



Getting the Message of Abraham Ortelius' Heart-Shaped Map and Atlas

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Abstract

In 1564, the celebrated Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius published his first cartographic work: a world map in the shape of a heart. This map manifests a spiritual call toward world unity heavily influenced by the heterodox sect known as the Family of Love. Six years later, Ortelius published the first edition of his groundbreaking magnum opus, an atlas entitled *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. With this later work, the unorthodox message of his cordiform map was not erased but transmuted into the form of an atlas. Abraham Ortelius' example demonstrates how the ways in which knowledge circulated within humanist networks ensured that spiritual concerns, particularly unorthodox ones, continued to influence European cartography long after the rediscovery and translation of Ptolemy in the early fifteenth century.

Keywords: *Atlas, Cartography, Cordiform, Family of Love, Ortelius*

1. Introduction

The Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598) published the first edition of his celebrated *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* in 1570. The *Theatrum* is considered the first atlas, defined as a bound collection of maps guided and shaped by its editor.¹ While Gerard Mercator's *Atlas*, which gave the name to the genre, would follow in 1595, Ortelius' *Theatrum* is the first work that fits this description. The work enjoyed enormous

¹ Unlike a simple collection of maps, the maps in an atlas must be coherent, in the same style, and include guiding text. The uniform structure of Ortelius' atlas meant that updated maps could easily be inserted into subsequent editions. Ortelius allowed for orderly supplementation of updated maps into later editions of his work. As a result, the original 1570 edition contained 53 maps, while the 1598 edition included 119. Beginning in 1579, Ortelius began inserting into editions of his atlas a collection of maps of ancient locations, called the *Parergon* (see Koeman *et al.* 2007, 1318-1320 and also Bagrow and Skelton 2010).

commercial success; it went through forty editions between 1570 and 1641, in Latin, Dutch, French, German, and English (Koeman *et al.* 2007, 1318-1321). An atlas would have been a luxury purchase, and indeed, the *Theatrum* cost the equivalent of a month of a printer's salary in 1570 (1331). Wealthy individuals could commission copies of the *Theatrum*, colored in by hand and specially bound (Van den Broecke *et al.* 1998, 81-82). Among those who could afford it, Ortelius' atlas was an instant success and assured the cartographer's financial security.

The work of Ptolemy, the second-century Egyptian geographer, had always been preserved in the Arab world, even if it had been essentially lost in medieval Europe. The Italian scholar and humanist Jacopo Angelo encountered Ptolemy's *Geographia* and translated it into Latin in 1406. This work laid the foundation for how we understand the creation and function of maps today, introducing the use of latitude and longitude to pinpoint locations and an index of place names to look up their locations quickly. Cartographic history since the nineteenth century has largely followed a positivist tendency: there were the Middle Ages, when monks created world maps with a mixture of guesswork and artistic license, and the Early Modern period, when the rediscovery of Ptolemy's ancient treatise on geography enlightened European mapmakers to techniques of mathematical cartography. Scholars have viewed cordiform, or heart-shaped, maps from the sixteenth century as exceptions that prove the rule, alternatively novelty items and grasping, failed attempts to depict the globe on a flat surface. As scholars such as Patrick Gautier Dalché (2013) have shown, however, one cannot draw a neat line between medieval and 'modern', reality and fantasy, spiritual and scientific. Using Ortelius' atlas as his primary case study, Denis Cosgrove argues against the notion that Renaissance geography was necessarily bound by the state political project, suggesting instead that it also served a moral and philosophical purpose (2003). Cultural critic Giorgio Mangani opened the door to scholarship on the spiritual themes of cordiform maps in particular with his 1998a article, 'Abraham Ortelius and the Hermetic Meaning of the Cordiform Projection'.

Some Ortelius scholars posit that 'Ortelius's atlas was primarily a commercial product' (Koeman *et al.* 2007, 1324). Ortelius' concern for profit, however, did not preclude him from imbuing his cartographic work with spiritual significance. Spirituality and commerce were not as opposed in Ortelius' world as this quotation suggests. Hailed as a watershed moment in the development of cartography, Ortelius' atlas was in fact not so distant from his first publication, a 1564 map of the world in the shape of a heart. This map manifests a spiritual call toward world unity heavily influenced by the heterodox sect known as the Family of Love. In his later work, the unorthodox message of his cordiform map was not erased but transmuted into the form of an atlas.

Ortelius worked in Antwerp during the early days of the Dutch Revolt, which began in the late 1560s and ended with the Netherlands achieving independence from Spain in 1648. Given the historical context, one might expect confessional divisions to have proved a barrier to communication between cosmographers and other intellectuals. Within Ortelius' network, this seems not to have been the case. Ortelius was a member of a religiously diverse network of European humanists. He was friends with Andrew Schotte, a Jesuit priest; Jakob Monau, a leader in the Calvinist church; and Justice Lipsius, who abandoned Catholicism for Calvinism before returning to the Catholic Church. Many of his friends had studied with the Protestant theologian Philip Melanchthon, whose 'philosophy of *pieta eloquens*, a synthesis of ecumenism, private piety, erudition, and observation, resonated in the irenic circle of Ortelius' (Meganck 2017, 22).²

² Ortelius' copious correspondence was published and translated in the nineteenth century by J.H. Hessels (1887). Given the number of Ortelius' surviving letters and the care he took to list the sources of his maps, it is no surprise that much scholarship on the cartographer has focused on his connections with other intellectuals, including

The idea that Ortelius' atlas was primarily a commercial product requires a narrow focus on the atlas itself. As a good humanist, Ortelius saw textual production as a collaborative effort, as evidenced by the detailed list of his sources that Ortelius included in the introduction to the *Theatrum*. We must situate Ortelius' work in its context in conversation with other texts and ideas in order to comprehend its message. Along with cartographic knowledge, Ortelius invested his work with spiritual meaning that like-minded individuals readily ascertained.

2. Ortelius' Cordiform Map

Ortelius' first map was a cordiform, or heart-shaped, map of the world (figure 1). A copper engraving on eight sheets, published by Gerard de Jode in 1564, the world of Ortelius' map somewhat resembles a kidney bean, curving upwards from the bottom and relatively flat on top. The world sits in a soup of winding clouds. A cartouche in the bottom left lists different commodities that one can find in various locales. Ortelius, after all, was a merchant producing maps for a predominantly merchant Dutch audience. On the bottom right, he included small maps of the cities of Tenochtitlan in the Aztec Empire and Cuzco in the Incan Empire, both based on illustrations in Ramusio's *Navigazioni et viaggi* (Van den Broecke *et al.* 1998, 98).

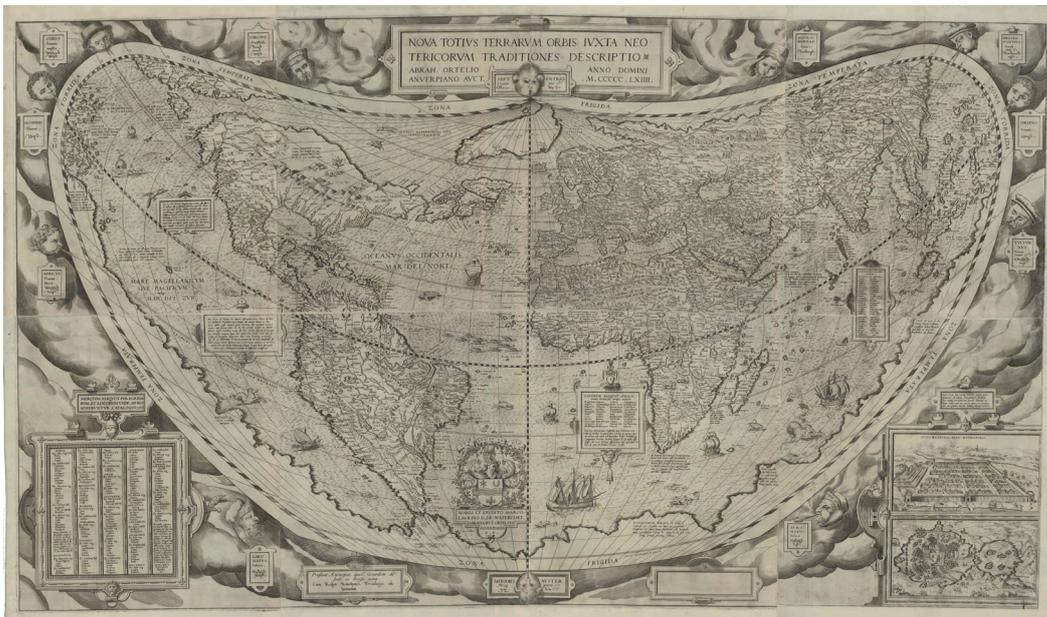


Figure 1 – Abraham Ortelius, *Nova Totius Terrarum Iuxta Neotericorum Traditiones Descriptio* (1564), ©British Library Board (Cartographic Items Maps C.2.a.6.)

It will be necessary to explain the origin of cordiform maps to understand the link between this map and a heart. Cordiform maps are based on a cartographic projection described in Ptolemy's *Geographia*. Addressing the problem of how to represent the globe on a flat surface,

the Family of Love. Influential works include Boumans 1954; Koeman 1964a and 1964b; Van den Broecke *et al.* 1998; Karrow 1993 and 1998; Mangani 1998a and 1998b. I discussed the theological implications of Ortelius' cordiform map in depth in Shifflett 2019.

Ptolemy proposed a mathematical projection for a world map that looks something like a horseshoe. It bulges in the middle and curves upward toward the top left and right corners. However, Ptolemy included descriptions of maps and how to make them, but no images of maps themselves. A German mathematician, Johannes Werner, first made explicit the visual link between Ptolemy's second projection and a heart in a 1514 treatise in which he printed blueprints for three different heart-shaped map projections (Kish 1965, 13). Over the next few decades, cartographers would play with these projections, stretching them into, presumably, what they believed were more accurate representations of the globe. By the time that Ortelius published his cordiform map in 1564, he had a range of cordiform cartographers on whom to draw: the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller; Oronce Fine, mathematician to King Francis I in France;³ the French cartographer Peter Apian; Apian's Flemish disciple, Gemma Frisius; and Gerard Mercator, a friend of Gemma Frisius as well as of Ortelius.⁴ Ortelius utilized a 'truncated' cordiform projection for his 1564 map, a flattened and distorted version of Werner's heart-shaped projection. The truncated cordiform projection represents a middle ground between portraying the world in the distinct form of the heart and trying to portray the spherical earth on a flat plane accurately, a problem that early modern cartographers had been wrestling with since the recovery of Ptolemy's *Geographia*.

Ortelius' connection to the Family of Love helps explain his decision to create a heart-shaped map. The Family of Love originated in Germany with the messianic visions of Hendrik Niclaes (c. 1501-c. 1580), then traveled to the Netherlands and England.⁵ The sect rejected mediation by priests in favor of direct contact between the believer and God. The goal was union with Christ, who would come to dwell inside the righteous man, erasing his sins. In a letter, French polymath Guillaume Postel asks Ortelius to give his regards to Christopher Plantin, a key member of the Family of Love, and to assure him that he knows members of the group.⁶ This letter is the principal piece of written evidence in support of Ortelius being a member of the Family; it would have been extraordinarily dangerous to write about a heretical sect to someone who was unaware of or unsympathetic to its existence. Unsurprisingly given the political climate in which he lived, Ortelius was discreet about his leanings. In March of 1593, he wrote to his nephew Jacob Cool: 'At in illo tempore sapiens tacebit ... Et crinistianismus est non hoc aut illud scire, dicere, vel agere, sed esse' (in Hessels 1887, 549).⁷ This conviction may link Ortelius to the Family of Love, who shared a belief that humans' relationships with God were internal and outside of the jurisdiction of worldly institutions. The very appeal of Familism in the Low Countries may have come from its convenient blending of individual spirituality and free trade: Niclaes emphasized that one could outwardly conform to local custom without betraying one's Familist conscience since rites and ceremonies were merely precursors to the real work of becoming united with Christ. He also encouraged his adherents to stay in the Catholic Church while participating in the rites of the Family of Love. This division may

³ On Oronce Fine, see Tom Conley's article in the present volume.

⁴ Werner himself credits Johannes Stabius, his contemporary and a professor at the University of Ingolstadt. For an overview of the cordiform projection and descriptions of these maps, see Kish 1965.

⁵ Friedrich Nippold published the seminal work on the Family of Love in 1862, where he discussed Plantin's connection to the sect. A steady stream of scholarship throughout the twentieth century worked to sort Familist beliefs from antagonistic propaganda and illuminate the extent of the group's influence, culminating in Alistair Hamilton's 1993 *The Family of Love* and Christopher Marsh's 1994 *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630*.

⁶ The Latin letter and an English synopsis were published in Hessels 1887, 46-49.

⁷ (The wise man, in these times, must remain silent ... Christianity is not so much knowing, saying or doing this or that, but being). My translation.

have been particularly appealing to Flemish humanists because it allowed them to maintain appearances and thus safety, reputation, and business.⁸

The heart served as the defining symbol of the Familist sect, representing universal love and compassion. It repeatedly appears in the work of its founder, Hendrik Niclaes. One such image, included in Niclaes' apocalyptic work, *The prophetic of the spirit of love* (1574), features a heart in which two hands embrace (figure 2). A label above the hands reads 'L.T.', for 'Love' and 'Truth'. A three-pronged lily fills the heart. A quatrain below the image celebrates the peaceful, loving qualities of a heart in which God dwells. In another image, from his *Exhortatio I* (1574), a lamb representing Christ stands on top of a human skeleton, which in turn rests on a globe in flames. The globe crushes a demonic figure labelled 'Synne'. The image represents the Apocalypse, entailing the end of the world and the victorious return of Jesus (Marsh 1994, 252).

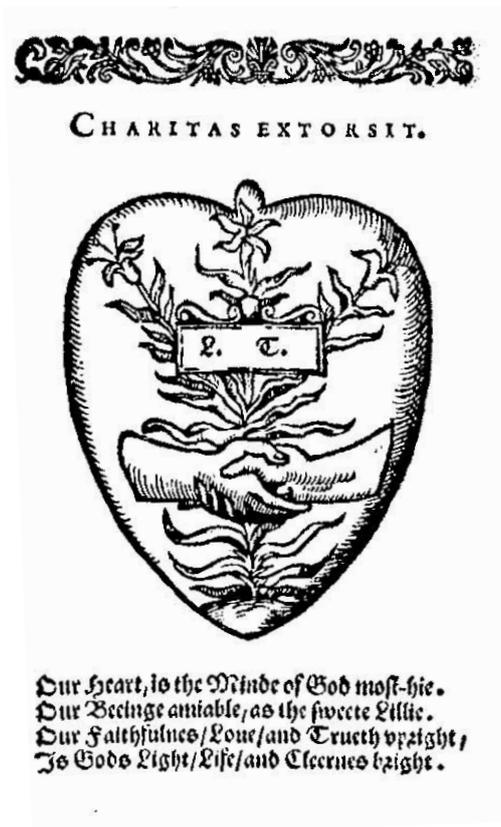


Figure 2 – Hendrik Niclaes (1574), *Hendrik Niclaes, The Prophetie of the Spirit of Loue. Set-fourth by HN: And by Him Perused A-New, and More Distinctlie Declared. Translated out of Base-almayne into English*, RB 62765, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California

⁸ Alistair Hamilton suggests that the Family of Love would have appealed to Ortelius because its philosophy would have allowed him to pursue commercial and scholarly interests without the barriers of traditional religious divides (1981, 71). Cultural critic Giorgio Mangani posits that the tremendous commercial success of the *Theatrum* – perhaps surprising given the atlas' exorbitant price – may have been due to Ortelius' network of prosperous Familists (1998b, 126-127).

Similar images appear in a collaborative text known as the *Album Amicorum* (c. 1574-1596). Ortelius circulated this tiny book, measuring just 16x11cm, among his friends in Europe. The basis of the book was a preparatory manuscript for a treatise on numismatics by Hans Vredeman de Vries, a Dutch artist and fellow resident of Antwerp. The manuscript contained circular frames that in the printed version would contain images of coins; Ortelius invited his friends to fill the frames with their own designs (Meganck 2017, 207). One hundred thirty-four authors contributed to the work between 1574 and 1596, filling the pages with textual and visual tributes to their friendships with Ortelius. For his *Album* entry, the burgmeister of Antwerp, Nicolas Rockox, drew two hands in a handshake, surrounded by the motto 'Amor Mutuus' (mutual love) and the Chi-Rho, symbol of Christian peace (1969, 27r). The humanist Adolphe de Meetkercke drew two hands in a handshake – one wearing an armored glove, the other bare – with a third hand gripping them both from above. The inscription around it reads in Greek: 'Being a brother for one's enemy as for one's friend' (31r).⁹ While it is impossible to determine the full extent of the Family of Love's membership in the Netherlands, we can see that the iconography of love and friendship that featured prominently in works by the group's leader was current amongst members of Ortelius' network.

How popular was Ortelius' cordiform map? How widely did it circulate? It certainly was not the cause of Ortelius' later fame and fortune. Ortelius' heart-shaped map does reappear later in the century, though. The so-called Fool's Cap Map, published anonymously, probably in Antwerp around 1590, recycles Ortelius' work into an explicit illustration of Neostoic philosophy (figure 3). The artist inserted Ortelius' cordiform map into the belled cap of a jester. The top of the image bears the title, 'Nosce te ipsum' (know thyself). Around the jester's neck, medals bear the phrases: 'O curas hominum', 'O quantum est in rebus inane', 'Stultus factus est omnis homo', and 'Universa vanitas omnis homo'.¹⁰ A quotation from Pliny tops the map: 'Hic est mundi punctus et materia gloriae nostrae, hic sedes, hic honores gerimus, hic exercemus imperia, hic opes cupimus, hic tumultuatur humanum genus, hic instauramus bella, etiam civilia. Plin' translated as: 'This is the place and the nature of our glory, here we have honor, manage power, wish wealth, here the human race riots, here we make wars, even civil ones. Pliny'. At the bottom of the map, one reads: 'Stultorum infinitus est numerus' (the number of fools is infinite). The Fool's Cap Map espouses the Neostoic theme of the vanity of life shared by Ortelius and his circle, which appears again in Ortelius' atlas. For the Neostoics, living in an era of calamity and destruction, humans must submit to God's will with mental fortitude and emotional equilibrium. Those who submit to the rule of emotions – including patriotism – are foolish.¹¹ The Fool's Cap Map is based on a 1575 work by Jean de Gourmont, a member of Plantin's circle. The two images are remarkably similar: a world map fills the face of a fool, who holds a scepter in one hand, a chain of Neostoic adages draped over one shoulder. The main difference is that while the 1590 map uses Ortelius' cordiform map, the 1575 version uses the world map from the *Theatrum*. Plantin, Gourmont, and Ortelius were part of a close-knit circle that shared philosophical assumptions and circulated Ortelius' work among themselves.

⁹ The *Album Amicorum* presents texts in several different languages, primarily Latin and Dutch. For this article, I relied on the Jean de Puraye's 1969 facsimile edition that includes a translation of the entire text into French, which I have here translated into English (Ortelius 1969). Page numbers after quotations refer to de Puraye's edition.

¹⁰ ('Oh human ambitions, Oh how empty is this life, Each man has become stupid, Each man is a whole vanity') translations in Mangani 1998a, 71.

¹¹ Cartobibliographic information for this map and a discussion of its provenance can be found in Shirley (1983). This map holds an outsized influence among cartographic works on literary scholarship; notably, see Chapple 1993 and Ramachandran 2017.

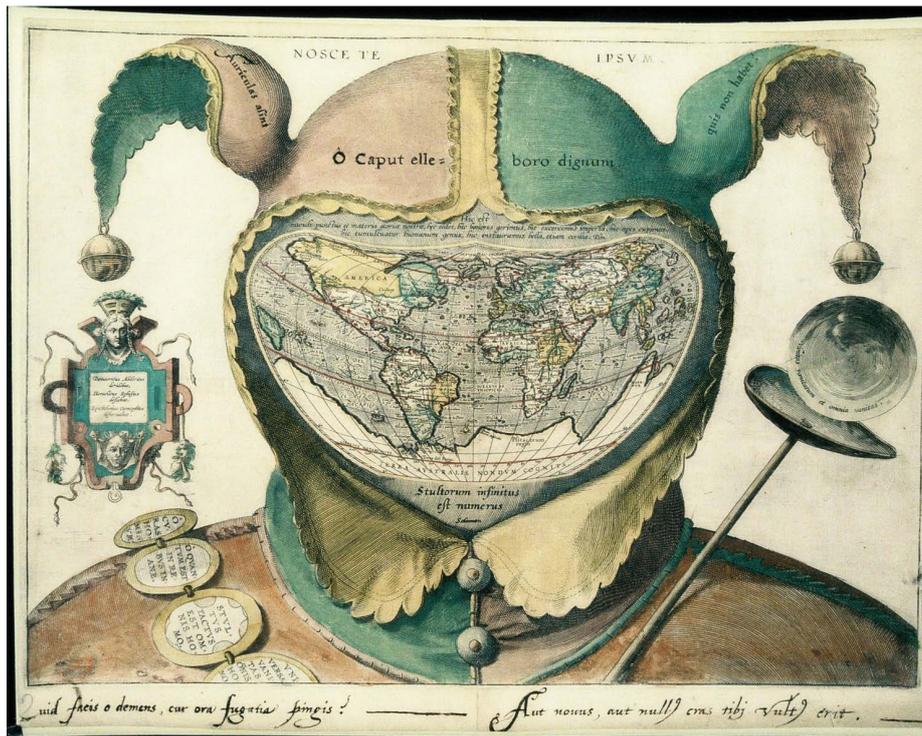


Figure 3 – Fool's Cap Map of the World (c. 1590), Bodleian Library.
Now at the Ashmolean, formerly Douce Portfolio 142(92)

3. Light as Familist Symbol in Ortelius' Atlas

It is evident from the Fool's Cap Map that Ortelius' contemporaries read Neostoic messages in his heart-shaped map. Did they also detect his Familist sentiments? Given the lack of recorded responses to Ortelius' heart-shaped map, this is difficult to answer. It is clear, though, as we shall see, that those in Ortelius' circle detected, and probably shared, the Familist leanings in his work as a whole.

The heart-shaped map visually represents what humanists like Ortelius believed would be mankind's ultimate destiny: to be united in Christ's love. The act of uniting the fragmented pieces of the world in between the covers of an atlas points to this same ideal. The French editions of the atlas published by Christopher Plantin alter the original text in subtle ways that highlight the Familist messages in Ortelius' work, as if to make sure they are not lost in translation. Plantin was a key member of the Family of Love.¹² He published fifteen treatises by Nicolaes between 1555 and 1565, along with Nicolaes' magnum opus, the *Glass of Righteousness*, a 600-page folio volume that Plantin somehow managed to circulate in secret. The French publisher took over publication of Ortelius' atlas from the printer Gillis Copen van Diesth of Antwerp in 1579.

¹² Plantin's connection to the Family of Love was elaborated upon by Rooses 1896, Verwey 1954, Voet 1982, and others. See especially Hamilton 1981, 65-70.

In French editions of the atlas, Ortelius' introduction reads: 'Et puis, pour fournir à la totale description de tout cest Univers, ou pour le monstrier totalement en ce Theatre, nous y avons adjousté certaines Cartes nouvelles, (selon nostre petite portée) pour approcher aussi pres de la perfection requise, que faire se pouvoit pour le temps present' (1581, 3).¹³ Plantin is translating the Latin phrase 'ad seriem nostram aliquo modo complendam' – in my own translation, 'in order to complete our series in some way' – as 'pour approcher aussi près de la perfection requise', or 'to get as close to the required perfection as possible'. His use of the word 'perfection' was a deliberate choice that echoes the rhetoric of the New Testament of the Christian Bible, where 'perfection' is used to mean spiritual completion, that is, union with Christ.¹⁴ This is how Niclaes uses the term in his Familist writings. Plantin implies that the 'required perfection' entails uniting accurate maps of all places in the world between the covers of one book – the atlas. If one replaces 'maps' with 'people', the statement comes to reflect the Familist definition of perfection, in which different people of all religions everywhere in the world would be united in the embrace of Christ's love. The goal of Familism was to lead its disciples toward this perfection. The individual could attain perfection by spiritually uniting with Christ, or in Niclaes' rhetoric, becoming 'Godded with God'. Incidentally, Niclaes' emphasis on perfection, and his assertion that his followers could attain it by becoming 'Godded with God', was a major target of criticism by contemporaries (Moss 1981, 42). The atlas was not simply a collection of maps, but a carefully curated selection of the best maps to create a stylistically unified whole. Ortelius created a book of maps that was not only easy to use but embodied the ideal of a unified world, so dear to the Familists.

In the preface to the original 1570 Latin edition of the *Theatrum*, Ortelius writes that he chose to use the best and most recent maps published – or in his words, 'in lucem editis' (brought to light).¹⁵ In the French edition, Plantin repeated the reference to light, as if to make it stand out: 'Premierement, nous avons deliberé de mettre en cedit Livre, toutes les Cartes Geographiques, qui ont esté imprimées, ou mises en lumiere ...' (1581, 2, my emphasis).¹⁶ And repeating in the next sentence: 'Nous avons choisi la meilleure Carte (a nostre advis) qui avoit esté mise en lumiere ...'¹⁷ (*ibid.*). The Familists thought of God as a form of light, and the goal of the individual was to unite with God's light. In his *Exhortatio I*, Niclaes refers to 'God, a mighty Spirit, a perfect clear Light and a true Being ... we become likewise with the clearness of his Godly Light ... Godded' (quoted in Moss 1981, 41). Adherents of any religion, anywhere in the world, were invited to participate in this mystical communion, which Familists believed would supersede confessional divisions. Light for the Familists was an important way of thinking about God and about spiritual teleology.

Plantin ranked just below Henrik Jansen van Barrefelt in Familist hierarchy (Moss 1981, 8 and 21). Barrefelt was a Familist who separated from the group to form a more radical and

¹³ (And so, to produce the total description of this Universe, or to show it totally in this Theater, we have added certain new maps [according to our limited ability] to approach the required perfection as closely as one can at the present time). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the the 1581 French edition of Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* are mine.

¹⁴ For example: 'But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away' (1 Cor. 13:10).

¹⁵ 'Primo, nobis animus fuit repraesentare tibi, quicquid in ullis Geographicis, aut Chorographicis Chartis hinc inde tam recenter, quam nuperrime multis abhinc annis (quo factum est, ut earum etiam multae nunc inveniri nequeant) in lucem editis, unquam habueris ...' (Aiiij).

¹⁶ (First, we decided to put in this book all the geographical maps that have been printed, or put to light ...) (my emphasis).

¹⁷ (We chose the best map [in our opinion] that has been put to light ...) (my emphasis).

more individualist cult of his own (Mangani 1998a, 73). Calling himself 'Hiël', meaning 'the uniform life of God', Barrefelt eschewed Nicolaes' increasing concerns with creating structure and ceremony within the Familist movement, reiterating that the connection between a believer and God was personal and transcended any particular church. He insisted on the importance of the image as an object of contemplation, capable of bringing men's spirits closer to God. The visual representation of the world was thus a means of transmitting a spiritual ideal. On the map of Ortelius' design that opens the *Theatrum*, titled *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, a cylindrically-projected world image rests on a sea of twisting clouds, reminiscent of those that appear on his cordiform map. A cartouche at the bottom of the map bears a quotation from Cicero's *Tuscolanae disputationes*: 'Quid ei potest videri magnum in rebus humanis aeternitas omnis, totiusque mundi nota sit magnitudo?' (IV, 17, 37).¹⁸ When Ortelius had to replace the worn-out plates for this map in 1587, he reinforced its message by adding four additional cartouches, two bearing further quotations from Cicero and two from Seneca, including this quotation from Cicero's *De natura deorum*: 'Equus vehendi causa, arandi bos, venandi et custodiendi canis, homo autem ortus ad mundum contemplandum' (II, 37) (figure 4).¹⁹ For like-minded readers, Ortelius' cartographic work filled the role of visual contemplation of God's creation, lifting the spirit toward the divine. This same quotation from Cicero is repeated at the beginning of French editions of the atlas, published by Plantin beginning in 1579. It replaces the dedication to Philip II of Spain that appears in the Latin editions. It is an open question whether the substitution was Ortelius' idea or Plantin's. It was most likely the result of a careful political calculation as to whether or not Philip II's authority in the Netherlands would survive the Dutch Revolt. Still, it is notable that Ortelius and Plantin thought this quotation worth repeating in the span of a few pages.

¹⁸ (For what can seem of moment in human affairs for him who keeps all eternity before his eyes and knows the scale of the universal world?) (in Nuti 2003, 54)

¹⁹ ('The horse was created for riding, the ox for ploughing, the dog for hunting and keeping guard; man himself, however, came into existence for the purpose of contemplating the world') (53).



Figure 4 – Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1608), David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries (Image 10001057.jp2)

The use of emblems to produce and react to cartographic work points to a shared affinity between Ortelius and his circle for visual contemplation as a spiritual exercise. With his contribution to the *Album Amicorum*, the Dutch engraver Philip Galle explains the value of emblems with an emblem of his own. He drew a profile of Christ's head, with this inscription: 'If Christ is the goal towards which our desires strive, what can I give you better than an image of his visage? This is nothing but a shadow, but the immaculate image [that] you love: that is his miraculous life'.²⁰ The metaphor of the mirror emphasizes the spiritual importance of the representation of the natural world. In a similar vein, Ortelius once wrote a letter in which he praised his friend Peter Brueghel for painting landscapes that were true to observation yet carried layers of meaning (Bakker and Webb 2012, 145). In his *Album Amicorum*, Ortelius himself wrote a text in honor of his late friend, commenting that he sees 'in his paintings not works of art but works of nature and I name him, not the best among painters, but Nature among painters; that is why I judge him worthy of imitation by all others' (1969, 12).²¹ Ortelius' letters and cartographic work suggest that he saw nature and its visual representations as equally effective in leading one's mind toward God.

²⁰ Translated from Dutch in Woodall 2017, 660.

²¹ For a discussion of Ortelius' relationship with Peter Brueghel, see Bakker and Webb 2012, 144-146.

4. *Getting the Message: The Album Amicorum*

Did the Familist influence get lost in translation between the cordiform map and the politically palatable atlas? Based on the entries in the *Album Amicorum*, it would appear not.

We have examined the metaphor of light as important to the Familist sect. The metaphor of publishing maps as thrusting them into the light, and of Ortelius as the source of that light, is revealing as to how Ortelius and his contemporaries thought about the dissemination of cosmographical knowledge. Several of the authors in the *Album Amicorum* link Ortelius with the sun god Phœbus, who lights the world. The poet Maximilian de Vriendt writes in his contribution: ‘But the favor of Phœbus does not land equally on all heads and there are few birds who can cross all the earth. Alone, Ortelius, through the investigation of his capable mind, traverses it and fills it with things deserving of his adoptive father the god of Claros ...’ (1969, 39v).²² The author Jean de Gruytere also portrays Ortelius as the new Phœbus. Referring to the atlas, he writes that ‘... an instant suffices him to reveal the world to all men’s eyes’. This makes Phœbe say: ‘I know, but allow that my name, that of the sun, be given to him that Ortelius may be the True Sun’ (53v). This last part is a play on Ortelius’ name, as Orth-Helios, or True Sun. Likewise, the poet Jean van Leernout writes: ‘Ortelius and Phœbus are equal. For one lights the world with his light, the other as well. To tell the truth, the greatest is not Phœbus’ (110r).

Shared assumptions between Ortelius and his readers allowed such coded images and emblems to be understood. This helps to explain some of the more bizarre and, to modern readers, indecipherable entries in the *Album*. Zacharias Heyns, Ortelius’ secretary and author of a popular book of emblems, contributed a strange drawing of a pyramid topped with the symbol of Christian peace filled with an assortment of objects: an eye, a coffin, two fish, and so on (104v) (figure 5). Heyns’ exact intentions are unknown. The symbols and the pyramid probably have some Hermetic meaning, perhaps known only to Ortelius and his circle. Following the Hermetic trend, the Englishman William Camden compares Ortelius to Hermes in his emblem. He sketches the head of Hermes and a symbol for the planet Mercury; around the images, an inscription reads: ‘Hermeti sydus sacrum, mihi sydus amicum’ (113v).²³ Hermeticism was secretive, saving its wisdom to be passed on orally to only the deserving and initiated, and thus it is unclear to modern scholars what exactly those tendencies were. These entries in the *Album* point to the existence of a shared visual language among Ortelius and his circle that allowed for coded communication.

²² The ‘god of Claros’ refers to Apollo.

²³ (Star consecrated to Hermes, star that is dear to me).

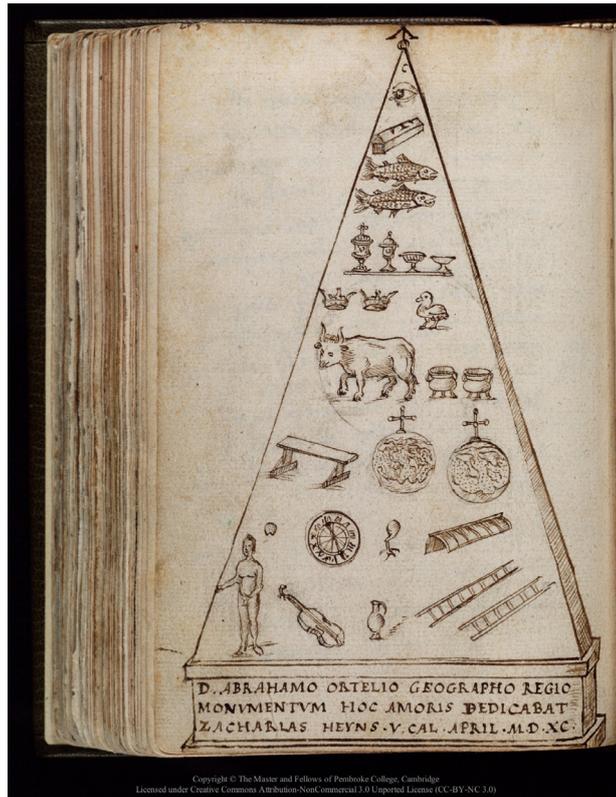


Figure 5 – Abraham Ortelius, *Album Amicorum*.

By permission of the Master and Fellows of Pembroke College, Cambridge, reference GBR/1058/ORT/1 [104v]

In a letter to Ortelius in 1567, three years after the publication of the cordiform map, Guillaume Postel praised Ortelius' cartographic work as (along with his own studies) contributing to the advancement of Christianity (in Hessels 1887, 42-46). Later Postel claimed that Ortelius' *Theatrum* was the most important book after the Bible, writing in a 1579 letter: 'Jesus, "qui Lux et Ros et Essentia vitæ nostre et industriæ est, ipse est Ortelius ille vere existens, qui Theatrum totius Galliæ depingi satagit et pro totius generis humani usu et Dei gloria scripsit ...' (189).²⁴ Here, Postel includes Ortelius in what he believed was the destiny of the human race, by which the king of France would pave the way for a universal religion and government. Allegorically linking Christ's blood to dew that lands upon the spirit of all people, Postel interpreted his own name as the Hebrew words 'post al', meaning 'by dew', and transmuted Ortelius' latinized name – Ortelio – into 'lumen roris', or 'light of dew', and pointed to the *Theatrum* as a mechanism by which the dew of Christ was disseminated to all peoples (Mangani 1998b, 261-262). Similarly, Zacharias Heyns portrayed Ortelius as a spiritual leader through a sketch in which three female figures representing Faith, Hope, and Charity gently guiding a nude man toward a symbol of Christian peace, the Chi-Rho, hovering in the sky in a brilliant sun (figure 6). An inscription

²⁴ (Jesus, our life and the Light ... He is Ortelius himself, who sketched the "Theatrum" of all Gaul, and wrote it for the use of the entire human race and the glory of God ...) (trans. in Hessels 1887, 186).

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