

Thule 60° 31'N, 28° 59'W (also spelled as Thylē or Tile, Thila, Thile, Thoule, Thida, Tila, Til/a, Tyle, Tylen, Ultima Thule) is the most northerly location mentioned in ancient Greek and Roman literature and early cartography.

Here shown on the 1539 Carta Marina by Olaus Magnus (#366)

The British Isles are a long way from the Mediterranean, and for the ancient Greeks it was a dark and potentially dangerous land, at the edge of the human world. But in the fourth century BCE, an explorer from the Greek colony of *Massalia* - today's Marseille - claimed not just to have reached Britain, but to have gone beyond, to the previously unknown island of *Thule*. That explorer was Pytheas, and his book recounting the journey, *On the Ocean*, though since lost, was widely read and remarked upon by other classical writers. From what has been pieced together, it seems Pytheas set out on his travels around 320-330 BCE. He first reached the tin-producing regions of southwest Britain and then went onwards, taking measurements of the sun's height along the way. When he reached the edge of the mainland he did not turn back. Instead, the Greek claimed to have continued, traveling six days north to the 'farthest of all lands', *Thule*. This was truly an astonishing journey, although Pytheas never explicitly describing *Thule* as an island, it has always been portrayed the way on maps..

Among early commentators, however, Pytheas' voyage was not looked upon with unqualified admiration. Some expressed considerable skepticism about the authenticity of his reports, and in particular serious doubts were raised about the existence of *Thule*. The first century BCE Greek astronomer Geminus of Rhodes claimed that the name *Thule* went back to an archaic word for the polar night phenomenon - "the place where the sun goes to rest". Dionysius Periegetes in his *De situ habitabilis orbis* also touched upon this subject, as did Martianus Capella. Avienius in his *Ora Maritima* added

that during the summer on *Thule* night lasted only two hours, a clear reference to the midnight sun. Strabo, in his *Geographica* (c. 30 CE, #115), mentions *Thule* in describing Eratosthenes' calculation of "the breadth of the inhabited world" and notes that Pytheas says it "is a six days' sail north of Britain, and is near the frozen sea". But he then doubts this claim, writing that Pytheas has "been found, upon scrutiny, to be an arch falsifier, but the men who have seen Britain and Ireland do not mention *Thule*, though they speak of other islands, small ones, about Britain". Strabo adds the following in Book 5:

Now Pytheas of Massilia tells us that Thule, the most northerly of the Britannic Islands, is farthest north, and that there the circle of the summer tropic is the same as the Arctic Circle. But from the other writers I learn nothing on the subject – neither that there exists a certain island by the name of Thule, nor whether the northern regions are inhabitable up to the point where the summer tropic becomes the Arctic Circle.

Strabo ultimately concludes, *Concerning Thule, our historical information is still more uncertain, on account of its outside position; for Thule, of all the countries that are named, is set farthest north.* The inhabitants or people of *Thule* are described in most detail by Strabo (citing Pytheas):

the people (of *Thule*) live on millet and other herbs, and on fruits and roots; and where there are grain and honey, the people get their beverage, also, from them. As for the grain, he says, since they have no pure sunshine, they pound it out in large storehouses, after first gathering in the ears thither; for the threshing floors become useless because of this lack of sunshine and because of the rains.

The mid-first century Roman geographer Pomponius Mela (#116) placed *Thule* north of *Scythia* [Russia/Asia]. In 77 CE, Pliny the Elder published his *Natural History* in which he also cites Pytheas' claim (in Book II, Chapter 75) that *Thule* is a six-day sail north of Britain. Then, when discussing the islands around Britain, he writes:

The farthest of all, which are known and spoke of, is Thule; in which there be no nights at all, as we have declared, about mid-summer, namely when the Sun passes through the sign Cancer; and contrariwise no days in mid-winter: and each of these times they suppose, do last six months, all day, or all night.

Finally, in refining the island's location, he places it along the most northerly parallel of those he describes: *Last of all is the Scythian parallel, from the Rhiphean hills into Thule: wherein (as we said) it is day and night continually by turns (for six months).*

The Roman poet Silius Italicus (25-101 CE) wrote that the people of *Thule* were painted blue: *the blue-painted native of Thule, when he fights, drives around the close-packed ranks in his scythe-bearing chariot*, implying a link to the Picts (whose exonym is derived from the Latin *pictus* "painted"). Martial (40-104 CE) talks about "blue" and "painted Britons", just like Julius Caesar. Claudian (370-404 CE) also believed that the inhabitants of *Thule* were Picts.

The Roman historian Tacitus (55-120 CE), in his book chronicling the life of his father-in-law, Agricola, describes how the Romans knew that Britain (in which Agricola was Roman commander) was an island rather than a continent, by circumnavigating it. Tacitus writes of a Roman ship visiting Orkney and claims the ship's crew even sighted *Thule*. However their orders were not to explore there, as winter was at hand. Some scholars believe that Tacitus was referring to the Shetland Islands.

The third-century Latin grammarian Gaius Julius Solinus wrote in his *Polyhistor* that *Thyle*, which was distant from Orkney by a voyage of five days and nights, was fruitful and abundant in the lasting yield of its crops. The fourth-century Virgilian commentator Servius also believed that *Thule* sat close to Orkney:

Thule; an island in the Ocean between the northern and western zone, beyond Britain, near Orkney and Ireland; in this Thule, when the sun is in Cancer, it is said that there are perpetual days without nights...

Other late classical writers such as Orosius (384–420) describe *Thule* as being north and west of both Ireland and Britain, strongly suggesting that it was Iceland.

Solinus (d. 400 CE) in his *Polyhistor*, repeated these descriptions, noting that the people of *Thule* had a fertile land where they grew a good production of crop and fruits.

Early in the fifth century CE Claudian, in his poem, *On the Fourth Consulship of the Emperor Honorius*, Book VIII, rhapsodizes on the conquests of the emperor Theodosius I, declaring that the *Orcades* "ran red with Saxon slaughter; *Thule* was warm with the blood of Picts; ice-bound *Hibernia* [Ireland] wept for the heaps of slain Scots". This implies that *Thule* was Scotland. But in *Against Rufinias*, the *Second Poem*, Claudian writes of *Thule* lying ice-bound beneath the pole-star. Jordanes in his *Getica* also wrote that *Thule* sat under the pole star.

In the writings of the historian Procopius, from the first half of the sixth century CE, *Thule* is a large island in the north inhabited by 13 tribes. It is believed that Procopius is really talking about a part of Scandinavia, since several tribes are easily identified, including the *Geats* (*Gautoi*) in present-day Sweden and the *Sami* people (*Scrithiphini*). He also writes that when the Herules returned, they passed the Warini and the Danes and then crossed the sea to *Thule*, where they settled beside the Geats. Procopius's *Thule* is believed to be the same place as *Scandza*, as described by Jordanes. Procopius says its inhabitants are pagans who practice human sacrifice. According to Procopius, the sun doesn't rise for forty days around the time of the winter solstice in *Thule*. After the winter solstice, the people of *Thule* send men to the mountaintops, and when they first glimpse the sun above the horizon, they send word to the people in the valleys below. On hearing the good news, the people of *Thule* then celebrate their greatest festival.

In the early seventh century CE, Isidore of Seville (#205) wrote in his *Etymologies* that:

Ultima Thule (*Thyle ultima*) is an island of the Ocean in the northwestern region, beyond Britannia, taking its name from the sun, because there the sun makes its summer solstice, and there is no daylight beyond (ultra) this. Hence its sea is sluggish and frozen.

Isidore distinguished this from the islands of Britannia, Thanet (*Tanatos*), the Orkney (*Orcades*), and Ireland (*Scotia* or *Hibernia*). Isidore was to have a large influence upon the Venerable Bede (d. 735), who was later to mention *Thule*. The Irish monk Dicuil in his *Liber De Mensura Orbis Terrae* (written circa 825) after quoting various classical sources describing *Thule*, says

It is now thirty years since clerics, who had lived on the island from the first of February to the first of August, told me that not only at the summer solstice, but in the days round about it, the sun setting in the evening hides itself as though behind a small hill in such a way that there was no darkness in that very small

space of time, and a man could do whatever he wished as though the sun were there, even remove lice from his shirt, and if they had been on a mountain-top perhaps the sun would never have been hidden from them. In the middle of that moment of time it is midnight at the equator, and thus, on the contrary, I think that at the winter solstice and for a few days about it dawn appears only for the smallest space at Thule, when it is noon at the equator. Therefore those authors are wrong and give wrong information, who have written that the sea will be solid about Thule, and that day without night continues right through from the vernal to the autumnal equinox, and that vice versa night continues uninterrupted from the autumnal to the vernal equinox, since these men voyaged at the natural time of great cold, and entered the island and remaining on it had day and night alternately except for the period of the solstice. But one day's sail north of that they did find the sea frozen over. There are many other islands in the ocean to the north of Britain which can be reached from the northern islands of Britain in a direct voyage of two days and nights with sails filled with a continuously favorable wind. A devout priest told me that in two summer days and the intervening night he sailed in a two-benched boat and entered one of them. There is another set of small islands, nearly all separated by narrow stretches of water; in these for nearly a hundred years hermits sailing from our country, Ireland, have lived. But just as they were always deserted from the beginning of the world, so now because of the Northman pirates they are emptied of anchorites, and filled with countless sheep and very many diverse kinds of sea-birds. I have never found these islands mentioned in the authorities.

The suspicion that came to surround *Thule* was understandable, for there was much to raise scholarly eyebrows about in Pytheas' tale of distant lands. For one thing, he claimed to be travelling in a place that many believed to be too far north for human habitation. According to Strabo, the island of Ireland '*is such a wretched place to live in on account of the cold that the regions beyond are regarded as uninhabitable*'. So *Thule*, a place six days' sail north of Britain, was a highly implausible idea.

But later writers have been less cynical. Pytheas has been given the benefit of the doubt by many, and celebrated as a true northern pioneer. The descriptions that survive of *Thule* seem just about plausible enough for it to be considered a real place. But where? The evidence is thoroughly ambiguous. A six-day journey from Britain could take you to any number of places, depending on where you left from, the direction you traveled, whether overnight stops were made, the type of craft that was used, the weather, and a multitude of other factors. The Shetland Islands, Norway, Faroe, even the Baltic, if your idea of north was somewhat confused: all could be reached within six days. Other potential locations are the island of Saaremaa (Ösel) in Estonia, or the Norwegian island of Smøla.

Beyond this, though, there are several other elements of the story that have fed speculation. There is, first of all, the rather fantastical description that Polybius gives, seemingly quoting directly from *On the Ocean*. In the vicinity of *Thule*, he writes:

there is neither unmixed land or sea or air, but a kind of compound of all time (like the jelly-fish or *Pulmo Marinus*), in which earth and sea and everything else are held in suspense, and which forms a kind of connecting link to the whole, through which one can neither walk nor sail.

This is a very strange image indeed, but has most often been taken to refer to fog combined with slushy sea ice, rising and falling like the body of a jelly-fish.

Another intriguing part of Pytheas' tale is the matter of daylight. According to Pliny the Elder, writing in the first century CE in *Thule* 'there is no night at the summer solstice, when the sun is passing through the sign of Cancer, while on the other hand at the winter solstice there is no day. Some writers are of the opinion that this state of things lasts for six whole months together.' Discounting the latter possibility, since it could be true only at the North Pole, the suggestion here is that *Thule* lies somewhere in the vicinity of the Arctic Circle, which would certainly shorten the list of possibilities. Unless, of course, the description is not entirely literal. In many parts of the north, including Shetland, the skies remain pale throughout midsummer nights, while in winter the sun seems barely to lift the darkness at all. A southern visitor could quite easily describe these periods in the language used by Pliny.

Over the centuries, the most popular candidates for the title of *Thule* have been Shetland, Norway and Iceland, and for a long time it was the last possibility that was favored. On maps, the two names were for a long time interchangeable. The Venerable Bede, in the early eighth century, was certain of the correlation, as was Christopher Columbus in the 15th. Gerard Mercator (#407), on his world map of 1569, evidently considered Iceland and *Thule* to be one and the same; and Barry Cunliffe, formerly professor of European archaeology at Oxford, has proposed the very same theory.

For poets and explorers, cartographers and historians, Iceland has seemed to fulfill the most important requirements of a *Thule*: namely, that it is far away and strange. But in accepting this they have chosen to ignore two factors. First, that reaching Iceland from Britain in six days, more than 2,000 years ago, would have been extraordinarily difficult. And second, that according to Strabo and others, *Thule* was populated by farmers who brewed a drink from honey; but at the time Pytheas travelled, Iceland was uninhabited. It had no people and no bees.

The problem, for those who have sought to pin *Thule* down, is that nowhere is quite right. The few clues available add up only to contradictions, and to a vague, uncertain shape. To try and unravel these contradictions or to add detail to the image is to fail almost at once. Pytheas may have traveled to Shetland or to Faroe; he may have reached Norway, Iceland or the Baltic; he may even have constructed his story entirely out of rumors and fantasy. In the end it matters little. For the legacy of his voyage has not been the discovery of an island, it has been the creation of a space: a mysterious, unfathomable hole into which, for two millennia and more, dreams of the north have been poured. And while the desire to erase uncertainty has now wiped it from the map, *Thule* still exists in the cartography of the mind.

In classical and medieval literature, *Ultima Thule* [Latin "farthest Thule"] acquired a metaphorical meaning of any distant place located beyond the "borders of the known world". By the Late Middle Ages and the early modern period, the Greco-Roman *Thule* was often identified with the real Iceland or Greenland. Sometimes *Ultima Thule* was a Latin name for Greenland, when *Thule* was used for Iceland. By the 19th century, however, *Thule* was frequently identified with Norway, Denmark, the whole of Scandinavia, one of the larger Scottish islands, the Faroes, or several of those locations.

In 1775, during his second voyage, Captain Cook gave the name *Southern Thule* to an island in the high southern latitudes of the South Atlantic Ocean. The name is now used for the group of three southernmost islands in the South Sandwich Islands, one of which is called *Thule Island*. The island group became a British overseas territory of the United Kingdom, albeit also claimed by Argentina (in Spanish *Islas Tule del Sur*). The Southern Thule islands were occupied by Argentina in 1976. The occupation was not

militarily contested by the British until the 1982 Falklands War, when British sovereignty was restored by a contingent of Royal Marines. Currently the three islands are uninhabited. The Scottish Gaelic for Iceland is *Innis Tile*, which literally means the "Isle of Thule". *Tile* was the toponym commonly used to denote *Thule* on medieval maps.



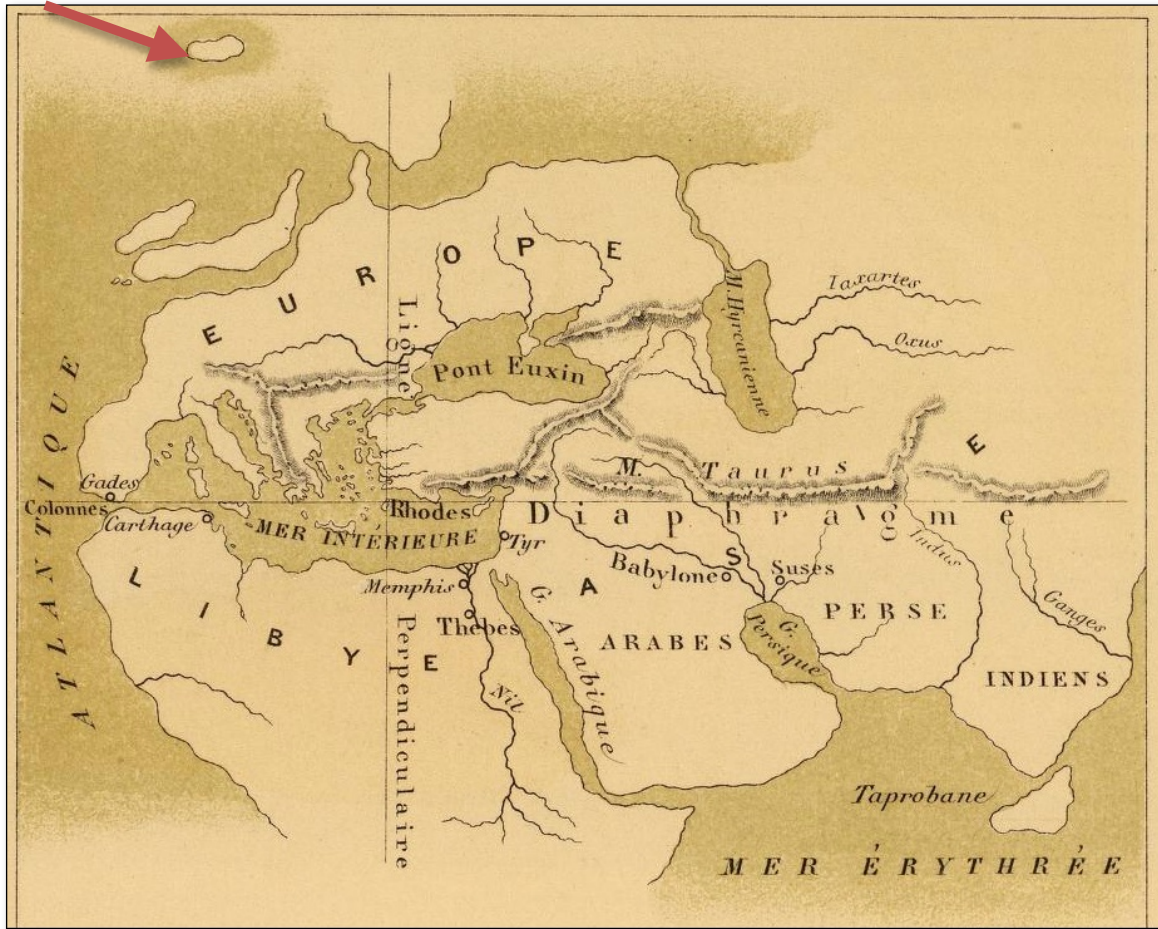
A map of Thule Island, also called Morrell Island, is one of the southernmost of the South Sandwich Islands. *Thule insula, quam vewteplkol Islandiam ... appellari volunt.*

Cartographically.

The following maps display *Thule* and are further described on this website.

Dicæarchus of Messana, 300 BCE, #111. Describing *Thule* as a place where land, sea, and air lose their distinctive properties—"congealing together in substances resembling a sea-lung (probably comb jellies), upon which one can neither walk nor sail"—Pytheas observed (or theorized) that this island was the northernmost point of the British chain, where "the circle of the summer tropic is the same as the arctic circle." He knew from the geometry of the sphere that there must be some point on the globe where the sun would shine for a full day at the summer solstice. He also noted that the amplitude of ocean tides depends on lunar phases, and that the celestial North Pole is marked not by a single star, Polaris, but rather by a rectangle of Polaris together with three faint stars.

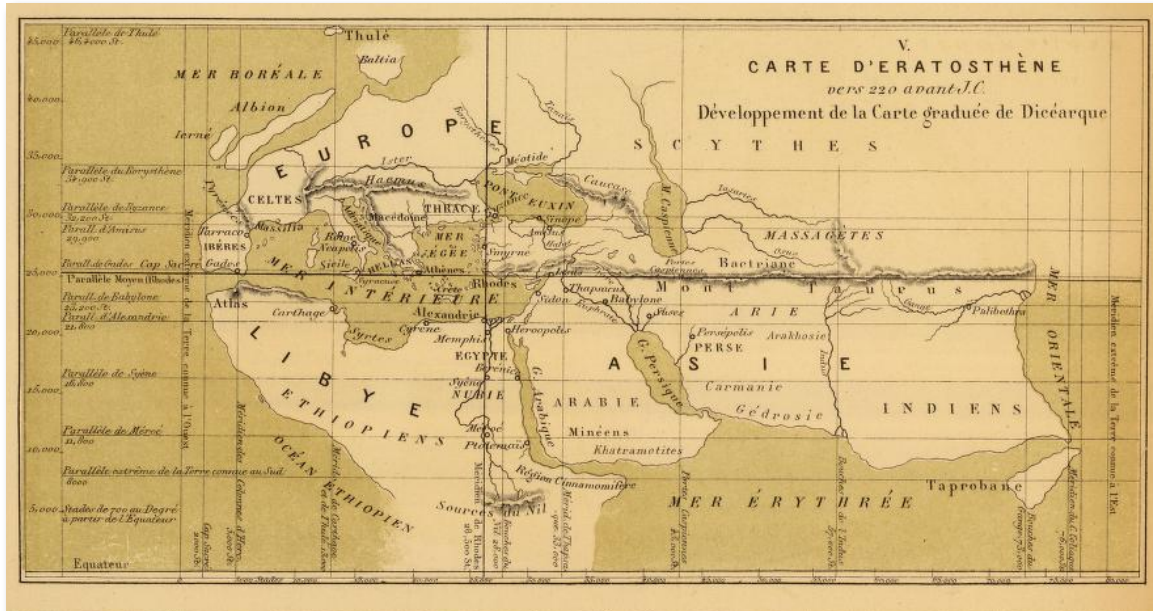
Thule



Modern reconstructed world according to Dicæarchus (#111)

Eratosthenes of Cyrene, 194 BCE, #112. The inhabited world (something the Romans would later call 'the civilized world') was believed to occupy about one-third of the northern hemisphere and was wholly contained within it. The northernmost point, represented by the island of *Thule*, was the last outpost before the world became unbearably cold; the most southerly tip, labeled enticingly as *Cinnamon Country* (Ethiopia/Somaliland) was the point beyond which the heat would burn your flesh. According to his calculation the length of the known world from the Atlantic to the Eastern Ocean amounted to 74,000 *stades*, while as breadth from the parallel of the *Cinnamon Country* [Ethiopia/Somaliland] to that of *Thule* mentioned that it was inhabited, 1,100 years before the Norsemen found Iceland uninhabited], did not exceed 38,000 *stades*. Eratosthenes' *oikoumene* resembled a cloak bound tight at the top (the north) and loose at the bottom (the south) with tapered ends in the east and west. Its northern boundary lay on the parallel of *Thule* (66° N), a legendary island, while its southern limit extended as far as the *Cinnamon Country* (12° N), close to the mouth of the Red Sea, and a mysterious island of *Taprobane*, off the coast of India. His main meridian

linked *Thule*, the Black Sea, Egypt, Ethiopia and the sources of the Nile River. His principal parallel of Rhodes at 36° N connected its western and eastern confines from the *Pillars of Hercules* to the eastern capes of India through the whole length of the Mediterranean Sea and via the lofty mountain ranges of Asia.



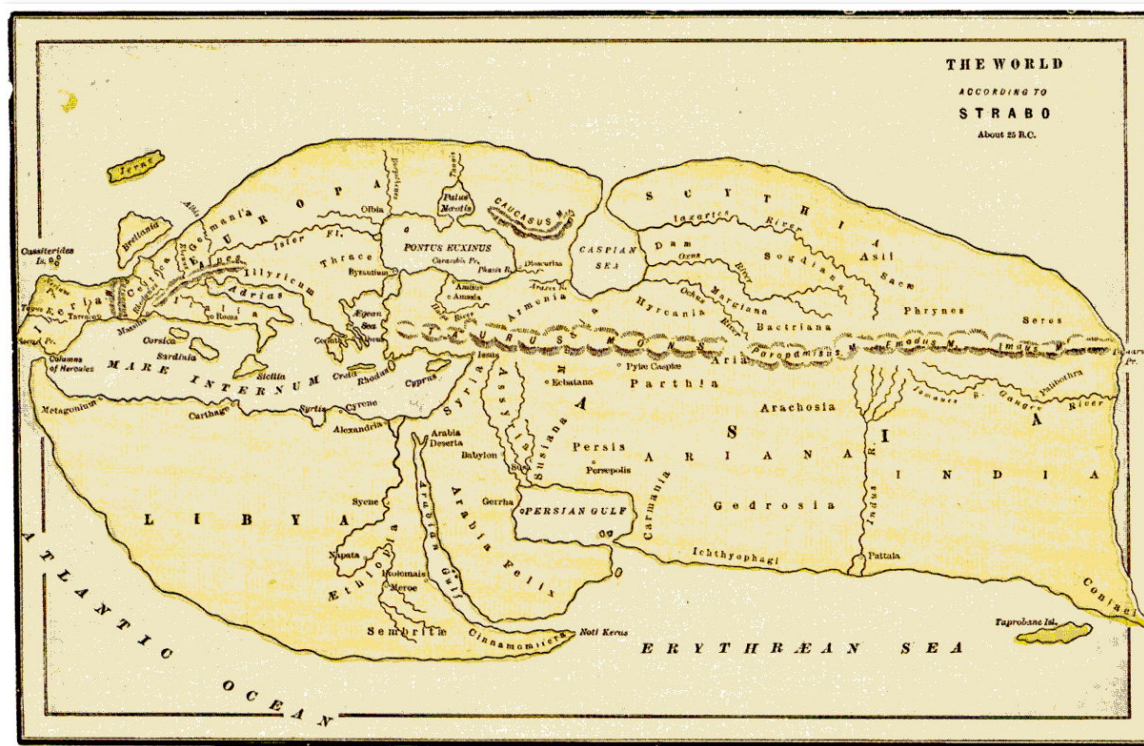
Reconstructed world according to Eratosthenes (#112)

Strabo, 18 CE, #115. Despite the extension of the geographical horizons of the inhabited world since the time of Eratosthenes, as mentioned, Strabo's *oikoumene* [inhabited world] was smaller. Although Pythæes, Eratosthenes, and perhaps Posidonius had fixed its northern limit on the parallel through *Thule* [66° N], Strabo, like Polybius, refused to believe that human life was possible so far north, and he blamed Pytheas for having misled so many people by his claim that the "summer tropic" becomes the "arctic circle" at the island of *Thule*. Again following Polybius, Strabo thus chose as the northern limit of the map and of the inhabited world the parallel through *Ierne* [Ireland], "which island not only lies beyond Britain but is such a wretched place to live in on account of the cold that the regions on beyond are regarded as uninhabitable." This parallel (54° N) is the projection of the celestial arctic circle constructed for the latitude of Rhodes (36° N); it coincides with the one mentioned by Geminus as the northern limit of the temperate zone. The southern limit of habitable land, for Strabo as for Eratosthenes, is the parallel through the "Cinnamon-producing country" [Ethiopia/ Somaliland] at about 12° N. He estimated the latitudinal extent of the inhabited world as less than 30,000 *stades* (compared with Eratosthenes' 38,000 *stades*) and reduced its length to 70,000 *stades* instead of Eratosthenes' 78,000 *stades* [one mile = 9 to 10 *stades*; there has always been some controversy over the equivalent modern length of a *stade* as used by various authors].

Strabo denied the existence of the island known as *Thule*. To him the most northerly inhabited area was *Ierne* [Ireland], itself "only wretchedly inhabitable because of the cold, to such an extent that regions beyond it are regarded as uninhabitable". Likewise, if one were to go not more than 4,000 *stades* [500 Roman miles] north from the center of Britain, one would find an area near Ireland, which like the latter would be barely inhabitable.

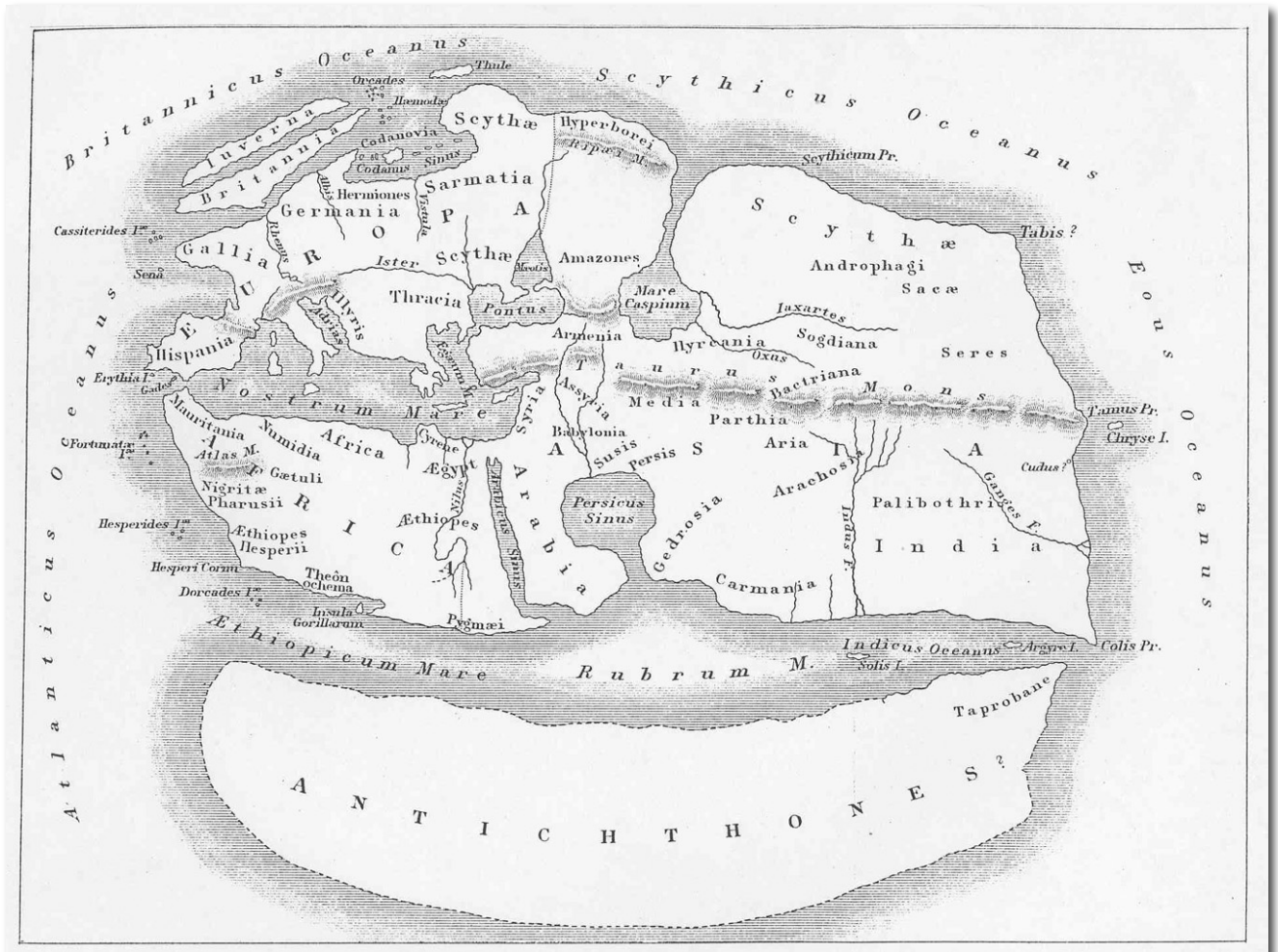
Strabo's idea of the shape of the inhabited world is defined as follows:

Let it be taken as hypothesis that the earth together with the sea is spherical . . . , though not as complete a sphere as if turned on a lathe . . . Let the sphere be thought of as having five zones. Let the equator be conceived as a circle on it, and let a second circle be conceived parallel to it, delimiting the frigid zone in the northern hemisphere, and through the poles a circle cutting these at right angles. Then, since the northern hemisphere contains two-fourths of the earth . . . , in each of these fourths a quadrilateral is delimited . . . In one of these two quadrilaterals . . . we say that an inhabited world is settled, surrounded by sea and like an island.



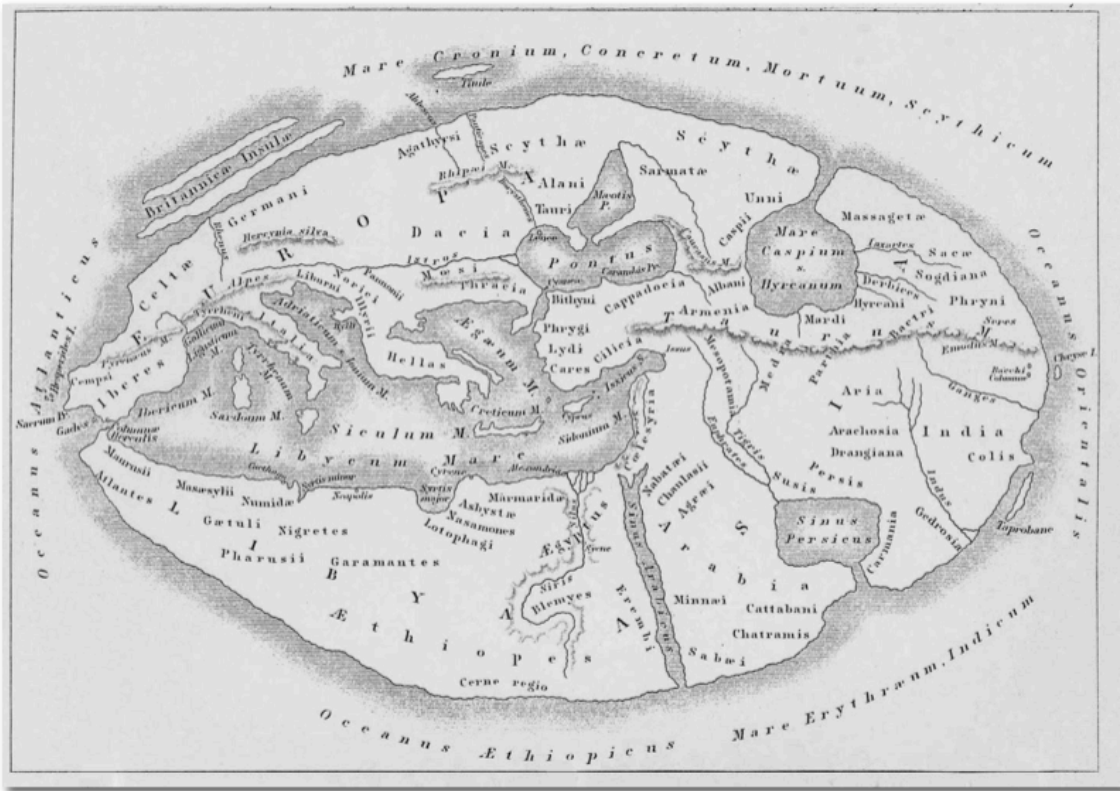
Modern reconstruction world map of Strabo (#115)

Pomponius Mela, 37 CE, #116. Mela was writing before the Roman invasion of Britain, and has only a very rudimentary idea of its geography. *Thule* in his work does not sound like the Orkney or Shetland islands. He says it is opposite the *Belcæ*, the name which he uses elsewhere as a synonym for *Scythia*. One may therefore wonder whether he is thinking of an island north of Russia, or whether it is really some part of Scandinavia. This latter, however, is treated not as part of the continent but as a very large island.



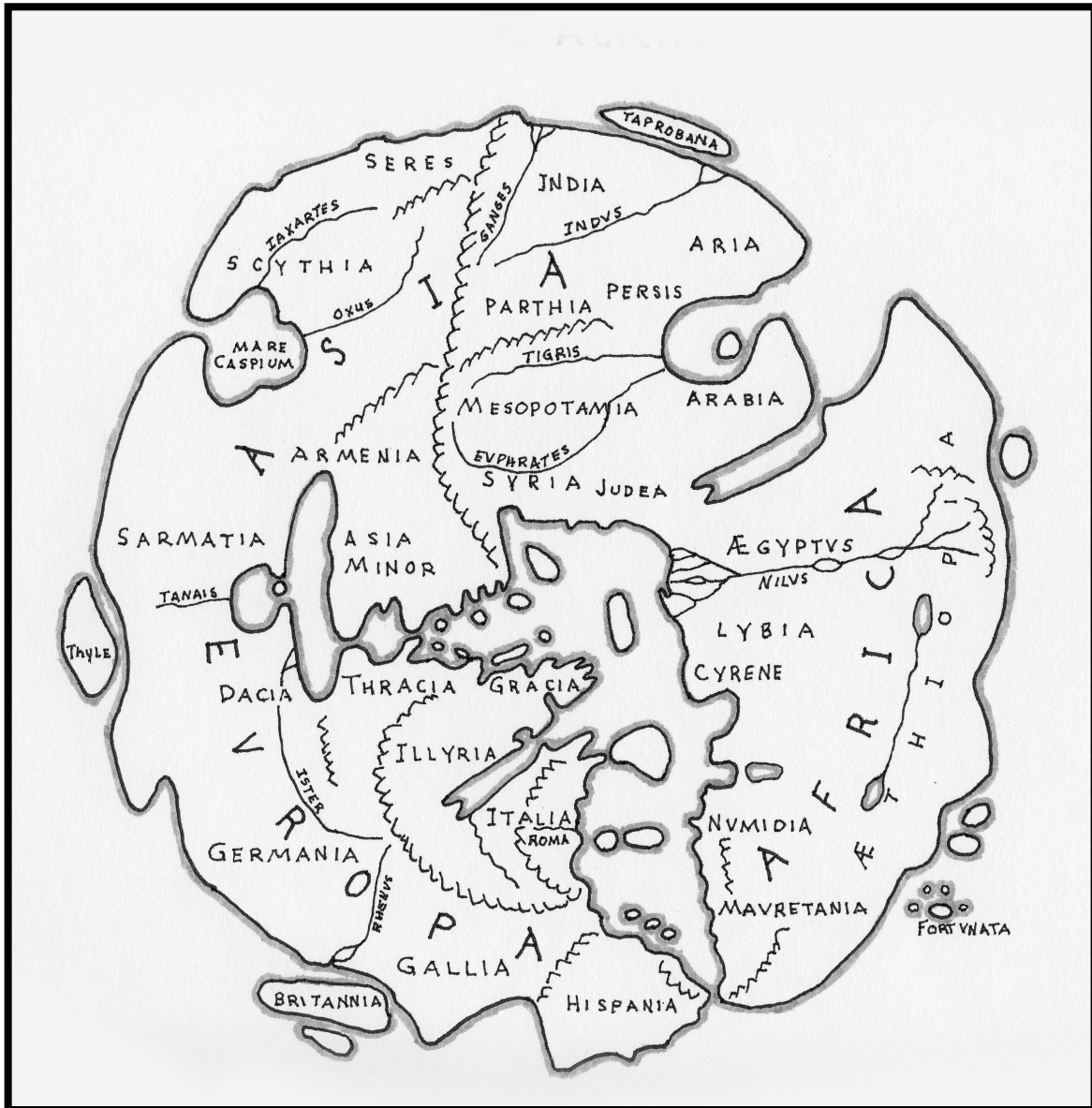
Reconstruction of Pomponius Mela's world view (#116)

Dionysius Periegetes, 124 CE, #117. Periegetes presented the *oikoumene* [known inhabited world] as an island, sling-shaped, entirely north of the equator, extending from *Thule* to *Libya* [Africa]. He did not mention either *Agisymba* or the promontory of *Prasum*. He limited the inhabited world eastward by the river Ganges, taking into account the *Seres* [Chinese and Tibetans], but locating them much less far east than Marinus.



Reconstruction of Dionysius Periegetes' world view (#117)

Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, 20 CE, #118. In the last chapter of the geographical books of Pliny's *Natural History*, that is, Book VI, cap. 39, sections 211-219, where Pliny mentions evidently as a work of supererogation, "the subtle Greek invention" of parallels of latitude, showing the areas of equal shadows and the relationship of day and night Pliny then gives seven parallels, running at intervals between Alexandria and the mouth of the Dnieper, with longest days running from fourteen to fifteen hours. For the sixth of these parallels he gives a slight correction due to the Publius Nigidius Figulus (ca. 98-45 BCE, a scholar of the Late Roman Republic). Pliny then adds "from later students" five more parallels, three of them, those of the Don, of Britain, and of *Thule* (*Thyle*) running north of the original seven, and two, those of Meroe and Syene, running south of them.



Modern reconstruction of Agrippa's map (#118)

Note that most scholars, however, believe that due to its placement on the column in a portico or stoa open to the public, the Porticus Vipsani, it was probably rectangular, not circular.

Claudius Ptolemy, 200 CE, #119. Ptolemy proposed to employ what is now called a "conical projection", i.e., to project the map, with equidistant parallels, on a conical surface developed around the axis of the earth, and passing through the parallels of Rhodes and Thule. Ptolemy laid down his parallels from the equator to Thule. The twenty-one parallels are spaced at equal lineal intervals and each one is designated by (1) the number of equinoctial hours and fractional hours of daylight on the longest day of the year and (2) the number of degrees and minutes of arc north of the equator. The Scandinavian peninsula was shown as two islands, *Scandia* and *Thule*. With *Thule* as the northern limit of Ptolemy's habitable world, he thus extended the breadth of this world from less than 60° (Eratosthenes and Strabo) to nearly 80°. Overall Ptolemy's world-





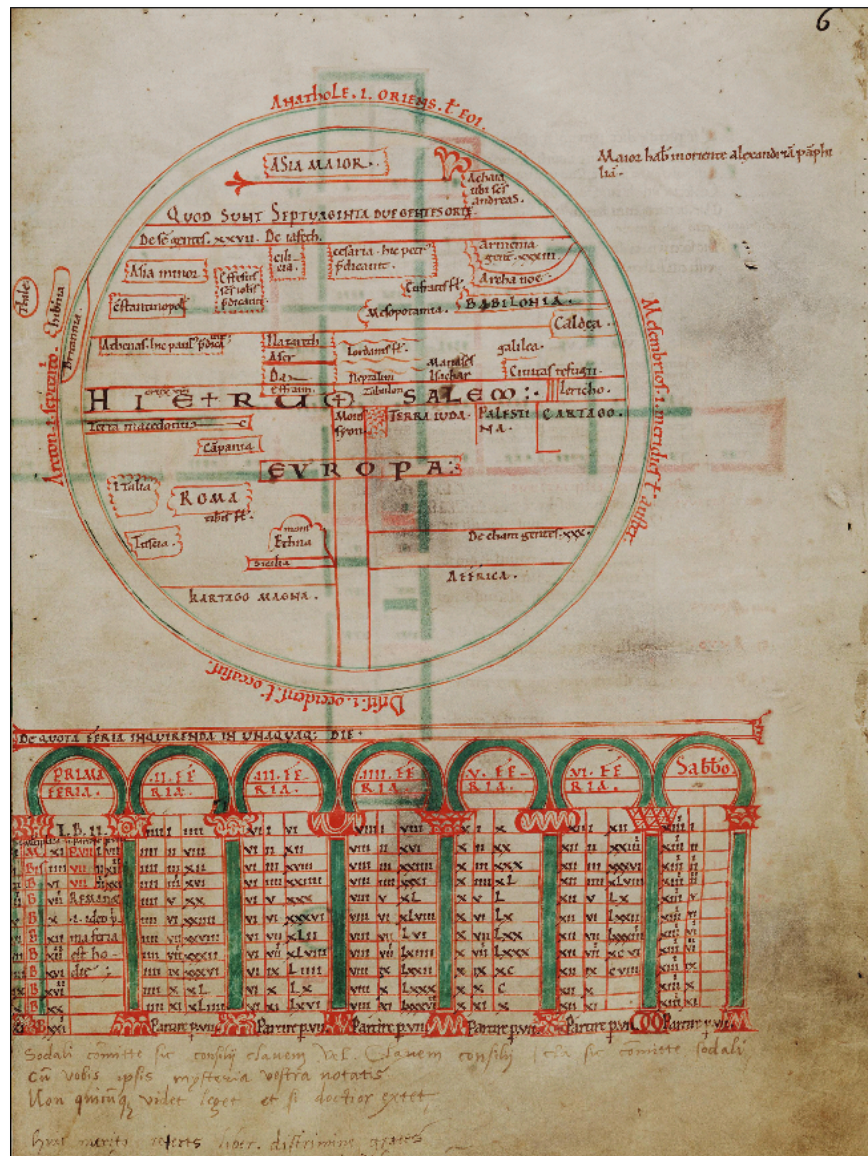
1482 Ptolemaic world map (#119)



This woodcut version is from the first printed edition of Macrobius' *Commentary* (#201). It was published in the late 15th century when realistic geographical configurations were beginning to appear in European maps, influenced by Ptolemy and Muslim mapmakers.

Asia, Europe, and North Africa are recognizable, and a few place-names have been added: India, *Tapro[bane]* (Ceylon), Babylon, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and *Mare Ruby* (the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean). In Europe, one is able to identify Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, France, Spain, Britain (only the home counties of England lie below the frigid zone), and *Thule*. The unique aspect of this Macrobius-type world map is that it is the first printed map on which ocean currents are denoted. There is a very small Africa (especially considering the date of this woodcut) and it contains the *Antipodes*. There are

the typical five climatic zonal divisions and very simplistic castellated figures to represent major cultural centers. While no rivers are shown, the Atlas Mountains are represented by stylized drawings.



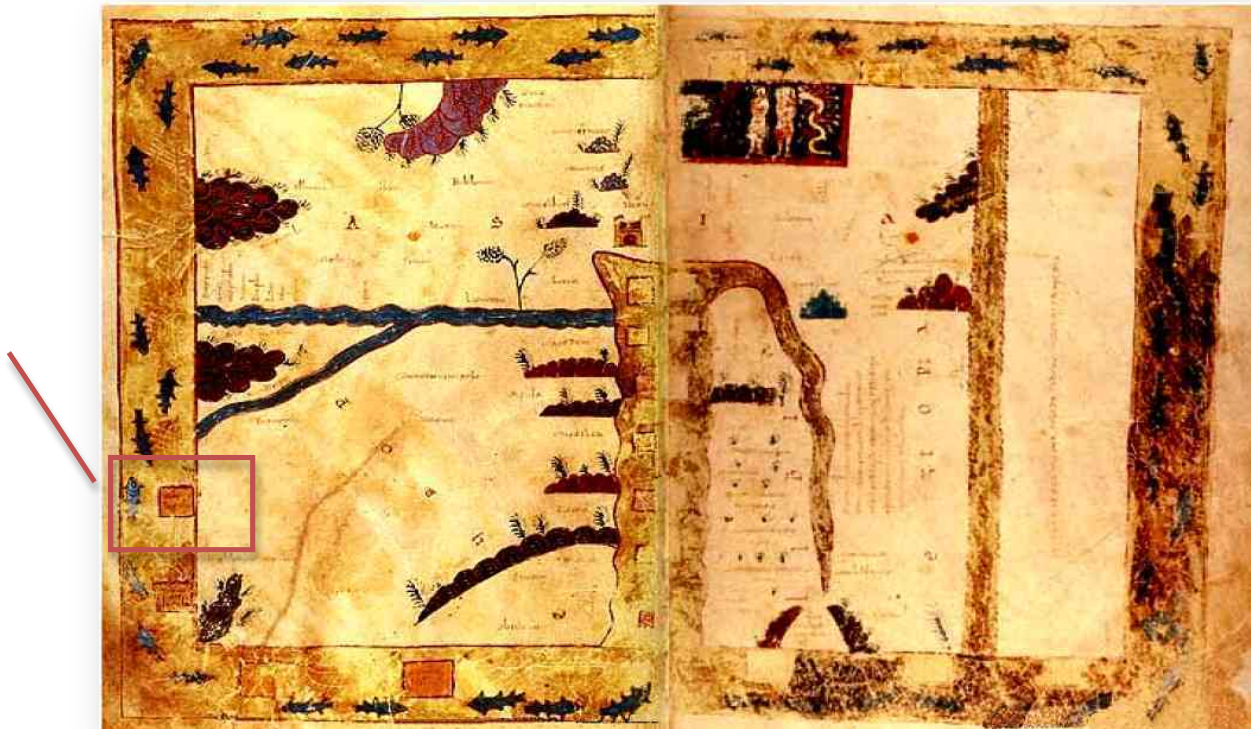
The St John's map, a Byzantine-Oxford (B-O) T-O map, 1110, 17 cm diameter (#205BB) In the Abbey of Thorney, England, 'Computus'. One of the most interesting features of this map is its highly abstract form: it is mostly comprised of straight lines with only a few concessions to irregular geographical forms. See, for example, mons Ethna and the islands of Thule, Hibernia and Britannia. Its heavily biblical content is also unusual: note Hierusalem on the central axis with the cross and Mt. Syon in the center. Place names are almost entirely omitted from Africa and Asia Major, and a note in the upper right adds "[Asia] Major has in the east Alexandria and Pamphilia". (Courtesy of St John's College, Oxford; MS 17, f.6.)

Isidore (#205): Thule is the furthest island in the Ocean in the Northern and Western waters beyond Britain, according to Isidore, . . . having its name from the sun, because there the sun makes its summer halt, and there is no day beyond it; whence the sea is there sluggish and frozen.

The map is dedicated almost entirely to places of significance in the Bible. The division of the earth among the sons of Noah, Noah's Ark, seven of the twelve tribal territories of the land of Israel, Jericho and the city of refuge (Joshua 20) for those guilty of involuntary manslaughter under Hebrew law, all come from Jewish history. Paradise is not shown. The life of Christ is illustrated by the river Jordan, Galilee, Nazareth and

Jerusalem. Athens, Ephesus, Achaia, and Caesarea are mentioned specifically as sites where the apostles preached. The only places without a biblical link of some kind are in Italy (Sicily, Mount Etna, Tuscany, Campania), Constantinople and Britain, Ireland and *Thule*. These islands, the only ones represented, break the frame of the map, perhaps as a burst of patriotism on the part of the scribes. They are in the north, but so far east as to be immediately above Constantinople. *Kartago Magna*, which could be Cartagena in Spain as *Cartago* appears elsewhere on the map, is another non-biblical site.



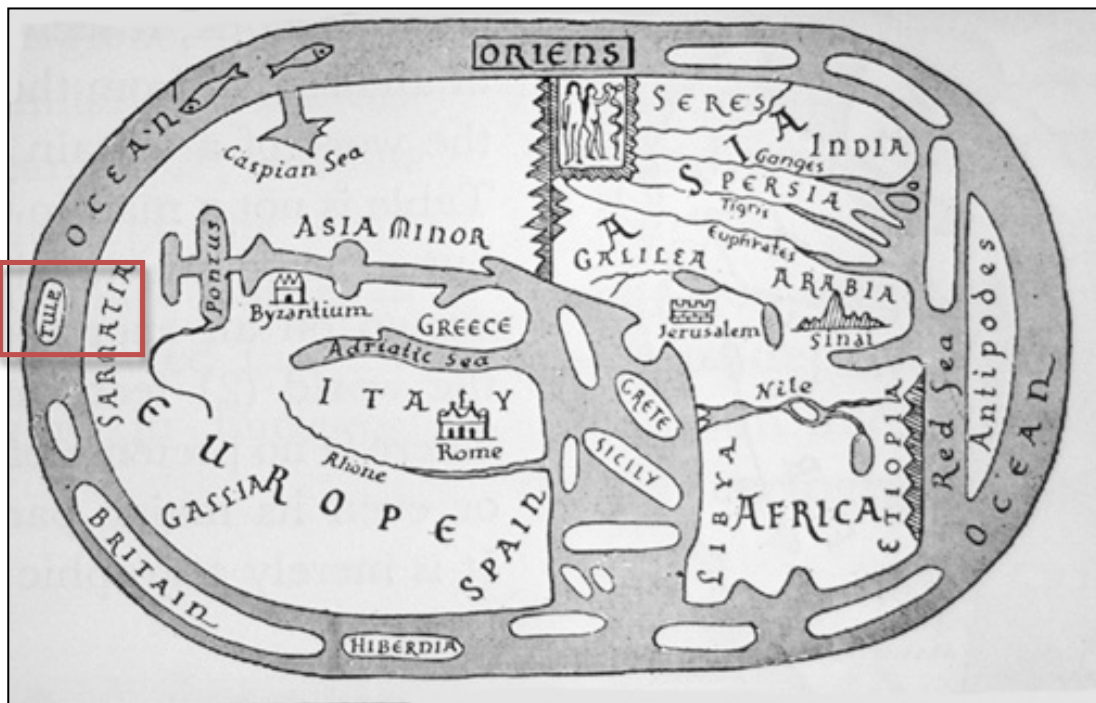


The Escalada, a.k.a. Ashburnham, Morgan 644, New York I, and/or Magius, Beatus mappamundi, 926 CE, (#207.2)

The islands have a rectangular form and are shown not only in the encircling ocean but also in the Mediterranean Sea. The oceanic islands are as follows, starting with the east, and going clockwise: *Chryse* and *Argyre*; an unidentified island in the far south west, *Scaria insula*; the Fortunate Isles; Ireland; Great Britain; *Thanatos*; and *Thule*. Those of the Mediterranean Sea, from west to east: Gades; Menorca; Mallorca; Corsica; Crete; Sicily; Samos; and Tarsus.



Saint-Sever a.k.a. Paris I, 1060, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France (#207.13)





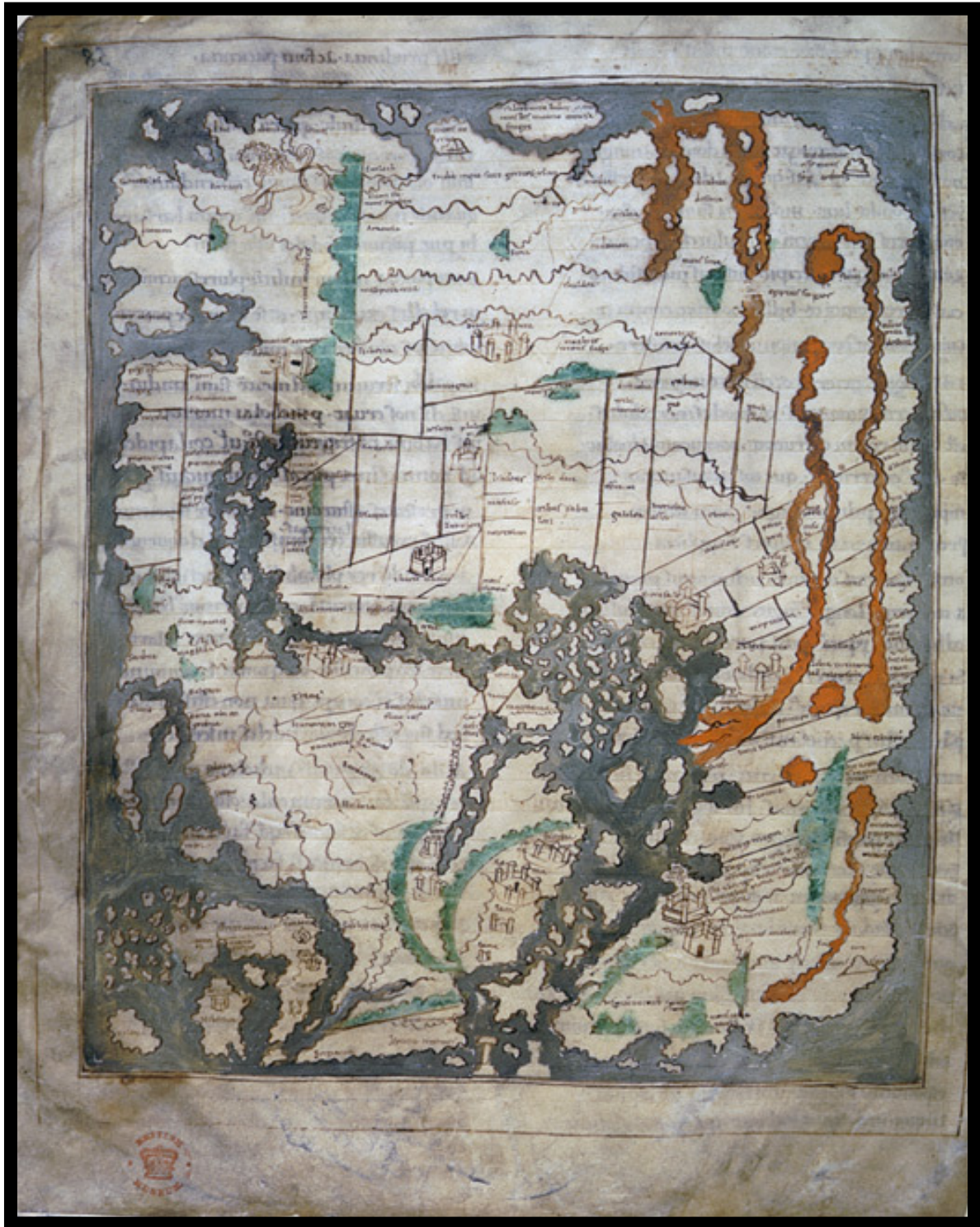
El Burgo de Osma, 1086, Archivo de la Catedral Cod. 1, ff.34v-35 [I] (#207.14)



*The San Andrés de Arroyo Beatus map, 1220-48, 39.8 x 37.6 cm
Bibliothèque Nationale Paris, na Lat. MS 2290, ff 13v-14r (#207.25)*



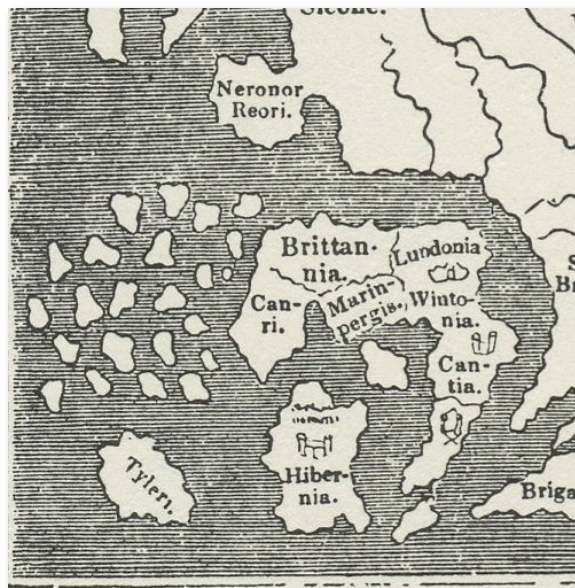
Tile Isula



The Cottoniana or Anglo-Saxon Map, ca. 995 CE, (#210)

The *Cottoniana* map gives a good preview of the confusion that was to come into the cartography of the North with the new discoveries by the Norse. It shows recently discovered Iceland correctly as an island, labeled *Tylon*, to the northwest of Britain and Ireland, and it illustrates the historical transfer of the name *Thule* from Scandinavia to Iceland (and

foreshadows a later transfer to Greenland). However, it identifies the Danish peninsula with Norway [Neronorroen] and mistreats Scandinavia badly. Admittedly it shows Scandinavia as a "very long and very narrow land," as Ottar had described it, and, incidentally, as an island. But the inscription "*Scridefinnas*" places the Lapps (then called *Finns*) at the lower end, closest to the Danish peninsula, where the Norwegians and Swedes should properly have been. Furthermore, the inscription "*Island*" at the far end of Scandinavia, while to modern English readers meaning a body of land surrounded by water, in Anglo-Saxon meant "*Iceland*."





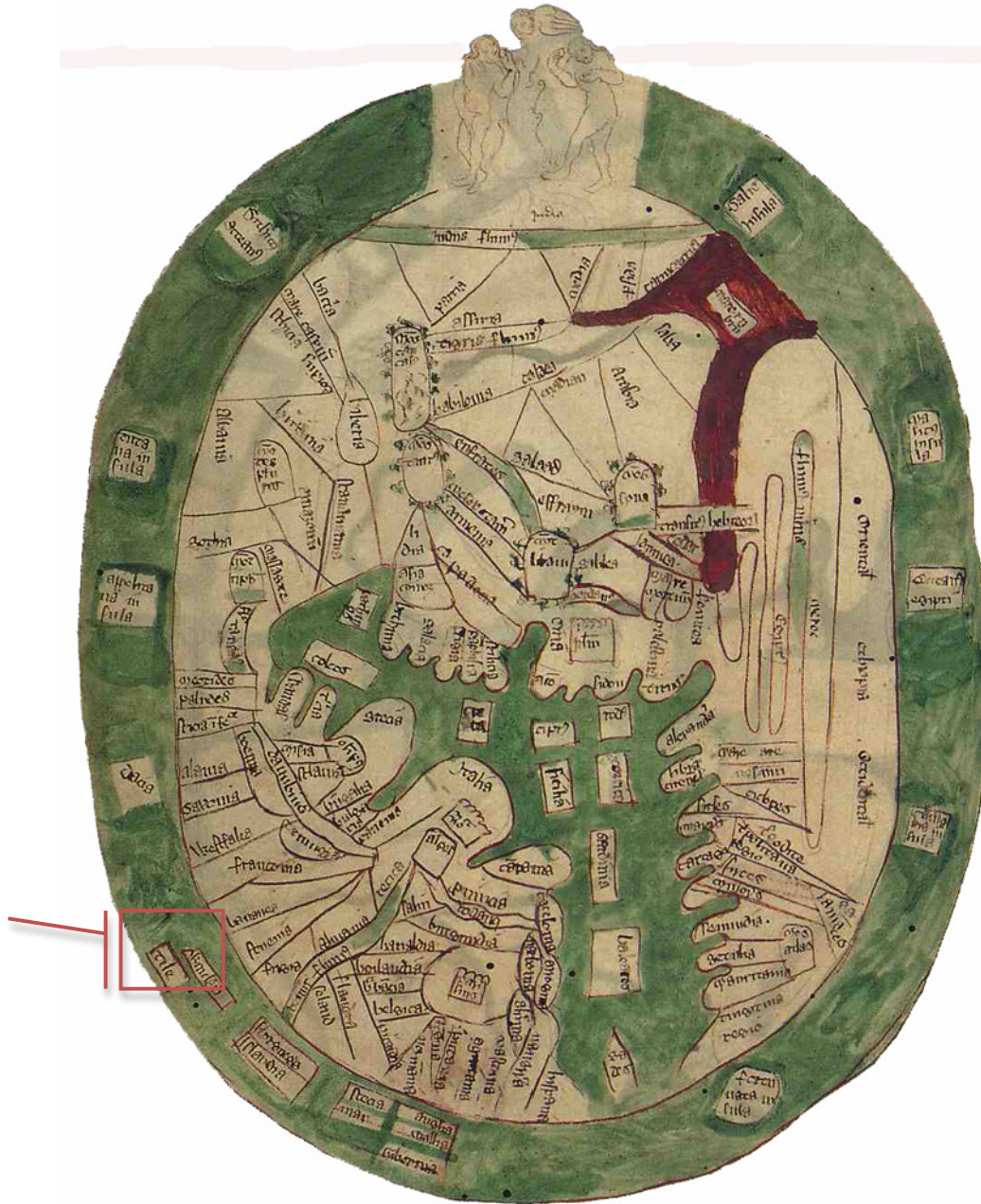
Zonal world map from Liber Floridus (#217)

(Herzog-August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Gud. Lat I, folios 69v-70r)

Lambert St Omer, 12th century 41.3 cm diameter; about 150 names noted. East is at the top with Paradise a small sunburst to the left of top center, with the rivers (Tigris, Euphrates, Nile, Ganges) flowing from it into Asia. The island just to the lower left of centre is the Antipodes. The two land masses shown are divided by the ocean crossed by the solar ecliptic. On the right a text describes the 'temperate southern continent, unknown to the sons of Adam'

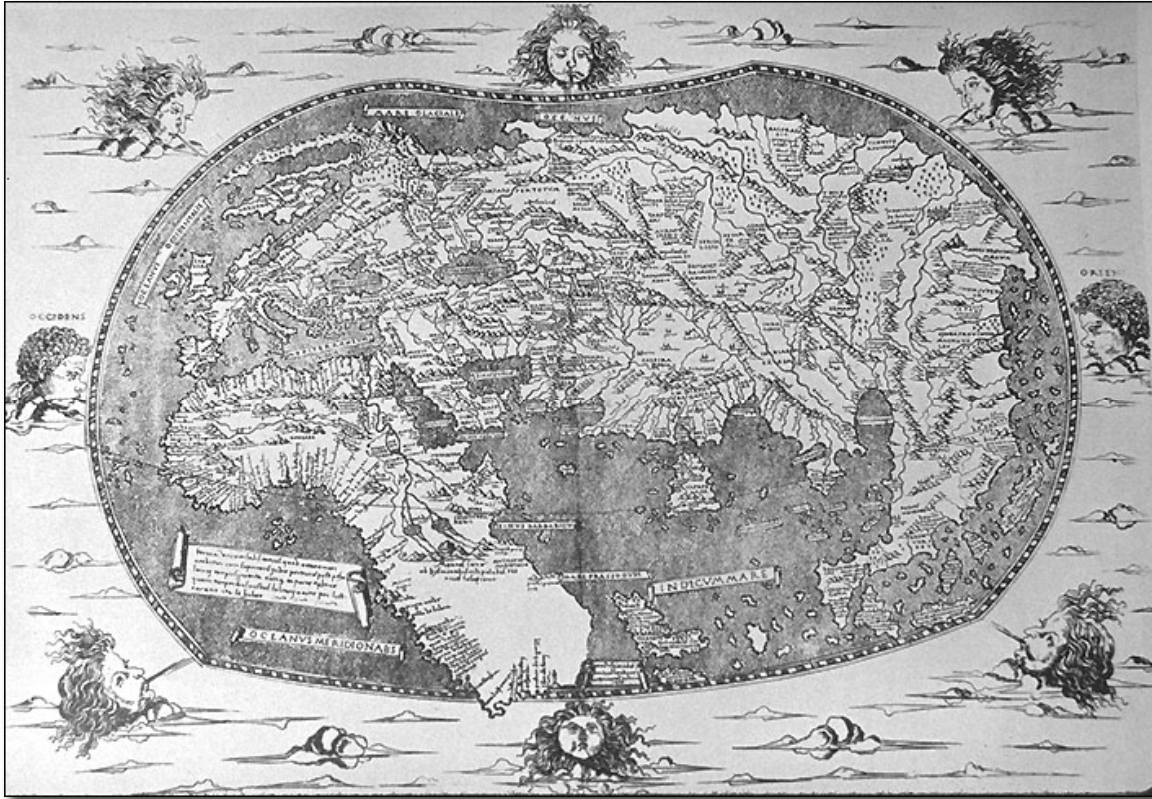
Within the outer Great Sea Ocean in the North on the far left and extending around the lower left are the islands of Thatania, Anglia, Hybernia, Hyberus, Thyle, and so on. Thyle or Thule and Hyberus or Hyperborea traditionally signal the most northern lands. However, Thyle is shown off the entrance to the Mediterranean. Like the Earthly Paradise, which also occupies this outer sea, the placement of these islands indicates that their location is separate from the coast of the three continents of Europe, Africa, or Asia.





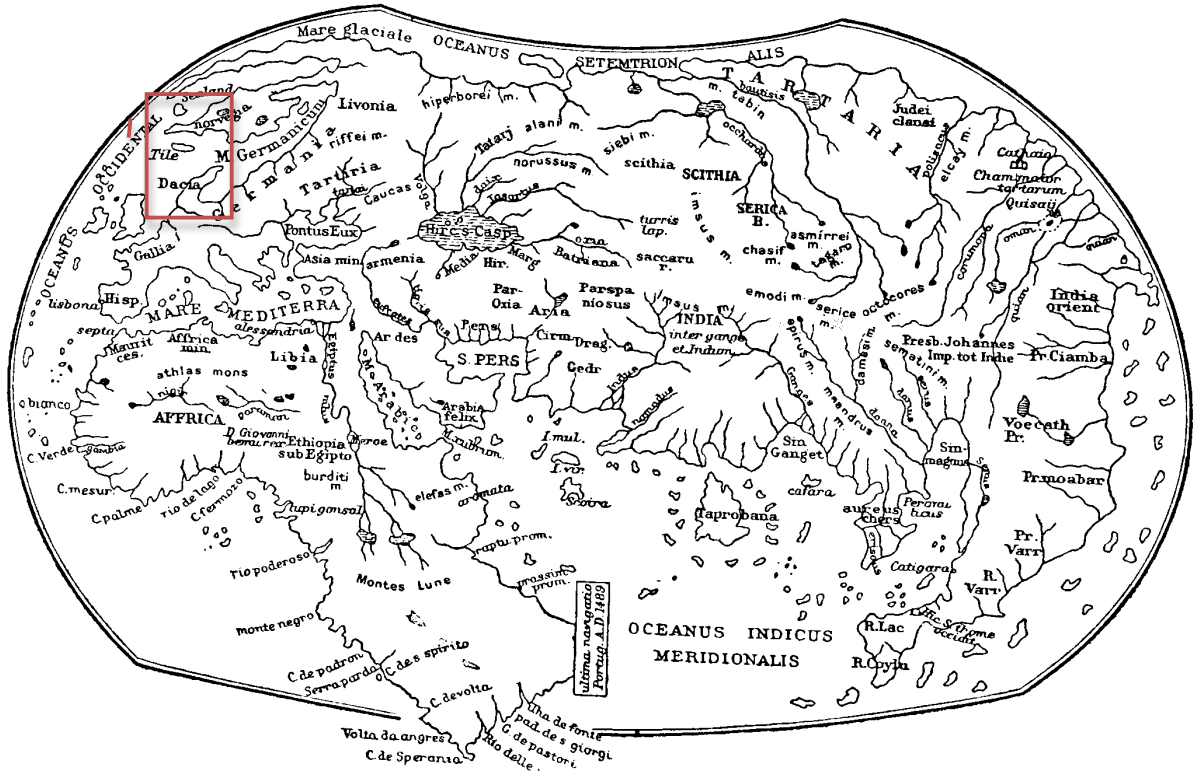
Ramsey Abbey world map by Ranulf Higden, ca. 1350, British Library, Royal MS 14.C.IX, fol.2v. The smaller of two world maps which appear in a manuscript of the *Polychronicon* produced at Ramsey Abbey, this map is closely related to other Higden maps (#232).

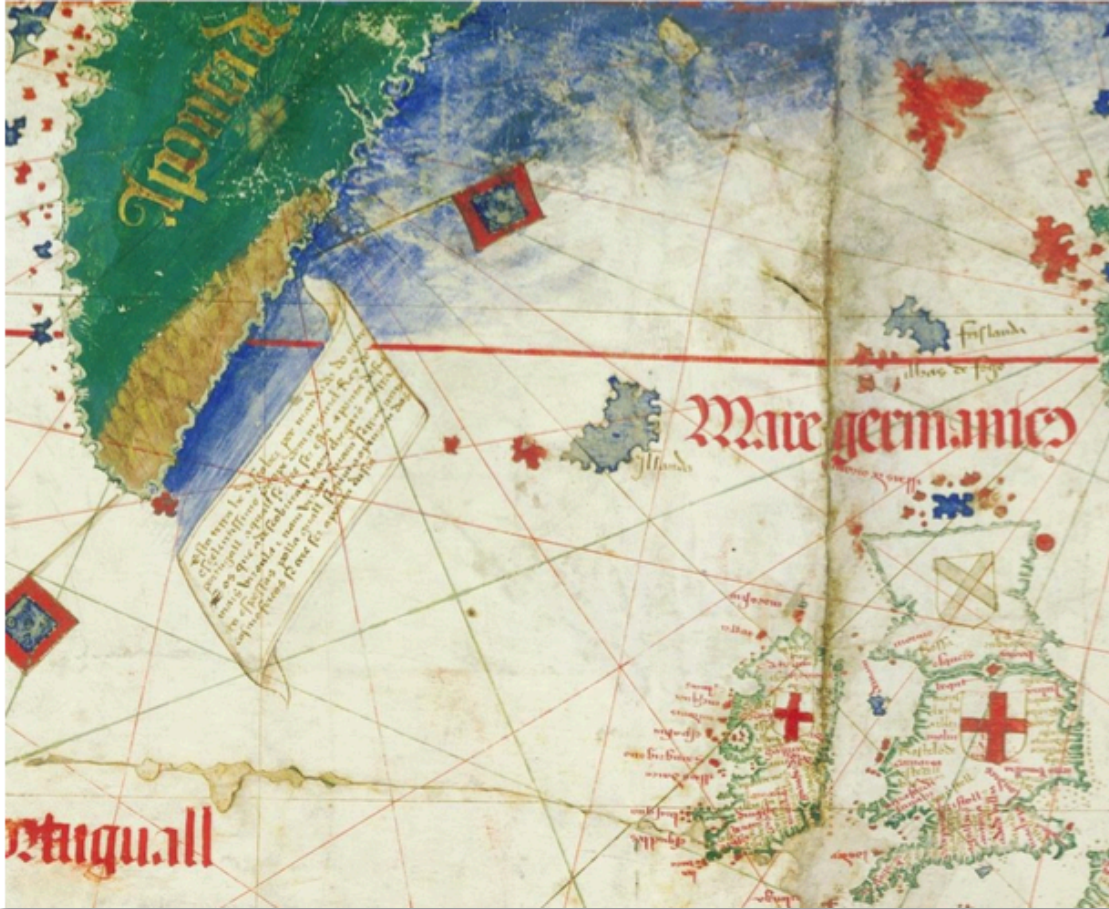
It appears to be unfinished, as the sketch of Paradise at the top is roughly done and now not entirely legible. It contains 150 names. Note the British Isles at the bottom (west) with *Tile* to the left. This manuscript has the ownership inscription of John Wardeboys, who was abbot of Ramsey at the time of its dissolution in 1539. At the top of the map is a sketch of Adam and Eve at The Fall. Below them to the right is the Red Sea (colored red), interrupted by a label marking where Moses led the Hebrews to safely from Herod. The small square islands near the middle of the page, set against a green sea, include Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes, and Sicily.



Martellus/Roselli world map, 1489 (#256)

Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Landau, Italy, Carte Rosselli, planisfero





Detail of the Cantino world map of 1502 (#306). It depicts a large *Illanda*, *Islanda* or *Ilsanda* to the northwest of Ireland, and a smaller *Frislanda* with *ilhas de fogo* meaning volcanic islands. The only reasonable candidate for the red islands is the Westmannaeyjar to the south of Iceland.

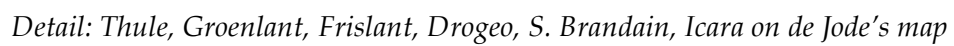
It should be noted that the name of this island appeared in many different forms: *Sialanda* (Angelino Dalorto 1325/1330); *Fixlandia*; *Ixilandia* (Fra Mauro, 1459 #249); *Frilland* (Nicolo de Caneiro, #307); *Frislanda*; *Frisland*; *Friseland*; *Frislant*; *Frischlant*, *Friesland*; *Frixlanda*; *Fixland*; *Island(a)*; *Thile*, *Tile*, *Thyle*, or *Thule*, and *Stillanda*.



Americæa Pars Borealis, Florida, Baccalaos, Canada, Corterealis
by Cornelis de Jode, 1593 (#432)

The waters of de Jode's northern Atlantic are largely derived from the purported adventures of the Italians Nicolo and Antonio Zeno in 1380. As Purchas relates it, the brother Nicolo, "being wealthy, and of a haughtie spirit, desiring to see the fashions of the world, built and furnished a Ship at his owne charges," passed through the Strait of Gibraltar and was promptly carried astray by a tempest. They were adrift until reaching de Jode's Frislant, where they were saved from barbarians by a Prince Zichmui who "spake to them in Latine, and placed them in his Navie, wherewith hee wonne divers Ilands".

Following "divers notable exploits" they reached Groenlant (Engronelant on the Zeno map), "where hee found a Monasterie of Friers of the Preachers Order, and a Church dedicated to Saint Thomas." This monastery was situated by an active volcano, which afforded a hot spring whose water was used for heating and cooking. The brother Antonio then reached Estotilant, assimilated by de Jode as part of easternmost Canada. Next he sailed south to Drogco (Zeno's Drogio), during which voyage cannibals were encountered. Among the other islands they reached was de Jode's Icario (west of Thule), where there were "Knights thereof called Icari, descended of the ancient pedigree of Dedalus, King of Scots." De Jode substitutes the archiac Thule for Zeno's Islanda. Frislant, which appeared on charts as early as 1500, was possibly based on early knowledge of Iceland, and certainly serves as Iceland on de Jode's map. Both Greenland and Iceland, then, appear in duplicate: Groclant and Groenlant are both Greenland, and Thule (the Shetland Islands of Ptolemy?) and Frislant are Iceland. From other northern traditions, de Jode has included the legendary Irish island of S. Brandain.



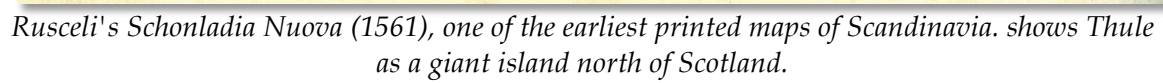


Scandia, sive regions septentrionales, 1598 by Giovanni Antonio Magni showing several mythical islands: Thule, S. Brendain, Frisland, Icaria, Neome, Brasil, Drogeo, Podalida and Groelandt

Cartography is a science that applies thorough research and prevents the denigration of ancient mapmakers by sensational theories about forgeries. Unqualified outsiders that have not seen most of the maps from those centuries should not make a final verdict. In general, the names *Island(a)*, *Thile* or *Thule*, and *Frisland(a)* were interchangeable in those centuries. They possibly all meant Iceland. There is no need to blame the 1558 Zeno map for introducing such confusion and many candidates for Iceland.



Two "Greenlands" [Groclant and Groenlandi] and Thule, Frisland, Drogeo, S. Brandam on Matthias Quadus' *Fasciculus Geographicus*, 1508







The Zeno Brothers' Map of 1558

The story of the Zeno brothers' 1380 voyage, accompanied by a map redrawn as well as possible from the aged and partially obliterated original, was finally published in Venice in 1558 by Francesco Marcolino. Marcolino's work was translated into English and appeared in 1660 in Richard Hakluyt's *Voyages, Navigations, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*. Marcolino's work, entitled *The Discovery of the Islands of Frislanda, Eslanda, Engroneland, Estotiland, and Icaria made by two brothers of the Zeno family, Messire Nicolo the Chevalier and Messire Antonio, With a Map of the Said Islands*. And the word "Discovery" must have been used with willful inexactness, for Greenland (Engroneland) had been in Norse occupancy for centuries, and Shetland (Eslanda, Estland, or Estiland) was as positively, though not as familiarly, known as Great Britain. This map exemplifies the display of new "replacement islands" for Thule: Frislanda, Grislanda, Engroueland (also Engrouiland), Grolanda, Estotilanda, Es(t)landa, Porlanda, Talas, Broas, Iscant, Trans, Mimant, Dambere, Bres, Sanestol, Bondendon, Dacul, Drogio and Icaria.

News of the discoveries and the first version of the Zeno map was published in 1558 by another Nicolo Zeno, a descendent of the navigator brothers. Nicolo the Younger published letters he had found in his family holdings, one from Nicolo to Antonio and another from Antonio to their other brother, Carlo, who served with distinction in the Venetian Navy. They were published under the title *Dello Scoprimento dell'isole Frislanda, Eslanda, Engrouelanda, Estotilanda, & Icaria, fatto sotto il Polo Artico, da due Fratelli Zeni* [On the Discovery of the Island of Frisland, Eslanda, Engroenland, Estotiland & Icaria, made by two Zen Brothers under the Arctic Pole] (Venice: Francesco Marcolini, 1558).

At the time of publication, the account attracted little to no suspicion; it was no more and no less fantastic than most other voyage and travel accounts of the time. Girolamo Ruscelli published a version of the Zeno map in 1561, only three years after it appeared in Zeno's original work. Ruscelli was not the only geographer to integrate the Zeno map into his work. Gerard Mercator used the map as a source for his 1569 world map and his later map of the North Pole. Ortelius used the Zeno islands in his map of the North Atlantic. Ramusio included them in his *Delle Navigations* (1583), as did Hakluyt in his *Divers Voyages* (1582) and *Principal Navigations* (1600), and Purchas (with some reservation) in his *Pilgrimes* (1625).

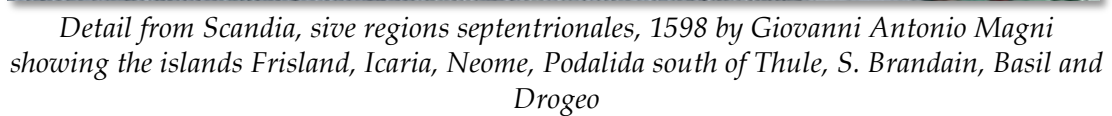
In the 19th century, when geography was popular as both a hobby and a scholarly discipline, the Zeno account and map came under scrutiny. Most famously, Frederick W. Lucas questioned the validity of the voyage in *The Annals of the Voyages of the Brothers Nicolo and Antonio Zeno in the North Atlantic* (1898). Lucas accused Nicolo the Younger of making the map up, using islands found on other maps and simply scattering them across the North Atlantic. He also accused Nicolo of trying to fabricate a Venetian claim to the New World that superseded the Genoan Columbus' voyage. Other research has revealed that, when he was supposed to be fighting for Zichmni, Nicolo was in the service of Venice in Greece in the 1390s. He is known to have drafted a will in 1400 and died – in Venice, not *Frisland* – in 1402.

Scholars still enjoy trying to assign the Zeno islands to real geographic features. For example, *Frisland* is thought to be part of Iceland, while *Esland* is supposed to be the Shetlands. Some still believe the Zenos to have sailed to these lands. Most, however, view the voyage and the map as a reminder of the folly and fancy (and fun) of early travel literature and cartography. Whatever the truth, the Zeno map, its islands and the search for *Thule* are one of the most enduring mysteries in the history of cartography.



Sebastian Munster's *Tabula Britanniae* (1571) shows the island of Thyle or Thule' to the northeast of the British Isles.

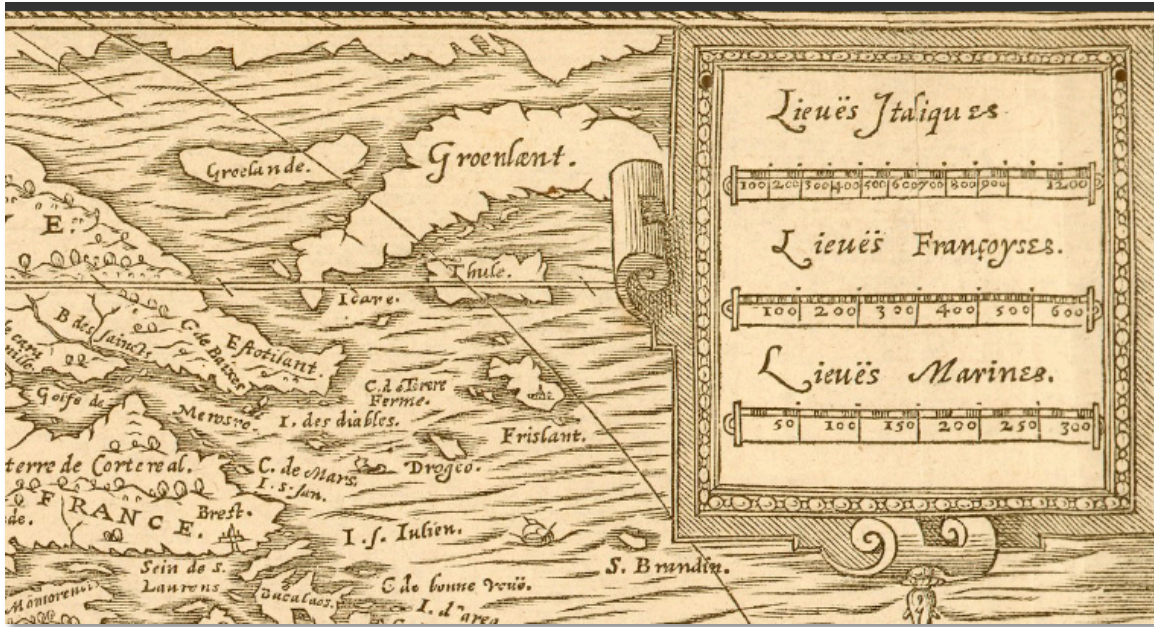






World map by Matthias Quad, 1600 showing a large Thule north of Britain





Frislant, Thule, Icare, Drogeo, S. Brandia and two Groenlants on the 1575 Western Hemisphere map by Andre Thevet

According to Rolf Bremmer there is one aspect in the account of the Zeno brothers' discoveries that strikes the reader as rather odd: the onomastics of the narrative. The abundance of geographical names in Nicolo's tale, most likely intended to inspire an awareness of tangible locality in the reader. This mythical land (island or landmass) began to fade away on the European maps of the medieval period and rarely appeared on European maps of the Renaissance period. This may have been caused by the more aggressive exploration that began in the late medieval period and new, still mythical islands/lands began to appear on European maps. Islands such as *Frislanda*, *Grislanda*, *Engroueland* (also *Engrouiland*), *Grolanda*, *Estotilanda*, *Es(t)landa*, *Porlanda*, *Talas*, *Broas*, *Iscant*, *Trans*, *Mimant*, *Dambere*, *Bres*, *Sanestol*, *Bondendon*, *Dacul*, *Drogio* and *Icaria*.

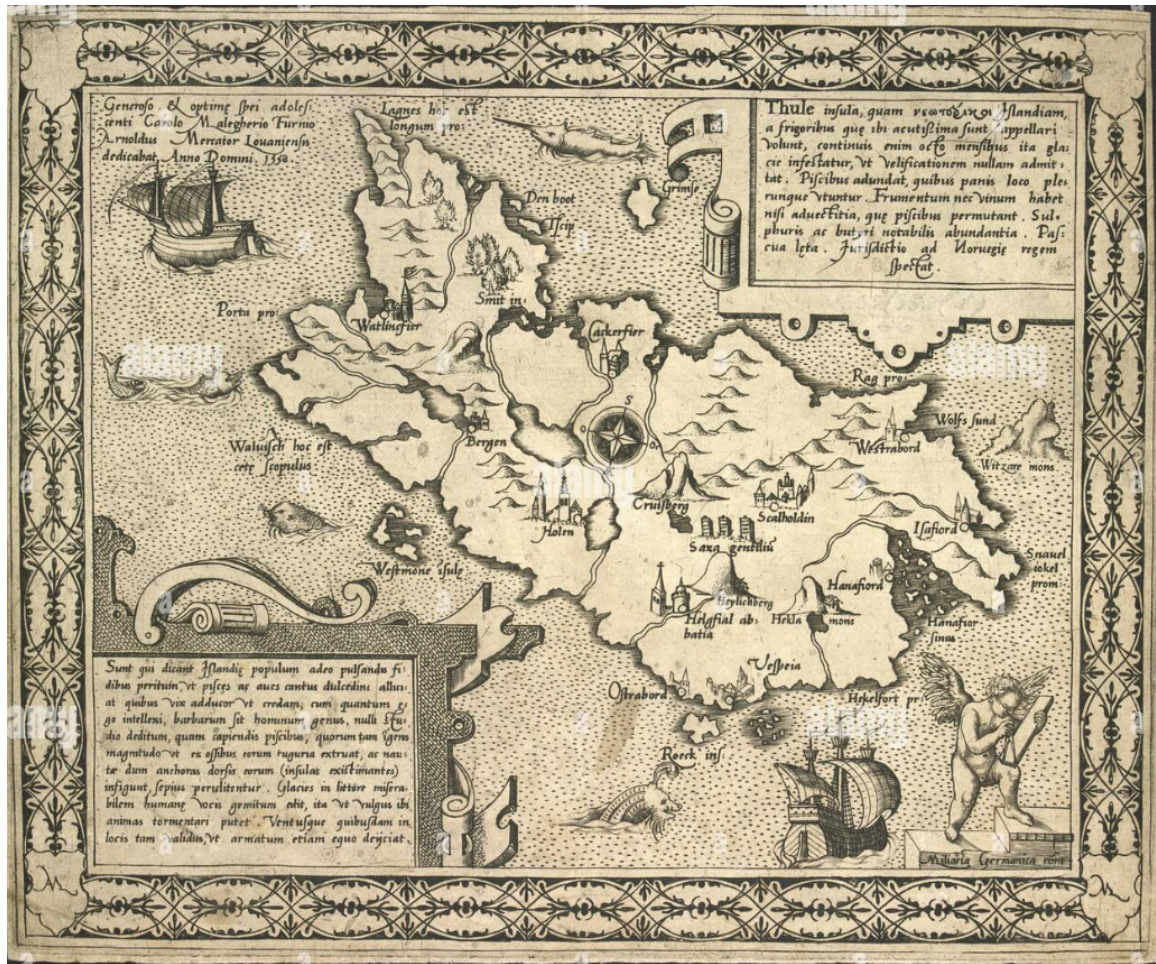
Summary: The *Land of Thule* was first recorded by the ancient Greeks around 300 BCE as a distant continent that encompassed the farthest corners of the northern hemisphere. It was a sort of 'land of ice' trapped in a perpetual state of day or night as the sun moved between the two tropics each year. The *Island of Thule* is found on ancient Roman maps where it is placed as far as north as Norway, Ireland, and Iceland. But *Ultima Thule* has been located in far more imaginary places, re-conceived over and over again in the minds of cartographers for hundreds of years.

Like *Atlantis*, *Ultima Thule's* concept wasn't meant to complete some unknown spot in ancient geography, but to fill the mind with its rich mythical connection to the 'Great Unknown' and somehow make real the more mysterious aspects of the universe our ancestors perceived. As such it has filled Mankind's thoughts of glory and gold like unknown monsters of the deep, buried pirate treasure on the *Seven Seas*, or the conquistador's search for *El Dorado* across the wilds of North America. *Thule* to many just simply represented the farthest frontier, the place beyond all beyond's where no man had ever been. For such was once the glorious mystery of the earth to us.

Ultima Thule reminds us that it's not the actual discoveries by great explorers or even science that matters. Then as today, what matters is the illusions of the mind and

For *Ultima Thule* in truth still exists, waiting to be explored. It cannot ever be known. Just as science now struggles to build more refined space telescopes to map the galaxies and powerful new spacecraft to travel it, we must accept that we will always need the wonderment of *Thule's* vast unexplored unknown. We will always need the last frontier of the mind, our imagination, long after scientific discovery washes away the mystery of it all.





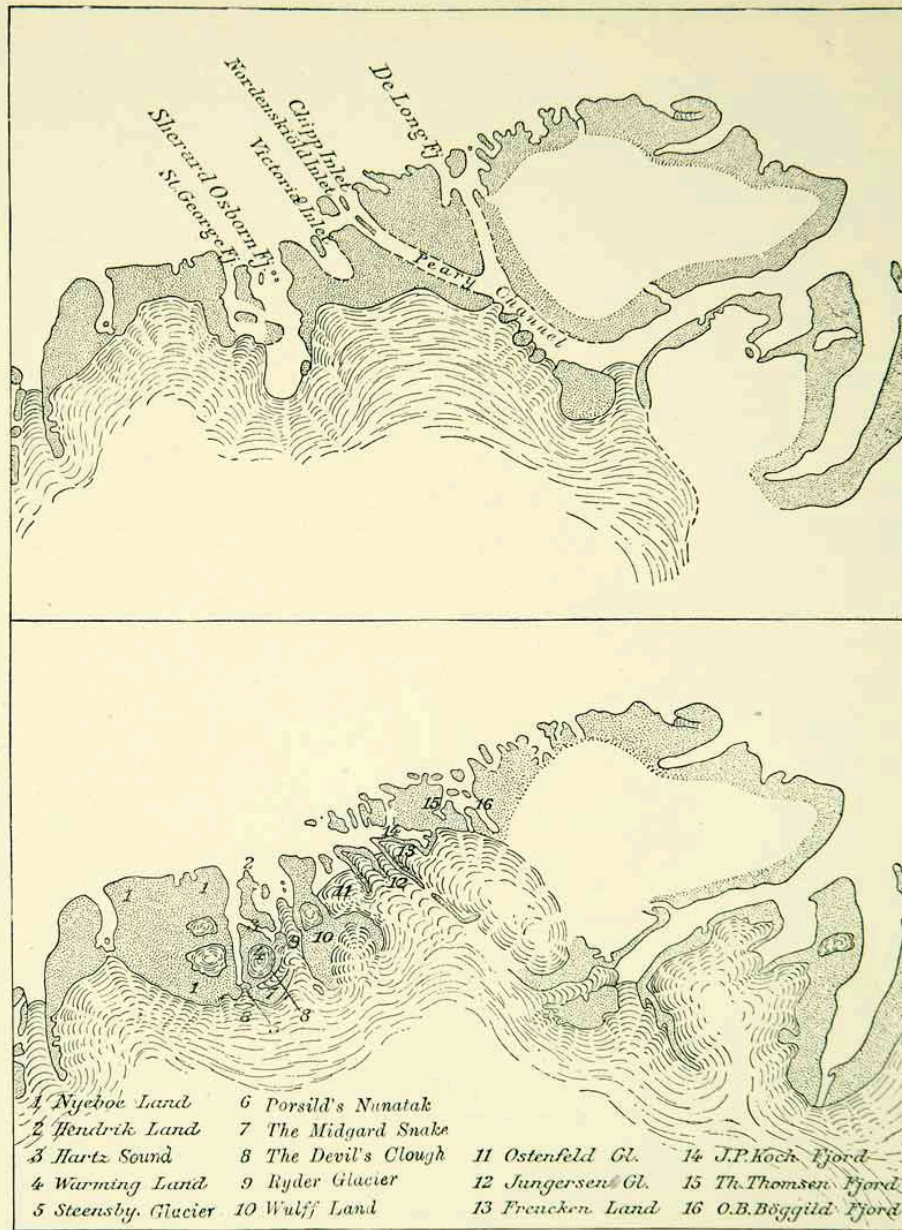
The Thule Expedition. Lauge Koch, renowned leader of 24 Danish government expeditions to Greenland spanning almost half a century, was born July 5, 1892 and died June 5, 1964 in Copenhagen. Dr. Koch's unique series of explorations began in 1913 in West Greenland. During 1916 and 1917 he accompanied Knud Rasmussen on the second *Thule Expedition* to northwest Greenland. From 1920 to 1923 Lauge Koch was leader of the remarkable Bicentenary Jubilee Expedition (to commemorate Hans Egede's arrival in Greenland) when he performed, together with three Eskimos [Inuits], the strenuous 200-day sledge journey along the north coast of Greenland, which resulted in the *Atlas of North Greenland* (24 maps at the scale 1: 300,000). On this journey Koch discovered a depression that, in his opinion, was the one that Robert Peary in 1892 had mistaken for a channel. Koch's observations of the interior of Independence Fjord led to considerable cartographic changes compared with the Peter Freuchen map of 1912. Although an 1865 map by Lauge Koch adheres to *Petermann's Theory*, the theory was gradually abandoned as more information was obtained throughout the 19th century, particularly with the drift of Fridtjof Nansen's *Fram* vessel across the north ocean in 1894-1895. The *Fram* drifted from the Pacific Ocean off Siberia at the New Siberian Islands to Spitsbergen in the North Sea. The final blow to *Petermann's Theory* occurred when Oliver Peary traveled around the north of Greenland.



Peter Freuchen map of the route of the first Thule Expedition. 1912



Map drawn by Freuchen during the 'First Thule Expedition' (Photo: Arktisk Institut)



THE UPPER MAP SHOWS THE NORTH COAST OF GREENLAND AND THE DISTRICT ROUND INDEPENDENCE FJORD WITH PEARY CHANNEL, AS KNOWN PREVIOUS TO THE FIRST AND SECOND THULE EXPEDITION

THE LOWER MAP SHOWS THE SAME DISTRICT MAPPED BY THE THULE EXPEDITION

Maps of North Greenland before (top) and after (bottom) the First and Second Thule Expeditions from Rasmussen (1923).

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