USQUE AD ULTIMUM TERRAE: MAPPING THE ENDS OF THE EARTH IN TWO MEDIEVAL FLOOR MOSAICS

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In the eleventh, twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, figurative floor mosaics were laid in a number of churches in northern Italy, part of a wider revival of the art in western Europe. The pavements feature a broad range of imagery, including subjects of a geographical, and even cartographical, nature. Two examples from Piedmont, in which such imagery is accompanied by unusually full and specific inscriptions, are of particular interest here: the well-known mosaic from S. Salvatore in Turin, which depicts the oceanic islands and winds familiar from medieval mappaemundi; and the presbytery pavement of Asti cathedral, which includes personifications of the Rivers of Paradise. It is revealing to consider both works in the light of the definition of maps proposed in the first volume of J. B. Harley and David Woodward’s History of Cartography, that is to say, “graphic representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts,


3 This article draws on Chapters 7 and 8 of my doctoral thesis: “Ornata decenter. Figurative Ecclesiastical Floor Mosaics in Northern Italy, 1030-1213” (diss., University of London, 2005). The research was carried out at the Courtauld Institute of Art and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board, to whom I am most grateful.
conditions, processes, or events in the human world.” From this perspective, not only can comparisons be drawn with both world maps and schematic diagrams in other media, but the mosaics themselves can also be seen to have possessed a mapping function appropriate to their location within the church.

The mosaic of S. Salvatore in Turin is the more explicitly cartographic of the two examples, and this aspect of its iconography has provoked scholarly interest since the time of its discovery in 1909. A central design of a Wheel of Fortune surrounded by animal roundels is encircled by a band representing the ocean, with personifications of the twelve winds at the corners of the square composition (Fig. 1). S. Salvatore was a palaeochristian foundation, which may have formed part of the early episcopal complex of Turin and was used by a college of canons from the Carolingian period onwards. Recent excavations have indicated that the church was rebuilt at some point during the eleventh century. At a later date, the presbytery was raised and enlarged in works that may well have entailed the abandonment of the crypt. The final arcades of the nave were closed off with low walls, and filled in to form a platform reached by a flight of seven steps and probably enclosed by plain marble slabs. It is this modified presbytery that was decorated with the mosaic pavement, generally dated to the end of the twelfth century. The mosaic covered all the area between the steps and the altar; but it was badly damaged in the 1490s when S. Salvatore was demolished to make way for the new cathedral, and it was further disturbed by burials over the following centuries. The surviving fragments, which were taken up shortly after discovery, have recently been restored to

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7 For the results of the 1996-97 excavations, see ibid., 140-44.
8 Ibid., 142, fig. 97, 143, fig. 98, 144-47.
9 Pianea, “I mosaici pavimentali,” 413-16, esp. 415 n. 79.