The Changing Role of Elizabethan and Early 17th Century Cartography. An Analysis of Christopher Saxton’s *Map of Hampshire* (1575) and John Speed’s *Map of Hampshire* (1611)

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On the official website of the British Library, there is a scan of a 1558 map of England, Ireland, France and Spain. The accompanying text recounts its story. The map is part of what came to be known as the Queen Mary Atlas and was ordered by Mary in 1558 from a Portuguese mapmaker, Diego Homen, most probably as a gift for her Catholic husband, King Philip II of Spain. Since Mary had died before the atlas was finished, it was presented to Elizabeth I. It is visible that Philip’s coat of arms on the map was scratched out for Elizabeth I. The royal insignia on the map served more than a purely decorative or pragmatic function: they also had their symbolic significance (“Elizabeth I’s map of the British Isles, 1558”). Whoever put a stamp on a map simultaneously argued their case for power over the depicted land. Elizabeth could not have possibly accepted a foreign, let alone Catholic, stamp of possession on her own land. The queen whose body remained virginal and unconquered wanted her land to remain virginally free of foreign (and, incidentally, male) touch. England’s body was her own as the famous Ditchley portrait dramatically shows (Helgerson 111). The royal coat of arms on the map does not merely speak about the source of authority but also about the relation of the authority to the depicted land (Helgerson 111). In this paper I will attempt to prove that Richard Helgerson’s argument (112) that Christopher Saxton’s atlas (1575) “unintentionally undermines” the royal authority can also be applied to John Speed’s map (1611), but in the case of the latter the undermining takes a more intentional form.

While it is stressed that England’s cartography of the English land,
despite its promising beginnings, had a late start, it is worth mentioning the state of affairs before the 1570s (Delano-Smith and Kain 66). Maps were used in a variety of situations: there were maps for overseas trade and exploration, for national defence and military planning (appropriated especially by Henry VIII and Lord Burghley), for boundary disputes and other legal matters, for land reclamation; maps of fortified towns, of buildings, of forests and woods and of manors and estates. They were all, however, produced in manuscript (Delano-Smith and Kain 50, 54). The maps concerning national defence could hardly be popularly shared given their secretive purpose. This meant that they were prepared for specialists and for special purposes. Thus, they remained both rare and expensive, unattainable for poor university students, for instance. A more general vision of the earth, the medieval theologically-based *Mappamundi*, quickly became redundant in the Protestant England, partly because of its Catholic origin and partly because of its unpractical purpose (Delano-Smith and Kain 54). Because of the policies affecting the freedom of the book trade, English religion and politics as well as the idiosyncrasies of England’s rulers (Delano-Smith and Kain 52), the English waited for a map of their own country longer than, for example, the German and the Italian. It was only in the 1570s that the first printed map was ordered by the soon-to-become Master of Queen’s Requests, Thomas Seckford (Delano-Smith and Kain 68).

The cartographic transformation would have been impossible had it not been for the printed map. Maps became popular not only because they became cheaper and more easily accessible; rather than specialized, maps were now multi-purpose, designed for a “diverse, largely unknown and impersonal market” (Delano-Smith and Kain 53). Given the rapid rise in the number of population, too, the proportion of those who could read increased (Delano-Smith and Kain 49). Maps no longer catered solely for the intellectual and the pragmatic in the elite of the society. Delano-Smith and Kain give a lengthy list of places where maps suddenly became a point of reference rather than a novelty (Delano-Smith and Kain 49). The ubiquity of maps naturally led to changes in the maps themselves. However, this paper attempts to analyze not the changes in the map-making technology but, rather, in presenting the landscape of England. To that end, I analyze two maps of Hampshire (Norgate and Norgate): Christopher
Saxton’s map of 1575 and John Speed’s map of 1611. It is my contention that the changes in the cartography both reflected and caused the changes that took place in the conceptualization of and the attitude towards the English soil and language by the English. As J. R. Hale (qtd in Harley 26) stressed, without maps “a man could not visualize the country to which he belonged.”

The 1575 map’s orientation is given on the borders of the map by labels (fig. 01): *Septentrio* (north) on the top, *Oriens* (east) on the right-hand side, *Meridies* (south) on the bottom and *Occidens* (west) on the left-hand side. Apart from the big royal insignia (fig. 03) on the left-hand side, there is also the coat of arms of Thomas Seckford, Master of Requests (fig. 02). The title of the map, “Sovthamtoniae” (fig. 04), is given under the royal insignia on the right-hand side. The writing in Latin says: “Comitatus (preter Insulas/Vectis, Jersey et Garnsey/quae sunt partes eins dem/comitatus) cum suis undiq:/confinibus, Oppidis, pagis/Villlis et flumnibus/Vera descriptio”, which translates to (my translation): “The county (apart from the Isle of Wight, Jersey and Garnsey, which are part of the same county) with all its borders, towns, villages, parks and rivers faithfully described”. Another cartouche (fig. 05) on the right-hand side gives even more precise information as to what the map includes: “Sovthamtoniae/Comitatus (preter Civitatem/Wincestriam) habet Oppidame/catoria 18 pagos et villas 248”, that is: “The county (apart from the city of Winchester) has market towns: 18, villages and towns: 248”. The author of the map decided it was necessary to clearly define the scope of his work. This may stem from the fact that his map-making project was ordered (in effect) and funded by the queen, therefore, it was wise to summarize and “show off” the effects of his work. Moreover, this being the first mass-printed English map of England, some introduction was needed. The scale of the map is drawn, but not given in numbers (fig. 06). The scale line is 10 miles but it is difficult to count its relation to land; according to Martin and Jean Norgate the scale is about 4 miles to 1 inch. The signature of Christopher Saxton is there on the bottom border of the map (fig. 09). There is no index grid. Nor is there a map key. Latin is the

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1 In the dispute over the true authorship of the map I agree with Helgerson and Delano-Smith and Kain and will refer to the 1575 map as the map by Christopher Saxton (Helgerson 110-111, Delano-Smith and Kain 70-71).
language on the map, with the names of towns being latinized and often shortened (Boldere, Sovthhmon). Its geographical content includes: rivers (some of which are named) (fig. 07), hills of various (somewhat random) sizes (fig. 11), forests marked by trees (fig. 10), shaded coast (fig. 12), marked shoals (fig. 12). Human geography includes: cities (fig. 13), towns (fig. 16) (a dot, a circle, buildings, a tower), villages (fig. 15) (a dot, a circle, a building), parks (fig. 08) (marked by circular fencing), county boundaries, bridges on rivers. There are no roads. The decorative elements include: swash lettering, ten boats (fig. 17), two monster-fish creatures (fig. 18) in the “Oceanvs”.

The 1611 map differs from its 50-year-old predecessor in a variety of ways. It is, too, north-oriented. The royal insignia are located on the right-hand side of the map (fig. 20). However, they are considerably smaller than those on the 1575 map. Moreover, apart from the King’s, there are also other coats of arms arranged neatly on both sides of the map. They belong to: three earls of Southampton on the right-hand side, arranged in a chronological order, and four earls of Winchester on the left-hand side. The first earl of Southampton mentioned is described as “a famous warrier/against ye Normans” (fig. 19); the others come from the times of Henry VIII and Edward VI. The title of the map (fig. 20) is positioned under the royal coat of arms. John Speed’s surname is written down in a box located on the English Channel (fig. 21). There is a similar scale of miles (fig. 21), but still without its relation to the real soil; it is only drawn. Nor is there an index grid. Interestingly, the map includes a map within itself: a map of Winchester (fig. 22) is drawn in the top right-hand corner. It is also north-oriented with a coat of arms of the town. Its scale is given in steps (“PASES”). The streets and important spots in the town are numbered, and numbers are explained in the key next to the map. Underneath the map of Winchester, there is a legend story written in English with an illustration under it (fig. 23). Its geographical content includes: rivers (fig. 24) (which are not named), shaded coast (fig. 24, 25), marked shoals (fig. 25), relief marked by hillocks (fig. 26), woods marked by trees (fig. 27), parks marked by circular fences (fig. 28). County and hundred boundaries are included in the map. There are cities (fig. 29), towns (fig. 30), villages (fig. 31) and coastal castles (fig. 25) drawn onto the map. There are, too, many decorative elements, which appear somewhat less
random than in the 1575 map. The names of neighbouring counties are written in swash lettering, there is an illustration of a dog chasing deer on the border between Rinwood Hundred and Christchurch Hundred (fig. 32). A vignette (fig. 23) describes and depicts the story of the Rout of Winchester and the most probably apocryphal story of the deposed Queen Mathilda escaping from Winchester during the siege of the city in 1141 (Crouch 184-187). While the names in the 1575 version are generally latinized, Speed provides the names in English (e.g. Exburye becomes Exbury, Boldere, with its Latin ending, Boldre, Christchurch with a “v” for “u” - Christchurch, Jane Austen’s future birthplace changes from Steventon to Styphenton – but, interestingly, changes back to its 1575 spelling afterwards since Jane Austen was born in Steventon). The map is written in the English language (apart from “PASES” and the Crown’s coat of arms).

The differences between the two maps are stark. Firstly, the languages of the maps differ: Saxton used Latin while Speed used as much English as possible. This must have played a role in the shaping of the English perception of the English land in two ways: it was more accessible to non-Latin speakers, thus more familiar, more “own”. The struggle for the native tongue to be used in the translation of the Bible apparently did not stop at religion only. Speed’s attitude towards place names, too, reflects an interest, to say the least, in what England truly looked, sounded and was like rather than its stiff Latin ideal. What Saxton calls the “Oceanvs”, Speed refers to as “The British Sea”. A first-glance observation is that Speed’s map is much more “dense” and detailed. While this obviously stems from the fact that Speed did not survey the land so much as he based his map on the work of his predecessors and himself focussed on the details (Delano-Smith and Kain 75), the fact that his map did come into being is proof that this attention to detail was needed and the interests of the public changed. Moreover, the amount of history incorporated into the maps also differs

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2 A comment by William Caxton in the preface to „The Book of Eneydos” concerning the diversity of the English language is an interesting one. While Caxton does describe the dialetical forms of language „overrude” and „curiouse” (in the negative sense of the word), there seems to be a sense of wonder at the fact that people using the „same” language cannot easily communicate. He says he will use „our” language, that is the upper-class English. This is a paradox that maps (and print) to some extent solve: they are ubiquitous and can spread the knowledge of different names by reaching to a greater audience (Helsztyński 207-208).
between the two pieces of work. There is the date of the publication of Saxton’s cartographic feat but, other than that, dates or historically important places or figures (apart from the royal insignia) are non-existent. Speed’s map, however, finds the space on the plan to recount the history of Queen Mathilda, illustrates it and places the coats of arms of figures important for the area. “BOGO or BEAVOVS/Earle of Southamp/ton”, the valiant warrior I have mentioned above, can be the source of pride for the people from the area. I have been unable to identify the figure behind the coats of arms. However, the mentioning of the historically distant figures makes Speed’s map rooted in history rather than aimlessly floating in the present moment as Saxton’s does. It may also have evoked a sense of pride in the inhabitants of the area: not merely pride in the Earl’s deeds but pride in their own deep-rootedness in the land. People living in Hampshire belonged to Hampshire, not the current queen or king. They had their common history that was fixed and unrelated to the Macbethan “hurlyburly” that the reign of Elizabeth I and James I to some extent were. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the solitary royal insignia and as many as eight coats of arms of people related to the land created the effect of the “mass” overshadowing the crown. The royal insignia are just barely bigger than the eight earls’. Finally, the map of Winchester brings the idea of a “town” closer to the imagination and the measurement of space in steps is tantalizingly tangible.3

Helgerson, while commenting on Saxton’s map, says that in the wake of the publication of Saxton’s atlas cartography was anything but politically and ideologically neutral. Because the generally available map changed the conceptualization of England in the minds of the English, in effect, although unintentionally, it did undermine the royal claim to possession. “Maps thus opened a conceptual gap between the land and its ruler, a gap that would eventually span battlefields” (114). However, what Saxton did at the queen’s order, Speed did of his own accord. And while his attention to detail and individual dedication to the task was not necessarily of revolutionary nature, the Crown’s unwillingness to grant official status to any cartography associations of

3I am of course aware of the fact that „steps” had been used in measuring distance since the ancient times. This, however, need not change the effect the description of land measured by an Englishman’s steps might have had on the imagination of his fellow Englishmen.
the 16th and 17th centuries may be telling (Helgerson 127-128). Queen Elizabeth’s famous speech in 1588 in which she made a reference to the “two bodies of a king” was reassuring and much-needed at the moment right before the battle. However, the identification of the body of the country with the body of the monarch was slowly becoming outmoded. In England, this ultimately led to the dramatic events of 1649. Saxton’s, Speed’s and their followers’ maps did play a role in the undermining of the idea that the crown’s body equaled the land.

Works Cited


APPENDIX 1
Christopher Saxton’s Map (1575)
APPENDIX 2
John’s Speed’s Map (1611)

Fig. 19  
Fig. 20  
Fig. 21  
Fig. 22