

REVIEWS

Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, *Literary Territories: Cartographical Thinking in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xiv, 195.
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Nothing might seem farther apart than the self-enclosed space of a dusty archive and the image of a pilgrim journeying from place to place towards an ever-shifting horizon. And yet, Scott Fitzgerald Johnson tells us, in Late Antiquity pilgrim and archive were not antonyms, but synonyms, if only metaphorically. Both images, according to J., symbolize the way in which knowledge was collected and organized. More specifically, they express that painstaking ‘aesthetics of encyclopaedism’ so characteristic of much of late antique literary production, whereby the world itself was imagined and used as ‘a symbolic container for many types of knowledge’ (p. 1).

Literary Territories can be situated within a fast-growing literature on perceptions of space and the geographical imagination in the pre-modern world. While over the past decade the literary territories of classical Greece and Rome have been accurately surveyed (see, for example, Purves 2010; Thalmann 2011; and de Jong 2012, among others) and both western and Byzantine medieval geographical imaginations are being increasingly mapped out (see, for example, Lilley 2013; Angelov et al. 2013; Nielsson and Veikou 2021), Late Antiquity has remained largely uncharted terrain. J.’s book thus brings a welcome and much needed contribution to the burgeoning field of the (pre-modern) spatial humanities.

In the words of the author, *Literary Territories* attempts to build bridges between ‘a familiar Greco-Roman culture’ and ‘the often surprising and exotic worlds of Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages’ (p. 136). This is achieved through the exploration of continuities (and discontinuities) of the geographical/archival metaphor as a way for organizing knowledge in different literary genres—from early geographical writing to pilgrim and hagiographical accounts. Spanning seven centuries of human history (2nd-9th c. CE), multiple cultures and languages (including Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Syriac), and a geographical area stretching all the way from Europe through modern Iraq, the book nonetheless does much more than providing a literary bridge between

the Ancient World and the Middle Ages. It offers a valuable conceptual framework and understanding of space and place.

J. ascribes late antique geographical and archival aesthetics to a series of interrelated phenomena, including: the incorporation of the familiar Mediterranean *oikoumenē* (inhabited world) into a universal Christian vision of the cosmos; the emergence of pilgrimage literature and its appropriation of the Roman *itinerarium* as a narrative model; and, in later centuries, the transformation of pilgrimage itself from ‘religious tourism’ into a precondition for attaining sanctity and authority in hagiographic literature.

Early pilgrims such as Egeria were ‘archivists’ in the sense that they collected and staggered temporally disparate information (linked, for example, to both New and Old Testament events) in the different places they visited, and used the journey as the ordering principle for their narratives. Pilgrimage was thus at its core an ‘archival practice’, a mode of collecting, whereas pilgrim accounts were ‘vast storehouses of loosely related, recyclable data points about the Holy Land, the *oikoumenē*, and other geographies of interest’ (p. 12). In Greek and Syrian hagiographical accounts, places were likewise described as repositories of over-layered historical narratives. The shrine of Saint Thekla, both classical *locus amoenus* and Christian pilgrimage destination, is a wonderful and understudied example, as are the later hagiographical accounts of Thomas of Marga and Isho’nah of Basra. The Syrian monks wander on the same imaginary map of the *oikoumenē* as their western counterparts: the map of an ancient world apportioned by Christ himself to his apostles (as later evocatively illustrated on one of Beatus’ *mappae mundi*). The *oikoumenē* thus becomes a global yet territorialized sacred space; a space divided into regions, spheres of influence, and holy centres affiliated to local saints.

Implicit in *Literary Territories* is the scalar tension that lies at the very root of Christian doctrine, working as it does between the locale (the places of Christ’s terrestrial ministry) and the *oikoumenē* as a space for universal redemption. More characteristically, the different literary sources discussed by J. present the reader with narrative structures which the author unpacks in sophisticated and often innovative ways. The resulting ‘maps’ range from linear, hodological models inherited from ancient geographical writings and *itineraria* (for example, in pilgrim accounts) to the ‘ring narrative’ employed by Saint Thekla’s hagiographer and the synoptic ‘apostolic world maps’ laid out in the apocrypha. Key to these different structures and representations is an emphasis on place and the locale, as well as an encyclopaedic vocation and, ultimately, the consciousness of being part of a larger integrated whole—a God-inhabited world and universal history.

One might ask to what extent this geographical and archival aesthetics is a prerogative of Late Antiquity and of literature. In other words, can the same framework be expanded to other times and applied to other modes of representation? J. discusses some key visual sources, such as the Peutinger table, which he aptly

characterizes as ‘an encyclopaedic *ekphrasis* of Empire’. He also provides a compelling reading of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople as a ‘geographical mausoleum’ originally meant to treasure the relics of the Twelve and of the first Christian emperor (raised by the Church to the status of *isapostolos*). It is hard, however, not to see further, and perhaps even more obvious, visual examples in the encyclopaedic floor mosaics of Aquileia and Umm ar-Rasas, or perhaps even more explicitly, in the summaries of universal history that later western medieval *mappae mundi* are.

At which point, another, and more general, question arises: why is this geographical and archival aesthetics so resilient? To this J. does not seem to have a clear answer. Perhaps here a look at the cognitive workings of such aesthetics might help shed some light. According to Giorgio Mangani (2006), in contrast to the analytical practices we know today, pre-modern geographical description and cartography were essentially systems for information storage and memorization—hence their encyclopaedic character. At the root of effective memorization (and pre-modern geography), Mangani argues, lie spatial visualization (both physical and mental) and the vivid description (*ekphrasis*) of places (or place events). The link is often only implicit in J.’s discussion, even though we do get ekphrastic glimpses.

As the author emphasizes, *Literary Territories* is not a history of late antique geography, nor does it aim at comprehensiveness. It is rather a sophisticated tool in the hands of the reader to make sense of a specific world view. It is a road map. As such, rather than dipping into dense description, the book traces trajectories and avenues; it offers directions; it points at pathways awaiting further exploration (for example, the reception of Ptolemy). The book is nonetheless masterfully researched and provides the reader with a remarkable repertoire of instruments for furthering the journey through late antique ‘literary territories’. Such tools range from a copious and erudite apparatus of footnotes (including extended excerpts in the original languages) to an excellent bibliography and an extensive appendix featuring cosmographical, geographical and topographic texts in Greek, Latin and Syriac from 1 to 700 CE, all complete with critical editions. The one thing that is perhaps missing is visual aids. While the focus of the book is primarily on literary sources and the author is right to affirm that late antique place names are unstable terrain, the book would have nonetheless benefitted from the inclusion of some maps, as not all the places discussed might be necessarily familiar to everyone.

Readers will appreciate J.’s sound scholarship, attention to detail, and not least, clarity. Each chapter is helpfully concluded with a summary of the key points, so that the reader is effectively prepared to press on to the next stage of this compelling journey. What makes *Literary Territories* truly distinctive, however, is the combination of multi-lingual sources and the pairing of well-known case studies (e.g. the Bordeaux pilgrim and Egeria’s accounts) with less well-known ones (such as *The Miracles of Saint Thekla* and the Syrian accounts of Thomas of Marga and Isho’dnah of Basra).

Critical and illuminating, at times even revisionist, *Literary Territories* is a scholarly contribution of fundamental importance. Beyond Late Antique specialists, it will appeal to classicists, medievalists, as well as historical geographers, map historians, and anyone interested in pre-modern perceptions of space.

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Anthony Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019. Pp. xv, 373.
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Anthony Kaldellis' latest book, *Romanland*, is the sum of a great deal of scholarship; it challenges many of the commonly accepted 'truths' about Byzantium. Drawing in part on his own earlier work, K. presents a revisionist view of the multi-ethnic character of Byzantium, highlighting the inappropriate use of the word 'empire' to describe the remnants of Eastern Rome; discussing the ethnic make-up of the medieval *Romaioi*; and tracing the development of Byzantium into an actual empire in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. The book's agenda is provocative and ambitious, and the author's argumentation is, for the most part, highly persuasive.

K.'s forte is the deconstruction of scholarship that he finds wanting. In *Romanland*, he turns his critical attention to works that have denied, sidelined, or minimized the Roman character of the Byzantine Empire and its citizens. With exemplary control and use of primary sources to demonstrate or reinforce his points, K. helps the reader to follow often highly complex arguments.

The first chapter outlines the problem perceived by K. He introduces the reader to primary texts that specifically highlight the Roman character of the people whom scholars generally call 'Byzantines'. The chapter provides a detailed account of errors made by previous scholars in their various understandings of Byzantium's Roman