Elements matter: The context and perception of classical and cosmological elements versus earthly and physical matter in the Rosette Map

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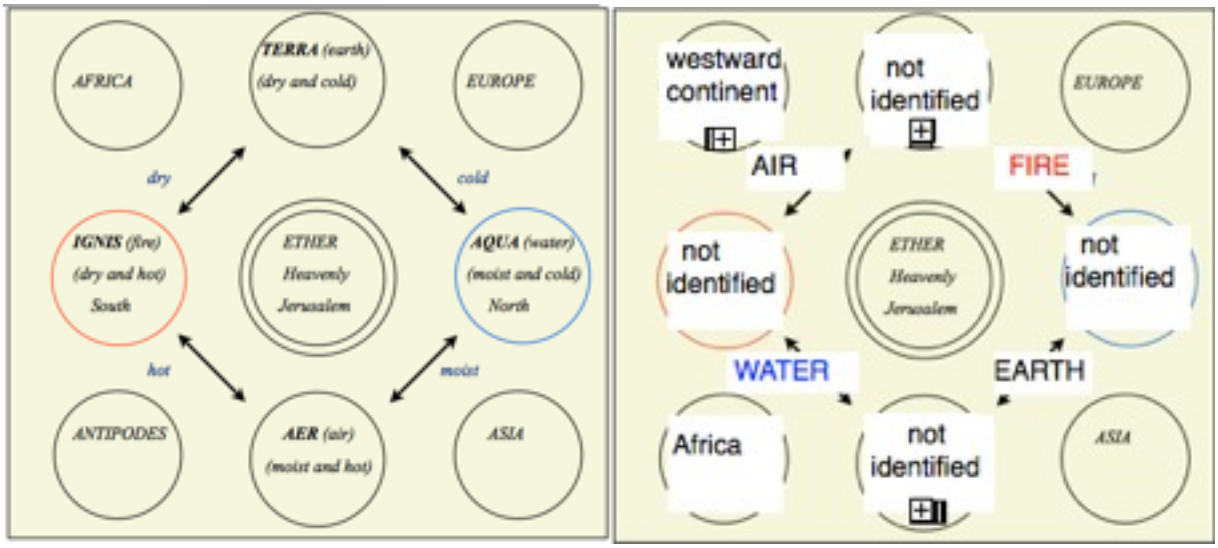
Introduction

Recently TH Ing published a blogpost (1) in which the author reviewed the paper ‘VM408 folio86v ‘The Rosette Map’: Elements of a *Mappa mundi* and a map of the Elements’ by Wastl & Feger (2) and set out an extension and revision to the proposed results in the reviewed paper.

The section with the review summarised in excellent fashion most of the proposed positioning of continents and classical elements in the Rosette Map. The review agrees with many of the basic conclusions, such as the joint presentations of both, continents and classical elements, in the Rosette map. The review, however, doesn’t include the section with the proposed synthesis of geographical positioning of continents and the deducted climate by the classical elements as identified in the Rosette Map.

TH Ing disagrees with a number of the identifications and set out to provide details and explanations for a revised version of the previous findings. For reason of a comparison, I summarise both positions in the following chart drawing on the published version (3)



a) Wastl and Feger b) TH Ing

Figure 1 : Summary sketches of elements in Rosette map by a) Wastl and Feger, from (3), and b) deducted summary for TH Ing’s placement based on (1)

Although TH Ing agrees with the depiction of elements in general, TH Ing merges continents and elements to one unit. Based on the independent identification of a volcano (previously identified by Rich SantaColoma) the top right circle (categorisation by TH Ing) is associated with Europe and fire as element in a jointly fashion. Asia (bottom right) is associated with earth, the bottom left continent is Africa, associated with water and the top left is affiliated with the remaining element of air and displays a westward continent (although speculation by the author links this continent with Antillia). This leads to the cardinal circles with no association to either continent or element.

Comparison of 'Continent-Element' theories by Wastl & Feger and TH Ing: Consensus and differences

1) Centre of the Rosette Map

Central to the 'full' Rosette Map theory integrating geography, classical elements and climate (2), TH Ing reviewed the position and function of the central circle in the Rosette map and agrees with the identification and depiction of the centre circle in the Rosette Map as Heavenly Jerusalem and the quintessential classical element ether.

2) ***Europe***

The general agreement and position of this continent has been mentioned on a variety of platforms.

I also agree with the argument TH Ing developed for the identification of 'Fire' with the location of volcanos on the Europe top right circle.

I believe that this actually is not in disagreement to the previously proposed theory at all and not a contradiction to our positioning of the classical element of Fire in the left cardinal circle (2) in Figure 1. In order to explain the co-existence of Fire in both arguments I need to introduce a new distinction scheme for elements to clarify the type of element in question.

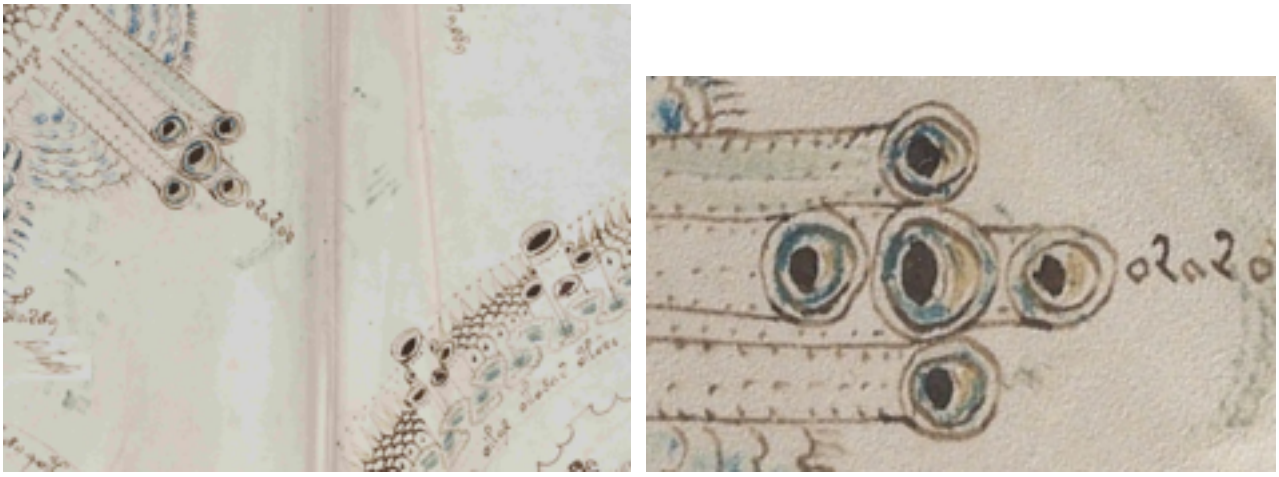
We positioned and defined the classical elements with the cardinal circles and I would like to suggest the prefix ***c-*** (classical or cosmos) for these elements leading to ***c-***Elements: ***c-Fire***, ***c-Water*** , ***c-Earth*** and ***c-Air***.

TH Ing's observation for Europe's element of Fire is actually based on the physical element of Fire (volcano) hence I propose the prefix ***e-*** (earthly or environmental): ***e-Fire*** (and for all others respectively; a summary of all elements is provided in Figure 5).

If we now take Europe's position (top right) we find it is based between ***c-Earth*** and ***c-Water*** (in the classical sense) based on Wastl & Feger's position of the classical elements. Crucial now is the deduction of the climate: According to Aristotle, the climate is derived by the interplay of the classical elements - ***c-Earth*** and ***c-Water*** lead to a cold climate in Europe due to its positioning (see more on the climate theory in the original paper). The physical experience of the cold climate in Europe now can be explained by the earthly observation of volcanic activity (***e-Fire*** !) that extracts the heat out of Europe (towards the centre, indicated by the positioning of the tip of the volcano). This fits in the overall theory of the position of classical elements AND the physical evidence (as experienced by humankind) with the proverbial elements.
With the introduction and distinction of classical/cosmos (in the meta-physical layer) versus earthly/ environmental elements as experienced on the continental 'layer' then TH Ing's theory matches and agrees with our theory.

Let us assume that the Wastl & Feger association of the African continent and Nile is correct (TH Ing postulates a westward continent and Air as element, see later). As previously mentioned in our paper, the Nile 'physically' draws and pulls Water (now ***e-Water***) out of the continent leaving the physical evidence of a dry continent AND dry climate as postulated by Aristotle due to the positioning between the classical Elements ***c-Earth*** and ***c-Fire*** in the cardinal circles.

This is in contrast to what TH Ing postulates for the top left circle. TH Ing questions the 5 pipe system to be the Nile based on the number of seven branches of the Nile (placed differently in the Rosette map) which according to the author is referred to in classical sources unfortunately not further specified or quoted. I still believe Herodotus to be an important, if not a predominant, classical source of information and won't add any more literary details here. TH Ing agrees that the number five clearly has some meaning as yet unidentified. This is exactly where my argument derived from: I believe that five is the reminiscence to the five branches described by Herodot (2). In addition to our previous argumentation, I would like to add another detail (Figure 2): TH Ing compares the pipes in question with the pipe system in the centre of the Rosette map confirming a possible wind/air relationship (1,2). I would like to point out that the rims of the 5 pipe system are coloured in blue, whereas the central pipe systems aren't. I propose to associate the blue rims with the aspect of water (Figure 2b) reiterating the top left circle to be Africa with the Nile displaying ***e-Water*** as physical element being extracted out of Africa as experienced by humankind and referenced by ancient classical sources.



a) b)

Figure 2: Blue rims on the Five pipe system: a) Five pipe system and detail of pipes in the central circle and b) detail with colour

In addition, other commentaries on Nick Pelling's blog are skeptical on this circle representing a westward continent. Anton Alipov pointed out that this would interfere with the typical T/O map structure (4).

Our identification of 'Africa' rests next to the River Nile on the identification of the Pharos, the Lighthouse of Alexandria. Brian Cham (5) argues that other towers also have yellow tops which we identify with 'Fire'. I agree that this is the case, although -without further knowledge of the meaning of the other structures- in my opinion it features very prominently. Comparisons with other medieval maps of the world (for a comparison and review see 2) reveal the Pharos as the most prominent feature for Africa next to the river Nile, e.g. Osma map. I strongly believe that these two landmarks are an indicator of the respective continent (like Paradise for Asia) to guide and lead the spectator of the Rosette map to the conclusion of 'This represents a particular continent and I can associate it with this feature'.

Recently I saw a sketch in a blog on Islamic architecture and art (hosted by Eric Broug) and was immediately reminded of the structure I identify as Pharos (Figure 3). After contacting the artist I got permission to share his sketch which has striking similarities in proportion, geometry and structure with the detail in the Rosette map (6). This sketch details an ornamental fountain at the Coptic Museum in Cairo, where this motif seems to reflect a reference to or even is part of tradition

of displaying the Pharos. Interestingly, there are other, very similar depictions like this in the historic quarter in Cairo.

a) Detail folio f86v

b) sketch, with permission by A Sicklinger

Figure 3: a) detail from the Rosette Map depicting the Pharos and b) sketch, ornamental fountain at the Coptic Museum Cairo with permission by Andreas Sicklinger, Cairo.

3) Asia

TH Ing agrees on the positioning of Asia in the bottom right circle, which, he argues, is united with Earth as element. In my argument until now, the identification of the physical element leaves ***e-Air*** and ***e-Earth***. I agree with TH Ing that Earth is the physical element or quality of Asia: The moist climate we proposed (based on ***c-Air*** and ***c-Water***) leads to a 'lack of Earth' hence underpins TH Ing's identification of earth as physical element of Asia. In addition, further strengthening this argument, I offer another physical indicator for ***e-Earth*** in this position: Earthquakes. Many earthquakes are known and described e.g. for Asia minor over a long period of time as described by Greek and Roman authors. Asia minor was repeatedly hit by devastating earthquakes in classical times and, for example, referred to by Tacitus (7) and Pliny who describes the earthquake 17CE as the 'greatest earthquake in human memory' (8, for quotes see bibliography) and others e.g. Strabo and Seneca. The Earthquakes may be interpreted as the extraction of that particular physical quality 'Earth' to the greater good (i.e. equilibrium) of the *cosmos*: Creating a new continent (antipodes) via the dynamic flux of physical matter.

With respect to the additional description and identification of potential mountains or mountainous areas in that context I am in favour of TH Ing's description of Noah's Ark on top of the mountain (and the proposed names and geographical positions), although the picture is not fully convincing partly due to the fold in the folio.

4) Antipodes

The dynamic of the elements, exchangeability and longing for balance (more on *equilibrium* later) led to the construction of the fourth continent in the Rosette map in the bottom left corner - based on knowledge preserved by the historical tradition of classical authors. Literary sources of the antipodes and the process of its evolution was provided previously.

I can envisage the pull of ***e-Water*** (from the African Nile), ***e-Fire*** (from the European volcanos) and ***e-Earth*** (from the Asian Earthquakes) as physical evidence (and visualised in the Rosette map) for the medieval map maker to create the forth continent (Figure 5). The climate (corresponding to the classical elements ***c-Fire*** and ***c-Air***) is hot hence creating a melting pot for the (still) unknown and uninhabitable continent according to the historical tradition.

These propositions would fit with the previously postulated climate in the regions of the inhabitated world: Europe is cold, Africa is dry and Asia is moist (fertile!) based on the cosmological interplay of the classical elements.

TH Ing associates the bottom left circle with Africa and the River Nile and the water flow towards the centre. I agree to the depiction of water, however I would like to propose the waterfall to be a place of hyperactivity and extend and reverse the flow of matter from the centre to the bottom left circle (NB the relevant e-elements look tidy and not exiting at all in comparison to what is going on in that area):

Figure 4: Detail of physical elements (e-Elements) between the central circle and the bottom left circle

I postulate an exchange of physical matter (***e-Water***, ***e-Fire*** and ***e-Earth***). Based on our climate theory, one may imagine the consequences of the hot climate: Steam may rise (and leave that area again before it settles down) and the depiction of this continent is an excellent visual indication for an hostile and uninhabitable environment. The missing ***e-Air*** is according to Isidor ('*De natura rerum*', 40,3) omnipresent around all continents.

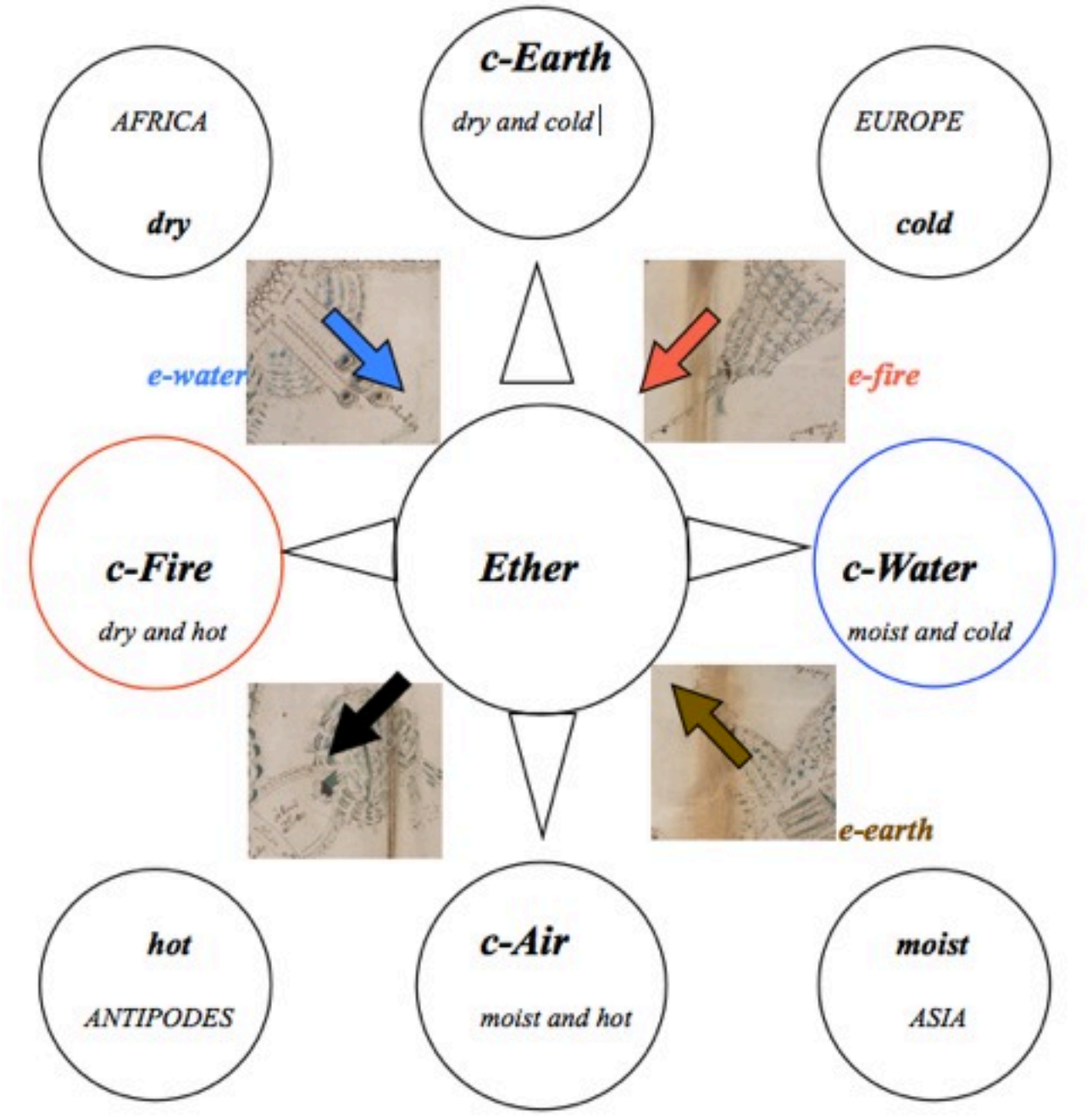


Figure 5: Summary sketch of classical and earthly Elements in Rosette map with continents, their predominant climate based on the classical Elements (c-Elements) in the cardinal circles and the flow of the physical matter (e-Elements)

The question remains why two different types of elements occur in folio86v: Next to the distinction made in physical matter (e-Elements) and theoretical elements (c-Elements) we deal with two layers of the *cosmos*: The physical world and the spiritual *cosmos* and how the universe evolved and interacts in-between. As pointed out previously, the depiction in the Rosette map is unique in several aspects. Although various medieval models on climates and the deduction thereof by the (classical) Elements exist (9), none to my knowledge exists that combines the ancient knowledge in such visual quality.

In addition, the physical extraction of earthly elements may be explained by another reason: The state of '*equilibrium*' was main part of the mindset in medieval philosophy. The extraction of physical quantities (e.g. ***e-Fire*** in the case of Europe) to the centre of the universe will contribute to the equilibrium state of the overall *cosmos* - participating in shifting quantities of elements to other 'areas' of the *cosmos* e.g. leading to the build-up of the antipodes, a continent in the making as identified in our original paper (2).

To sum up, TH Ing's theory improves and develops further the existing theory, if one agrees and accepts the distinction between classical Elements and earthly Elements (physical matter) as proposed in this manuscript. TH Ing provides further proof and visual identification for physical elements (***e-Earth*** in Asia and independent confirmation of ***e-Fire*** for Europe) fitting into the climate model as previously postulated. TH Ing's theory on its own can't be combined though with the climate and classical Elements theory of Wastl and Feger, partly due to a lack of meaning for the cardinal circles and different geographical allocations.
Furthermore, even without the topics addressed in this response (in particular the positioning of Africa and the Antipodes and the positioning and identification of the River Nile) both have much common ground. It will be interesting to follow up on these in further discussions.

Bibliography

1. TH Ing, (28/11/2014) https://medium.com/@thingsnorthern/thoughts-upon-the-voynich-rosettes-2b78d7d698dd, accessed Friday 12/12/2014 3 pm GMT

2. J Wastl, D Feger (14/02/2014) VM408 folio86v 'The Rosette Map': Elements of a *Mappa mundi* and a map of the Elements. fig**share**. http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.903756

3. J Wastl, D Feger (20/02/2014): Summary view of the details in the Rosette Map in VM408 f86v. fig**share**. http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.939437

4. Anton Alipov (December 6, 2014 3:30 pm) on Nick Pelling's blog (http://www.ciphermysteries.com/the-voynich-manuscript/voynich-theories#comment-313466) Quote : '*this idea contradicts the T-O picture. If the author did not believe in the T-O picture of the world, he would not have included T-O diagrams into the VM. On the other hand, if he believed in the T-O, then why would his large map contradict that worldview?'*

5. Brian Cham (December 6, 2014 9:06 pm) on Nick Pelling's blog (http://www.ciphermysteries.com/the-voynich-manuscript/voynich-theories#comment-313466) quote: '*Their Lighthouse of Alexandria idea is strange as they take the yellow top to mean "fire", but all the towers have yellow tops*.'

6. Original sketch by Andreas Sicklinger, Cairo. image with permission by Andreas Sicklinger accessed at https://www.facebook.com/groups/islamicgeometricdesign/ Photograph of the object at http://st-takla.org/Gallery/Architecture/Christian-Places/museum/coptic-museum-10.html

7. Tacitus, Annales [2.47]; T*hat same year twelve famous cities of Asia fell by an earthquake in the night, so that the destruction was all the more unforeseen and fearful. Nor were there the means of escape usual in, such a disaster, by rushing out into the open country, for there people were swallowed up by the yawning earth. Vast mountains, it is said, collapsed; what had been level ground seemed to be raised aloft, and fires blazed out amid the ruin. The calamity fell most fatally on the inhabitants of Sardis, and it attracted to them the largest share of sympathy. The emperor promised ten million sesterces, and remitted for five years all they paid to the exchequer or to the emperor's purse*. http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/txt/ah/tacitus/tacitusannals02.html (accessed 13/12/2014 11:50 am)

8. Pliny, Natural History [2.86]; quote from Larry J. Kreitzer: Living in the Lycus Valley: Earthquake Imagery (page 83) in 'Testimony and Interpretation: Early Christology in Its Judeo-Hellenistic Milieu'; edited by Jiri Mrazek, Jan Roskovec, Petr Pokorný (2004)

9. A very good illustration of the interplay between elements and the resulting climate can be found here (http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/folio.php?p=39v&showitem=39v_6Cosmography_14CosmosHierarchy) MS17 folio 39v - MS17 (St John's College, Oxford)