



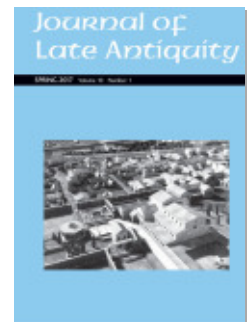
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Literary Territories: Cartographical Thinking in Late Antiquity by Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (review)

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(Review)

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to have fared far better when under the care of ethnographer Stewart Culin in the 1920s than it has subsequently, despite the creation of a permanent gallery of Coptic Art in 1943. Culin had encouraged engagement with contemporary fashion and textile designers, forging links with commerce through display-windows in the department store of Abraham & Straus in Brooklyn. This approach was discontinued when the collection moved from the ethnographic to the Egyptian collection, where Late Antique items were considered of lesser importance (value?) than Pharaonic or Classical Greek and Roman art. Despite this, Coptic textiles proved popular enough to allow for the installation of the first permanent gallery of late antique art in 1943. Sadly, since 1997, they have not been on display. It seems that the original curator, Culin, was remarkably prescient in his view of how museums could engage with contemporary society.

A similar story is recorded by Dospel Williams in “Minor Art, Major Works: An Overview of the Dumbarton Oaks’ Collection of Late Antique and Medieval Textiles.” Begun in the late 1920s by collectors Robert and Mildred Bliss Woods, this collection includes remarkable pieces, such as the Hestia Polyolbos hanging. As tastes changed, the collection was overshadowed by other forms of Byzantine Art. Williams draws attention to another Bliss project, “The Census of Byzantine Textiles in North America” (1938–1943), still available as a resource, and to the forthcoming publication of a new online catalogue edited by Gudrun Bühl, together with Elizabeth Williams.

Ratcliff addresses “Collecting Late Antique textiles at the Metropolitan Museum of Art” which, like that at the Brooklyn Museum, had an early association with the education of textile artisans

and with textile manufacturers. In the 1930s textiles from late antiquity were moved into the new galleries for Near Eastern Art and consequently given little attention until the 1990s when the creation of new galleries for Byzantine Art, and two exhibitions (Textiles of Late Antiquity 1995 and Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 2011) have raised awareness of textiles as key artefacts of the period.

The final chapter, by Colburn takes “A Closer Look at Textiles from the Collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Materials and Techniques” and draws together the threads of the entire volume, by offering a detailed analysis of several textiles from the Metropolitan Museum including discussions of the design, craftsmanship, weaving techniques, dyes and colors. The volume ends with a glossary and a checklist of exhibits which detail, size (a key detail, often missing in the captions within the volume), provenance, and current museum holding identifier.

Defining Identity is an excellent volume, beautifully illustrated, full of high quality scholarship and a perfect substitute for those not able to visit the exhibition.

Literary Territories: Cartographical Thinking in Late Antiquity

SCOTT FITZGERALD JOHNSON
Oxford and New York: Oxford
University Press, 2016. Pp. xiv + 195.
978-0-19-022123-2

Reviewed by Georgia Frank
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In *Literary Territories*, Scott Johnson explores the intertwined metaphors of map and library as they shaped the production of literature in late antiquity. Much of the book focuses on the fourth

through the sixth century, a time when increased travel expanded notions of the *oikoumenē*, or the “inhabited world.” Efforts to accumulate and organize all knowledge, Johnson argues, fueled an “aesthetic of encyclopedism” or “archivalism” in many late antique genres.

Cartographical thinking—the impulse to compile, archive, and epitomize—is a by-product of this interest, appearing in travel descriptions, letters, pilgrims’ guides, and miracle collections, as well as in non-narrative works such as Roman lists of overland staging posts (*itineraria*) and topographical catalogs (*notitiae*). Casting his net widely, Johnson cleverly pairs and compares secular and religious works: Pliny’s (d. 79 CE) *Natural History* with the sixth-century Cosmas Indicopleustes’s *Christian Topography*; Pausanias’s (c. 115–c. 180) *Description of Greece* with the travel diary by the Christian pilgrim Egeria (ca. 484); Synesius of Cyrene’s (ca. 370–ca. 414) description of a harrowing sea voyage (*Ep.* 5) and Jerome’s account of his journey to the Holy Land with Paula (*Ep.* 108, 404 CE); or astronomical works such as Macrobius’s *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (ca. 430) and Gregory of Tours’ late-sixth-century handbook, *The Course of the Stars*, written for monks regulating prayer times. For each work, Johnson exposes the underlying “archival aesthetic” and makes a persuasive case for how accumulation is put to the service of argument. Collecting would be instrumental for asserting imperial control, marking out a holy land, or revealing cosmic order.

In addition to attuning the reader to these cartographical habits of thought, Johnson tracks how geographical thinking and frameworks underlie Christian travelers’ descriptions, miracle collections, and

legends related to the apostles and saints. All these genres share a focus on “locatedness,” whereby the saint is rooted in a particular place. For instance, the *Miracles of Thekla* celebrate her local, even chthonic, powers. Yet, the *Miracles* also cast Thekla’s influence beyond the region by inserting her into the legendary account of the apostles casting lots to missionize all the cities and lands of the world. The *sortes apostolorum*, as this legend is called, recurs in several collective hagiographies and miracle collections. The *sortes*, Johnson argues, also found expression in imperial monuments, such as Constantine’s final resting place. According to Constantine’s biographer, Eusebius, the mausoleum at the Church of the Holy Apostles complex featured the imperial coffin flanked by “coffins” for each of the twelve apostles, effecting an “archive of the apostles” and fixing the emperor in a universalizing apostolic geography. The persistence of this legend is evident in a seventh-century collection of tales about monastic wonderworking, the *Spiritual Meadow* by John Moschus. Although the collection lacks an explicit geographical itinerary, Johnson detects resonances between monastic and apostolic spaces.

In the final chapter Johnson explores the geographical frameworks of two ninth-century East Syriac works. He analyzes Thomas of Marga’s *Historia Monastica* and Isho’dnah of Basra’s *Liber Castitatis* to show how a cartographic reading of these texts reveals their orientation toward Jerusalem and Egypt, suggesting the “westwardness” that informs their self-understanding. Johnson is also to be commended for providing an appended chronological bibliography of critical editions and English translations of Greek, Latin, and Syriac works from the first seven centuries CE.

Through his individual examples Johnson exposes the frameworks by which Christians and non-Christians mapped their own field of dreams, so to speak. Rather than view all this “commentary, compilation, and repackaging” as unoriginal or parasitic, Johnson claims it is profoundly creative and innovative. He suggests that, as with the codex, a technology that increasingly displaced the scroll in the later third and fourth centuries, readers could enter these narratives at random and easily compare, quote, and recombine portions. Like musical sampling today, new genres emerged from repurposed fragments. Thus, Late Antiquity, Johnson claims, constitutes a vibrant stage in the transformation of antiquity and the advent of the Middle Ages rather than an era of stagnation or rote imitation. Johnson’s astute and incisive analyses reveal how “cartographical thinking” elides the map and the library to intriguing effect. Seeing Egeria as a collector, for instance, nuances our understanding of that pilgrim. Yet, some readers may also desire some firmer distinction between map and library in places. For, as much as cartography is about accumulation, it can also result in erasure. Not all sacred sites lend themselves to “stacking,” Johnson’s term for the convergence of Jewish and Christian holy places in some pilgrims’ descriptions. As a recent study of Antioch by Shephardson reminds us, collective memory and the “politics of place” can give rise to competing sacred geographies that resist compilation or smooth synthesis.

In sum, *Literary Territories* is an important book that demonstrates handily how a “more fluid approach” to geographical literature can provide fresh insights into the astrological, astronomical, cosmographical, geographical, and

topographical texts of late antiquity. It poses new questions for the study of Christianization and urbanization in Late Antiquity. Moreover, Johnson’s insights into the dynamics and effects of cartographical thinking are likely to serve as springboards future research. Students of pilgrims’ writings stand to benefit from the similarities Johnson detects between these works and other non-Christian travel genres. Although Johnson focuses less on the portion of Egeria’s diary describing rites in Jerusalem, historians of liturgy may detect therein additional “maps” and perhaps further insights into the development of the stationary liturgy. Although the contributions of Islamic geography are beyond the scope of this volume, Johnson’s illustration of the age’s zeal for adaptation and commentary may also provide useful points of comparison for considering the Islamic “reworking” of Greek and Roman geographical writing. And his theory of late antique literary aesthetics stands to benefit the study of visual culture in the period, particularly, in respect to the visual rhetoric of Roman maps and the significance of *spolia*, monuments, and maps in late antique art and architecture. With Johnson as navigator and fellow-traveler, the journey ahead is bound to be eye-opening.

The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 97.

HUGO LUNDHAUG AND LANCE JENOTT
Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015. Pp. xvii + 332. ISBN 978-3-16-154172-8

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Throughout the past half-century, the Nag Hammadi codices have fascinated