

Ancient Israel and the Modern Bounded State

Nathan MacDonald 

University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

nm10011@cam.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The rediscovery of Ptolemy in the early modern period altered the representation and understanding of boundaries between territorial states. From the late fifteenth century onward, atlases increasingly began to depict countries with their political borders marked. In the first part of this essay, I argue that an important influence on this development was maps of the Holy Land which delineated the territories of the twelve tribes. These maps of the Holy Land were adopted from medieval maps, and the tribal boundaries depicted not political authority but the spiritual inheritance that Christians were to possess. Thus, the Bible and its reception through maps was a significant agent in the changing perception of the relationship of space to political authority, but in an unexpected way. In the second part, I argue that changes in political sensibilities also influenced the reading of the Bible. Through an examination of the interpretation of the table of nations in Genesis 10 in early modern England, I demonstrate that the separation of the peoples that descended from Noah's sons came to be seen as the establishment of homogenous, bounded states.

IN his stimulating analysis of the relationship between developments in cartography and the emergence of the modern nation state, Jordan Branch argues that 'new mapping technologies changed the fundamental framework of politics in early modern Europe. Key characteristics of modern statehood—such as linear boundaries between homogenous territories—appeared first in the representational space of maps and only subsequently in political practices on the ground'.¹ In other words, the rediscovery of Ptolemy and the proliferation of printed maps in the early modern period altered the perception of how sovereignty was exercised and an emphasis on place was supplanted by that of space. In the late medieval period, rule radiated from the centre and took complex, overlapping forms including the personal, the

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¹ Jordan Branch, *The Cartographic State: Maps, Territory and the Origins of Sovereignty* (Cambridge Studies in International Relations 127; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 3.

territorial, and the jurisdictional. In the early modern period, this began to be displaced by the idea of a homogenous territorial space marked by firm boundaries. The representation of states on maps did not stem from a shift in political realities, but rather contributed to the conditions that made a changed political sensibility possible.

Despite their prevalence in the early modern period, maps of the Holy Land play little role in Branch's analysis and are cited as simply a recipient of this altered political sensibility.

While medieval maps of religious space (including *mappaemundi* as well as regional maps) showed pilgrimage routes, key towns such as Jerusalem, and images of biblical events, early modern maps of the region used the visual language of Ptolemaic mapping. In particular, many mapmakers attempted to draw boundaries between the areas ruled by the twelve historical tribes of Israel. These tribal areas were presented as homogenous territorial entities, in spite of the fact that the mapmakers had extremely limited information on what the boundaries of these territories might have been. The new visual grammar of mapmaking had no other way to depict political authority.²

Whilst Branch is right to observe that early modern mapmakers had limited information on the geography of Palestine, his claim that marking tribal boundaries was an innovation is belied by numerous medieval maps of the Holy Land that depict the territories of the twelve tribes.

How are we to explain this apparent anomaly? One possibility that has attracted many adherents is that ancient Israel had many of the features of a nation state. The Israeli-American philosopher and political theorist, Yoram Hazony, for example, claims in his recent defence of nationalism's virtues that the understanding of national boundaries in European political thought is similar, if not identical, to that found in ancient Israel. 'Protestant political theory followed Hebrew Scripture in considering national boundaries to be no less important for the peace and well-being of mankind than property boundaries ... Statesmen and philosophers raised on the Bible just assumed that their own nation was, like ancient Israel, a bounded entity that sought freedom and independence from other nations'.³ From this perspective, mapmakers of the Holy Land merely represented what they found in the biblical text.

In this essay, I will argue that the reality is more complex and, consequently, more interesting than either the mapping of the biblical world reflecting modern political sensibilities or the modern world recovering a notion of political boundaries from the Bible. The mapping of the biblical world should be recognized as a significant agent in the changing perception of space's relationship to political authority. But it was not just an agent, for the understanding of ancient biblical notions of territoriality was itself transformed in the early modern period by the intellectual changes to which it had partially given rise. In the first part, I will examine how Palestine was represented in maps from the Renaissance and the early modern period. I will show that maps of the Holy Land depicted boundaries in ways that were not innovative, but simply a replication of medieval precursors. The maps of the Holy Land led the way in depicting boundaries and set a norm which other maps eventually matched. In the second part, however, I will argue that the interpretation of the Bible was itself impacted by this changing perception. Thus, scriptural references to boundaries which had been understood to represent spiritual realities began to be seen primarily in terms of political borders. Through a representative sample of the interpretation of the so-called table of nations (Genesis 10) in early modern England, I will argue that the changing notion of political territory transformed the way that this text was understood. As a result, the separation of the peoples that descended from Noah's sons came to be seen as the establishment of homogenous, bounded states.

² Branch, *Cartographic State*, p. 86.

³ Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), p. 35.

1. TRIBAL TERRITORIES IN THE MAPPING OF THE HOLY LAND

Whatever knowledge of Ptolemy's *Geography* existed in western Europe in the medieval period, its translation into Latin in the early 1400s and subsequent appearance in printed editions in the 1470s secured its influence upon renaissance cartography. Early printings included twenty-six projections which drew upon the technical tables in Ptolemy's work. These included a map of the Levant and Mesopotamia, the so-called fourth map of Asia. It presented the region as it was known to Ptolemy in the second century CE with the region divided into Roman provinces. The incorporation of contemporary maps had already begun with the manuscripts of Nicolaus Germanus. He first added maps depicting Spain, Italy, and northern Europe, and later included a map of France and one of Palestine. Germanus's work was the basis of the 1482 Ulm printing,⁴ and the innovation of including contemporary maps was followed in most subsequent editions of Ptolemy.⁵

Germanus's maps of Europe reproduced Ptolemy's projections with contemporary place names or, in the case of northern Europe, provided a new, updated map based on the work of Claudius Clavus. The *Tabula moderna Terrae Sanctae* ('Modern Map of the Holy Land'), however, was not a Ptolemaic projection, but the reproduction of a map by the fourteenth-century Genoese portolan mapmaker, Pietro Vesconte, versions of which had circulated widely in late medieval Europe (see Fig. 1).⁶

The widespread dissemination of Vesconte's map of the Holy Land was due, at least in part, to the ease with which it could be reproduced. A grid system allowed the map to be copied quickly and accurately. The production of a map from a series of coordinates was the one feature that the *Tabula moderna Terrae Sanctae* had in common with Ptolemy's projections, but the similarities ended there. The Vesconte map, to which we will return, used a grid that plotted relative distances between locations, not latitude and longitude, and was orientated with the top of the page in the east rather than the north. The map of Palestine in the 1482 Ulm printing followed its medieval precursor by representing all twelve tribes with clearly marked territories that are discrete and contiguous so as to cover the entirety of Palestine. They included a separate territory for the tribe of Simeon located south-west of Judah, and the tribe of Dan is positioned in its original allocation on the Philistine plain. Naphtali erroneously received two territories as a result of a misspelling of Ephraim. The borders are denoted by a dotted line that was also used elsewhere in some of the other maps to indicate provincial borders from Ptolemy's time and kingdoms on the contemporary map of the Iberian Peninsula.

Subsequent editions of Ptolemy's *Geography* nearly always included a map of Palestine amongst their modern maps. The tribes of Israel were labelled even if the tribal boundaries were not always clearly marked. In the same year as the Ulm edition appeared, the Florentine politician and diplomat Francesco Berlinghieri produced his famous poetic rendering of the *Geography*.⁷ His maps of other regions marked relatively few borders, but he did include the grid map of Palestine with the territories of the 12 tribes clearly delineated.⁸ The accomplished German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller attempted to avoid the confusion of combining ancient and modern maps by presenting them in separate sections in his

⁴ Claudius Ptolemy, *Cosmographia*, ed. Nicolaus Germanus (Ulm: Lienhart Holle, 1482).

⁵ Patrick Gautier Dalché, 'The Reception of Ptolemy's Geography (End of the Fourteenth to Beginning of the Sixteenth Century)', in David Woodward (ed.), *The History of Cartography, Vol 3: Cartography in the European Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 285–364; Patrick Gautier Dalché, *La Géographie de Ptolémée en Occident (IVe-XVIe Siècle)* (Terrarum Orbis 9; Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

⁶ Paul Harvey, *Medieval Maps of the Holy Land* (London: British Library, 2012).

⁷ Claudius Ptolemy, *Geographia*, ed. Francesco Berlinghieri (Florence: Niccolò Todescho, 1482).

⁸ Sean E. Roberts, *Printing a Mediterranean World: Florence, Constantinople, and the Renaissance of Geography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).



Fig. 1. The 'Modern Map of the Holy Land' from the 1486 (1482) Ulm reprinting of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* (<https://purl.stanford.edu/fs844yc9264>).

1513 edition published in Strasbourg.⁹ Described as the 'first modern atlas of the world',¹⁰ it had twenty modern maps though only the maps of Spain and the Holy Land presented boundaries. Many of the maps were given a coloured wash in Waldseemüller's workshop.¹¹

As James Akerman has shown, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries increasingly used boundaries on their maps to mark political territory.

Whereas only 45 percent of the maps in Ortelius's *Theatrum* (1570) had boundaries, 62 percent of those in a Hondius edition of Gerard Mercator's *Atlas* of 1616 were marked with boundaries; 79 percent of those in the Blaeu's *Theatre du monde, ou nouvel atlas* (1644); and 98 percent of those in Nocalas Sanson's *Les Cartes générales de toutes les provinces de France* (1658–[59]). Thereafter large format world atlases typically had 90 percent or more of their maps showing boundaries.¹²

It is no surprise that high quality maps of the Holy Land with tribal boundaries clearly marked are found in the works of Ortelius and Blaeu. When it came to the representation of boundaries, maps of Palestine led rather than followed.

⁹ Claudius Ptolemy, *Geographia*, ed. Martin Waldseemüller (Strasbourg: Johannes Schott, 1513).

¹⁰ Claudius Ptolemy, *Geographia. Strassburg, 1513*, ed. Raleigh Ashlin Skelton (*Theatrum Orbis Terrarum; a Series of Atlases in Facsimile* II/4; Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1966), p. v.

¹¹ In his examination of the colour scheme Chet van Duzer notes that the frequency with which the Holy Land maps were coloured makes them particularly valuable for identifying atlases whose washes stemmed from the workshop. (Chet A. Van Duzer, 'Colored as Its Creators Intended: Painted Maps in the 1513 Edition of Ptolemy's "Geography"', *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum* 13 (2019), pp. 311–31).

¹² James Akerman, 'The Structuring of Political Territory in Early Printed Atlases', *Imago Mundi* 47 (1995), pp. 138–54, at 141.

Atlases were prestigious and high value items, and their ownership and readership was limited to a narrow scholarly and aristocratic elite. Beyond those circles, however, maps would rarely have been encountered with one notable exception: Protestant Bibles. Early in the movement's history, Protestants showed an interest in maps and their potential to provide an alternative paratextual apparatus that emphasized the literal meaning of the text.¹³ A map of the Holy Land by Lukas Cranach was included in a 1525 Bible published in Zurich by Christopher Froschauer (see Fig. 2).¹⁴ It showed both the stations of the wilderness wanderings and the tribal division of the Promised Land.

This first attempt was far from successful, as the east-west orientation was reversed so that the Mediterranean Sea was on the right-hand side of the map with Palestine on the left. Nevertheless, the experiment was followed by future publishers and maps became a ubiquitous feature of Protestant Bibles. Publishers would eventually settle on four standard maps: the wilderness wanderings placed at Numbers 33, the division of the land at Joshua 15, the land at the time of Jesus before Matthew 1 and the journeys of the apostle Paul at the end of Acts.¹⁵ The map of the tribal division suggested that Joshua 13–19, despite all its contradictions and textual difficulties, could be understood as a coherent account which apportioned Palestine into twelve distinct, contiguous territories without remainder. For those acquainted with Ptolemy's work, the second half of Joshua becomes a veritable *Geography*: a complicated verbal description that could be transformed into a map. As a result, the biblical book of Joshua took on the features of an archetypal renaissance text.

For a range of readers in the early modern period, then, atlases and Bibles presented a Palestine that was neatly divided into twelve distinct territories. They were not solely responsible for the changing sensibilities about the nature of territorial boundaries, but they played a role that should not be overlooked. They also complicate the story that Branch wishes to tell, because maps of the Holy Land divided into tribal territories were not, as he seems to suggest, a consequence of the Renaissance's reception of Ptolemy. Instead, they had roots that extended into the medieval period. As we shall see, however, this tradition was not interested in the political division of space, but was animated by other concerns.

The grid map of Pietro Vesconte that Renaissance scholars appropriated for their editions of Ptolemy's *Geography* had originally been produced to accompany a popular appeal for a new crusade written in the early fourteenth century by the Venetian statesman, Marino Sanudo.¹⁶ The *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis* ('The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross') included several maps that were designed to excite the religious imagination of its readers and convince them of the practicalities of recapturing Christianity's holy sites. Sanudo and Vesconte appear to have worked closely with one another, and the third part of Sanudo's book includes a detailed description of the Holy Land and directions about how to produce a grid map.

¹³ Catherine Delano-Smith, 'Smoothed Lines and Empty Spaces: The Changing Face of the Exegetical Map before 1600', in J.-F. Chauvard, G. Odile, and I. Leboulois-Lesage (eds.), *Comblent les blancs de la carte. Réflexions à propos de la construction des savoirs géographiques (XIV-XIX Siècles)* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2004), pp. 17–34.

¹⁴ Arthur Dürst, 'Zur Wiederauffindung der Heiligland-Karte von ca. 1515 von Lucas Cranach dem Älteren', *Cartographica Helvetica: Fachzeitschrift für Kartengeschichte* 3 (1991), pp. 22–7; Peter Meurer, 'Analysen zur sogenannten "Cranach-Karte" des Heiligen Landes und die Frage nach ihrem Autor', in Detlef Haberland (ed.), *Geographia Spiritualis: Festschrift für Hanno Beck* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 165–75; Armin Kunz, 'Cranach as Cartographer: The Rediscovered "Map of the Holy Land"', *Print Quarterly* 12 (1995), pp. 123–44; Pnina Arad, 'Frederick III's Holy Land Installation in Wittenberg during the Cultural Transition of the Reformation', *Viator* 48 (2017), pp. 219–52, at 219.

¹⁵ Catherine Delano-Smith, 'Maps as Art and Science: Maps in Sixteenth Century Bibles', *Imago Mundi* 42 (1990), pp. 65–83; Catherine Delano-Smith, *Maps in Bibles, 1500–1600: An Illustrated Catalogue* (Travaux d'humanisme et Renaissance 256; Geneva: Droz, 1991).

¹⁶ Peter Lock, *Marino Sanudo Torsello, the Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross: Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).



Fig. 2. Map of the Holy Land from Christoph Froschauer's 1525 *Das Alt Testament dütisch* (Zentralbibliothek Zürich, 31 Nv 02: 1, <https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-32932>).

The length of the Land of Promise extends from Dan at the foot of Mount Lebanon, on the north, to Bersabee [Beersheba], which is in the south near the desert of Egypt, a distance of 83 leagues. In breadth it extends from the Mediterranean Sea on the west, 29 leagues to the east. Let us imagine the Land of Promise to be divided by straight lines into 28 spaces which extend from Mount Lebanon to the desert which goes into Egypt and in 83 spaces by straight lines drawn transversely over the first [lines] from West to East so that many squares are produced each measuring one league or two miles. In the first and last space which is towards the East, beginning at the north and going towards the south, in square 53 is Ar, now Arepolis or Petra. In square 76 is Petra of the desert or Mons Regalis...¹⁷

In this way over 150 places are located on the map ending with Gaza in the 77th square of the 27th column. At least nineteen copies of the work were produced in Sanudo's lifetime, nine of which were accompanied by maps.

Though the grid maps that are extant delineate the borders of the Israelite tribes, Sanudo's work says little about them. The principles of plotting the Holy Land and mapping the boundaries of the tribes had been adopted from a work by a German Dominican, Burchard of Mount Sion, entitled *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*. Sanudo's understanding of the geography of Palestine was indebted to Burchard's work which had been composed several decades earlier in the late thirteenth century, and was even more popular than Sanudo's *Liber Secretorum*. On the most recent reckoning, there are no fewer than 60 manuscripts of a longer version of the work and

¹⁷ Lock, *Marino Sanudo Torsello*, p. 392.



Fig. 3. The Large Burchard Map (Carte nautiche, IV (recto); by permission of Ministero della cultura / Archivio di Stato di Firenze; <https://archiviodistatofirenze.cultura.gov.it/archivigitali/riproduzione/?id=148182&ua=37>).

31 of a shorter version.¹⁸ It seems that Burchard himself produced a map to accompany the work, though this is no longer extant. The earliest surviving Burchard map has been dated around 1300. Even though it is thought to be an imperfect copy of an earlier map, this extant map still precedes the grid maps of Vesconte. The map is more than five feet wide, and the Mediterranean Sea is placed at its bottom with a meandering Jordan river at the top (see Fig. 3). Mountains are marked on the map and towns are indicated by images of buildings, usually including a tower with battlements. In addition, the tribal territories are indicated by lines of red ink with the names of the tribes written in a slightly larger hand than other place names (see Fig. 4).¹⁹

Burchard's work described the Holy Land from the perspective of the remaining crusader stronghold of Acre, dividing the land into seven sections. It was both a practical guide for those who might undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and the provision of a mental picture for those who could not. As Pnina Arad puts it in her recent examination of Christian maps of the Holy Land, 'Throughout, he describes what the visitor, the pilgrim, would find, so that his readers could imagine themselves there, sharing in what Burchard saw and experienced in his travels'.²⁰ But it is not so much medieval Palestine that Burchard's readers experienced as the biblical land of Israel. 'Is not Christ's sepulchre all the more venerable among us because every time one enters it, one sees in the mind's eye the Saviour in his winding cloth (*totiens inuolutum sindone mentis uidet oculis Saluatorem*)'.²¹ Time is collapsed and the faithful pilgrim-reader sees the entire biblical narrative played out synchronously, or even beyond time, as they traverse the map with their eyes. They encounter a complex cultural landscape where biblical history sits alongside contemporary crusader castles. As Arad observes, the various Burchard maps and the grid maps of Vesconte functioned as icons effecting an encounter of the medieval observer with the entire Scriptural story. 'The combination of guide and map offered the viewer a way to conduct a vicarious pilgrimage to the Holy Land through text and image'.²²

Although previous studies of the Burchard maps and Vesconte's grid maps have noted that they include a delineation of tribal territories, the distinctive role of these borders in medieval maps of the Holy Land has not received adequate attention. The tribal boundaries do not relate to any resonant biblical story, nor did they have any contemporary relevance. They are,

¹⁸ John R. Bartlett (ed.), *Burchard of Mt Zion: Descriptio Terrae Sanctae* (Oxford Medieval Texts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹⁹ Harvey, *Medieval Maps*, pp. 94–106.

²⁰ Harvey, *Medieval Maps*, p. 95.

²¹ Bartlett, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, pp. 2–3, i.2.

²² Pnina Arad, *Christian Maps of the Holy Land: Images and Meanings* (Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 28; Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), p. 44.



Fig. 4. Detail (centre-right) of the Large Burchard Map showing Ephraim, Benjamin and Dan and tribal borders marked in red ink (Carte nautiche, IV (recto); by permission of Ministero della cultura / Archivio di Stato di Firenze; <https://archiviodistatofirenze.cultura.gov.it/archividigitali/riproduzione/?id=148182&ua=37>).

however, central to Burchard's conception of the Holy Land as a space which Christians could claim as their inheritance. Not only does he include an account of the tribal territories adopted from the first-century Jewish historian Josephus,²³ but his detailed account of Palestine begins with a reference to the tribes.

First you must know that the land which we call 'holy', which fell to the lot of the twelve tribes of Israel, one part, consisting of two tribes, namely Judah and Benjamin, was named the kingdom of Judah; the other part was named the kingdom of Samaria, the city which is now called Sebaste, and was the head of the ten remaining tribes which was called Israel.²⁴

It is no accident that Burchard's account begins with a recollection of Joshua's allotting of the land to the Israelites after their wilderness wanderings. The tribal territories function as a metonym for the possession of the land which comes out most clearly on one striking occasion

²³ Bartlett, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, pp. 178–83, xi.1–11. Josephus' understanding of the tribal territories (*Ant.* v.80–7) is a simplification of the biblical descriptions found in Josh. 13–19. For discussion of Josephus' understanding of the tribal allotments, see Zeev Safrai, *Seeking out the Land: Land of Israel Traditions in Ancient Jewish, Christian and Samaritan Literature (200 BCE–400 CE)* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives 32; Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2018), pp. 65–8. Mediated through Burchard, Vesconte, and the early modern cartographers, Josephus' schematized presentation was not displaced until the research of historical geographers like Edward Robinson, Carl Ritter and A.P. Stanley in the nineteenth century (Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *The Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979]). Burchard makes no effort to integrate Josephus' portrayal of the tribal territories into his own description of the land from the perspective of Acre. The two are simply juxtaposed and are part of Burchard's complex layering of different symbolic and historic geographies.

²⁴ Bartlett, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, pp. 8–9, i.1.

when Burchard of Sion abandons his usual focus on the biblical past and its holy sites to speak about the contemporary plight of the crusader cause. Deeply affected by the loss of the fortress and city of Safed to Saladin almost a century earlier in 1188, Burchard laments, 'It had belonged to the Knights Templar, but it was betrayed and taken, shamefully, to the loss of all Christendom, because from that castle the Sultan controls all Galilee, that is, the land of the tribes Zabulun, Naphtali, Asher, Issachar, and Manasseh, and the whole land as far as Acre, Tyre, and Sidon'.²⁵ Burchard invokes the names of the tribes at this point because they communicate not just the physical loss of territory, but also the claim that the land of the Israelite tribes is the rightful inheritance of Christians.

Christian interest in Palestine has been longstanding, both as a physical and imaginative space. For medieval Christian readers of Burchard's and Sanudo's books and their accompanying maps, there was a rich history of interpreting the Israelite conquest and allocation of the Promised Land which guided their understanding of the tribal territories. Such ideas are arguably found as early as the epistle to the Hebrews, in which the benefits of the Promised Land are seen as a foretaste of the spiritual benefits that would accrue through the sacrificial actions of Christ. There was, as the writer of this epistle put it, 'a Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God' (Heb. 4:9). A couple of centuries later the noted historian and theologian Eusebius of Caesarea produced a gazetteer of the Holy Land, the *Onomasticon*, that took a particular interest in identifying the tribal association of places mentioned in the biblical text. Eusebius' influential work is now mostly appreciated for the insights it can provide into Palestine's geography, but for earlier readers it was an aid to pilgrimage and for understanding the biblical text. In the Christian imagination, the stories of the biblical past are vividly present in the landscape, and mention of place names alone can activate entire biblical episodes in the minds of readers. The *Onomasticon* was not just an aid to piety, but helped to form Christian identity and to construct Palestine as a distinctly Christian space. The identification of the tribal territories was an important part of this supersessionistic appropriation of the land. As Eusebius informs his reader in his introduction, 'I shall make a map of ancient Judaea from the whole book, dividing the allotted territories of the twelve tribes'. The interest in the tribal territories reflects not just a concern to assist readers confronted with a plethora of names, but also a Christian claim to the Jewish inheritance.²⁶ As the Israelite tribes once received the land from God, now Christians obtain it as a space full of places with religious significance. Little surprise that the earliest Christian map of the Holy Land, the famous Madaba map, a sixth-century CE mosaic that decorated the floor of the Byzantine church of St George in Madaba, labels the land with the names of tribes, though it does not delineate the tribal territories as Burchard and Vesconte were later to do. The tribal territories were a distinctively Christian concern and one without parallel in Judaism.²⁷

²⁵ Bartlett, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, pp. 42–3, iv.5.

²⁶ As Stenger observes, 'in drawing a virtual map of the Holy Land it implied that the history and territory of ancient Palestine were part of the Christian heritage. What is more, through mapping the Old Testament times onto physical space Eusebius suggested that the Christian claim to antiquity was firmly founded on material evidence and could still be experienced in the environment' (Jan R. Stenger, 'Eusebius and the Representation of the Holy Land', in Serena Bianchetti, Michele Cataudella, and Hans-Joachim Gehrke (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Ancient Geography* [Leiden: Brill, 2016], pp. 381–98, at 395).

²⁷ It is only in the seventeenth century that Jewish mapmakers incorporate the tribal territories; this first came under the influence of Christian mapmakers (Rehav Rubin, *Portraying the Land: Hebrew Maps of the Land of Israel from Rashi to the Early 20th Century* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018], pp. 173–203). The earliest Jewish maps of the land of Israel from the medieval period are schematized with a particular interest in defining the borders of the land and portraying what neighboured it. This is consistent with Rabbinic texts which have little concern for the description of the tribal boundaries in Josh. 13–19, but do try to resolve the different perspectives on the extent of the land of Israel. Its borders are important not for claims about political sovereignty, but because certain laws in the Torah were only applicable to the land, such as the law of the tithe and the sabbatical year. As Eyal Ben-Eliyahu observes, 'The halakhic system required that the land have defined borders. This was crucial: Jews thus knew in which area they were commanded to observe the Sabbatical Year and set aside tithes and other gifts of produce for the priests. The land beyond these borders was also considered impure' (Eyal Ben-Eliyahu, *Identity and Territory: Jewish Perceptions of Space in Antiquity* [Oakland: University of California Press, 2019], p. 93).

In the Christian exegesis that emerged during the first few centuries and was influential throughout the medieval period, the land and its inheritance were a metonym for all the benefits that the gospel bestowed. Such ideas were helped in no small part by the fact that Joshua and Jesus are the same name in Hebrew and Greek. Joshua was a type of Christ who had shown himself superior to Moses just as the Gospel was superior to Jewish Law. Moses was unable to bring the people into the Promised Land, but with Joshua the inheritance was obtained that Moses could only view from a distance on Mount Pisgah. In the same way, the Gospel brought the salvation that the Hebrew Scriptures had foretold.²⁸ The possession of the land by the Israelite tribes was also seen to point to the eternal inheritance that Christians anticipated would be theirs in heaven. In the words of Jerome, ‘The whole account of the land of Judah and of the tribes is typical of the church in heaven. Let us read Joshua, the son of Nun, or the concluding portions of Ezekiel, and we shall see that the historical division of the land as related by the one finds a counterpart in the spiritual and heavenly promises of the other’.²⁹

2. THE ‘TABLE OF NATIONS’ (GENESIS 10) AND BOUNDED TERRITORIALITY

In the medieval maps adopted by early modern mapmakers, tribal boundaries communicated significant religious messages. They claimed the Christian right to inherit the holy sites of Old and New Testaments, and they were reminders of the salvation brought by the gospel and the prospect of a future, heavenly inheritance. When transferred from the *Tabula moderna Terrae Sanctae* to other modern maps in Renaissance editions of Ptolemy, the boundaries between geographical regions took on another, more mundane, significance. Lines on maps symbolized not eschatological realities, but contemporary ones; not the boundless divine promises, but the limits of political sovereignties.

The shift to the mundane and the political transformed the way that the Bible’s descriptions of geographical space were understood in the early modern period. An important example of how this occurred is the interpretation of the so-called ‘Table of Nations’ in Genesis 10 in England from the late sixteenth century to the early eighteenth century. The ‘Table of Nations’ describes how the descendants of Noah’s sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—spread over the earth and settled it. It is a repository of ancient Israelite knowledge of the inhabited world which lists around seventy peoples and is dated by critical scholarship to around the late sixth century BCE. Throughout the medieval period and Renaissance, the spreading of Noah’s descendants across the face of the earth was understood in conjunction with the story of the tower of Babel that followed in Gen. 11:1–9. The ‘Table of Nations’ described the multitude of languages that arose after the divine judgement and a learned discourse arose which sought to identify the languages and peoples mentioned in the biblical text. These were often accompanied by speculations about the original language of humanity, and claims about the cultural superiority of particular ethnicities. More cautious scholars recognized that languages had developed considerably since the time of Babel, and that efforts to identify the peoples of Genesis 10 were often difficult, if not impossible.³⁰

²⁸ Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: Part I: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (The Bible in Ancient Christianity 1; Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 290.

²⁹ John R. Franke and Thomas C. Oden, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament 4; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 73.

³⁰ Arno Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel: Geschichte der Meinungen über Ursprung und Vielfalt der Sprachen und Völker*, vol. 3.1 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1957), pp. 958–1150.

In late Tudor England the ‘Table of Nations’ was incorporated together with Pseudo-Berosus into various Chronicles which traced England’s kings back to Brute, Britain’s first and eponymous ruler, who was understood as a descendant of Japheth.³¹ English interpreters were inclined to attach great significance to Gen. 10:5, which read according to the Geneva Bible, ‘Of these were the yles of the Gentiles deuided in their landes, euery man after his tongue, and after their families in their nations’. In their view, the isles assigned to Japheth related to the British Isles. The English chroniclers agreed with most of their medieval predecessors that Noah’s three sons corresponded to the division of the known world into Europe, Africa, and Asia. The descendants of Japheth had received Europe as their inheritance, the Hamites, Africa, and the progeny of Shem, Asia. Andrew Willet, the author of a commentary on Genesis and Exodus (1633), would admit, however, that the division was not quite as neat as that ‘and in processe of time the three parts of the world were for the most part possessed, Europa by *Iapheths* posteritie, Africa by *Chams*, Asia by *Sems*: yet so, that in all these coasts, some of each were intermingled: as the Medes in Asia came of *Madaï* of *Iapheth*, the Cananites in Asia of *Chus* of *Cham*’.³² Beyond those broad continental ascriptions, English chroniclers do not concern themselves further with the precise territorial delimitation of the different descendants of Noah. Willet perceptively observes that Genesis 10 only describes the borders of the Canaanites with precision: ‘*Moses* doth carefully limit the Countrey of Canaan, because it was that land, which the Lord had promised to the Israelites.’³³

The notion that every people that descended from Noah had its own precisely delineated territory emerges clearly with the influential legal treatise by John Selden entitled *Of the Dominion or Ownership of the Sea* (1652) originally published in Latin under the title *Mare Clausum* (1635).³⁴ Selden was a celebrated jurist and Christian Hebraist whose *Mare Clausum* rejected the open sea arguments of Fernandus Vasquius and Hugo Grotius and insisted instead that the sea could be subject to national sovereignty.³⁵ Organized into two parts, the first is an astonishing display of erudition in which Selden deploys biblical and classical sources alongside Talmudic and post-Talmudic literature as well as European writings to demonstrate his contention that the sea was no different to the land in being able to be territorially divided. The second part utilized various historical sources to demonstrate the rights of the monarchs of Great Britain to the waters around the British Isles.

Selden’s understanding of territoriality reflects the influence of Ptolemaic cartography and aptly demonstrates the dynamics that Branch identified. It is not so much that *Mare Clausum* contains several maps of the British Isles, but that Selden imagines lines across geographical space. In particular, where biblical texts adopt the Mediterranean Sea as the western boundary of the Promised Land, Selden appeals to the medieval exegete Rashi who he believes understood these texts to be describing a line that crossed the Mediterranean Sea from the Nile to the northern coast of Israel.

³¹ Richard Grafton, *A Chronicle at Large and Meere History of the Affayres of Englande* (London: H. Denham, 1569); Raphael Holinshed, *The Firste [Last] Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande Conteyning the Description and Chronicles of England* (London: John Hunne, 1571); John Stow, *The Chronicles of England from Brute vnto This Present Year of Christ 1580* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1580).

³² Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis & Exodus: That Is, a Sixfold Commentary upon the Two First Bookes of Moses, Being Genesis and Exodus* (London: Haviland, 1633), p. 97.

³³ Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis & Exodus*, p. 103.

³⁴ John Selden, *Of the Dominion, or, Ownership of the Sea* (London: William Du-Gard, 1652); John Selden, *Mare Clausum Seu de Domino Maris* (London: William Stansby, 1635).

³⁵ Ofir Havry, *John Selden and the Western Political Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

And so that which is cut off here by the Border in a strait line (as the *vulgar* hath it) drawn from the entrance of *Nilus* to the Promontorie of Mount *Hor*, contain's no small portion of the Sea as assigned unto *Israël*.³⁶

Though Selden insists that such an idea 'is very easily to be understood without the help of a Map',³⁷ his conceptualization of space reflects early modern Europe where maps circulated widely amongst the literate.

Selden's claim that the seas can be subjected to national sovereignty assumes that the land is divided into clear national territories. In unfolding his argument, Selden begins by establishing the rights of individuals to private property and of states to national territories. Such rights are established by appeal to the text of the Bible. The use of private property Selden traces back to Cain and Abel. Cain had his own fields and Abel his own livestock, and further confirmation is found in Josephus who observes that Cain 'first set Bounds unto Fields'.³⁸ The dominions of nations, however, he traces back to the time just after the great flood as described in the so-called Table of Nations (Gen. 10). In the time of Noah the land was held in common, but with Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the world was divided between them. Of particular importance to Selden's argument is the allotment to Japheth's descendants, since these had long been associated in medieval exegesis with the peoples who had populated Europe.

*By Japhet and his sons were the Isles of the Gentiles divided in their Lands, everie one after his Tongue, after their Families, in their Nations; as it is recorded by Moses: That is to say, they settled themselves as private Lords, and appointed Bounds according to the number of their Families from the River Tanais even as far as the Atlantick Sea, or through a great part of the Western Asia, as it bend's towards the North and throughout all Europe.*³⁹

Scripture's reference to the 'Isles of the Gentiles' will play no small role in Selden's argument since these isles included most especially the British Isles, and he reasons that territorial assignment to Japheth and his progeny must also include the seas between those isles.⁴⁰

For my purpose, what is interesting about Selden's citation of Gen. 10:5 is the way that he has paraphrased the biblical text which speaks of 'divided in their Lands' to mean that they 'settled themselves as private Lords', that is with exclusive rights to enjoyment of a property, and 'appointed Bounds according to the number of their Families', that is with clearly defined boundaries. In time, these private dominions possessed by individuals will become nations. In the Table of Nations of Genesis 10, the spreading of peoples throughout the populated world seems to be in view, and the only borders that are explicitly mentioned are those of the Canaanite peoples (Gen. 10:19) for the simple reason that these will eventually mark the boundaries of the people of Israel (cf. Num. 34:1–12).

Subsequent writers also seemed to accept Selden's assumption that the 'table of nations' imagined a division of the world into bounded territories. In a discourse on Gen. 10:5 (1672), the Cambridge scholar Joseph Mede offered a detailed discussion of the location of the 'isles of the nations'. He imagined the known world to have been surveyed and divided

³⁶ Selden, *Of the Dominion, or, Ownership of the Sea*, p. 40. From a modern exegetical perspective Selden's interpretation has several issues. First, he has misidentified the brook of Egypt (נהל מצרים) with the Nile (for the difficulties with the term see Nadav Na'aman, 'The Brook of Egypt and Assyrian Policy on the Border of Egypt', *Tel Aviv* 6 [1979]: 68–90). Secondly, the verb / ה"א ת"ו is probably better rendered 'mark a border', rather than 'draw a line' Horst Seebass, *Numeri* 22,2–36,13 (Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007), p. 393.

³⁷ Selden, *Of the Dominion, or, Ownership of the Sea*, p. 34.

³⁸ Selden, *Of the Dominion, or, Ownership of the Sea*, p. 20; cf. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.62.

³⁹ Selden, *Of the Dominion, or, Ownership of the Sea*, p. 19.

⁴⁰ Selden, *Of the Dominion, or, Ownership of the Sea*, pp. 25–6.

in an orderly manner. The assignment ‘could be done no otherwise but by instituting an orderly Division; and that either by casting of lots, or chusing according to the order of their birthright, after some survey taken, of a sufficient portion of the Earth, and portions border’d out according to the number of their Nations, than of their Families, &c.’⁴¹ In his commentary (1695), Simon Patrick, the bishop of Ely, followed Mede in understanding that the verb ‘divide’ implied organization and not ‘a confused irregular Dispersion, wherein everyone went whither he listed, and seated himself where he thought good’. In contrast, it indicates a ‘distinct Partition’.⁴²

The non-conformist commentator Matthew Henry (1707) would go further and connect the division to Joshua’s distribution of the Promised Land. He observes about the allocation to Japheth’s sons, ‘The posterity of Japheth were allotted to the isles of the Gentiles, which were solemnly, by lot, after a survey, divided among them, and probably this island of ours among the rest’.⁴³ The division was even attributed to the great survivor of the flood himself:

*In his days ... was the earth divided among the children of men that were to inhabit it; either when Noah divided it by an orderly distribution of it, as Joshua divided the land of Canaan by lot, or when, upon their refusal to comply with that division, God, in justice, divided them by the confusion of tongues.*⁴⁴

Thus, the allocation occurred in the same manner as the Israelite tribes would later receive their territories. National territories will be as clearly delineated as the tribal territories were believed to be.

3. CONCLUSION

Branch’s analysis of the emergence of boundaries and the idea of the modern nation-state places his work alongside those theorists of the nation whom Anthony Smith would label (early) modernists: the nation is a product of the modern world.⁴⁵ For those who are perennialists, nations have always existed and ancient Israel is often adduced as a paradigmatic example.⁴⁶ For some, like Hazony, the nationalism that emerged in Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is an act of recovery. This essay seeks a cautious approach between the two and recognizes with Philip Gorski that what he calls ‘Hebraic nationalism’ drew its inspiration from the Old Testament.⁴⁷ As such, early modern notions of the nation were influenced by the Bible, but the interpretation of the sacred text was itself shaped by the new political theories. It was both the agent of change, and its object. The marking of boundaries spread from maps of the Holy Land to other maps in modern atlases. But this entailed a transformation of how these boundaries were understood. In medieval maps, the division of the land into tribal territories communicated spiritual realities: the inheritance of all things by Christians. As the lines in atlases were transferred from the maps of the Holy Land to the

⁴¹ Joseph Mede, *The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede, B.D., Sometime Fellow of Christ’s Colledge in Cambridge* (London: Roger Norton, 1672), p. 274.

⁴² Simon Patrick, *A Commentary upon the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1695), p. 176.

⁴³ Matthew Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (6 vols.; London: T. Pankurst, J. Robinson, and J. Lawrence, 1707), on Gen. 10.

⁴⁴ Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, on Gen. 10.

⁴⁵ E.g. Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), esp. pp. 7–13.

⁴⁶ Steven Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality, Ancient and Modern* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jacob L. Wright, *Why the Bible Began: An Alternative History of Scripture and Its Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁴⁷ Philip S. Gorski, ‘The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism’, *American Journal of Sociology* 105 (2000), pp. 1428–68.

maps of the modern world, the lines took on a different significance that indicated political sovereignty. At the same time, as we have seen from the interpretation of Genesis 10 in early modern England, the precise delineation of political borders was read back into biblical texts. A text that says very little about geographical boundaries gradually became a paradigmatic instance of God's ordering of the world according to nation-states.