

History of Cartography Project
No. 3: John Donne on Maps and the Microcosm: A Sampler

Commentary

For some years, I have been gathering material for an article on the cartographic allusions of John Donne, the well-known seventeenth-century English poet who became a celebrated preacher and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. The selections printed here represent but a small sample of the geographical quotations found in his poetry and prose. He was fascinated with the concept of grids and globes, particularly as they served to illustrate the concept of the macrocosm-microcosm theme. As Marjorie Nicholson explains in her book *The Breaking of the Circle*, the idea of the "great world" of the universe with astrological correspondences to the "little world" of man can be traced back at least to classical Greek times. It never completely disappeared from Christian thinking and was a powerful metaphor for the relationship of man to God during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.¹ For Donne, who had sailed with Sir Walter Raleigh and was clearly *au fait* with cartographic and navigational technicalities, the map was an ideal illustration of the "epitome" of the world, as man was of the heavens, and he frequently wove these images into his poems and sermons. To quote from Jeanne Shami's study of Donne, "The microcosm-macrocosm analogy is central to Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, written in 1623 after a serious illness. By claiming in this work that man is a little world, Donne opens up the whole range of correspondences between the two worlds. Conventionally, this metaphor is used to suggest harmony, completeness, and intricacy of the two worlds, and is intended to reinforce man's significance."² The microcosm-macrocosm theme also relates to man's brief and fleeting life on earth, as the unwinding of his cosmos by the figure of Time dramatically shows.

1. Marjorie Hope Nicholson, *The Breaking of the Circle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).
2. Jeanne Shami, "John Donne: Geography as Metaphor," in William E. Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley, eds., *Geography and Literature: A Meeting of the Disciplines* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 161-67.

Printed by David Woodward and friends on Rives Heavyweight with a Vandercook No. 4 at the Juniper Press, Madison, Wisconsin. The type is Monotype Dante set by Michael and Winifred Bixler, Skaneateles, New York. The man in the cosmos is from the title page to Robert Fludd, *Utriusque cosmi maioris et minoris metaphysica* (Oppenheim: Theodore de Bry, 1618). Jenny Woodward drew the "woodcut" of the globemaker. Blocks by Royal Engraving, La Crosse, Wisconsin. 200 copies have been numbered and initialed.

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