

In Search of Ancient Travel Writers Studies on Sources, Identities and Social Locations

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Theme and Background

This workshop aims to explore the complex socio-cultural contexts and conditions in and under which ancient writers produced texts about travel. In doing so, it connects two growing trends in scholarship of antiquity: the nuancing of methods for studying identity, and the topic of travel. Recently, scholars have begun to problematise the simplistic models of identity used to study ancient cultures, acknowledging the complexity of social life and the representations of such complexities. Examples of this scholarly phenomenon include the rise of studies focusing on minorities and marginalised groups in society, or intersectional investigations of identity in the ancient world. Such studies move beyond binary and reductionist understandings of ancient political, religious, cultural, ethnic, and gendered identities—for instance, notions of what it means to be ‘Greek’ or ‘Roman’. Scholarly interest in travel—including, but not limited to forced and/or voluntary migration, tourism, and pilgrimage—is also a burgeoning interest across individual fields invested in the study of the ancient Mediterranean. More work needs to be done across traditional disciplinary boundaries of Classics and Religious Studies, and this volume contributes to this cross-disciplinary dialogue by bringing together a group of scholars working on Greco-Roman, early Christian and early Jewish texts.

Stemming from the ERC-funded research project ‘An Intersectional Analysis of Ancient Jewish Travel Narratives’ (ANINAN: <https://projects.au.dk/aninan>), this workshop contributes to the growing discussion of travel and human mobility in the ancient world by exploring the connections between the study of sources, identities and social locations of travel writers. In short, we seek to address research questions, such as: Who is a travel writer, and how do they become one? What are the sources of travel writing? How does travel affect the production of literature or the intellectual disposition of individual writers? In what ways do ‘travel writers’ thematise and represent stories concerning human mobility, and what are the cultural conceptions of mobility that underlie these narratives? Answers to these questions will shed new light on the sources, literatures, texts, and contexts that contributed to the production of ancient travel literature from Hellenistic to Imperial periods, and examine the use of different theoretical categories (such as exile, diaspora, migrant and migration literature, intersectionality) for understanding the identity of authors of travel writing, or the literary representation of travel and identity in their works. In addition to borrowing modern analytical models, we intend to ask how case studies from antiquity complicate and challenge the application of modern theoretical frameworks, and how the study of antiquity can contribute to the shaping and sharpening of contemporary models and theoretical approaches involving the study of textual production in contexts involving human mobility, transcultural contact, and the transcultural transmission of ideas.

Abstracts

Travel Writing and the Construction of 'Home' in Latin Literature

Thomas Biggs (University of St. Andrews)

This chapter is concerned with the entanglement of travel writing with conceptions of 'home.' It explores the relationships between 'home' and influential ways of depicting 'away' in Latin literature, especially in texts that are *not* primarily geographic or ethnographic. It interrogates the importance of domestic thinking for understanding travel in Roman texts and pushes the parameters of what we might call travel writing by ranging beyond expected generic borders. The study begins with a brief survey of Greek and Roman conceptions of 'home' alongside notions of nostalgia, dwelling, and the *unheimlich*. After touching on modern theoretical articulations of 'home' and the construction of space in Latin literature, the contribution considers writers from the Middle and late Republic whose identities and acts of authorship complicate the very notion of a travel writer. The readings in each section address several key questions: Can all writings composed by a traveller be read as travel writing? Is displacement a prerequisite for travel writing? Is 'home' itself? How long is a layover a layover before it becomes relocation? When movement is enforced and 'home' is fluid and unfixed, is travel writing possible?

Recent work on mobility, migrant literature, and disorientation in an expanding Roman Republican world has contributed much to scholarly understanding. Polybius and Plautus have been well studied on these terms. Both exemplify enforced mobility and attempt through their art to make sense of new surroundings. My focus, however, moves away from these authors to account for other stories and ways of engaging with movement. First, by approaching the fragmentary texts of Livius Andronicus' *Odusia*, Gnaeus Naevius' *Bellum Punicum*, and Quintus Ennius' *Annales*, *Euhemerus*, and *Saturae*, this chapter establishes the primary Latin depictions of 'home' and away across a range of genres. The variation here allows us to uncover a plural conception of Rome as 'home.' These readings of Latin's earliest authors prioritise works rarely discussed through the lens of travel. Next, through analysis of Cato the Elder's *De Agri Cultura*, and more extensively, Gaius Lucilius' *iter Siculum* (Book 3 of his *Saturae*) and the journeys of Marcus Terentius Varro's *de Re Rustica* (rural and Italian) and *Eumenides* (urban), the chapter demonstrates how travel leads readers to cross boundaries between putatively lived, authorial detail (biography/biofiction) and the content of literary worlds. This is a dialogue not a divide. It argues that travel and movement allow for the development of unique authorial personae that interact with Roman socio-cultural norms of the period, and that these developments define the shape of most Roman literary genres. But things are far from straightforward, and seeing Rome as 'home' remains a challenge even in the seemingly most Romanocentric and triumphalist of works like Ennius' *Annales*; where did such authors live in Rome, and how free to roam were they? Unsettling dimensions of travel abroad also appear in the writings of several intra-urban travellers, especially Varro. In a world marked by what Polybius dubbed *sympleke*, the emergent *imperium sine fine*, an increasingly cosmopolitan Rome comes to contain the away within itself. Perhaps it always did. Republican Latin's Rome is both home and *unheimlich*.

Cultural Hybridity, Identity, and Foreignness: The Perception of Space in Jewish Hellenistic and Rabbinic Travel Narratives

Catherine Hezser (SOAS, University of London)

Whereas Jewish writers who grew up in a Hellenized environment, such as the apostle Paul and Flavius Josephus, report about their sea journeys and adventures abroad, the travel narratives in Palestinian rabbinic literature almost exclusively deal with walks of relatively short durations within the Land of Israel itself and adjacent regions such as Syria, Babylonia, and Egypt. This raises the question whether and to what extent Palestinian rabbis perceived space differently from their more Hellenized Jewish coreligionists. To what extent were certain spaces considered “foreign” in the sense of being potentially dangerous and idolatrous? Did certain objects, inhabitants, or practices render a space “strange” and was “foreignness” part of rabbis’ immediate environment already? Since rabbis had more or less hybrid identities themselves already, their perception of otherness and identity is likely to have varied and depended on their respective origins and the locales and contexts they travelled in.

Silencing Women Travellers: The Absent Voices of Women Travel Writers in Antiquity

Lien Foubert (Radboud University Nijmegen)

Throughout Roman antiquity, ancient writers have incorporated stories that deal with the movements of individuals and groups. These stories vary in scope and genre from historical accounts of war refugees and political exiles, reports of diplomatic missions, poetic portrayals of wandering heroes to philosophical reflections on tourism. All of these ‘mobilities’ and ‘movers’ have become well-studied research topics in their own right. But somehow women have long remained absent in these mobility studies. But the reverse is true as well: mobility as a social practice that impacts on women’s lives has been absent from examinations of women’s histories and of gender dynamics in Roman society. Using Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s notion of ‘silencing the past’ (Trouillot 1995, 2015), this contribution aims at better understanding the mechanisms behind the invisibility of women travellers in the ancient records as well as in the classical scholarship of the past centuries. Firstly, I will critically assess our understanding of ‘travel’ and ‘travel writing’ as it has been conceptualized in a male-dominated imperialistic world view of the nineteenth century (Scott 1995). And secondly, I will use an intersectional approach to illustrate how class, citizenship, ethnicity, religion, gender, and ages have rendered some women travellers more invisible than others (Hill Collins & Bilge 2020).

Imagine No Diaspora: The Impact of Migration on Jewish Literary Culture from the Early Roman Empire

Eelco Glas (Aarhus University)

The Jewish people represent one of the most extensively studied migrant populations of the ancient Mediterranean and West Asia, although this is not usually how the phenomenon is framed in the scholarly literature. What has hampered research in this direction is the scholarly reflex to approach Jewish settlement practices and the associated cultural diversity almost exclusively in terms of the classical diaspora paradigm. This article draws on insights from the study of historical and contemporary diasporas and migrations to elucidate the impact of migration on Jewish literature written in Greek. Paying particular attention to the thriving Jewish literary culture in the first century CE, it examines how ancient Jewish intellectuals such as Philo of Alexandria, Paul of Tarsus, and Flavius Josephus reflected on the Jewish people as a migrant population and shaped their position as itinerant or migrant writers. If used to supplement the existing critical apparatus, ‘migrant writing’ can serve as a heuristic tool to fundamentally rethink Jewish literary culture in the early Roman Mediterranean. An emphasis on migrancy in Jewish literary culture will provide the necessary nuance to move away from the siloed study of ancient Jewish diaspora culture, which tends to articulate Jewish particularism and responsiveness to hegemonic cultures (Hellenistic, Roman), towards a more integrated study of Jewish literary practices as symptomatic of Mediterranean-wide intellectual discourses.

Philo's Theory of Traveling

René Bloch (University of Bern)

Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish philosopher and theologian writing in the Roman province of Egypt, is a figure at the crossroads of Jewish, Greek, and Roman thought. While secure information on his life is sparse, we know that Philo left his hometown Alexandria at least twice: he traveled to Jerusalem to pray and offer sacrifices (*Prov.* 2.17) and he participated in the Jewish embassy, probably as its leader, to the Roman emperor Caligula in the wake of the anti-Jewish riot in Alexandria in 38 CE. (Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, Josephus, *Ant. Iud.* 18.259). In a remarkable reflection on the meaning of traveling, in his tractate *De Abrahamo* (§65), Philo lines up three reasons for why people leave their homes: they do so to pursue business (*kat'emporian*), diplomacy (*kata presbeian*), or education (*kata thean...di erōta paideias*). Much like modern travel agencies, Philo distinguishes between “business” (*epikerdeia*) and “pleasure” (*terpsis*) as reasons for voyaging. In *Abr.* 65 he goes so far as to state that the “untraveled” (*anapodēmētos*: a hapax legomenon in Greek literature) is to the traveled as the blind to the sharp-sighted. In this paper, I aim to contextualize Philo's theory of traveling within his larger oeuvre as well as that of Hellenistic Judaism as a whole. Two important forms of ancient Jewish traveling are conspicuously absent in Philo's list: traveling for military and religious reasons. Especially with regard to the latter, pilgrimage, Philo elsewhere draws up an image of an intense movement: “multitudes from countless cities” travel to Jerusalem “at every feast” (*Spec. Leg.* 1.69). To what extent are Philo's comments on traveling, then, to be understood as theoretical and philosophical reflections, and to what extent are they based in actual observations? How does Philo make sense of pilgrimage in the spatial configurations of diaspora and the land of Israel? Finally and more generally: What are the cultural conceptions of mobility underlying Philo's narrative and how might they relate to modern theoretical frameworks?

Sailing between Greece and Rome: Greek Epigrams (50 BCE – 50 CE) as Travel Writing
Casper C. de Jonge (Leiden University)

The *Garland of Philip* is an anthology of Greek poems that was compiled in the age of Nero (AD 54-68). It includes epigrams by at least 39 poets, many of whom were moving through the Roman Empire. Poets like Antipater of Thessalonica and Crinagoras of Mytilene, who came from the Greek speaking world, found patronage in Italy. They can be considered writers of migrant literature (De Jonge 2021). Sailing and voyages are prominent themes in the *Garland of Philip*. A goat proudly travels with the emperor to Greece (Crinagoras 23), a traveller is looking for a guide who will bring him safely through the Cyclades to Rome (Crinagoras 32), and a poet prays to Poseidon after a destructive storm at sea (Crinagoras 34). Some epigrams on the dangers of the sea are ascribed to ‘Archias’, possibly to be identified with the migrant poet from Antioch, who was defended in Cicero’s *Pro Archia*. There are also several epitaphs for travellers who drowned at sea or who were buried far from home. This paper examines Greek epigrams of the late Republic and early Empire as a form of travel writing. It is argued that these poems, while depicting physical journeys within the Roman world, invite readers to reflect on the continuities, transitions and interactions between the cultures of Greece and Rome.

Origen on the Move: Between History, Autobiography, and Eusebius of Caesarea
Christian Djurslev (Aarhus University) and Miriam DeCock (Dublin City University)

Book 6 of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* provides the most comprehensive historical account of Origen's life. Eusebius represents Origen as a globetrotter, saying that the Christian polymath made regular visits to the cultural centres of the Empire, as well as the outer rims to combat heresies. He even uprooted his school from the imperial city of Alexandria to the Roman provincial town of Caesarea Maritima. Origen's mobility thus makes him seem as if he is a dynamic intellectual, who put his vast learning to good use, such as defending orthodoxy and advising the imperial court.

Eusebius' mini-biography of Origen offers a rich portrait, but does it fly? In this paper, we examine the reliability of Eusebius' account by comparing it to Origen's references to his personal travel. It is striking that Origen himself gives us very little about his apparently extensive travels in what remains of his corpus. We identify two primary ways in which Origen writes about travel. First and foremost, he describes the act of biblical interpretation as a journey during which the inspired and attentive exegete is led along the path of scripture by Christ himself. The exegete in turn acts as a kind of tour guide of scripture for those under his tutelage, a role for which Origen's students also acknowledged him (Gregory Thaumaturgus *Panegyric*). The second way concerns Origen's own travel, e.g., his exile from Alexandria, which he tends to describe when he must provide an excuse for the slow or late delivery of a text he has promised a patron or correspondent. Thus, Origen's own account of his travel is both highly biblicised in nature, and tightly connected to his perception of himself as an author.

Even this preliminary investigation puts pressure on Eusebius' narrative. Of course, it does not completely contest it, but it is an interesting result. It compels us to revisit how Eusebius used his sources. It invites us to rethink the social location of the traveling Christian intellectual between the third and fourth centuries AD. It encourages us to probe how different Christian communities were perceived in Alexandria and Caesarea, and how an individual could move between them. We plan to conduct analyses such as these in the article.