



**SEA MONSTERS, NAVIGATION AND POLITICS AT EDGE OF THE WORLD:
AN INTERPRETATION OF A OLAUS MAGNUS' "CARTA MARINA" (1539)**

**MONSTRUOS MARINOS, NAVEGACIÓN Y POLÍTICA EN LOS FINALES
DEL MUNDO: UNA INTERPRETACIÓN DE UNA "CARTA MARINA" DE
OLAUS MAGNUS (1539)**

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Abstract: On the 16th century sea map, commonly known as *Carta Marina*, by the Swedish archbishop in exile, Olaus Magnus, monsters roam the Atlantic. This article offers an interpretation of these monsters as carriers of symbolic meaning, and as messengers of specific, coded messages. This article argues that rather than being just figments of myth or superstition, or purely decorative, the monsters must be seen as visual political comments or practical indications of dangerous waters. This interpretation undeniably demystifies the fantastic map, though the possibility of a symbolic meaning does not have to take away from either their decorative quality; or the realm of religious mysticism. Olaus Magnus' strategic use of monsters shows that the monsters themselves did not hold a central position within his world view. Instead the humans, their role on the sea and their political behaviour had his interest. For Olaus Magnus, it was not about the mysterious creatures of the sea - let alone whether they existed or not - but about the viewer of the map's ability to decode the messages they held.

Keywords: Carta Marina (1539), Olaus Magnus, Sea monsters, Maps, Reformation, Northern Europe.

Resumen: En el mapa marino del siglo XVI, comúnmente conocido como Carta Marina, del arzobispo sueco en el exilio Olaus Magnus, los monstruos vagan por el Atlántico. Este artículo ofrece una interpretación de estos monstruos como portadores de significados simbólicos y mensajeros de mensajes específicos y codificados. Más que meros productos del mito o la superstición, o puramente decorativos, deben considerarse comentarios políticos visuales o indicaciones prácticas de aguas peligrosas. Esta interpretación desmitifica innegablemente el mapa fantástico, aunque la posibilidad de un significado simbólico no tiene por qué quitarles ni su cualidad decorativa; ni el ámbito del misticismo religioso. El uso estratégico de los monstruos por parte de Olaus Magnus demuestra que los monstruos en sí no eran el centro de su visión del mundo. Más bien eran los humanos, su papel en el mar y su comportamiento político. Para Olaus Magnus, no se trataba de las misteriosas criaturas del mar -y mucho menos de si existían o no-, sino de la capacidad del espectador del mapa para descifrar los mensajes que contenían.

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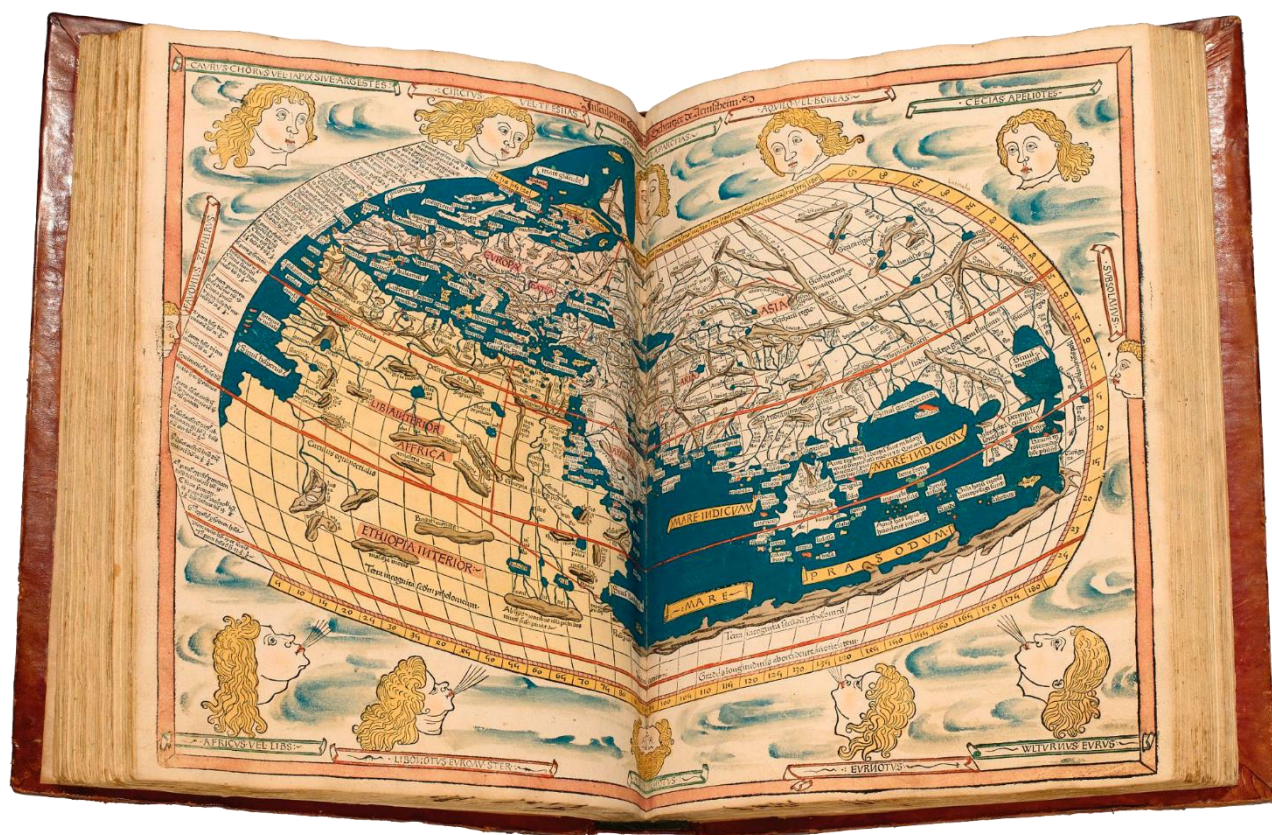
Palabras clave: Carta Marina (1539), Olaus Magnus, Monstruos marinos, Mapas, Reforma, Norte de Europa.

Introduction

Archbishop Olaus Magnus' (1490-1557) map of the Nordic countries from 1539 is probably the best-known early chart of Northern Europe and the Atlantic. It is popularly known as *Carta Marina* (A Maritime Map), but has the somewhat longer and not very colloquial title (translated here): "A maritime map and descriptions of the Nordic countries and their wonders, carefully prepared in Venice in the year 1539 and generously supported by the honourable lord and city patriarch Hieronimo Quirino".²

Carta Marina is not the first of its kind, but it is different enough from its predecessors to be noticed and remembered. Partly because of its rich figures, especially the many sea monsters, which have given rise to many interpretations in research (Rossby, 2015; Starkey, 2017) as well as in popular monster books and encyclopaedias (Brotton, 2014; Van Duzer, 2013; Nigg, 2013; Nigg, 2014; Sandmo, 2020). On the other hand, the map is also the first map of Northern Europe to be based on actual sea observations. Older nautical charts of Scandinavia are all based on the Greek Ptolemy's world atlas, *Geographia*, from around 150 A.D. Of course, Ptolemy had never seen Scandinavia, but he still set the standard for roughly 1400 years. The fact that Olaus Magnus' *Carta Marina* broke with this standard is probably the main reason why it is so well known today: Without explicit dependence on Ptolemy's worldview and the errors in his mathematical calculations, *Carta Marina* was indisputably the most accurate sea and land map of Northern Europe of its time (Rossby, 2015, p. 77; Sandmo, 2020, p. 239). This point is most obvious through visual comparison. Figure 1 show a 15th century edition of the Ptolemaeus *Geographia*. It is obvious from this map that Northern Europe was viewed as just a small area in the periphery of the world.

² *Carta marina et descriptio septentrionalium terrarum ac mirabilium rerum in eis contentarum diligentissime elaborata anno dni 1539 Veneciis liberalitate Rmi D. Ieronimi: Patriarche Venetiae* (Miekkavaara, 2008, pp. 3-4).



A map of the world from a 15th century translation of Ptolemy's *Geographica*. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries; B b.19 b.19, fol. [1a]v, and [1b]r

The view of Northern Europe as a periphery in the Ptolemean atlas is further found in the medieval *Orbis Terrarum*-maps, popularly known as Orb or circle maps, or just as TO-maps. These maps aimed at unifying physical observations of the world with the worldview presented in biblical texts. The consequence was a series of religious and idealized representations of the world (Mauntel, 2021, p. 81-82). These maps exist in both small drawings of poor quality, and as stunning pieces of art. In the spirit of comparing within the same artistic level, these kinds of maps are in this article illustrated with the magnificent *Hereford Mappa Mundi* (ca. 1300). In this map east is facing upwards, which places the north on the left of the map. This information does however not help the beholder much, so I have highlighted the deformed and unrecognizable north on the map.



The Hereford Mappa Mundi. The North is outlined with a blue circle. © *The Hereford Mappa Mundi Trust*.

Looking from the two presented maps to Olaus Magnus *Carta Marine* (Figure 3, below) should make it abundantly clear why his map was a cartographical revolution, giving unseen attention and detail to the perceived edge of the world: Northern Europe. Add to this that the map was so detailed that it lists more than 900 place and city names (Miekkavaara, 2008, p. 4). However, despite this impressive level of detail, the map also bears the mark of being based on rough sketches and stories collected from sailors, as well as Olaus Magnus' own observations from his many travels (which primarily took place in the Baltic Sea and along the coast of Norway) (Ehrensward 2006, p. 57; Henningsen, 1984, p. 59; Richter, 1967, p. 48, 64ff). Eye measurements and sailors' sketches are obviously not the most accurate approach to mapmaking, but perhaps because Olaus Magnus took the time to gather knowledge from many different sailors - it took him 12 years to produce the map, from 1527-1539 - he was able to produce a map that greatly improved the geographical knowledge of Northern Europe (Sandmo, 2020, p. 239).

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine exactly how much the map was actually used in its time, and there are both arguments in research that the map was widely used, with over a hundred copies in circulation, and arguments to the contrary: that the map was only used in a few copies (Balzamo, 2005, p. 56; Ehrensward, 2006, p. 66; Lynam, 1949, p. 35; Richter, 1967, p. 38). Today, only two copies of the map are preserved: one in Munich and one in Uppsala (Rossby, 2015, p. 77). This chapter is based on the latter.³ However, this poor preservation of the map cannot be used to argue in favour of its distribution and use. Firstly, because the large size of the map (1.7m x 1.25m) has made preservation difficult, and secondly, because the map's poor transmission to posterity can logically be explained by the fact that it was a practical object of use. The copies of *Carta Marina* simply lost their relevance in the 1570s, when newer and more accurate charts were created (Miekkavaara, 2008, p. 4). Despite these doubts regarding the circulation - and thus actual, practical use - of the map, the aim of this article is to offer a suggestion of how the map might have been read and used in its time. Hence the map is seen as a practical object, with practical messages. This approach differs from existing research, which tend to outline the conceptual or theological traditions of the map.

³ Both preserved copies are considered original, even though they are different (Miekkavaara, 2008, p. 8; 12-13).



The people choosing this way of analysis are completely right in doing this as the map is loaded with monsters and other elements, which plausible can be read allegorically. Thus, the aim of this article is not to take anything away from existing readings of the map, but rather to add to these by focusing on another aspect of the allegory: The immediate, practical reading, based on an in-depth analysis of the internal logic of the map. As this aim is rather ambitious, I will mostly concern myself with sea monsters (and a single mystical island) in this article, and I hope to demonstrate, that the sea monsters on *Carta Marina*, can be classified into three different groups, each with their own practical function:

- 1) Non-sea monsters that only seem monstrous to the modern reader.
- 2) Sea monsters that were used as political/religious commentary.
- 3) Sea monsters that are monstrous in the literal sense of the word, used to point out danger.

***Carta Marina*, the expanded north and symbolism**

Olaus Magnus' *Carta Marina* aimed at helping captains understand the many mysteries of the sea and Northern Europe. This is of course a noble goal, but for the modern viewer, the map is difficult to read. Olaus Magnus – similar to the TO-maps – allowed religious allegory and political symbolism to be an integral part of the structure of the map. This shows in both existing research and popular books which by and large view the map as a mystery, rather than as a practical object. These works analyse the map and its layers of meaning through a smokescreen of religious doctrine, riddles and superstition. In other words, if Olaus Magnus drew the biblical sea monster Leviathan, they assume that people in the past believed it existed and roamed the sea; similar to immigrating whales. Instead, I want to take the map seriously as an object intended to convey practical knowledge about Northern Europe and the sea. It should however be made clear to the reader that this article only scratches the surface of the map, focusing primarily on the monsters drawn upon it. These are in focus in the article,



simply because they claim the attention of the modern reader. Having addressed these, there should be much more to deduce from the map; both about land and sea. One such thing, just to illustrate my argument, is the island of Thule.

The island is a work of fiction, but all medieval scholars knew about it. First described by 4th century BC Greek Ptolemy, the island designated the northernmost island in the world. The same scholars also knew that it did not exist, at least not under the name “Thule”. Adam of Bremen, for example, suggested in the 11th century, 500 years before the creation of the *Carta Marina*, that Thule was Iceland (von See, 2006, p. 73). His reasoning was that Thule was a symbolic representation of the end of the world, more than an actual physical place: Beyond Thule one would only find ice, water and death. Therefore it is interesting that on *Carta Marina*, we find Thule, though not as a placeholder name for any existing island. Iceland, the Faroe Islands and the Shetland Islands all appear on the map, and only the Shetland Islands south of Thule. Going further, Olaus Magnus even had two castles and three towns drawn on Thule, accompanied by a proclamation in text that around 30.000 people, 2-3 times the population of Gotland, lived on the island. As we can assume that Olaus Magnus had read Adam of Bremen, and very well knew that Thule did not exist, this seems odd. Still, it was not without reason. But to his reasons we need to take a step back and examine the origin of the map. Archbishop Olaus Magnus was not only a spiritual figure, but also a man of power who was active in the politics of the Reformation (Richter, 1967, p. 29ff), and this actually led him to the creation of the map, as he wanted to show his peers in Rome how much the Catholic Church lost with the Reformation in Northern Europe (Jones, 2020, p. 211). It is in this light that we need to interpret the island of Thule. To convince his southern European colleagues of the size, wealth and potential of Scandinavia, he challenged their understanding of the scaling of Northern Europe. His peers would gaze upon the map, identifying Thule – symbolically the most northern place in the world – and contemplate upon the fact, that according to *this* map, the world reached further north than they had believed. This visual argument was even further emphasised at the northern edge of the map, where we find Greenland.



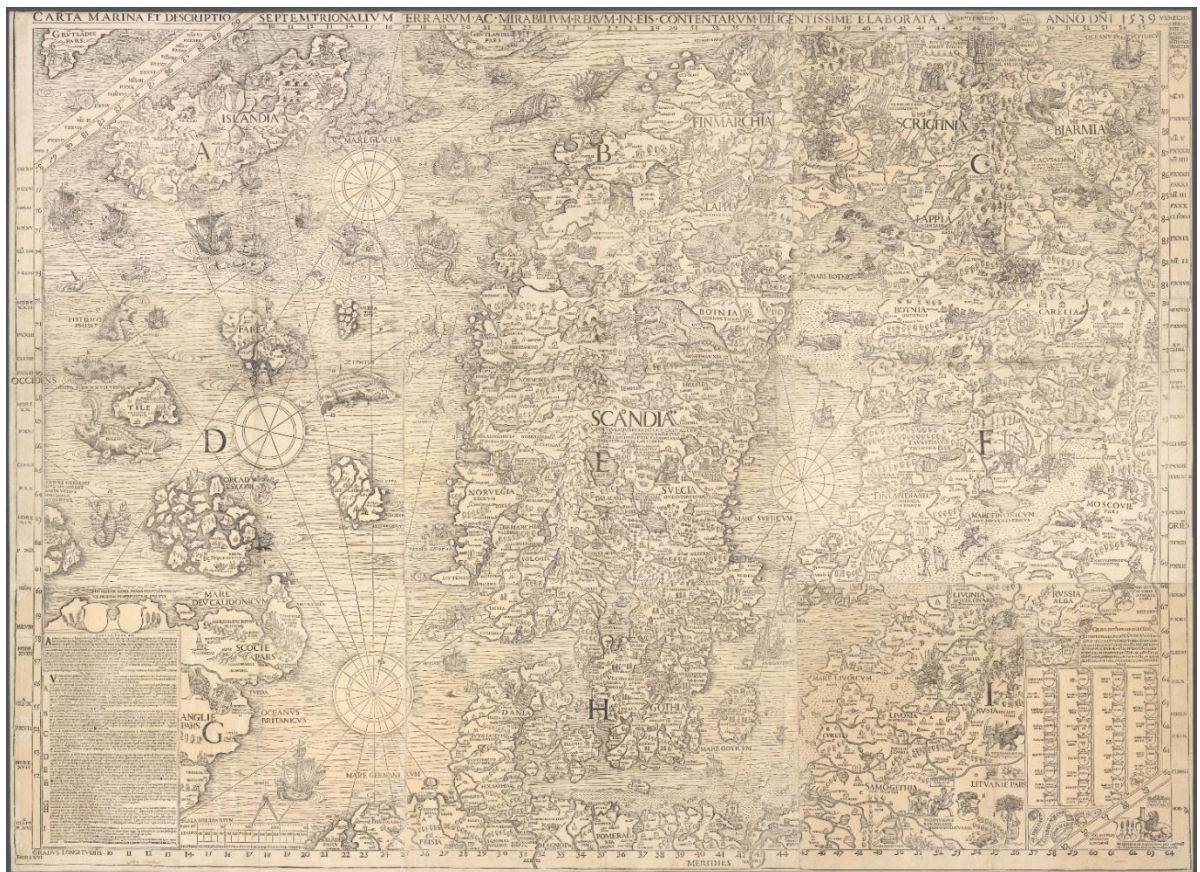
A section of the *Carta Marina* (1539), showing Greenland at the upper edge of the map. (Uppsala University Library, Public Domain Mark 1.0, Own endorsements).

Greenland was cut off, holding the promise that the world might be bigger than even Olaus Magnus realised. In other words: The world did not end in ice, water and death after Thule, but continued and called for further exploration. As such, Northern Europe should not be seen as a periphery, as on the other maps, but as the portal to a larger world. The discovery of America some 50 years prior had led to a general spirit of exploration in his time, making Olaus Magnus' visual arguments both reasonable and possible. Thus: What seems to be an oddity or maybe even a mistake, hold great political impact and meaning. And this is the case with all the details on the map; especially the sea monsters.

With this approach to interpreting and analysing *Carta Marina*, I follow the work of Norwegian historian Erling Sandmo by aligning my research with the Christian, allegorical and symbolic literary and pictorial tradition in which Archbishop Olaus Magnus was schooled. Sandmo argues that the sea monsters should not be understood as actual, occurring monstrosities, but rather as omens, symbols and visual landmarks that require decoding: "The monsters are there for a reason; they carry meaning and have points to make [...] they were



signs and they were real in the sense that they pointed to or corresponded to something else” (Sandmo, 2020, p. 240; 246). The difference, however, is that Sandmo focuses primarily on the monsters' geographical affiliation traditions, i.e. which maps they are taken from; which monsters are new to the Nordic map; and what this means. In this article I will demonstrate the monsters' internal logic and classify them into the three different categories, mentioned above. This by no means contrasts Sandmo’s great works but rather adds to peritextual method.



Olaus Magnus' *Carta Marina* from 1539 (1.7 x 1.25 m). (Uppsala University Library, (Public Domain Mark 1.0).



The non-monsters: Aesthetics and cartographic traditions

Carta Marina is unconventional in that it blends two rather different cartographic traditions: one artistic and one practical. The artistic maps, known as *deluxe charts*, are usually characterised by rich and fantastic figures pointing to images of sovereigns, cities and creatures. They were hung for decoration in offices and cabins and collected by royalty and nobles. Practical nautical maps, on the other hand, so-called *portolans*, were not richly illustrated, but focused on presenting accurate coastlines and being precise with names and designations (Van Duzer 2013, p. 10; Granlund & Crone, 1951, p. 41). *Carta Marina* embraces both traditions (Figure 4 1). This combination allowed Olaus Magnus to utilise characteristics from the deluxe charts to convey important information to the map's reader. The many sea monsters on the map are thus placed according to the prevailing ethnographic and cartographic traditions of the Middle Ages (and antiquity) (Sandmo, 2020): For example, all exotic oddities are located far from the "known world" (Starkey, 2017, p. 39). It is not without reason that we find sea monsters in the Atlantic Ocean and the British Isles, while the Baltic Sea, where Olaus Magnus himself travelled a lot, is empty of monstrosities. The more imaginative elements of the map illustrate where Olaus Magnus had doubts about the topography, and thus also where the map is most misleading (Ehrensward, 1984, p. 553), and this is important information for a helmsman.

The map's sea creatures range from harmless curiosities to ferocious monsters. This distinction is important to keep in mind when looking at the map's "remote areas". Along the Norwegian east coast, it's not until Nordmøre - some distance north of Bergen and the Hanseatic Norwegian trade - that maritime life becomes downright monstrous. Along the well-known coastline of the navigation, from Lindesnes to Bergen, there are only three sea creatures: a stingray (Figure 5A); a 40-foot-long sea snake, which may well approximate a herring king (Figure 2B); and a cow that appears to be swimming westwards (Figure 5C). The map explanation on the *Carta Marina* further adds to this, that the stingray protecting a man in the water while the sea snake is described as harmless.



Figure 5: Detail of actual sea creatures that appear monstrous due to Olaus Magnus' visual expression. (Uppsala University Library, (Public Domain Mark 1.0), Own endorsements).



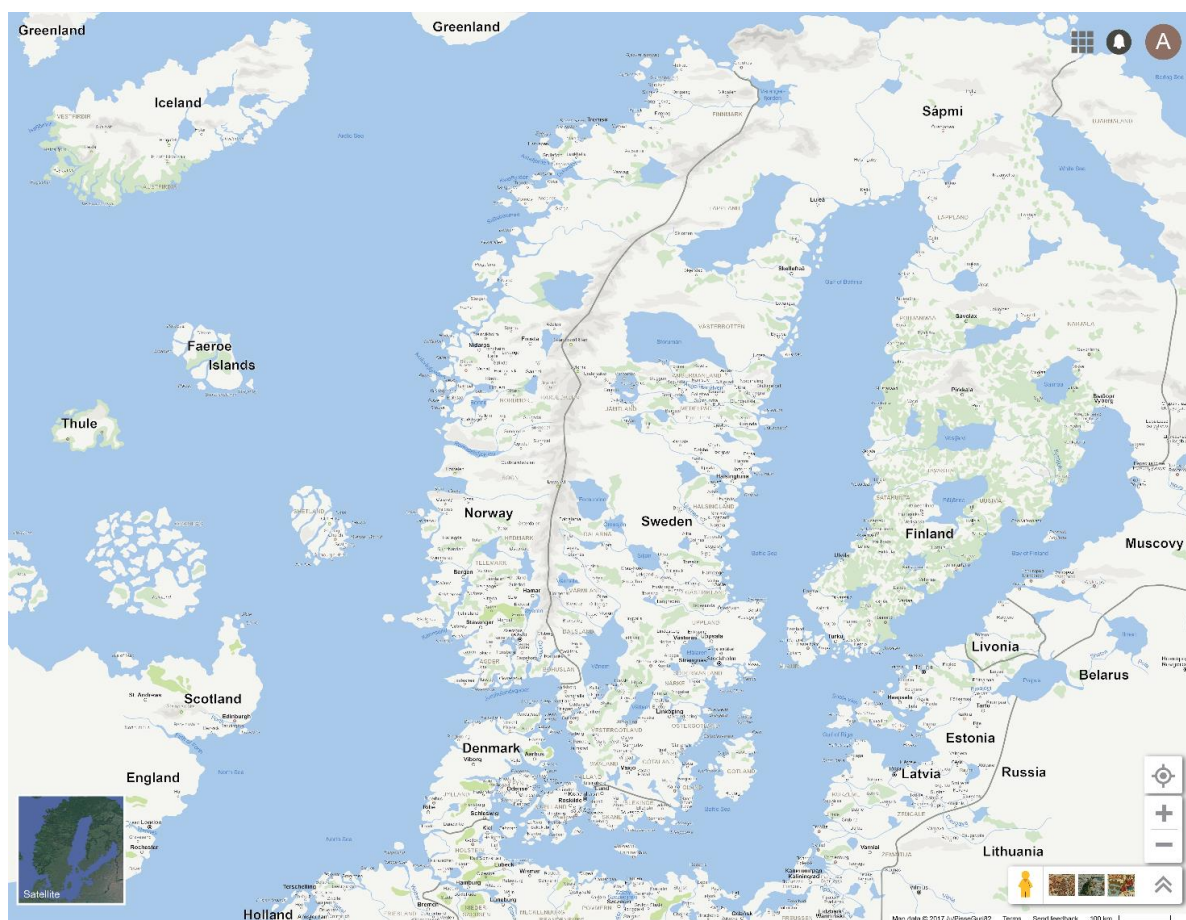
The common notion of maritime life in Olaus Magnus' time was that sea and land mirrored each other. In other words, if an animal existed on land, it would have had a counterpart in water (White, 1954, p. 250). With the west-swimming cow (Figure 5C), Olaus Magnus was very much influenced by the predominant worldview of his time: He drew a sea cow under the clear expectation that such a creature must have existed. The same explanation could follow the somewhat monstrous sea pig in the centre of the western edge of the map (Figure 5D). This is only made more monstrous by the fact that it has both front and hind legs. But this is not an actual monster.⁴ Instead, the sea pig reveals that Olaus Magnus' aesthetics - or rather his poor understanding of marine biology - can be a hindrance that makes the map excessively mysterious to the modern reader. Several of his monsters are simply monstrous representations of actual sea creatures. Just south of the sea pig, for example, we find a large "sea monster" being attacked by two small ones (Figure E). Like the sea pig, these have both front and hind legs, but the explanation in the corner of the map informs the reader that this depicts a killer whale attacking a whale, nursing her offspring. It is thus important to not let the aesthetics of the map make the sea more mysterious to people of the past than they experienced it. The attack of the killer whale is certainly a dramatic event - probably also mysterious and terrifying for a 16th century human - but it is neither monstrous nor supernatural. Similar reservations can be made for the map's sea unicorn (narwhal, see: Olesen, 2020) (Figure 5F) and walrus (Figure 5G). Just as the geography was based on sailors' accounts, so were (parts of) the wildlife he depicted (Nigg, 2013, p. 12; Rossby, 2015, s. 81.).

If one takes the aesthetics and Olaus Magnus' (mis)understanding of marine biology into account, several of the would-be sea monsters can be sorted out as ordinary sea creatures. Sea creatures that Olaus Magnus had probably not all seen, and which he therefore drew to the best of his ability. Of course, this still leaves real sea monsters. These are discussed in the next section. Before discussing these, however, I would like to point out that when you modernise *Carta Marina*, it is experienced quite differently. An example of this can be seen in Figure 6.

⁴ Olaus Magnus himself calls the sea pig a monster, but as both Sandmo and Starkey have argued, his own definition of *the monstrous* is not applicable/meaningful to the modern reader (Sandmo, 2020; Starkey, 2017)



Note that even though the geography is distorted, the map is not that misleading at all⁵ - especially in Scandinavia (Starkey, 2017, p. 39). If one want to further unfold Olaus Magnus' *Carta Marina*, one must first be prepared for the fact that the aesthetics of the map makes it more mysterious to the modern reader, that was not originally intended.



Reproduction of coastlines and locations on *Carta Marina* (1539) in google maps. (Prepared by Anders Kvernberg, Librarian specialist at the Map Centre, National Library of Norway, Oslo).

⁵ I have argued elsewhere that the map can also be seen as a "mental map", or a practical travel guide. If you look at the entrance through Øresund, for example, it does not harmonise with satellite images, but it visually reproduces that Øresund was obviously the period's gateway between the Baltic Sea and the Atlantic (Vognsen. 2020, p. 46).

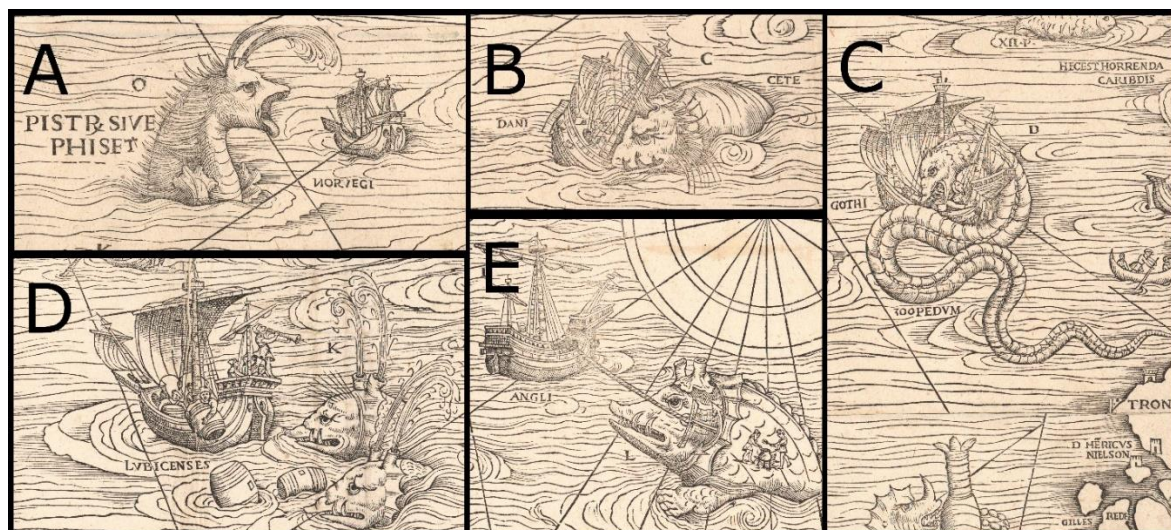


Political comments

Moving on from the mystical aesthetics of the map, we can focus on the sea monsters. These are, as mentioned previously, most monstrous and dramatic in the places where Olaus Magnus has them attacking seafarers. However, these seafarers and their ships are also interesting because they are not just generic ship models, but characteristic ship types that indicate affiliation with different kingdoms (Nigg, 2013, p. 27). German historian Elfriede Regina Knauer has noted that all ships sunk by sea monsters come from Protestant kingdoms. This opens up the possibility of interpreting the interaction between sea monsters and ships as containing contemporary political commentary (Knauer, 1981, p. 44; Rossby, 2015, p. 81); and it calls for further investigation.

Knauer's observation can thus be pursued further: the ships that are sunk are not only Protestant, but also all formally belonged to the Danish crown. They are Danes and Gotlanders (Figure 7B & Figure 7C) who are capsized by a whale-like monster and a sea serpent respectively. We know from other parts of Olaus Magnus' writing, such as his description of Danish tax collectors in Sweden under Erik of Pomerania, that his sympathy for the Danish kingdom was at a very low point (Olaus Magnus, book 8, chapter 27.) A possible and quite understandable reason for this antipathy can be found in The Stockholm Bloodbath, 1520, where Christian II had 82 Swedish magnates and clergymen executed after inviting them to a peace negotiation. Olaus Magnus witnessed the "trial" and was of course quite horrified by it (Sandmo, 2020, p. 238). Within this explanation, it should also be noted that he began working on *Carta Marina* in 1527, just seven years after the Stockholm Bloodbath. So, he had no reason to be particularly fond of Denmark. In Olaus Magnus' other writings, he also writes that the sea serpent appeared to sailors as a heavenly prophecy of political changes, such as the death of a monarch or the prospect of a particularly bloody war (Starkey, 2017, p. 47). This was probably exactly what he wanted for the Danes. The ships sunk by the sea monsters are therefore not only a jab at Protestantism, but also at the Danish kingdom. For the same reason, a Norwegian ship (Figure 7A), which had a Danish king at the time, is confronted with a sea monster, while the Swedish ships (Sweden was reformed in 1527 - the same year Olaus Magnus began work on *Carta Marina*) are noticeably absent from the map. This is not to say

that his choice does not also present a critique of religion: Olaus Magnus' use of imagery and symbols to criticise Protestantism is well documented in research (Sandmo, 2020, pp. 245-246; Starkey, 2017, p. 49), but parallel to this critique of religion, we also find geopolitical commentary.



Selection of encounters between ships (where a geographical affiliation is indicated) and sea monsters. (Uppsala University Library, (Public Domain Mark 1.0), Own endorsements).

In addition to the criticism of religion and Danish rule, there are two parallel but quite different depictions of the English and the Hanseatic League - specifically Lübeck. The Lübeckians on the map are found off the coast of Iceland, where they have thrown their cargo overboard and are making a lot of noise to scare away two sea monsters (Figure 7D). Right next to them is the English ship, and the contrast between them is stark. The English have dropped anchor by a sea monster and have "landed" on its back, where they have even started a fire (Figure E). The map's explanatory corner commentary states that the reason for this action is lack of experience: "Sailors who anchor on the backs of whales/beasts believing them to be islands expose themselves to mortal danger"[*naute in dorsa cetorum que insulas putant anchoras figentes sepe periclitantur*]. The parallelism between these two images calls for comparison, and like the duality in the criticism of Protestantism/Denmark, this also works on several levels.



On the first level, this is a comment on levels of experience and historical presence in the North Atlantic: The Lübeckians are portrayed as belonging to the. They know of the monsters and tries to fight them off. The English, on the other hand, unwittingly make mistakes. In this way, Olaus Magnus visualises a difference in competence between the two: the presence of Englishmen in Iceland/the North Atlantic is presented as an oddity. Research has predominantly regarded the Hanseatic League as the primary actors in the Icelandic trade in the 16th century (Rossby, 2015, p. 82). However, this impression is probably primarily an unintended consequence of Ernst Baach's extensive studies of the Hamburg skippers' Icelandic voyages in the 16th-17th centuries (Baasch, 1889, p. 106ff). Þórhallsson & Kristinsson has presented a different reading with a particular focus on the 16th century Anglo-Icelandic trade (Þórhallsson & Kristinsson, 2013, p. 117-123.). Both Hanseatic and Englishmen operated in and around Iceland during the time of Olaus Magnus. However, there were obvious differences in their involvement and presence: the major shipments came from the Hanseatic League, while the English visitors to Iceland were typically smaller boats, such as fishermen or small traders (Gardiner & Mehler, 2007, pp. 387-398, 405-406; Þórhallsson & Kristinsson, 2013, pp. 117-123). Given that Olaus Magnus spent many years in the Hanseatic cities, it is thus quite likely that he regarded the large Hanseatic shipments as the "rightful" traders, and the English small-scale fishermen as pretenders. It is this situation that he visually comments on by the juxtaposition of the two parties.

Another possible interpretation of the juxtaposition is also obvious: namely that it should be seen as a jab at the Hanseatic League. Hanseatic demands for reparations, compensation and criticism of circumstances beyond their control were well known in the Middle Ages (Höhn, 2018, pp. 261-290; Höhn, 2019, p. 96; Poulsen, 2009, p. 112; Rohmann, 2018, p.15; Vognsen, 2018, p. 149ff; Vognsen, 2021, pp. 50-51). On the map, they stand with a brass instrument and make noise, a rather indiscreet commentary on their maritime behaviour. This is also why they throw their cargo overboard. They are simply causing the losses, they require everyone else to pay for. To the strengthen this reading, Olaus Magnus even writes in his explanation in the corner of the map, that their attempts had little to no effect on the imposing monsters. It is not surprising that Olaus Magnus should direct criticism at the Lübeckians. In the 1520s, he was engaged in numerous diplomatic missions in Lübeck. The

goal was always the same: to renegotiate the large loans and settle the war debts Sweden owed the Hanseatic League (Rossby, 2015, p. 80). Despite the many strong alliances between Sweden and the Hanseatic League, the relationship was coloured by the mistrust and antipathy that the debtor easily develops towards the lender.

The five real sea monsters (Figure 7) interacting with ships thus seemed to be of secondary interest to Olaus Magnus' message: his real point was the ships, or rather the kingdoms they represented. Here, the monsters were used as visual-rhetorical jabs to comment on his political contemporaries. The mythical and mystical creatures served some very mundane purposes.

The monsters of the map

Of course, the monsters on *Carta Marina* do not *only* function as aesthetic landmarks or contemporary political jabs. As Starkey and others have shown, some of the monsters also had symbolic interpretations. The aforementioned sea pig (Figure 5D) is accompanied on the map by the text *Monstr. MDXXXVII visa* [this monster was observed in 1537]. Starkey notes that the pig is observed in the year of the Danish Reformation as an allegory that "that heretics pursued a piglike existence, showed them their unclean habits, and urged them to embrace goodness" (Starkey, 2017, p. 49). Sandmo has further developed the argument by observing that the crescent-shaped formation on the pig's back can be understood as an reference to Islam: the pagan archenemy of the Catholic Church (Sandmo, 2020, pp. 245-246). This brings Islam and Protestantism together as one: as pagan enemies of the Catholic Church.

The sea pig thus has both a religious-symbolic function and can also be interpreted as an aesthetic corruption of a maritime creature. It both is a monster – and it is not. This is the problem with allegorical interpretations: Conflicting readings can coexist. If we now turn our attention to the sea monsters not yet covered in the article, we are left with a small group that cannot be meaningfully interpreted as ordinary sea creatures or as political commentary. This group consists of seven clearly monstrous creatures – some even biblical – spread across three map sections (Figure 8).

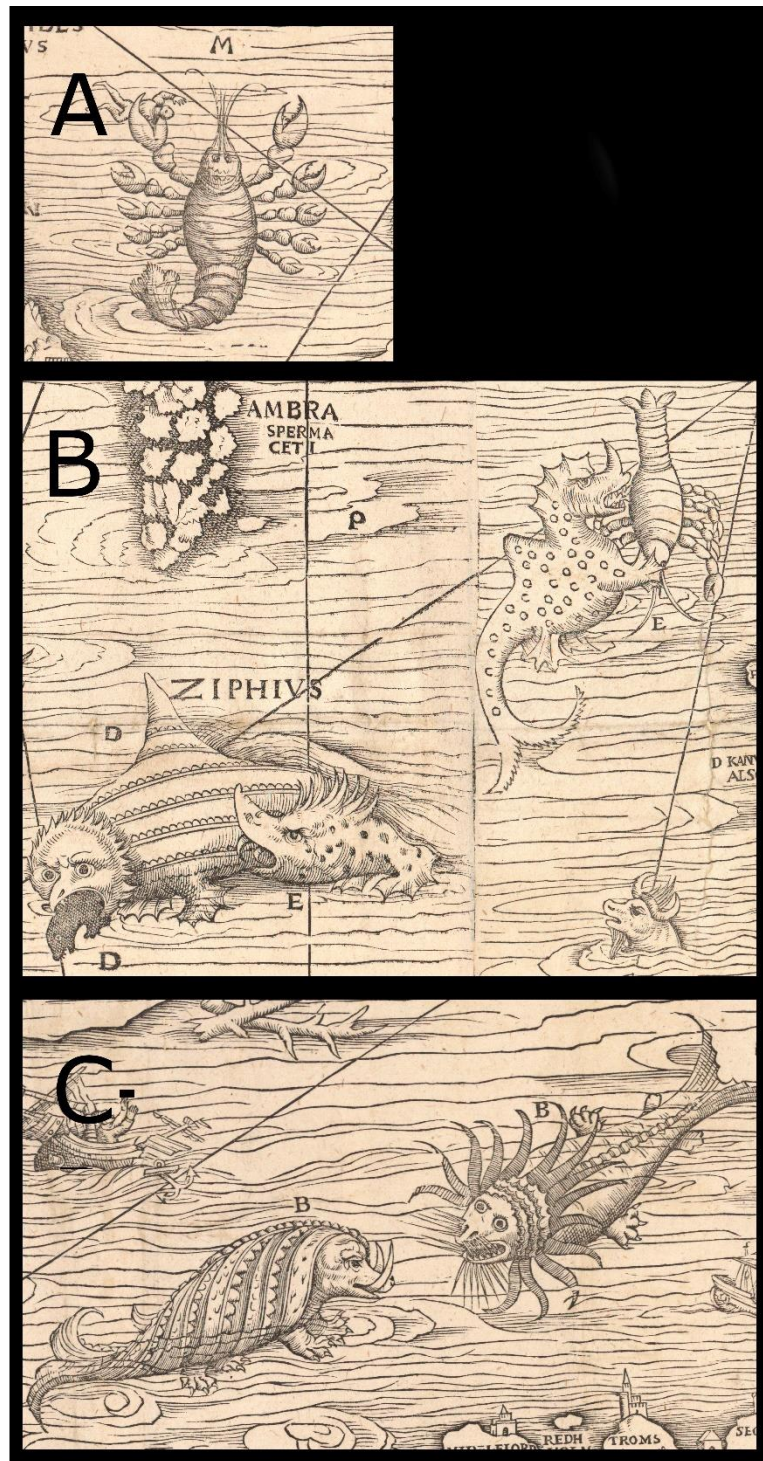


Figure 8 The three map sections containing seven sea monsters indicating danger. (*Uppsala University Library, (Public Domain Mark 1.0), Own endorsements*).

The first monster, the giant lobster (Figure 8A), is found off the coast of Scotland (see Figure 4), likely somewhere in the Hebrides; an area that harbours some of Europe's most challenging sailing conditions - especially before the 1750s, when the area was not yet properly mapped (*Historic Environment for Scotland*). The point made at the beginning of the chapter that the monsters indicate the periphery of the map bears repeating here. It is unlikely that the intent was to prepare seafarers for man-killing giant lobsters; or lobster-like octopus, as pointed out by Van Duzer (Van Duzer, 2013, p. 85-86). On the contrary, the lobster indicates that this area was poorly, had difficult waters, and changeable weather conditions. In addition to being a relatively unknown area to Olaus Magnus, it was also a dangerous place to go if you didn't already know the area well. Therefore, it makes sense that the giant lobster symbolically represented these dangers.

Similar conditions, however, cannot be said to apply to the next map section of the map (Figure 8B). This section contains as many as four sea monsters fighting each other, albeit one-on-one. They fill the space from the west coast of Norway to the Faroe Islands. The waters here were not particularly dangerous, although there was a risk of violent storms. The route, on the other hand, was probably well travelled. Sailing in the Middle Ages, especially across the open sea, always involved risks, not so much from sea monsters and pirates, but simply due to natural conditions. Wind and weather were the real threat, even on otherwise 'safe' routes (Vognsen, 2018, p. 50). Since Olaus Magnus' map is mostly based on accounts, it is highly likely that he was the victim of a misinterpretation caused by, what we might call *the Law of Great Numbers*: It is only logical that because this route to the Faroe Islands was well-travelled, and because of the changeable weather in the Atlantic, there were also many accounts of ships sinking here, never to be found again.⁶ Therefore, I would argue that the placement of these four sea monsters follows the same logic as the giant lobster: They were meant to warn of treacherous waters. Even though this route was probably not so treacherous in reality.

This leads us to the third and final map section of the map, where we find two sea monsters with their heads and bodies facing each other (Figure 8C). They are not engaged in

⁶ However, it should also be considered that these sea monsters may have been placed as decoration: simply to fill in the large area of the sea on the map so it wasn't just empty.



combat, but could well be on their way to fight. These are in the Barents Sea: The stretch between Northern Norway and Greenland - yet another unknown area and again certainly a dangerous stretch of water (Buckland, 2006). Olaus Magnus shows this on his map with numerous whirlpools, a shipwreck north of the monsters and plenty of debris along the Greenland coast. Given the nature of the area and the other indicators of maritime danger drawn in the Barents Sea, it is a plausible interpretation that also these two sea monsters were meant to signal danger. Just like the other sea monsters in this section.

All seven sea monsters - all three map sections - can thus be attributed to one rather simple message: *DANGER!* This may seem simple when you consider some of Olaus Magnus' more subtle, political visual comments. On the other hand, these warnings were important - and it was important that they could not be misunderstood. As such it would be a mistake to see them as literal representation of the existence of monsters. Symbolically they were meant to warn of dangerous waters.

Conclusion

On his impressively detailed map, *Carta marina et descriptio septentrionalium terrarum ac mirabilium rerum in eis contentarum diligentissime elaborata anno dni 1539 Veneciis liberalitate Rmi D. Ieronimi: Patriarche Venetiae*, Olaus Magnus used the monsters as meaningful symbols and messengers of specific, coded messages: as visual political comments or indications of dangerous waters. This interpretation undeniably demystifies the fantastic map somewhat. On the other hand, this does not exclude the possibility that the sea was mysterious or that it was believed to potentially harbour monsters at the time of Olaus Magnus. His strategic use of these monsters simply shows that the monsters themselves were not at the centre of his understanding. Rather, it was the humans, their role on the sea and their political behaviour. For Olaus Magnus, the question was not about the mysterious creatures of the sea - let alone whether they existed or not - but about the viewer of the map's ability to decode the messages they contained.

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