

A Map of the Body, a Map of the Mind



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A Map of the Body, a Map of the Mind

Visualising Geographical Information
in the Roman World

Iain Ferris

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Cover: Artemis Ephesia, probably from Rome. Second century AD.
Detail of part of the Peutinger Map. Original early second century to early fourth century AD.

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For JMF.

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Note: As with any study there comes a point at which a cut-off time is reached, when bibliographic research and reading have to stop: for this book that point was March 2023. Therefore books and papers published after that time have not been consulted, with the exception of the important studies by Richard Talbert (Talbert 2023) and Andrew Fox (Fox 2023).

Preface

This study is about the relationship between geography, topography, and power in the ancient Roman world, and most particularly about the visualisation of ideas about geography, at the interface between art and environment, though not necessarily between nature and culture.

This is not going to be a work about centre and periphery but rather about ideas circulating at the centre itself or emanating from there. The centre, the Greek *agora* and the Roman *forum*, was probably the most essential space in the ancient world both because of its intrinsic sacrality and because of its very functionality, assuming different forms depending on what was taking place there or who was present there at any one time. As Rome broke its political bounds and headed towards empire the whole city became the centre and the Roman world-view changed with it.

The Roman state then needed to present to the Roman people an easily-digestible narrative about its imperial ambitions and its imperial possessions, in a way that went beyond the fact that servitude, enslavement, and misery for many underpinned this expansion. There needed to be a publicly-guided discourse centred around the smoothing out of difference, rather than its obliteration or elimination, and the presentation of very different lifeworlds in a familiar way. It marked a way of directing how change could be managed and a way of reimagining how the world might be and might work, at the intersection between selection, presentation, knowledge, and insight. Reflection and communication sought to create a communal sense of belonging.

There was a number of stages to this process, and indeed the first stage will have been the presentation of Rome as an entity in itself, and later as a regional power within Italy, but this is a programme that is difficult to see in the archaeological record even if it can be plotted through written historical accounts. For instance, Cato the Elder in his *Origines* of the 160s BC related the origins of a number of Italian peoples and discussed their relationships with Rome, clearly setting out what it then meant to be Roman.¹ The early Roman expansion into Italy might have been more of a process of elite negotiation and the promotion of elite family agendas, as quite recently suggested by a number of academics, rather than expansion by war and conquest.² A well-known wall painting from a fourth century BC tomb on the Esquiline Hill in Rome, now in the *Musei Capitolini Centrale Montemartini*, depicts what are generally considered to be treaty negotiations during the Samnite Wars and catches the progress of Rome's expansion *in stasis*. The so-called Social Wars have sometimes simplistically been seen as Rome's Italian allies turning on Rome in order to gain more rights rather than actions arising out of dissatisfaction at Roman rule and colonisation.

As Rome's power grew it acquired territory outside of Italy. The process of empire naturally led to the importation and adoption of goods and ideas from a wider network beyond the Italian peninsula itself, leading to what can be termed a deterritorialisation of Rome the city. By intensifying practices that stressed Roman individuality this process was mitigated. Rome after all was not the first power to establish wide Mediterranean networks beyond home

¹ Cato *Origines*.

² See, for example: Terrenato 2019; and Van Dommelen and Terrenato 2007.

territory: indeed far from it. Rome's external relationships were underpinned by strongly-articulated localised expressions which served to demarcate identity both internally and externally. Local and global practices interacting together played a significant and important role in Rome becoming what might awkwardly be called Mediterraneanised, as had previously and variously happened for the Greeks, Phoenicians, Etruscans, Assyrians, and Egyptians.

A point that needs to be made from the outset is that in the ancient world Rome's recourse to constructing a vision of the contemporary world using the kind of 'geography products' discussed in this book was not necessarily unique, though the motives, preparation, and presentation certainly were. The Hellenistic world was hyper-connected in a similar way to Rome's world. The Hellenistic Ptolemies in Egypt through their building of a great library at Alexandria, the collecting of books, the forging of a culture of intellectual classification, the assembling of scholars, poets, and artists at court, and the display of collected exotic animals in one particularly famed street parade in the 270s BC made grand statements about links to the world of Alexander the Great.

It is true to say that the turning point for Romans in terms of their engagement with new and original geographical knowledge came after the fall of Carthage to the Roman general P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus in 146 BC. Even though the Romans now had an empire, up until that time their world had to all intents and purposes been the world known to the Greeks and written about by them. Greek maritime and shipping itineraries, known as *periploi*, would have been available for use by the Romans criss-crossing the Mediterranean. After 146 BC the Romans began to break the bounds of their world and of their geographical knowledge.

Rome was an inland city, admittedly with a river connection to the coast, yet up until c. AD 300 it could still talk about *mare nostrum*- 'our sea'-as if geographical location was a state of mind rather than a fact, a barrier to the exploitation of their environment as they pleased. Interestingly, the term was originally applied specifically to the Tyrrhenian Sea after the capture of Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia from the Carthaginians in the Punic Wars, but by the mid-first century BC, around 30 BC, as Roman territorial ambitions grew, it came to be applied to the whole Mediterranean. Use of the phrase by Julius Caesar, Livy, Pomponius Mela, and Sallust suggests that it was a commonly-applied and widely-accepted term.³ Thus a geographical epithet changed as a reflection of political ideology and military expansion. Yet curiously, despite this self-identification with the Mediterranean, the Romans never altogether identified themselves as a seafaring people in the way that the Greeks had done. Yet Rome became like the sea, its immensely deep sky and all its movement, all its houses, domes, and arches imitating the tumultuous waves of the ocean. The sound of the city awakening, of its bustle and street traffic must somehow have seemed to mimic the rhythmic crash of ocean tides. A true image merged with a metaphor.

The Roman attitude of 'owning' of the Mediterranean is especially interesting today in terms of comparisons with nineteenth and twentieth century European colonial discourses which helped create an imagined geography of the Mediterranean as somehow exclusively Greek and Roman in the past, and which then became part of the strategy for legitimising European colonial incursions and appropriations at that time.

³ Julius Caesar *De Bello Gallico* 5.1; Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* 26.42; Pomponius Mela *De Situ Orbis* 1.5.1; and Sallust *Bellum Jugurthinum* 17.

A pivotal point in the history of the Roman empire, and highly germane to this present study, was the accession of Septimius Severus and the Severan dynasty in the late second century AD. Most probably because of the Severans' roots in the east their reigns saw concerted efforts to reach out to provinces and communities in the eastern empire, but at the same time to stress unity between east and west in a way that perhaps had not been done since the time of Augustus. The cultural syncretism that underpinned their policies reached a singular and significant peak in AD 212 with Caracalla's extension by law of Roman citizenship to virtually all of the empire's free people. The implications of this were extraordinary in terms of trying to foster a sense of empire-wide unity and Roman identity.

The creation of the Roman empire and its expansion almost inevitably led to a recalibration of spatial relationships between Rome and Italy and between Roman Italy and the rest of the known world as it was then. It is true to say that the detail is often in the small print of Roman culture, in its undercurrents. Geographical thinking shaped the forms of contemporary art then, even if only at the level of sub-genres, thus making this present study a geography of art but not a study of geography *in art*, a political geography of the Roman world told through images, a strange spatial ontology layered onto Rome's fixity in defined physical space. Extraterritoriality such as this can signify openness, freedom, imprisonment, or subjugation.

The history of Roman imperialism to some extent could be described as being a history of fragmentation and a history of exclusion. The city of Rome became a space where an attempt was made to create and present a kind of collective memory. If we can also then talk about moves towards inclusion our discussion has to be tempered with awareness of the constant undertow of cultural dislocation and alienation there. If environments can be said to inhabit us, then Rome became alive with peoples and products of the whole known world: it was not where you were but where you could be, through movement, transformation, becoming. However, a Roman when away from the city would have carried with him or her the air they once breathed in Rome, the waters of the Tiber, and the warmth of the Italian sun. The sun had not trapped all shadows there, without the city's refuge of silence its vision was fugitive, composed of silence, matter, and compact form. The potential level of synaesthetic power involved must have been considerable, with light, music, texts, images, and architecture probably headily combining.

It is becoming increasingly fashionable among ancient historians and archaeologists to write about geography and cartography, and indeed in the last few years a number of books have been published on conceptual ideas centred around ancient experiences of space and geography and the mapping and recording of space. However, this present book has to some extent been gestating for over twenty years, ever since I wrote my first book on images of barbarian peoples in Roman art-*Enemies of Rome. Barbarians Through Roman Eyes*.⁴ Presenting such images to the Roman viewer was to all intents and purposes a way of coming to terms with the world in which Roman power held such a sway. In many contexts this was as much an exercise in self-representation as it was the deliberate and accurate dissemination of geographical information about distant lands and non-Roman peoples. Again, in a later book of mine-*Cave Canem. Animals and Roman Society*-attention was turned in part of the book to how the capture, collection, and display of exotic animals and birds, and often their killing in the

⁴ Ferris 2000.

arena, became a defining characteristic of Roman culture's coming to terms with the wider world.⁵

As always, while researching and writing a book my mind has been sparked by various modern or contemporary artistic and cultural sources that provided both ideas and stimulation with regard to the subject at hand. One has only to read the works of Margaret Atwood, J.G. Ballard, W.G. Sebald, Amitav Ghosh, and Chang-Rae Lee, for example, to find parallel thinking about the relationships of peoples, places, and spaces to that in the writings of ancient authors such as Herodotus, Homer, Virgil, and Livy. Journeying, travelling, belonging, and being an outsider underpins much of the poetry and other writings of Blaise Cendrars. The interconnectedness of emigration, immigration, and identity can be gauged from works by writers as varied as Michael Ondaatje, Kristjana Gunnar, Noreen Masud, and Dan-el Padilla Peralta. The experimental, and often very funny, writings of Georges Perec together provide a fragmented but somehow coherent view of Paris in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, in a short Appendix to this present book I have produced my own attempt at replicating Perec's idea of utilising repetition (as in his book about Paris *Je ne souviens/I Remember*) to produce an imagistic vision of the ancient city of Rome and its reception. The consideration of films about space and place, most particularly those of Agnès Varda as discussed further below, but also others such as John Smith's *The Black Tower*, Patrick Keiller's *London*, Andrew Kötting's *Gallivant*, Sarah Maldoror's *Regards de Mémoire*, and almost any film by Andrei Tarkovsky, can add to the interpretative arsenal on the subject. Michelangelo Antonioni's way of representing places, of constructing narratives and telling stories by depicting squares and streets and the urban environment has been hugely influential for me. In his cinema such places became almost metaphysical arenas where knowledge was displayed and exchanged. Looking at published portfolios of photographs by Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Sebastião Salgado, and Dorothea Lange has also opened my mind to thoughts about moving through, and being caught in, place and space. For me the post-punk music of Joy Division, The Pop Group, The Fall, and Wire from the late 1970s to early 1980s proposes many routes through interzones into clear space, as their music moves through time and maps a geography of revelation and resolution. Low-frequency sounds rumble up like suppressed memories of hauntological places. Less dark, but equally vivid in evoking place and time, past and present is the early 1980s music of The Go-Betweens, as best heard on their seminal, haunting *Cattle and Cane*.

Importantly, viewing films by the French director Agnès Varda has helped me to theorise around many past situations relating to ideas of place and home, and to throw up transferable possibilities of interpretation. For instance, in her short documentary film *Les Dites-Cariatides-The So-Called Caryatids-* of 1984 Varda drifted around Paris photographing numerous examples of architectural caryatids, cognisant of the descriptions of the Roman architectural writer Vitruvius who contextualised and sought to normalise the use of such images of captured, subservient women in Greek and Roman building practice (Figure 1). Accompanied by the poetry of Baudelaire and the music of Offenbach, Varda, as she so often did, here created a topography of the human experience mediated by the camera lens and her piercing feminist perspective. The rolling of the film gave motion where for the caryatids there was just paralysis. This was as much an exploration of ideas about place, a discourse on desires and the city form, as it was a study of architectural traditions. These images of women inhabited

⁵ Ferris 2015.



Figure 1. Relief depicting architrave supported by the figures of two caryatids, Pozzuoli. Early first century AD. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. (Photo: Author).

these multifarious urban spaces, and Varda used them to reclaim the streets of Paris from the tyranny of the modern male *flâneur*. As Varda herself later said in her semi-autobiographical film *The Beaches of Agnès* of 2008 ‘if we opened people up, we’d find landscapes’.

Ideas relating to identity, alienation, assimilation, diaspora, and exile could be manifested and presented in the form of images in the Roman world without overt references to geography and origins, and yet inform viewers of just those very things through a mixture of lyricism and dialectics. These images were not simply part of a reflection of a separate or separated world of art: rather they were part of the passionate, rational, and dramatic aspects of everyday life at the time, sparking imaginations that were to be turned on the transformation of reality itself. Viewers were encouraged to discover within themselves desires for other, particular environments and places in order to make them seem real, to regenerate the nature of imagined experience under other skies. The tensions implicit in such strategies are obvious: the city became the total work of art, playing with the presentation of time, space, and place each in turn, then in tandem and combination. The solicitation of the city’s architecture and monuments was seductive and informative to those who were susceptible or open to suggestion. Information gleaned in this way reflected the absence of more practical means to orientate oneself in a changing and expanding world. The study and correlation of accepted snippets of geographical information obtained by cultural osmosis or

sought out in a targeted manner on the city's streets created new and what must sometimes have been very individual and idiosyncratic mental and emotional maps of both the existing cityscape and of distant imagined cities and places. These geographies framed Roman cultural practice. Representational and sometimes direct and sometimes almost abstract, intimate and monumental, systematised and impulsive, together these works did not break the rules of contemporary Roman art but they pushed the boundaries by signing up to all of them. If asked to say what they were about, I would say 'everything'.

New forms of communication, new messages, and deconditioning from misunderstood or jumbled images must also have gone hand in hand with all of this. Many individuals as viewers were given information, they and others must have also sometimes found it or stumbled across it. We should not imagine a merely one-way transmission of experience in a city such as Rome or in other Roman cities and towns: thinking of viewers as just an audience, non-creative, purely receptive, passive, and isolated, surely misdirects us away from understanding open forms of cultural communication that in fact must have been active as well as reactive. Although occasionally imprecise, these images conveying geographical information in the form of architectural expression were often highly charged with emotionally-evocative power and representing desires, control, events from the past, the present, and the future, rational extensions of religious experiences and myths. Imperial Rome ushered in a period of city planning seen as a means of knowledge exchange. Parts of the city could have corresponded to the feelings usually experienced by chance, but here managed or even manipulated. One could leave the realm of direct experience for that of representation and presentation. The passivity of the old, pre-imperial Rome needed to be reconstituted in some respects by a collective project explicitly concerned with confronting every aspect of the audience's lived experiences, by drawing attention to the contrast between what contemporary life was actually like and what it could be. Rome could only find its poetry in the present, if informed by the past.

While planning this study I read Katja Pilhuj's brilliant book of 2019 *Women and Geography On the Early Modern English Stage* and was particularly struck by her use there of the term 'geography product' to describe different kinds of objects and texts in the early modern period which each contained some element of spatial or geographical information.⁶ There was an immediate realisation that the use of such an umbrella categorisation of disparate 'things' offered a number of potentially critical openings for looking at ancient Rome and its defining of place and space, that a new strand of critical conversation and dialogue could be started. Indeed, therefore I have adopted the phrase 'geography product' here with regard to the study of geography and ancient Rome, using it more broadly to include a slew of visual sources which acted as mnemonic triggers to spatial awareness and extending the definition even to encompass tastes, sounds, and smells which might have had the same effect. Written histories, geographic texts, ethnographic studies, poems, epigrams, plays, maps, drawn surveys, and inscriptions could also be geography products. Bodies and images of bodies could also on occasions be geography products or carry on them such information as to qualify in this respect: land, space, and place literally could be written on the body. In other words this book will set out to discuss the full range of geography products that would have appeared or circulated in the city of Rome and elsewhere in the Roman world from the time of early

⁶ Pilhuj 2019.



Figure 2. Example of a Roman 'geography product'. Statue personification of the River Arno. Exact provenance uncertain, probably Rome. Hadrianic. *Musei Vaticani*, Rome. (Photo: Author).

Rome up to Late Antiquity. Adopting this strategy of definition has allowed narratives, plots, structures, and themes in the evidence to emerge.

Roman ideas and concepts about geographic space, about topography, about landscape, about foreign peoples, and about barbarians were developed, one might even say workshopped, in the theatrical sense, through a process of almost trial and error in terms of creating and presenting a coherent series of geography products which utilised words and images to telescope distance and space and to create maps of the body and maps of the mind. The famous and canonical statue of the emperor Augustus from Prima Porta, now in the *Musei Vaticani* in Rome, can very much be viewed and read as a kind of prophetic document and archive like the body of Ray Bradbury's fictional *Illustrated Man*. The decorated cuirass worn by the emperor contained in its roster of discrete images a narrative of sorts that helped set the agenda for the presentation of the geography of the Roman empire to its viewers in all its complexity.

Highly-relevant to the idea of traversing a city to read its buildings, streets, and monuments and to decode their messages is the concept of psychogeography as developed by the Situationist International and in more recent British culture best represented by the writings of Ian Sinclair, such as in his book *London Orbital* of 2002. Even though the psychogeographic concepts of the *flâneur* and of 'drifting' principally relate to modern urban or industrialised

environments, nevertheless there are certain strategies of analysis that can satisfactorily be applied to the study of other types of cityscape, landscape, and topography in the deeper and more distant past.

Did people ‘drift’ (*dériver*) through the streets of Rome, wandering without purpose, intent, obligations, or destinations in mind? In the late nineteenth century the idea of the solitary, disassociated city *flâneur* took hold in avant garde circles, with walking the city being presented now as oriented towards some goal, some deep revelation. But, on the contrary, a city could become specific and non-specific, all at once, as Georg Simmel’s early twentieth century city-dwelling ‘blasé person’ found, indifferent to their surroundings and often unresponsive to them.

As we travel around a modern city, wandering its streets and boulevards, exploring its arcades and alleyways, if not happy to be lost in urban space we are often glad to find a mounted street-map that displays our position in the city with a red arrow that tells us ‘You are here’. It situates us at an exact location, a certain unique spot. Many of the urban and civic artworks discussed in this study played the same role, spatially and conceptually locating Romans who viewed them both in their city and in the wider world. Rome was marking out its own position in the world by inviting viewers to linger in the city and reaffirm its significance. Rome was an urban architectural map built from lived trajectories, histories, truths, and fictions. We can retrospectively search its spaces for the voices and stories buried within them, to create topographies of the human experience. Artworks conveying geographical information still managed to embed their locations with a sense of their individual human resonance. If women could not move as freely in Rome’s public spaces as its male citizens and inhabitants then their active participation in the creation of the idea of the city as a nexus for a world beyond came to be largely represented by images of the female body in and imposed on masculinised spaces.

Footfalls Echo In the Memory

The Roman state, whether in the Republican era or during the years of imperial authority, was not an inventor and user of ‘information technology’ as we understand it today. Just as there can be seen to have been two strands to healthcare in the ancient world—a ‘rational’, quasi-scientific one relating to medical practice and an ‘irrational’, or perhaps emotional one linked to the recourse to the gods to seek help when sick—so space could be controlled and understood by measuring and mapping it, but equally could be confronted by its conceptualising in other ways by the use of images and, to a lesser extent, by metaphor.

The school of ancient historians who write about ‘common-sense geography’ or who use the even less-appealing term ‘illiterate geography’ often, unintentionally, present readers with an either/or dichotomy: that is between what might be termed scientific or descriptive geographical works, for the literate elite, and popular images presenting geographical information for the masses. Yet both types of geography co-existed in Roman society and each interacted with the other, informed the other, fed in to the other, enhanced the other, contradicted the other, and so on, depending on time, circumstance, and context. As in all of my previous books this work primarily will be about Roman visual culture which was central,



Figure 3. Example of a Roman ‘geography product’. Nilotic scene on a terracotta Campana plaque. Mid-first century AD. British Museum, London. (Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum).

perhaps the central, means by which the Romans forged their geographical identity and through which they ordered and transformed the world around them.

When you start out writing a book on a particular subject you know what the book is going to be about, even if only broadly. As work progresses you discover what the book is most certainly not going to be about, in other words which particular topics are either not going to be discussed at all or which topics are going to be raised in certain specific ways only, committing to omit other lines of enquiry or certain approaches to particular topics. Every study, like a flood, leaves a residue, a silt of unused case studies and undiscussed artworks. Not because they are irrelevant: simply that less is indeed often more, and these undiscussed cases remain otiose to the main arguments propounded, but not because they would necessarily be invalid as examples. This book is not a history of geography in the ancient world, of Greco-Roman geographers, or of maps and map-making at the time. A great deal of recent academic writing about Roman geography indeed has dwelt on the topic of maps, very specifically the absence of accurate scale-mapping at the time, and indeed has sometimes consisted of quite pedantic debates about the definition of what actually constitutes a map in the first place. Other studies appear to me to have become slightly bogged down in the mire around questions of accuracy

and of measurement in Roman times. The Roman compilation and use of travel itineraries is not viewed here negatively, because they were not what we would understand as a map today. That some portable Roman sundials were not hugely accurate again is not an issue here. Nor is the fact that most Greco-Roman geographical writing is viewed by some as somehow being compromised and having had no 'utility on the ground' because of its structures, tropes, and themes. All of these things relate to context, to differences of scale and ambition, an unusual degree of lack of concern over precision and regularisation, and differing interests in the uses and currency of information at the time.

That the Hellenistic and Roman periods were the first great eras of mass mobility suggests that travelling without pinpoint-accurate scale maps was not an issue at the time. If the concern of the contemporary traveller then was to get from City A to City B along a single road route, stopping at five designated intermediate places, then an *Itinerarium* or itinerary was more than able to provide a sequential list of places making up this particular journey and to provide the distances between each stopping point, and thus provide a total mileage for the trip. Rather, the book is about what I will call geography products after Katja Pilhuj, principally in the form of images of peoples, places, and landscapes, but also in the form of written texts or inscriptions, public display maps, monuments, and objects of various kinds including surveying instruments and sundials: in fact any thing that could be said to be intended to convey or to have been conveying a piece or pieces of geographic information to a viewer or reader, even if that information was allusive rather than necessarily always factual or correct, sometimes impressionistic rather than always clear or detailed, and more often than not open to different interpretations or a number of interpretations all at the same time. The book will ask how the creation of these geography products came about, though that cannot always be explained or surmised, what their creation and dissemination were intended to convey in terms of knowledge transfer and outcomes, who the intended audience was for these geography products, and how the intended audience might have reacted to contact with the products, as single, stand-alone entities or as part of a series or sequence. In the main the action is set in the city of Rome itself but many other examples and case studies from elsewhere in Italy and from around the Roman empire will also be discussed. Inevitably the politics of geography will feature heavily here, while issues relating to mobility, travel, connectivity, interconnectedness, standardisation, sameness, and difference will also be addressed. People, ideas, and images travelled in the Roman world and around the Roman world, in a dance of dizzying complexity, and everywhere the ceremony of isolation and its attendant innocence was drowned.

By calling attention to the distortions, inflections, disidentifications, confrontations, dissatisfactions, and recombinations of a diverse range of codes in the preparation of geography products, this book attempts to contribute to the discussion of their innovative potential as vehicles of information about what it meant to be Roman.

In subject order consideration will be given to: pre-Roman Italian ideas about conceptualising geography, topography, and space (Chapter One); a discussion of an ancient rumination on belonging and an introduction to the broader subject of the study (Chapter Two); the contemporary significance of Rome's famed seven hills and of mountains in general to the Romans, and how Romans conceptualised Rome (Chapter Three); the significance of rivers and their personification in Roman art (Chapter Four); landscape art, especially painting, and



Figure 4. Example of a Roman ‘geography product’. Sarcophagus depicting the Indian triumph of Bacchus, Ostia/Portus. Second to third century AD. Museo Archeologico Ostiense. (Photo: Author).

the idea of control and surveillance (Chapter Five); the particular Roman discourse about the city’s relationship with Egypt and its colonial landscapes (Chapter Six); the practice and politics of mapping in the Roman world (Chapter Seven); the use of images of barbarian peoples in Roman imperial art as geographical markers for the definition of *Romanitas* (Chapter Eight); the process and concept of journeying in the Roman world as a way of establishing conceptual links and mnemonic chains between places (Chapter Nine); and more theoretical and comparative issues relating to the conceptualisation of space and place in the Roman world and in more recent societies and cultures (Chapter Ten).

Almost inevitably, images of barbarians will loom large in this study, as will writings about non-Roman peoples. Roman ethnographies were not all about barbarians and the other. It must be remembered that by often writing about non-Roman peoples using the terms *gens* and *populus* these writers were often doing more than simply telling tales about the barbarians. They were trying to define what it meant to belong to a defined territory with a particular character rather than simply being on some nondescript, interchangeable piece of land.

Who could have known that certain non-Roman peoples in some contexts would journey from image to subject, that they could pivot or move from being the object of the gaze to the subject that looked. The terms that modern academic archaeologists, historians, and

classicists use to describe some of the subject peoples of the Roman empire—Romano-Britons, Gallo-Romans, and so on—were not used by the Romans themselves and therefore really can sometimes confuse the discourse around the relationships between the conquered and conquerors, between the subjects and the rulers. By using such terms of hybridity the origins of these peoples are sutured to Rome and masked by being described through fractions of other places. Designating in this way defines and contains them in a manner that will have been very different to ancient contemporary perceptions. No model of Roman belonging can function unproblematically based as it was on the constant recourse to violence inherent in founding any empire encompassing someone else's lands.

The idea that Latin literary and historical texts were artefacts—objects—of Roman culture is widely accepted among academics today, but here such texts when they include spatial information or ethnographies will also be treated as geography products, indeed as one such product among many in the Roman era. I certainly do not consider that the analytical blurring of boundaries here is a bad idea. The idea that we can speak of Ovid's Rome in the same way that we might about Dickens' London is attractive, but potentially misleading. Everybody had their own Rome, not just Ovid, even if his listing of hotspots around the city to meet women and find love or sex read like emotional maps for personal journeys of discovery. Ovid's Rome was indeed a mixture of interconnectivity and alienation, the latter intensified during his time in exile from the city at Tomis on the Black Sea.

On some occasions we can see indisputably that the presentation of geographical information was an imperial initiative but not necessarily a coherently thought-out and planned project with dedicated aims and objectives, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Enquiring and answering how and why the Roman state and its military and bureaucratic agents shared and subdivided real and imaginary spaces goes some way towards understanding the making of the transnational cultures of the empire. Rather, information was placed in the public space and spaces in a piecemeal fashion, with the creation of a series and its maintenance not being always apparent. Pliny the Elder dedicated his monumental encyclopedia, the *Naturalis Historia*, to the emperor Titus and throughout the work can be found references to the benefits of the Roman peace for the whole world, while at the same time stressing the totality of all nature and not just that of those lands under Roman rule. It is also true to say that a Greek geographer and ethnographer such as Strabo, writing his *Geographia* during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, the pivotal era when the Roman conception of empire changed subtly but irredeemably, was not strictly 'writing the Roman world', and certainly not to order.

Roman culture needed to locate itself in both quotidian time and in a cosmic order. There needed to be a structure for aligning events in both time and space. In order to do so its social system defined itself by expressing boundaries which also involved the recording of social pathways through the pursuit of knowledge about ancestral relationships and lineage. To a member of the Roman male elite the idea that he was placed within a map of familial connections would have been certain and indisputable. Garrett Sullivan's idea of what he called 'affective spaces', that is locations imbued with some form of significance by those that occupied them or who were in some way connected to them is highly pertinent here. This combining of bodily and terrestrial space created two parallel geographies, of the wider world or known world and of others which were made up of affective or local places. This geographically-inflected thinking would have led men of this class to (over)identify with

a family house or estate, or with a place linked to family origins. Its political and military system needed to centre Rome itself within its contemporary world by recording geographic pathways and their history. This meant that the Romans chose to visualise both qualitative data in their art relating to expressions of social hierarchy, their cultural and religious beliefs and values, and quantitative data relating to economic trends that were themselves defined by the management of overland travel and transportation, and trading by river and sea. Geographical knowledge in the Roman world was actually part of a vast network of cultural codes, rather than simply a specialised branch of general knowledge.

There were very varied models for conceptualising the world beyond Rome. Geographically they bled together, from text to text, image to image, region to region, race to race. The globe, an unbroken circle, could be seen to represent conquest, unbroken in time and space, the circular endlessness contrasting with a map demarcating finite, limited space: this was to all intents and purposes a contrasting of ambition with realism. These geographic products were in a language, both textual and visual as well as imaginative, and were not simply static representations or allusions to space: rather, they helped map out new ways for people to create conceptions of themselves and of the world.

The interplay between ideas of impermanence and permanence also must have been significant. A picture of a personified river carried in a triumphal procession—seen fleetingly if at all by the spectators lining the route of the triumph—was very different indeed to an image of a personified river in the form of a permanent statue, a static image. It will be argued that geographical information could be visualised in a number of ways in the Roman world and that the categories of representation were to some extent fluid depending on context.

Anyone familiar with the song *Roadrunner* by Jonathan Richman will be aware that the song's great success lies in the universality and relatability of its theme of carefree, youthful driving on American highways in general, startlingly contrasted with the geographically micro-specific experience of being 'out in Needham now, out on Route 128, by the power lines'. This astonishing switch of scale represents a good example of imagistic mapping that situates the local and perhaps unfamiliar in a broader context that feels inclusive and understandable.

In many ways ancient Rome became a kind of National Park, turning in on itself in order to display its character externally. Rome was a monolith, a monument to an idea, composed of thousands of individual monuments, each an accretion that nuanced a central theme and trope. Rome acted to frame art about the world around and its peoples. It was part of a more general and much broader programme to transform and inform everyday life in the city. It became a montage of attractions, with the real and imaginary, the physical and the mental, the objective and the subjective, description and narration, actual and virtual, reflecting each other, ultimately becoming confused, indiscernible one from the other. While each individual geography product tells us something about specific aspects of Roman geographical knowledge and the ordering of information, taken together they help provide a window onto broader issues relating to the coexistence of streams of thought relating to the pictorialisation of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas through objects and images. To understand the world was to see it and conceptualise it at the same time.

This would seem to have marked a critical conjunction between the poetics of representation and the poetics of ideological conceptualism that opened up a fluid, intertextual aesthetic and theoretical space for distinctive moments of engagement with the world beyond the city. The individual thus memorialised his or her own encounters with geography. Metaphors of storage and preservation, of legend and myth, of historical events, were reflected back at the population as monuments and as archival materials. In these geography products space became freed from objective context and became the subject in itself. A concern for tragedy, ecstasy, and doom in Roman battle monuments, marrying violence and anxiety, was contrasted here with flat grounds on which more subtle ideas were projected. Simultaneously dividing and uniting the composition through repetition they looked forward to a new and seemingly calmer future. The fragmented and compartmentalised nature of the then-contemporary spatial experience was not somehow a unique experience or some kind of exception, as history might be thought to be telling us: rather, utilising different levels of revelation of geographical information did not prevent the development of unifying narratives around the place of Rome in the world. Quite the opposite in fact it would appear.

Away from Rome, in first Italy and then in the conquered provinces, it will also be considered how the armature and infrastructure of Roman imperialism- its roads, forts and fortresses, towns and *coloniae*, ports, and harbours-served to create layered landscapes. Exploration of the stratigraphy of the empire's geography will reveal shadow landscapes under this superimposed, mesh-like grid. Beneath the rule(r) countries hid. What will be more difficult to extrapolate will be the different layers of lives that would have been lived contemporaneously in the same places: in other words how the same places and landscapes-the same topography and geography of a place-would have been experienced differently by soldiers and traders for example, or by colonists and indigenous peoples.

A number of twentieth and twenty-first century politicians have used remarkably similar phrases to each other to voice their concerns about modern internationalism. For instance, Hitler in 1933 railed against an international elite- '[the] clique...people who are at home both nowhere and everywhere', while British Prime Minister Theresa May in a speech in 2016 told pro-European British people that 'if you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere.' Both of these stances served to make very different points about citizenship, belonging, and the idea of home, and yet both adopted an either/or position, with there being no nuance, no compromise, and no recognition of the complexity of national identities. Time and time again throughout this book it will need to be stressed that Roman identity was astonishingly fluid as a concept, both geographically and chronologically: ever-changing and at the same time always staying the same. To paraphrase the political speech sound-bites quoted above Roman citizens came to think of themselves as at home both nowhere and everywhere, while simultaneously being citizens of the world and of nowhere.

Sexual exploitation, most usually of women, has been a marker of global empires throughout history, and the Roman empire was of course no exception, with travel, mixing, and integration a potent mixture that helped create a new blend of practices and ideas that constituted a new form of Roman sexuality. If sex, men, and imperial expansion were interlinked, so were sex, women, and imperial control. Surviving abuse, captivity, and exploitation was difficult but possible. The common Roman habit of masters marrying their female slaves and thus

emancipating them in one way, but legally ensnaring them in another, evidently somehow became a marker of status, a recontextualisation of both sexual and geographic cultures.

In Rome in particular, but in many other Romanised locations and contexts, images of female foreigners were a kind of geographic product, displayed so that the Romans could write a world where they asserted their status of moral and cultural superiority. One of the most active demonstrations of this relates to the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. For Julius Caesar, Antony, and then Octavian (Augustus) she represented territory that could be claimed by Roman men through possession of her body. Octavian's Egyptian triumphal parade was itself ultimately an exploitation of the symbolic importance of Cleopatra's body, even if she had asserted her control over her own body, and thus her identity, by her suicide. In death she maintained a physical presence in Egypt in terms of it becoming a monument she had constructed. It removed her from any potential sexual and political uses—she did though come to be framed, it could be said contained, on posthumous Roman coin issues.

Augustus's great *Ara Pacis* monument in the *Campus Martius* in Rome with its much-repeated decoration of multiple trailing plant tendrils called up a discourse of planting that went hand in hand with the project of empire, an agro-sexual appropriation of fertile land. As these plants stabilised and bound the soil, so the Augustan peace bound the known world together, and brought different and disparate peoples together in the same spheres of influence and interaction. If Hellenistic mathematical geographers had developed the idea of the spherical earth, the orb became a very significant and different kind of symbol, for world conquest, in the art of the Augustan court. This was a kind of triumphal geography, with ceremony and art highlighting contemporary spatial awareness.

It is known through textual references to names and works that there were around 250 geographical books written by Greek and Roman authors, and yet only four of these today survive in whole or in part, that is works by Strabo of Amaesia, Pomponius Mela, Pliny the Elder, and Ptolemy of Alexandria.⁷ Each book built on pre-existing knowledge, and it is through the acknowledgement by the authors of these four geographies of the studies and travels of their predecessors that the one-time existence of these lost works is known. The works of these ancient geographers were not intended as travel guides as we might understand and use the term today. They were works to be read at home or in the library, reference works for the sedentary traveller. Plutarch, writing probably around the end of the first century AD, introduced his *Life of Theseus* by comparing his task of writing accurate ancient history to that of the geographer:

'Just as geographers...crowd on to the outer edges of their maps the parts of the earth which elude their knowledge, with explanatory notes that 'What lies beyond is sandy desert without water and full of wild beasts' or 'blind marsh', or 'Scythian cold', or 'frozen sea'.....I might well

⁷ On Greek and Roman geography and geographers see, for example: Adams and Laurence 2001; Adams and Roy 2007; Batty 2000; Bekker-Nielsen 1988; Bianchetti *et al.* 2016; Bishop 2019; Blum 2019; Clarke 1999; Damer and Myers Forthcoming; Dueck 2000, 2012, and 2021; Dueck *et al.* 2005; Ellis and Kidner 2004; Evans 2005; Geus and Thiering 2014; Mayer 1986; Merrills 2005; Myers and Damer 2021; Nicolet 1991; Raaflaub and Talbert 2010; Riggsby 2017; Roller 2006, 2015, 2019, and 2022; Romer 1998; Romm 1992; Shahar 2004; Skempis and Ziogas 2014; Talbert 2010b; Van Der Vliet 2006; and Van Paasen 1957.

say of the earlier periods: 'What lies beyond is full of marvels and unreality, a land of poets and fabulists, of doubt and obscurity.'⁸

This passage is particularly relevant to this present study in a number of respects. If the world was experienced vicariously by those who stayed at home and were receptive to messages mediated through geography products, then it was differently experienced by those who travelled away from Rome or around the empire from other locations. A study such as this cannot altogether ignore the potent Greco-Roman myth of the wandering hero such as Aeneas, Bacchus/Dionysus, and Hercules, and the idea of journeying as a metaphor. The travels of the emperor Hadrian, who the writer Tertullian called *omnium curiositatum explorator*, that is 'an explorer of everything interesting', explored both foreign lands and foreign bodies.⁹ Travel became under him virtually an imperial virtue. Imperial authority was wherever the emperor happened to be, a principle that first found its *raison d'être* under Hadrian, to become much later a rationale for some emperors never to visit Rome or to seldom do so. Roman geography products helped their users and viewers to make journeys through ruins, and to comprehend the creation of a global sense of place through the working of theatres of memory. The fleet concatenation of images was experienced as a great flow which swept the viewer along, making him or her almost a passenger or traveller rather than an active agent in the creation of a visual narrative.

Itineraries were highly practical guides for travelling along predetermined routes but it is interesting to consider that they also formed a record of absent places, places off the route, topographic features with no name, areas of unpassable swamp, desert, or wilderness. They remind us that no matter how efficient the Romans might have been at gridding an infrastructure over their empire in order to exploit its natural resources, nevertheless many areas still remained off the grid, and that the wilderness was not pushed back everywhere. Rational expansion based on the argument of necessity met other forces headlong: movements of tectonic plates and the volcanic activity that saw the destruction of Pompeii, was more than just a mechanistic folding and faulting of the earth's crust, and the swells and surges of the Mediterranean Sea disputed with the land and coast through its slow, crumbling erosion.

Around AD 333 a native of the city of Bordeaux (Roman *Burdigala*) in the Roman province of *Gallia Aquitania* set out on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This pilgrim, who may well have been a woman, travelled there and back in AD 333-334 using a pre-prepared itinerary. Remarkably this document, known to us today as the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* or, less commonly, as the *Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum* or Jerusalem Itinerary, survived and was copied in whole or in part in four manuscripts between the eighth and tenth centuries. The route took the pilgrim through northern Italy and the Danube valley to Constantinople, then through the provinces of Asia and Syria, before arriving at Jerusalem. The route back was through Macedonia, Otranto, Rome, and Milan. The Itinerary is annotated with some notes on the journey and even some topographic descriptions of Jerusalem itself, providing the journey with personalised elements beyond being simply a practical list and guide to routes, stopping points, and distances.

⁸ Plutarch *Theseus* 1.1.

⁹ Tertullian *Apologeticum* 5.7.

This journey seems particularly significant to us today but we must not view it as a necessarily exceptional undertaking for its time. The ancient world was criss-crossed daily by soldiers, administrators, merchants, and pilgrims, the latter group creating their own devotional geography. What makes the story of the Bordeaux Pilgrim stand out as an exemplar is the fact that in this document politics, salvation, and geography were here intertwined in a way that clearly demonstrated how interconnectivity and mobility made the Roman world negotiable and understandable. The story of the Bordeaux Pilgrim somehow acts as the perfect induction into the delicate connection-making of the time, between the very close and the unreachably distant, between the seismic and the minute. It is attractive to view pilgrimages such as this as individual Odysseys, almost mythic journeys controlled by four defining tropes: diffusion and mixture (travelling from home and encountering others); separation and distance; passage and detour; and return and split ending.

This book then will consider the many ways in which archaeologists and ancient historians have attempted to categorise different types or strategies of presentation of geographical knowledge in Roman times. The concepts of 'pilgrimage landscapes' as just mentioned, coexisted with 'chthonic landscapes', 'landscapes of war', 'landscapes of defeat', 'sacro-idyllic landscapes', 'colonial (or imperial) landscapes', and 'Christian landscapes', all of these terms being useful framing devices for certain pockets of information presentation.

Any study of ancient Roman society, if undertaken using modern moral standards as a yardstick, is likely to be condemnatory in some way, criticising Rome for its anthropocentric world view, its contribution to the degradation of Nature, its indifference to human and animal suffering, the materialistic corruption of love and religion, and the alienation of many social groups. If in Rome there were streets of blacksmiths forging chains for tomorrow's children then we must envisage the city as being like Federico García Lorca's Wall Street, with 'rivers of gold flow(ing) there from all over the earth, and death (coming) with it.' The social and sexual geographies of Rome would be reflected in the geographies of the other, and of the world outside Italy. The quite recent turn towards introspection in Roman studies means that it is now appropriate to bring contemporary concerns of social justice into a work such as this, while previously it might have seemed merely self-indulgent.

This research project, its methodologies and outcomes, are to some extent dialogues in subjectivities that are not fixed, but which subtly move in empathetic exchanges, open to the possibility of not just change itself but constant change. But this is not an easy situation to imagine or interpret. It is highly likely that many Roman monuments were, or became, so familiar that they became impregnated against attention in a complex historical practice. Mapping land and conceptualising land as other kinds of images were not contradictory ideas: they ran parallel to one another at the time. Ultimately this study will be an exploration of variations on themes of alienation, oppression, and trauma, as well as meaning, belonging, and hope. It is a fractured narrative to present, episodic and spasmodic, about identification and disidentification, the parsing of potential lineages, vehicles of transmission each with its own benefits and drawbacks, while still revealing the potential for new forms of exclusion and complication. But as a study it does not aspire to the uninflected detachment that this might suggest. It is not after all a novel.

In a Huxleyan sense the contemporary Roman viewers' doors of perception were opened to other worlds, but not necessarily through feeling oneness with the universe. Such subtle narcissism fuelled the desperate human need to transcend the given: the love and beauty and ironic fraternity to be found in a great city such as Rome led to a broader, more unstable and frightening outside world where human aspirations could be satisfied or thwarted by perversion, blasphemy, and death. If not actually doors, these images were at least windows on self-identity and on otherness, letting light in on a sombre struggle against accidie.

Iain Ferris, Pembrey, January 2021-January 2024.