be divided as follows (note repetitions of themes): The division of world into heaven, earth, sea (13-14); the motion of the world (15-18); no-one can know the world, except God (19-28); the world is round, and all equal (29-30); the ocean surrounds the world (31-33); no-one can know the ocean (34); the ocean surrounds the earth (35-36); the ocean is all equal (37-40); the motion of the ocean (41-46); the division of the world into North, South, East, West (47-54); no-one can know the world, except God (55-59); the seas surround the world (60-72). The key words and ideas in vv. 13-72: world (*munt* 13, 15, 18, 19, 29, 35, 48, 61, 64; *terre* 14, 35); firmament (54); ocean (*mer* 14, 61; *oceans* 31, 36, 45, 60); motion (*move*, *movement* 16, 18, 42); God (*mestre* 28, 59, *criere* 28, *Dex* 59); creation, disposition (*formations* 47; *divisions* 48; *parz* 49; *diverses* 61, 65, 66, 67); circle, encircle (*roonz* 30,

33; *cercle* 33, 54; *avironne* 31, 69, *aclot* 36, *serre* 36, *ceignent* 64); source (lettre 32, *écriture* 40, *Plines* 42, *Ysidorus* 50).

²⁰ 'Mundo est cælo et terra, mare et quæ in eis opera Dei': Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIII.1; but see also Æthicus, *Cosmographia* 92-4.

²¹ 'Nulla enim requies eius elementis concessa est, ideoque semper in motu est': Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIII.1; 'Hanc ergo formam eius aeternus et inquieto ambitu': Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* II.3.

²² 'Mundus dicitur quasi undique motus, est enim in perpetuo motu': Honorius, *Imago mundi* I.1.

²³ See Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* II.171; Honorius, *Imago mundi* I.38.

²⁴ The earth is generally described as round 'like a ball' by cosmographers from Pliny onwards: see e.g. Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* II.160-66; Isidore, *Etymologiae* III.30; Iohannes Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon siue de diuisione naturæ* III, ed. I.P. Sheldon-Williams, *Scriptores Latini Hibernæ* 11, Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1981, 716D-18A; Bede, *De natura rerum*, ed. C.W. Jones, *Corpus Christianorum series latina* 123A, Turnhout, Brepols, 1975, pp. 173-234, § xlvi, 'terram globo similem'; Honorius, *Imago mundi*, I.1: 'huius figura est in modo pilæ rotunda'. The vernacular *Divisiuns del mund* has the rather charming variant: 'li mund est, c'est la soume, / rounz cum une poume' ('the world, to sum up, is round like an apple'; 47-8).

²⁵ 'Est igitur in toto suo globo tellus medio ambitu præincta circumfluo mari': Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* II.166. See also, e.g., Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIII.15 (§ 1) and XIV.2; Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, ed. J. Willis, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Græcorum et Romanorum* Teubneriana, Leipzig, B.G. Teubner, 1983, 617.

²⁶ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XL.1-2.

²⁷ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XL.1: 'Quidam aiunt in profundis oceani esse quosdam meatus uentorum spiritu, ueluti mundi nares, per quas emissi anhelitus vel retracti alterno accessu recessuque nunc'.

²⁸ Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* II.215-16 ends his description of the moon's influence on the tides with the words: 'sicuti fulguris et tonitrus et fulminum' (216).

²⁹ Æthicus, *Cosmographia* 100-101. This too links 'tonitrum et fulminum crepitanter volutiones (...) et fulgorum' with another possible cause for the tides.

³⁰ Honorius, *Imago mundi* I.41: 'Juxta hæc sunt caverna loca (...). In his venti de spiramine aquarum concipiuntur, qui et spiritus procellarum dicuntur.' It should be noted, however, that the expression occurs in a

description of the underwater caves, and is followed (I.44) by a reference to the moon as cause of the tides.

³¹ Æthicus, *Cosmographia* 156: 'bestiæ et uolucres fugiunt ab impetu illius feruoris undarum, circumseptus est enim eminentissimis montibus'.

³² Honorius, *De philosophiæ mundi*, ML 172, Paris, 1854, cols. 39-102, III.14, gives a variety of causes for tides, ascribing them at one point to underwater mountains: 'cum item usque ad ipsos mare pervenit retro cadit, et ingurgitatur impleturque retro aluens'.

³³ 'Nam partes eius quattuor sunt. Prima pars mundi est orientis; secunda meridiana; tertia occidentalis; ultima uero atque extrema septentrionalis': Isidore, *De natura rerum* IX.3 (but cf. VII.4).

³⁴ Isidore, *De natura rerum* X.1.

³⁵ Isidore, *Etymologiæ* III.43.

³⁶ See, e.g., Job 11:7-12, 38:4-41:34; Psalms 8, 19 (18), 92 (91):5-8, 104 (103), 139 (138):4-18, 147:15-18.

³⁷ Isidore, *De natura rerum* XL.2: 'hoc soli Deo cognitum est cuius et opus mundus est solique omnis mundi ratio nota est.'

³⁸ Isidore, *De natura rerum* XI.2; see also Ambrose, *Hexameron* I.6; Honorius, *Philosophia mundi* I.21; *Divisiuns del mund* 121-62. Other contrasting qualities used in the division of the elements include Isidore's *tenuis/crassus*, *acutus/obtusus* and *mobilis/inmobilis* in the *De natura rerum* XI.1. Active and passive qualities are sometimes mentioned, though not consistently: for Honorius, *Claves physicae* § 194, heat and cold are active, wet and dry passive qualities, while for Eriugena, *Periphyseon* III.712D-713A, fire and air are active, water and earth passive elements.

³⁹ See Eriugena, *Periphyseon* III.712C-D; cf. Honorius' rather confused account in *Claves physicae* § 194. The scheme is very infrequently used by Latin writers, and Eriugena is probably quoting Gregory of Nyssa's *De homo opificio*, which he mentions at other points. See Viret, 'Le quaternaire', p.14.

⁴⁰ For Eriugena, *Periphyseon* III.712, the qualities are: ignis, caliditas; aqua, frigiditas; terra, ariditas; aer, humiditas. The same pattern can be pieced together from Honorius, *Imago mundi* I.44, and *Claves physicae* §§ 194-99.

⁴¹ See Pliny, *Naturalis historiæ* II.172.

⁴² See, e.g., Isidore, *Etymologiæ* XIII.3 (§ 2).

⁴³ Pliny, *Naturalis historiæ* II.103; Augustine, *de Genesi ad litteram* II.4.

⁴⁴ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIII.3 (§ 3): 'cælum angelis, ærem uolucris, mar piscibus, terram hominibus ceterisque animantibus (...)'. But see also Bede, *De natura rerum* § 4; Eriugena, *Periphyseon* III.714D (again quoting Gregory of Nyssa); Honorius, *Claves physicae* § 41; *Imago Mundi* I.3.

⁴⁵ See Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* II.189-90: 'corporum autem proceritatem utrobique, illic ignium nisu, hic umoris alimento. Medio uero terræ salubri utrique mixtura fertiles ad omnia tractus, modicos corporum habit magna et in colore temperie, ritus molles, sensu liquidos, engenia fecunda totiusque naturæ capacia (...)'. See P. Zumthor, *La Mesure du monde: représentation de l'espace au moyen âge*, Paris, Seuil, 1993, 150.

⁴⁶ Isidore, *De natura rerum* XI.1; *Etymologiae* IV.5; see also, e.g., Honorius, *Imago mundi* I.82, II.59.

⁴⁷ For a description of monstrous races in medieval literature see the complete typology in Claude Lécouteux, *Les Monstres dans la littérature allemande du moyen âge: contribution à l'étude du merveilleux médiéval*, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 330 (3 vols), Göppingen, Kümmerle, 1982. Thomas of Kent gives a lengthy description of the races met by Alexander in India in *The Anglo-Norman Alexander* (*Le Roman de toute chevalerie*), ed. Brian Foster & Ian Short, Anglo-Norman Text Society 29-33, London 1976-77; for a later (mid-thirteenth-century) vernacular version of monstrous races, see *Eine altfranzösische moralisierende Bearbeitung des Liber de monstruosis hominibus orientis aus Thomas von Cantimpré, De naturis rerum*, ed. A. Hilka, Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen philologisch-historische Klasse, 3rd ser., 7, Berlin, Weidmann, 1933.

⁴⁸ See C. Iulius Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, ed. T. Mommsen, Berlin, Weidmann, 1864, 1895, LII.14; Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* V.43. There is a description of the Nigritæ in Thomas of Kent's *Anglo-Norman Alexander*: 'Al derein de Ethiope, droit en orient, / ad mostres contrefez e mult orible gent. / La face out tote plein, noir cum arrement.' ('In the furthest part of Ethiopia, right in the east, there are misshapen monsters and very horrible people. They have completely flat faces, black as ink'; 6751-53).

⁴⁹ See Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI.3, 19: 'Panotios apud Scythiam esse ferunt, tam diffusa aurium magnitudine, ut omne corpus ex eis contegant'; Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* IV.95 (but appearing as inhabitants of the frigid region); VII.30; Solinus, *Collectanea*, XIX.8.

⁵⁰ See Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI.23: 'Sciopodum gens fertur esse in Æthiopia, singulis cruribus'; Pliny, *Naturalis historiae*, VII.23; Solinus, *Collectanea* LII.29. The Skiapodes are also mentioned in the *Anglo-*

Norman Alexander: 'E cels qui n'out qe un pié corent as monz cum as vals, / e se coverent de cel pié en chaut e en haans' ('and those who have only one foot run over hills and valleys, and cover themselves with that foot when hot and tired'; 5920-21); see also *Divisiuns del mund*, 451-57; *Liber de monstruosis hominibus*, 777-92.

⁵¹ The Cynocephales are mentioned in Pliny, *Naturalis historiae*, VII.23; Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* XVI.8; Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XI.3, 15; Æthicus, *Cosmographia*, 114-15 (where they are described, however, as a northern people); and the *Liber de monstruosis hominibus* 483-92. For the Cynamolges see Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* VI.195; Solinus, *Collectanea* 30.8; *Anglo-Norman Alexander*: 'Cinamolgris i sunt, un fier pople chanin; / il sunt velu cum urs, abaient cum mastin' ('the Cynamolges are there, a savage dog-like people; they are hairy like bears and bark like mastiffs'; 6739-40).

⁵² Lecouteux distinguishes between the Sternophtalmes or Blemmyæ, who have eyes in their chests, and the Omophtalmes, who have their eyes in their shoulders: see Lecouteux, *Les Monstres*, II, 5-7. The Blemmyæ are mentioned by Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI.17: 'Blemmyas in Libya credunt truncos sine capite nasci, et os et oculos habere in pectore'; IV.32 and Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* V.46; and Solinus, *Collectanea* XXXI.5 among others. The Omophtalmes are mentioned by Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* VII.23 and by Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* XVI.8 as well as Solinus, *Collectanea* LII.32; and the *Liber de monstruosis hominibus* 821-30 (where they are called 'Epiphagos'); a 'cyclops' variant is found in the *Anglo-Norman Alexander* 4749-50. The description of them in the *Divisiuns del mund* provides a link with Benoît's description: 'Savez ou sunt lur oil? / Es espauls en unt; / car trous el piz unt, / tut pur nés e pur bouche' ('Do you know where there eyes are? They have them in their shoulders; and they have holes in their chests for their noses and their mouths'; 462-5).

⁵³ *Anglo-Norman Alexander*: 'Une autre gent i ad od longe forcheure: / doze peez de longur out en lur estature. / Serbote sunt nomez icist pople par lettrure' ('Another people there have a long stride: they are twelve feet in height. These people are called Serbotes in writing'; 6714-16). For the Macrobian ('xii. cotes de grant', 386) see *Divisiun del mund* 381-87; Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* VII.31; Honorius, *Imago mundi* I.11. Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI.13, mentions the 'gigantes' among his monstrous races.

⁵⁴ See Thomas of Cantimpré, *De natura rerum* III.5, 24; Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* § 92. After Benoît they appear in Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum naturalis* XXXI.128 and in the *Liber de monstruosis hominibus* 1141-50 (where they have tails as well).

⁵⁵ The *Letter of Pharasmanes* XVIII.3: see Lecouteux, *Les Monstres* II, 94-98.

⁵⁶ Apart from the Hyperboreans, doubly exceptions Benoît's general schema by virtue of their gentleness and civilised behaviour —which could, however, theoretically be ascribed to the fact that they dwell in a region inexplicably free from cold and ice. See Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* IV.89.

⁵⁷ See Isidore, *Etymologiae* IX.2: 'quod sint inmania corpora inmanesque nationes sæuissimis duratæ frigoribus: qui mores ex ipso cæli rigore traxerunt, ferocis animi et semper indomiti'; Æthicus, *Cosmographia* 116: 'gentes spurcissimas hac vita inmundissima, degentes ultra omnia regna terrarum, sine deo, sine lege vel cærimonias (...) frigore et rigore ferentes ultra omnes gentes'.

⁵⁸ See A.J. Minnis, *The Medieval Theory of Authorship*, London, Scholar Press, 1984, 100; cf. M.D. Chenu, 'Auctor, actor, autor', *Bulletin Du Cange* 3 (1927), 81-6.

⁵⁹ Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* II.80: 'Medio uero terræ salubri utrique mixtura fertiles ad omnia tractus, modicos corporum habit magna et in colore temperie, ritus molles, sensu liquidos, engenia fecunda totiusque naturæ capacia (...)'.
⁶⁰ See Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* II.80.

⁶¹ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIV.2 (§§ 1, 3): 'Undique enim Oceanus circumfluens eius in circulo ambit fines. Diuisus est autem trifarie: e quibus una pars Asia, altera Europa, tertia Africa nuncupatur. (...) inter utramque ad Oceano mare magnum ingreditur, quod eas intersecat.' This is however a commonplace; see, e.g., Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* III.3; Capella, *De nuptiis* VI.622; *Divisiuns del mund* 183-202.

⁶² Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIV.2 (§ 2): 'Nam Asia a meridie per orientem usque ad septentrionem peruenit; Europa uero a septentrione usque ad occidentem; atque inde Africa ab occidente usque ad meridiem.'

⁶³ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIV.11 § 3: 'Unde euidenter orbem dimidium duæ tenent, Europa et Africa, alium uero dimidium sola Asia; sed ideo istæ duæ partes factæ sunt'.

⁶⁴ Philippe de Thaon's *Physiologus* is the only surviving twelfth-century bestiary, but there are early thirteenth-century bestiaries by Gervaise, Guillaume le Clerc and Pierre de Beauvais: see Florence McCulloch, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1960, pp. 45-69. Lapidaries dating from the twelfth century include the *Lapidaire alphabetique*, the *Lapidaire apocalyptique*,

and (probably) the *Lapidaire de Cambridge*: see Paul Studer and Joan Evans, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, Paris, Champion, 1924; Cesare Segre, 'Le forme e le tradizioni didattiche', *Grundriß der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters* VI/1, *La littérature didactique, allégorique et satirique*, ed. Jürgen Beyer, Heidelberg, Winter, 1968, pp. 58-145 (132-3).

⁶⁵ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIV.4 § 3: 'Prima Europæ regio Scythia inferior, quæ a Mæotidis paludibus incipiens inter Danubium et Oceanum septentrionalem usque ad Germaniam porrigitur; quæ terra generaliter propter barbaras gentes, quibus inhabitatur, Barbarica dicitur.' See also Honorius, *Imago mundi* I.24.

⁶⁶ Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIV.4 § 3: 'Huius pars prima Alania est, quæ ad Mæotidis paludes pertingit; post hanc Dacia, ubi et Gothia; deinde Germania, ubi plurimam partem Suevi incoluerunt.' IX.2 § 92 mentions the Gepidians, IX.2 § 66 the 'Hugnos ante Hunnos vocatos'.

⁶⁷ See Cornelius Tacitus, *De origine et situ Germanorum* in *Opera minora*, ed. H. Furneaux and J.G.C. Anderson, Oxford, OUP, 1949, 43.6.

⁶⁸ But see Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* IV.80, 83, 88-91.

⁶⁹ This may also have been Benoît's source for the monstrous races. The Alani, Slavonians (Illyrians), Bulgarians and Hungarians all appear as exotic peoples in either the *Alexandre décasyllabique* or the *Venjançe Alixandre*, or both, as well as in other romances; see L. F. Flutre, *Table des noms propres avec toutes leurs variantes figurant dans les romans du moyen âge*, Poitiers, Centre d'Etudes Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale, 1962. There are no vernacular examples of the 'Roge' or Rugii outside the *Chronique*.

⁷⁰ Æthicus, *Cosmographia* 116, gives a long list of the savage peoples of the frigid regions including the Alani and the Huns but none of Benoît's other peoples. Benoît's description of the Alani as 'qui ne se vent qu'est vin ne pain' ('they do not know what is wine or bread') is reminiscent of a phrase in Æthicus, *Cosmographia* 120, which describes the savage tribes who 'vinum pænitus ignorant, (...) frumenta numquam usi'.

⁷¹ Capella, *De nuptiis*, 662: 'Hister fluuius, ortus in Germania de cacumine montis Abnouæ [Adnobem in MSS B and D], sexaginta annes adsumens etiam Danuuius uocitatur.'

⁷² Capella, *De nuptiis*, 663: 'Dehinc litus Scythicum confertum multiplici diuersitate barbarica (...)' See also Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* IV.76-83.

⁷³ Although 'Rosie' would normally be a reference to Russia; see André Moisan, *Répertoire des noms propres dans les chansons de geste françaises*, Geneva, Droz, 1986, 1359.

⁷⁴ The *Gesta Normannorum ducum* is prefaced with a short passage describing how internecine warfare between the sons of Louis the Pious weakened France and left it a prey to the Danish invaders. Benoît moves this chapter to a more logical place in the narrative — as an introduction to the invasion itself — where it is expertly inserted, preceded by a few introductory lines (*Chronique* 769-72). The historical narrative proper of the *Gesta* begins after this preface.

⁷⁵ Note 'Cance que si vos ai nonmee' (381).

⁷⁶ The references to Isidore in also appear to be fictitious, as the material is in fact taken directly from the *Gesta Normannorum ducum* and there is no mention of Isidore in the Latin text.

⁷⁷ But see E. Baumgartner, 'Benoît de Sainte-Maure et l'oeuvre de Troie', in *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, rewriting, and transmission in the French tradition*, ed. D. Kelly, Faux Titre 116, Amsterdam & Atlanta, Rodopi, 1996, 15-28, for a more unified vision of Benoît's prologue as 'une vision encyclopédique, une géographie du monde, liée, par la théorie des climats, à l'histoire et au progrès de la civilisation' (27).

⁷⁸ Baumgartner, 'l'oeuvre de Troie', describes Benoît in this context as 'sûr de ses compétences, de son engenz' (27); see P. Damian-Grint, 'Translation as *enarratio* and hermeneutic theory in twelfth-century vernacular learned literature', *Neophilologus* 82 (1998), ...

⁷⁹ See P. Damian-Grint, 'Etoire as word and genre: meaning and literary usage in the twelfth century', *Medium Aevum* 66 (1997), 188-205 (196).

⁸⁰ 'La *descriptio Terræ* ou, plus simplement, la liste des peuples de la Terre constituent l'introduction obligée de tout chronique à prétensions universelles, voire ambitieusement nationales, come la *Chronique des ducs de Normandie* qu'entreprit (...) Benoît de Sainte-Maure': Zumthor, *Mesure du monde*, 227.

⁸¹ The modern editor of the *Divisiones Mundi*, O.H. Prior, notes (35) that 'we are not dealing with a work of unrecognised genius. The poem is interesting from scientific and linguistic point of view, but not otherwise.'

⁸² Edward Gibbon, *A History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London, A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1782-7, chapter 3.