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In different ways, these two recent books (Talbert on the Peutinger Map as an invitation to imagine Roman imperial power, Nasrallah on the full-immersion of early Christian texts in the space and fabric of empire) tap into a critical and popular zeitgeist firing new analysis of “geographical thinking” in the ancient world. As curators of the recent British Library exhibition (“Magnificent Maps: Power, Propaganda and Art” 2010) were quick to point out, we are in the midst of a “mapping revolution” which is also very much a renaissance. While Henry VIII took to carrying a parchment map of the world on his person, maps come to us now—layered, moving, ever transformable digital creations that travel in the palm of the hand, stretching and framing our bodies-in-space. Cheap air travel means rich Westerners can whizz around a shrunk-down world, or peep into the furthest cul-de-sac at odd angles with “Street View.” Yet as maps have become ubiquitous, highly accurate, vibrant, and interactive, so we have begun to spy again the art in cartography: recent digital maps of blogging activity resemble photographs of distant galaxies, or close-ups of the latest stunning maps of our universe—the largest capturing a diameter of four billion light years. Maps help us understand where and who we are in the world, yet they also spur adventures into the unknown, into the landscapes maps remake, and into what lies beyond their edges. We hunt out the places Google forbids us to see, turn geographical coordinates into tattoos or artworks that appear both as banal barcodes and a kind of arcane algebra only lovers can decode.¹ This is an era of advanced scientific cartography, but also of “personal geographies”—we map moods, matrimony, myths, novels²—so that maps are where “hard” knowledge and “soft” imagination compete for power. We might remember Cassius Dio’s cautionary tale of Mettius Pompeianus, who was executed by Domitian for having a map of the world on his bedroom wall and presumably dreamt of world domination every night.³

¹ Actress Angelina Jolie famously had the geographical coordinates of her twins’ birthplace tattooed on her body. British gift companies and museum shops offer a range of vintage map items; notonthehighstreet.com produces “personalised coordinates” prints, with the coordinates of a location special to the customer presented in a colourful, graphic style.


³ Dio 67.12.2-4 reports that Domitian exiled the senator Mettius Pompeianus to Corsica and then had him put to death, one of the complaints against him being that he had a map of the world painted on the walls of his bed-chamber (implying that he hid this imperialistic gesture in the most intimate room of the house), and another that he had excerpted and liked to read the speeches of kings and other leaders, taken from Livy. Suetonius (Dom.10.3) tells a similar story, but in his version Pompeianus carries a map of the world on parchment around with him.

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Almost three decades have passed since Foucault declared the late twentieth century “l’époque de l’espace,” yet in classics the interest in geography and space in the ancient world has continued to boom. Scholars have plotted multiple tributaries from Nicolet (1991), who argued that we glimpse under Augustus the emergence of a new sensibility and control over space that was much influenced by Greek geography and cartographic learning (we think especially of the Res Gestae, and the lost “map of Agrippa”). Yet Roman mapping remains an enigmatic zone: why is there apparently no Latin word for map (tabula being the nearest fit)? Was the “map of Agrippa” really a map at all, or a written text? The Romans were enthusiastic surveyors, but to what extent is Roman “map culture” a projection of modern obsessions? Talbert makes a distinctive, thought-provoking contribution to an exciting interdisciplinary field: he proposes a provocative and timely new reading of the Tabula Peutingeriana, the medieval copy of the surreally sausage-shaped roadmap of the Roman empire which fell into the hands of German humanist and antiquarian Konrad Peutinger in 1508. Talbert exploits not just cutting-edge technology but also a sharpened, twenty-first century awareness of what maps can do. The book is itself a hypertext, accompanied by on-line, multi-strata images of the map, plus impressive database and partner encyclopedia—the majestic Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World (Princeton, 2000), a project Talbert directed.

Talbert stresses from the outset the striking visual appeal of the map, standing ground against Konrad Miller’s 1916 commentary, which was unconcerned with cartographic design and treated the artefact as a purely practical guide for imperial administrators and generals. The map, as this project lets us appreciate in unprecedented detail, is spectacularly colourful, perversely (almost comically?) squat, dazzling in its detail, and frustratingly incomplete. It reshapess continents, inflates and pares down distances, turns whole seascapes into green worms: was it originally exhibited with a sea-route twin, and possibly a celestial map too? Or do the whittled down waterways suggest Plinian dreams of bridging seas (see for example Pliny NH 3.101), making terra firma encroach over untraceable sea floor and protean waters above? (It is interesting to ponder that in 2011, we know less about the sea bed under the English Channel than we do about the surface of Mars.) Educated viewers would have understood the visual tricks, Talbert argues: comparisons might be made with Henry Beck’s revolutionary London tube map. The other curious feature of the Peutinger map, perhaps underplayed by Talbert, is the fact that it layers time within weirdly remoulded space: it marks Campania before the eruption of Vesuvius in 79, together with Dacia, a Roman province between the early second century and late third century AD, and the effect is augmented by what Talbert argues are later insertions—Constantinopolis, for example, the new name given to Byzantium by Constantine in 324. That the map urges us to ponder the inseparability of space and time (something the Romans thought deeply about) merits more room than this study can perhaps afford.4

Chapter 1 gives a full account of the map’s discovery, successive ownership, and

4 See e.g. Varro, De Lingua Latina 5.10 (in hoc libro dicam de vocabulis locorum et quae in his sunt, in secundo de temporum et quae in his sunt, in tertio de utraque re a poetis comprehensa), and the recent volume edited by Claude Moussy (Espace et temps en latin [Paris, 2011]), which explores various perspectives on the overlapping of temporal and spatial thinking in Roman times.

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various attempts to publish and provide commentary (the account reads like a novel in parts, fueling fantasy at every turn: our Odyssean protagonist was neglected, then presumed lost in the seventeenth century, before being washed up “overlayed with dirt and decay” in 1714. And when the map was bought by Prince Eugen of Savoy, who promptly died in 1736, a funeral oration compared it to “a land newly discover’d, as was America”). Chapter 2 consists of a long and detailed analysis of the map’s paleography, discussing where and when the copy was possibly made. Chapter 3 is concerned with principles of design and presentation. Chapter 4 asks to what extent the surviving copy reproduces the lost original. Chapter 5 makes a series of conjectures regarding the likely sources (such as the first century Orange cadaster, the Severan Marble Plan of Rome, and the third-century “Dura Shield” map), date, authorship, and purpose of the original. And a conclusion considers the map’s place in classical cartography, its subsequent circulation and influence on medieval mapamundi. There are also nine appendices, including discussions of the Latin text attached to the 1598 engraving of the map, reflections on the 1835 testimony by Johann Hugo Wyttenbach’s claim to have discovered a lost piece of the map, and user guides to the on-line material.

Talbert makes three major and interrelated contentions: first, that on the original map Rome must have been centrally positioned (though assumed by some earlier scholars, the idea was rejected by Miller, leading to what Talbert sees as a mistaken reconstruction of the missing Western end). While this is ultimately an unprovable thesis, Talbert argues convincingly that no mapmaker would have missed the opportunity to make Rome so prominent. Secondly, he proposes that the “purpose of the map is primarily artistic and celebratory, not practical or geographic.” The remoulding of the orbis terrarum would have seemed overtly fantastic to educated viewers: we see a loss of cohesion and errors creeping in as we head toward the mysterious East, much inconsistency throughout, and no highlighting of more important, “recommended” routes, for example. Talbert wants not so much to polarise the aesthetic and the geographical/practical (spatial and other distortions can only be viewed as “extreme” in the context of detailed ancient experience of travel and knowledge of more utilitarian representations) but to underscore and unfold the politics of geography. Hence icons marking bathhouses on this map don’t necessarily serve to aid weary travellers in dire need of a sauna, but are eye-catching signposts of imperial peace, culture, technology, and wealth; equally the lack of military features and the absence of boundaries flaunt pax romana, make the point that it is not only possible and fashionable, but safe to travel. The map wows its viewers with the great long sweep of civilising Roman power, invites them to scan the length of empire as vast and intricate spectacle. This is largely convincing, though as Talbert is aware, interpretation constantly hinges on whether the original mapmaker or copyist was in places underinformed, slapdash, mistaken, or wildly creative.

The third contention relates to the date and presentation of the original map: while Miller thought it was made in the late fourth century, Talbert discounts this—reasonably—on the basis of the fact that there is insufficient sign of Christian influence (the presence of Constantinopolis, built between 324 and 330, is dismissed as a “conspicuous” later addition). Instead, he builds up a tentative picture in favour of the map having been produced for display in a ruler’s public space (later conjectured

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to be the reception hall of Diocletian’s palace at Split in modern Croatia), during the Tetrarchic period, around 300. Not only because, he suggests, we can most likely locate the map between the organization of Dacia as a province in the early second century and Constantine’s sole rule and foundation of Constantinople, but because the map seems to fit a distinctive fourth-century aesthetic (with its exotic names, rich, mosaic-like detail and jewel brights, it appears as a “long colourful robe”) and a contemporary ideological need (though this is predicated on Talbert’s earlier conjecture of Rome’s central position) to demonstrate the symbolic importance of a capital that in reality had lost its privileged status. It is not clear, however, what motives there might have been for displaying the map at Split, and not at Rome itself, or at Constantinople. Similarly, the cultural-political reading of the Tabula that sees it responding specifically to early fourth-century ideals does not really address the issue of its “nostalgic” layering of select elements of the Roman imperial past.

The conundrum of where and how the map might originally have been displayed is fascinating, and this is where a map’s potential to stimulate intellect and imagination alike comes into its own: the metaphor of map as text hits home when we ponder the fact that the copy, at least, is about the same height as a papyrus roll. Even if, as seems likely, it was painted onto a long wall, was it designed nevertheless to resemble a text, evoking a similar effect to the epic film-roll of images snaking round Trajan’s column? Following it along a colonnade, was the viewer meant to get the sense of “travelling” down a road (a well-worn ancient trope for reading a story or poem), of following the “plot” of empire from its familiar centre to fuzzy borders? In his conclusion Talbert writes in an evocative way about the “dynamism” of the map: as we move along it, he implies, it too seems to move, its routes “forging purposefully across the landscape.” This important project, equally impressive for its rigorous scholarship and imaginative, interdisciplinary vision, zooms study of the Peutingen map into the twenty-first century: it leaves us buzzing with questions, and will do much to inspire a new generation of classicist-geographers unable to remember life before Google Maps.

Much of Laura Salah Nasrallah’s very different book is also focused on what she calls “geographical thinking” in second-century empire (as manifested not just in mapmaking but in the ancient novels and accounts real and fictional of travel), though she moves in the opposite direction—from written texts to material artefacts and archaeological evidence. Her main title, then, Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture, could be slightly misleading, as the project is primarily about important early church writers, not about art and iconography; more to the point, “responses to” flattens out the 3D interactions between written and visual “texts” which Nasrallah aims to chart (indeed she intends the vocabulary of mapping to seep across borders, plugging an ongoing metaphor for the way in which New Historicism criticism shifts and reallocates intellectual terrain). Nasrallah’s main thesis is that the texts she discusses—the Acts of the Apostles, Justin’s Apologies, Tatian’s To the Greeks, Athenagoras’ Embassy and Clement’s Exhortation—are not marginal qua oppositional, but engaged participants in the “cultural, ethnic, philosophical, religious, and political struggles of their time.” From a (New Historicist, but also more broadly post-structuralist and feminist) perspective which has moved beyond atomistic constructions of reality, we can see these texts opened onto the “space” of empire, and embedded in the “anxious

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performativity” seen as characteristic of the Second Sophistic. These writers are “Vitruvian men,” inhabitants of a world described in the De Architectura 6 as both centred on Rome and without a centre, citizens who grasp and live the Vitruvian analogy between human and architectural body. Nasrallah’s quest to speak for the material has its own ideological frame—“I believe that literature is elucidated by as full as possible an analysis of the broader culture in which it arose, but also because of my feminist commitments. The realm of matter, philosophically elided with the feminine in antiquity and even the present, is too often overlooked in preference for tracing a history of ideas through literary and philosophical writings” (16)—could have been put less clumsily. Many will balk at the suggestion that feminism has been more interested in the material than the literary—nor is it the case that classicists have paid insufficient attention to art and archaeology; rather, interdisciplinarity, the study of/based on the reality of interconnection, has deep roots in feminism and what Anglo-Americans like to call “continental” philosophy.

The book splits into three parts: Part 1 unpacks “apology,” questioning the validity of any neat definition and pushing for an understanding based on relationality. Once we redraw the map and pan outwards, we can make new connections (all five texts respond to/perform a blurring of human and divine, advance debate about piety and about what counts as true religion, ask political questions about identity), reveal interpretative possibilities (are the apologists always serious? Dare we talk of satire?), and compare and contrast with material evidence (the Fountain of Regilla and Herodes at Olympia, the Sebastieon at Aphrodias). Postcolonialist theory and postmodern geography lend the backdrop to the second chapter in part 1: Justin, Tatian, and Lucian “sketch mental maps of the world,” are alert to the ways in which bodies are constituted by the space they inhabit and move in, are products of a vital cultural chemistry which cannot easily be mapped in terms of centre v. periphery, metropolitan v. provincial, Christian v. Roman/Hellenistic. Part 2 moves “into the cities”: Nasrallah’s spatial metaphor comes from architecture this time, as she compares the travels of Paul with Hadrian’s Panhellenion, both “memory theatres” which tell geographical stories, before viewing Justin’s Apologies and Trajan’s Column in parallel. Part 3 turns to a different kind of representational “crisis” that bubbles up repeatedly in these texts: what separates human from divine. Again, for Nasrallah’s purposes, writings have their visual partners which facilitate creative recontextualisation: Athenagoras’ Embassy plus the portrait of Commodus as Hercules, Clement’s Exhortation plus the statuary bodies of the Aphrodite of Knidos. An epilogue takes us full circle, delineating the scope, reemphasizing interdisciplinarity, and rejecting straight lines.

What we are left with is often frustratingly broad; however, relationality is sometimes not thought out beyond description or juxtaposition, and the familiar late twentieth-century-on-Second Sophistic flags of “crisis,” “negotiation,” “hybridity,” “performativity” are arranged as destinations rather than as starting points. Nasrallah does important work in sketching out the bigger picture, yet it sometimes feels as if her thematic buzzwords (justice, piety, culture, ethnicity), traced through all literary and non-literary texts, become drained of meaning: what era is not concerned about “what it means to be human?” What do we learn from such statements as “Trajan’s column was thick with messages of power and culture” (14)? Was it so novel that in the early

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fourth-century imperial power could threaten “loss, disgrace . . . and harm” not only of “goods or honor” but of “bodies and souls” (186)? Her global eye lacks nuance at points: in Chapter 5, for example, it is not clear why an obsession with one of antiquity’s many multivalent gods (Herales) constitutes a historically and culturally specific “crisis of representation” to which Athenagoras’ Embassy then responds, though no one would object that this text is concerned with representation: on one hand Nasrallah applauds, even sentimentalises, a plurality of readings, but on the other implies that multiplicity or contradiction is not or should not be the nature of reality, that it is somehow (here the views of critic and Athenagoras bleed into one) a dangerous lie. Yet Nasrallah is successful in bringing the envigorating insights of cultural poetics to bear on the fertile fields of Christian apologetic literature, and in allowing us to see these texts as active bodies in live imperial space. Her own spatial thinking, like Talbert’s, is very much of its time, an index of how far we have come, as well as of how many roads lie ahead.

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The most influential study on the ancient economy in the last four decades is, without a doubt, Moses Finley’s *The Ancient Economy,* first published in 1973 and based on his Sather Lectures at the University of California, Berkeley. His economic model is the result of studies by Polanyi, Hasebroek, and Weber and employs methods drawn from sociology and anthropology, presenting a “substantivist” view. He proposes that the ancient economy was “embedded” in the social and political institutions prevalent throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. In his discussion, he touches upon the nature of money, coinage, and monetary development, concluding that money was essentially coined metal and nothing else; therefore, the money supply depended in large part on the amount of gold and silver available. There was no fiduciary money. As for credit, no structure beyond the lending of coins existed; these loans were not for productive purposes, but rather consumptive: i.e., to meet social and political obligations.1 Recently Finley’s conclusions about money and coinage have been challenged by a number of studies.2 Sitta von Reden’s *Money in Classical Antiquity* is one of the most recent examinations of this important aspect of the ancient economy in support of many of Finley’s views. In her preface she states that her aim “is to nurture an understanding of the complexities of money and monetization in classical antiquity, and the possibilities of exploring them by means of the various kinds of evidence available” (xiii). She admits that a small volume, such as this one, on money in classical

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