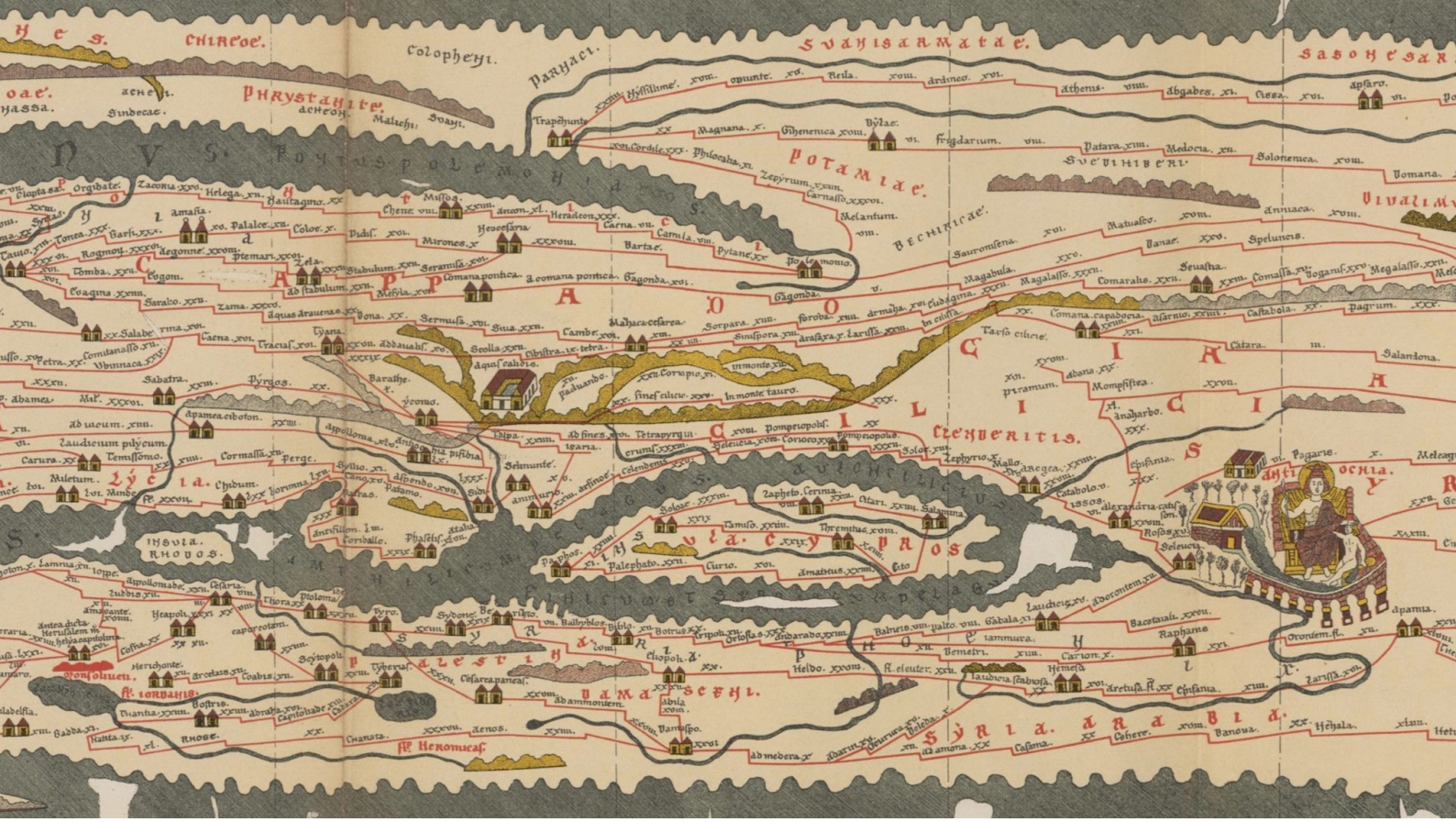

Abstracts

Nils Klim Symposium on Travel and Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean

Friday, December 1st 2023, Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies

Session One: TRAVEL AND TRANSITIONS

Dying To See: Death and Pilgrimage Experience in Aelius Aristides' Sacred Discourses (Hieroi Logoi)
— Georgia Petridou, University of Liverpool

Along with Uusimäki's excellent ANINAN project, the last couple of decades have seen a plethora of extremely important advances in our understanding of ancient mobility and travelling. This paper follows recent scholarly work on ancient lived religion perspectives and religiously motivated mobility that favours a broader understanding of the notion of pilgrimage in the Greek-speaking world, one that would not necessarily shy away from the concept of 'sacred sightseeing'. The main aim is to demonstrate that the emphasis placed on the potential threat of death and dying in Aristides' Sacred Discourses (Hieroi Logoi) makes for an even fitter component to its author's pilgrimage experience than has been previously thought, because it dovetails nicely with his conceptual recasting of his illness experience as a mystic initiation. To flesh this premise out, this study looks at: a) how Aristides' pilgrimage experience to the temple of Asclepius at Poimanenos or Poimanenon (a town of ancient Mysia near Cyzicus) is wholly recast and presented in terms of traveling to the sacred site of Eleusis, one of the most important cultural and religious centres of the Roman Empire in the Antonine Era; and b) danger of dying as one of the most important conceptual parallels that drive this process of relational mapping of illness onto initiation at Poimenanos.

Of course, the close conceptual links between death and initiatory rites, on the one hand, and pilgrimage and death, on the other, are widely known to modern sociologists and anthropologists. The link between

death and pilgrimage has been very aptly summarised by Turner (1977, 29) as follows: “pilgrimage is also a rehearsal of the pilgrim’s own death”. This truism is applicable to a great number of modern pilgrimage traditions and practises, which will be briefly surveyed in the paper. What is exceptionally interesting, however, is that this relational mapping of pilgrimage experience onto initiatory rites appears to have already been firmly established in Aristides’ Hieroi Logoi, “the earliest detailed first-person account of pilgrimage that survives from antiquity” (Rutherford 2001, 51).

Heavenly Schoolrooms and Divine Homework: The Importance of Locations and Cosmic Content in Enoch, Er, and Scipio’s Learning

— Gillian Glass, Aarhus University

Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cosmologies shared general assumptions about the interconnectivity of Heaven and Earth. Plato’s “Myth of Er,” 1 Enoch, and Cicero’s Somnium Scipionis, narrate the travels of Er, Enoch, and Scipio, respectively, into the heavens, and then back to earth. While on their travels, each man learns astonishing things about the cosmos, and is tasked with imparting a message to humanity. In the ascent and descent, the two spheres (mortal space and divine space) briefly merge, and their concerns align. This article argues that otherworldly knowledge is associated with the location in which it is learned, but as Heaven and Earth are ultimately connected, education from above provides insights into the world below. This article considers the type of knowledge acquired, the location of its acquisition, and the pedagogic function each man is intended to play upon his return to earth in the Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36), Plato’s “Myth of Er” and Macrobius’ didactic interpretation of Cicero’s Somnium Scipionis. Without arguing for deliberate intertextuality between all these sources, this study compares the use of heavenly voyages as a literary device for legitimising worldview across cultures, times, and places.

Session Two: TRAVEL AND TROUBLE: Marianne and Mark

Travelling Thomas: Slave trade and missionary travel in The Acts of Thomas

— Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, University of Oslo

The Acts of Thomas is a long, rich, and fascinating narrative about the Apostle Thomas who was forced to travel to India as a missionary. When Thomas hesitates to go, his master Jesus literary sells him as s slave to an Indian merchant. Like other Apocryphal Acts the Acts of Thomas circles around the apostolic figure battling both human and demonic adversaries. Celibacy is the norm, although including narrative elements familiar from ancient romances and novels. On his way, Thomas sings, prays, teaches, heals, converts, and baptizes. His travel follows open trade routes in the ancient world, by boat and by land. He participates in various social events like parties, weddings, and family celebrations. His own status as a foreign slave/apostle, with a strange religion, is negotiated and contested: Sometimes he is treated like a foreign slave, suffering violence and harassment. At other occasions, his exotic strangeness in language and religion gives him access to royal palaces and influential men and women. By examine the role played by slavery for initiating this travel, as well as various intersections of religion and gender in the overall narrative, this paper will employ the Acts of Thomas to draw a more nuanced picture of travel in the ancient world.

Travel and Incarceration: Evidence from the Papyri

— Mark Letteney, University of Washington

In the middle of the third century BCE, a professional grain measurer traveling in the Egyptian city of Philadelphia was arrested and deposited in the civic prison. Our only source for his plight is a letter, excavated two thousand years letter, in which Phaneisis begs the favor of an elite local man who might be able to tide him over until his family can arrive to care for his bodily needs. “It is now three days since Dionysodoros saw me and ordered me to be taken to prison. Will you kindly then send one of your people along with the messenger who hands you this letter, because I have no friend in this city, and send me a cloak or some money, as much as you please, to serve until one of my folk sails down.” Phaneisis’s pathetic plea is just one of a surprisingly common type, extant from the Ptolemaic period through Late Antiquity, in which prisoners write to anyone they can think of, hoping to obtain basic supplies to keep them alive. Epigraphic and papyrological evidence sheds light on the peculiar vulnerability of travelers to incarceration and, as a result, death by thirst, starvation or hypothermia — fates common among ancient prisoners, but especially acute for those in prison far from networks of local support. Literary sources across the Greek-speaking world attest the virtue of philoxenia: caring for the foreigner in one’s midst. Documentary sources suggest a rather different picture, in which such literary accounts speak a bright wish into a dark world in which travel rendered one especially vulnerable to the whims of locals keen to take advantage, armed with the capacity to turn the local carceral state against unwitting people far from home in order to extract money. My talk explores a few paradigmatic cases of travel, incarceration, and the danger that lay just down the ancient road.

Session Three: TRAVEL AND SENSORY EXPERIENCE: Laura and Elpiniki

"Keeping the Home Fires Burning – Sensescapes of Pompeian Shrines"
— Laura Nissin, Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies / University of Helsinki

Sensations such as smell, often regarded as purely physiological phenomena, are in fact profoundly influenced by culture and history. Without comprehending the sensory landscape of the ancient world, our grasp of the past remains inevitably limited. This paper delves into the sensory encounters provided by Pompeian shrines dedicated to the worship of tutelary deities of households (Lares Familiares) and neighborhoods (Lares Compitales).

The household gods, Lares Familiares, along with their counterparts, the Lares Compitales—guardians of crossroads—constituted an integral part of the urban religious landscape of ancient Pompeii, intertwined with both family and neighborhood identities. G. K. Boyce has identified over 450 so-called lararia altars within Pompeian houses, while Van Andringa has identified 38 crossroad altars dedicated to the Lares Compitales, distributed throughout the town.

Lares Familiares received worship within the confines of private houses, apparently on a monthly or even daily basis. On the other hand, the crossroad altars served as focal points for the Compitalia festival, celebrated annually in mid-winter. Literary evidence suggests that Lares were offered bloodless sacrifices, including (frank)incense and honey cakes, yet archaeological findings indicate a preference for pigs as offerings to Lares. In addition to the burning of offerings, the Compitalia rites incorporated music and culminated in banquets.

Consequently, the sensory landscape engendered by these rituals must have been remarkably varied and distinctive. This paper primarily concentrates on the olfactory sensations emanating from these altars and the associated rituals. The goal is to comprehend the role of these sensory experiences in establishing the "sense of home," a hallmark of one's domicile and identity, juxtaposed with the concept of travel.

Travelling colours: Charicleia's ecphraseis in Heliodorus' Aethiopica
— Elpiniki Meimaroglou, University of Cambridge

Heliodorus' 4th century CE romance, the Aethiopica, is essentially a text about colour. Despite her Ethiopian royal parentage, Charicleia's white skin is the reason Persinna, her mother, sends her away from Ethiopia. In Book Ten, the similarity between Charicleia and the painting of Andromeda that lay inside her parents' chamber is proven, shielding effectively Persinna from any accusations of adultery and proving the legitimacy of her child. Although this chromatic contrast of skin tones is a governing theme of the novel, here, I wish to focus on other sets of colour data that are associated with Charicleia.

These are evident in four pivotal moments during her travels: at the opening scene at the Heracleotic mouth of the Nile (1.2.2; 1.2.5-7), at the Delphic procession (3.4.1-6), in the scene inside Pelorus' boat (5.31.1-2), and during the virginity test in Ethiopia (10.9.3-4). Due to limitations of space, my focus here lies on the passages in Books Three and Five. By looking closely at the colour references that appear in connection to Charicleia's body, attire, and background, I examine and interrogate the various ways with which colours manifest during her travels, their patterns, their connection to space, as well as their effect.

To do so, I also trace and address the thematic similarities between the two colourful passages. As I will show, these revolve heavily around Charicleia's god-like features: her otherworldly κάλλος, her statuesque body, and the dazzling effect she has on various audiences. The fragility of mortality however, features prominently too, as remaining themes include allusions to death, echoes of violence, and questionings of Charicleia's purity.

Session Four: TRAVEL TEXTS IN CONVERSATION

The Journey Continues: The Ending of Travel Narratives and the Making of Worldview
— Pieter B. Hartog, Protestant Theological University Groningen

In this paper I will address the function of travel in two travel narratives: Acts of the Apostles and Philostratus' Life of Apollonius of Tyana. My particular focus will be on how these two narratives end, and how their ends instil a particular worldview in their readers. By demonstrating how Philostratus turns the travelling Apollonius into an object of travel/pilgrimage in his own right and Acts of the Apostles invites its readers to continue the journeys of its protagonists, I aim to illuminate the rhetorical power of the topos of travel.

Travel, Intercultural Contact and the Fear of God(s) in the Ancient Mediterranean
— Elisa Uusimäki, Aarhus University

Even though the fear of Yahweh is often presented as an intrinsic feature of the ancient Israelite religion in particular, the disposition of fearing God(s) is not actually limited to the people of Israel in the Hebrew Bible, and similar notions of fearing a deity or deities occur in various texts produced by neighbouring cultures. In this paper, I investigate the cross-cultural ethical relevance of the fear of God(s) in situations involving travel and intercultural contact. First, I analyse a cluster of Hebrew Bible texts in which such a fear characterizes or is presented as intelligible to non-Israelite people (Gen 20:11; 42:18; Exod 1:17, 21; Deut 25:18; Jon 1:9). Second, I examine the fear motif in other texts from the ancient eastern Mediterranean milieu. I argue that scholars working with the ancient Hebrew tradition have overlooked the interpretative importance of the Odyssey, which puts great emphasis on the value of fearing deities in the context of travel and contact with outsiders.