

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 34 – “Facts”, Fantasy and Fiction: A look at
Geography, Ethnography, Utopian Literature and the Novel

CLCS4007

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Myth, Epic and Poetry

- ▣ Homer as the 'founder of geography' (Strabo 1.1.2):
 - Spatial orientation
 - Sea travels
 - Early toponyms
 - Ethnographic ideas
- ▣ All encompassing Ocean (shield of Achilles – *Iliad* 18.468-617).

“Now, since it is thought that Homer's account of the wanderings of Menelaus, also, argues for ignorance of those countries on his part... Menelaus says, then, to Telemachus... I roamed over Cyprus and Phoenicia and Egypt, and came to Ethiopians, Sidonians, Erembians, and to Libya... Of those who say that Menelaus "sailed" to Ethiopia, some propose a coasting-voyage by Gades as far as India, making his wanderings correspond exactly to the time which Homer gives...” – Strabo 1.2.31.

Mythic Lands

“[Description of the Hyperboreans] Of those who have written about the ancient myths, Hecataeus and certain others say that in the regions beyond the land of the Celts there lies in the ocean an island no smaller than Sicily. This island, the account continues, is situated in the north and is inhabited by the Hyperboreans, who are called by that name because their home is beyond the point whence the north wind (Boreas) blows....

...and the kings of this city and the supervisors of the sacred precinct are called Boreadae, since they are descendants of Boreas...” – **Diodorus Siculus 2.47.1, 6.**



Sixteenth century map by Gerardus Mercator

Poetry and Geography

- ▣ Myth gaining “authenticity” through geographic knowledge.
- ▣ Newly discovered places being given mythic pasts.
- ▣ Development of “poetic geography”:
 - Dionysius (of Alexander) ‘Periegētēs’ – 1,187 hexameter verse poem based mainly on Eratosthenes.

“The shape of Asia is symmetrical to both continents, and from the other side is similar to a cone extending a little up to the edge of the entire east.

There stand the Pillars of the Theban Dionysus
by the waters of the extreme Ocean,

near the most remote Indian Mountains, where the white Ganges rolls down its water to the Nysaeon coast. (620-626).

Historiography and Ethnography

- ▣ The need to convey “when” and “where” an event occurred.
- ▣ Herodotus of Halicarnassus – four of nine books spent on the spatial and ethnographic features of the Persian Empire.
 - Mix of concepts – archaic-mythic-epic geography and beginning of scientific-empirical geography.
 - *Oikoumenē* – torrid zones – encircling ocean.

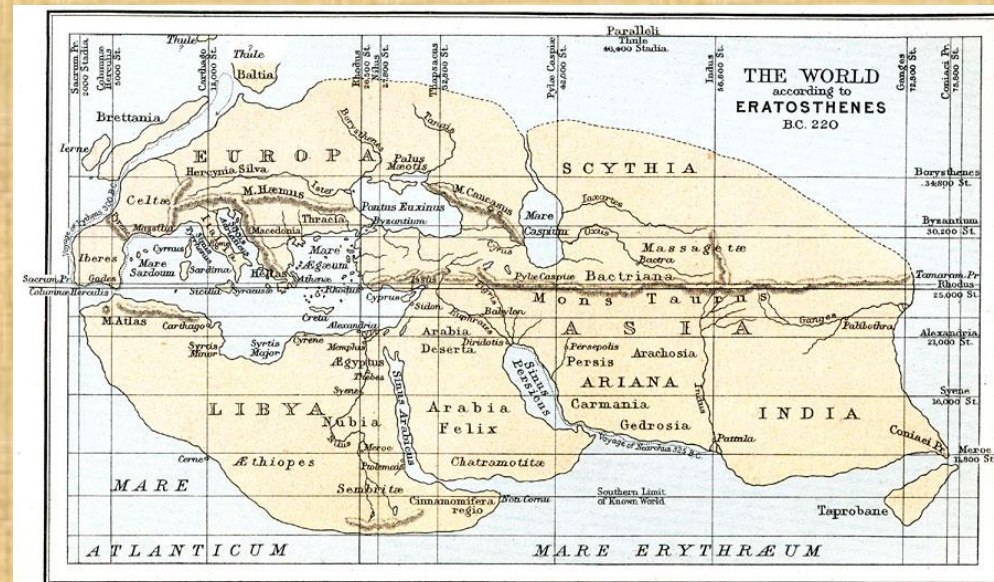
“There is a custom, too, which no Greeks except the Lacedaemonians have in common with the Egyptians: younger men, encountering their elders, yield the way and stand aside, and rise from their seats for them when they approach.” – Htd. 2.80.1.

“There seems to be an Indian beast... the size of the largest lion, red in colour like cinnabar, and as hairy as a dog. In India it is called the martichora. It has the face that more closely resembles a man than a beast. It has three rows of teeth on its upper and lower jaws... its feet and claws resemble a lion's. The stinger of a scorpion is attached to the tip of the tail...” Ctesias F45dβ = Aelian NA 4.21.

New Explorations, New Horizons

- “Scientific patronage”?
 - Conquests of Alexander in the East, subsequent ambassadors.
 - Ptolemaic exploration of lands south (and east) of Egypt.
- A much wider conception of the world in the Hellenistic period.
 - Development of *chôrographia* (*chôra* – countryside, region).
 - New ideas, but also incorporated into pre-existing expectations and ideas.

“According to Megasthenes the population of India is divided into seven parts. The philosophers are first in rank... the second caste consists of the farmers... the third caste the herdsmen... the fourth... those who work at trades... the fifth... fighting men... the sixth... the overseers... the seventh... the councillors and overseers of the king...” – Megasthenes Frag. 33 and 34 = Strabo *Geog.* 15.1.39-41, 46-48.



Paradoxography

- ❑ In third century BC emerged the phenomena of collections of marvellous stories excerpted from works of history, geography and science.
 - Wonder tales – *thaumata* Gk., *mirabilia* Lt.; *paradoxa* Gk. – contrary to human expectation (*doxa*).
- ❑ Features of paradoxography:
 - Strange animals
 - Extraordinary plants
 - Unusual nature features, e.g. springs and rivers with odd features.
 - Strange peoples – physically and in terms of social customs.
- ❑ They are concerned with the REAL WORLD.
 - Observed and reported phenomena.

“I hear that another 3,000 elephants of exceeding size and strength follow trained to attack and tear down the enemy walls on the [Indian] king’s order... according to Ctesias who claims that he wrote this after hearing it, and also that he had personally seen date-palms in Babylon uprooted...” – **Ctesias Frag. F45bα = Aelian NA 17.29.**

Utopian Literature

- ▣ Political context of the early Hellenistic period – decline of the *poleis* and rise of major Hellenistic monarchic dynasties.
- ▣ Escapist - providing a remote but plausible location in time and space.
- ▣ Utilisation of new geographic knowledge.
- ▣ Ideals set outside the bounds of normal difficulties of human existence. Consequently inability for political ideals to be achieved.
- ▣ These works tend not to survive in their own right but as fragments in other works – notably Euhemeros and Iambulos in Diodorus Siculus!

The Island of the Panchaeans

- ▣ Euhemeros of Messene *The Sacred Inscription* – part of Cassander's circle.
- ▣ Euhemeros writer of the first Utopia?
- ▣ Origins of the gods from deified men.
- ▣ “Discovery” of the Sacred Island – after sailing several days from Fortunate Arabia.
- ▣ Abundant flora, fauna and mineral wealth.
- ▣ Class/caste structure of three divisions:
 - Priests
 - Farmers
 - Soldiers and herdsman.
- ▣ Gold ornaments are common to everyone – only private property is houses and gardens.

- ▣ No distinction between citizens and non-citizens, lack of reference to slavery.
- ▣ Place is not isolated from the rest of the world – influence of foreign fashion, contact with Arabia, cosmopolitan population.
- ▣ Political leadership based on kingship, except in the city of Panara.
 - People of Panara elect three magistrates annually.
 - Abolition of capital punishment.
 - Mixed constitution?
- ▣ No obvious practical influence of this work – possibility of influence on Alexarchos, brother of Cassander, and Uranopolis.

Island of the Sun

- ▣ A “first-hand” account of Iambulos.
- ▣ Capture by pirates and then by Ethiopians – enforced voyage for ritual purification.
- ▣ Inhabitants with unusual physicality and double tongues – great beauty.
- ▣ Island of mild climate and abundance – but practice of moderation.
- ▣ Gerarchy – kinship groups of 400.
- ▣ Interested in education, especially astronomy.
- ▣ Little disease, very long-lived, euthanasia.
- ▣ Wives and children in common (simplicity rather than a negative trope).
- ▣ All work shared in a cycle, senior citizens exempt (no reference to slavery).

Socio-Political Critique

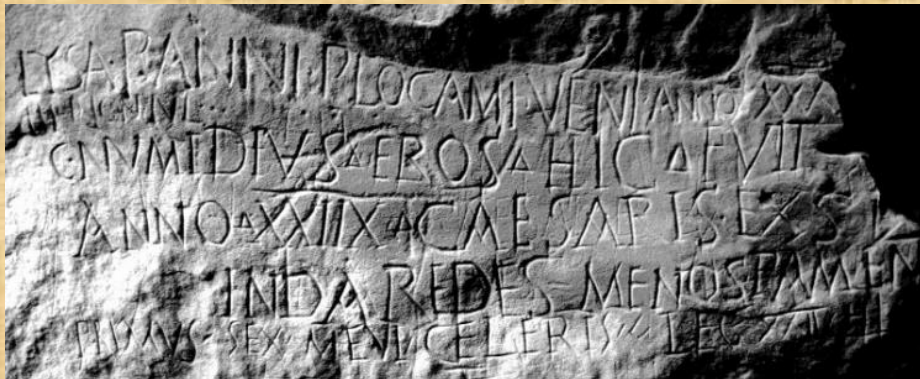
Tacitus' *Germania*

“They have fierce blue eyes, red hair, huge frames, fit only for a sudden exertion... Silver and gold the gods have refused to them, whether in kindness or in anger I cannot say... The border population, however, value gold and silver for their commercial utility, and are familiar with, and show preference for, some of our coins... They choose their kings by birth, their generals for merit. These kings have not unlimited or arbitrary power, and the generals do more by example than by authority... to imprison, even to flog, is permitted to the priests alone... In these same councils they also elect the chief magistrates, who administer law in the cantons and the towns. Each of these has a hundred associates chosen from the people, who support him with their advice and influence... When they go into battle, it is a disgrace for the chief to be surpassed in valour, a disgrace for his followers not to equal the valour of the chief...” - 4-5, 7, 11-12.

“Their marriage code, however, is strict, and indeed no part of their manners is more praiseworthy. Almost alone among barbarians they are content with one wife... Thus with their virtue protected they live uncorrupted by the allurements of public shows or the stimulant of feastings. Clandestine correspondence is equally unknown to men and women. Very rare for so numerous a population is adultery... No one in Germany laughs at vice, nor do they call it the fashion to corrupt and to be corrupted... To limit the number of their children or to destroy any of their subsequent offspring is accounted infamous... Every mother suckles her own offspring, and never entrusts it to servants and nurses. The master is not distinguished from the slave by being brought up with greater delicacy... If you indulge their love of drinking by supplying them with as much as they desire, they will be overcome by their own vices as easily as by the arms of an enemy... The freedmen do not rank much above slaves, and are seldom of any weight in the family, never in the state, with the exception of those tribes which are ruled by kings... Of lending money on interest and increasing it by compound interest they know nothing... They do not heap garments or spices on the funeral pile...” - 18-20, 23, 25-27.

Pliny's Taprobanē

“...during the reign of the Emperor Claudius, an embassy came from even this distant island to Rome. The circumstances under which this took place were as follow: Annius Plocamus had farmed from the treasury the revenues arising from the Red Sea. A certain freedman of his, while sailing around Arabia, was carried away by a gale from the north beyond the coast of Carmania. In the course of fifteen days he had drifted to Hippuros, a port of Taprobanē...” - *Natural History* 6.24.84.



"I, Lysa, slave of Publius Annius Plocamus, came here 3 days before the nones of July in the 35th year"



“But yet Taprobane even, isolated as it is by nature from the rest of the world, is not exempt from our vices. Gold and silver are held in esteem even there... They asserted that their wealth is much greater than ours, but admitted that we know better than they how to obtain real enjoyment from opulence. In this island no slavery exists... the price of corn is always the same; they have no courts of law and no litigation... their king is chosen by the people, an aged man always, distinguished for his mild and clement disposition, and without children. If after he has been elected king, he happens to become the father of children, his abdication is the consequence... Thirty advisers are provided for him by the people, and it is only by the advice of the majority of them that any man is condemned to capital punishment... The king, if he is found guilty of any offence, is condemned to death; but no one slays him; all turn their backs upon him, and refuse to hold any communication or even discourse with him.” - *Natural History* 6.24.88-90.

Pseudo- Documentarism

- ▣ Compact between the author and the reader that what they are reading is fictional – most apparent with the novel.
- ▣ Plausibility necessary for enjoyment – maintenance of the illusion.
- ▣ Pseudo-documentaries – an “authentic” document or some other form of corroborating evidence is “discovered” which recounts events – done with varying levels of irony.
- ▣ Elaborate back-story for discovery, transmission and translation – playful advertisements of fictionality?
 - Letters / texts
 - Inscriptions.
- ▣ Fictionalising the issue of historical truth.
- ▣ Contemporary issues of reconstructing the past – inventions of inscriptions or other “archaeological evidence”.

- ▣ Development of a literary cannon – problems of authenticating texts.
 - Circulation of forged treaties – Galen *in hippocratis de natura hominis commentarium* Preface 109.5-9.
- ▣ Intellectual bibliomania – desire for antiquarian knowledge.

“Report says that you, Fidentinus, recite my compositions in public as if they were your own. If you allow them to be called mine, I will send you my verses gratis; if you wish them to be called yours, pray buy them, that they may be mine no longer.” – **Martial** *Epigrams* 1.30.

“I found a manuscript of Livius Andronicus [third century BC] of undoubted antiquity, entitled ὁδύσσεια, in which the first line contained this word without the letter υ... On that point then I trust a book of great age and authority.” – **Aulus Gellius** *Attic Nights* 18.9.5.

Dictys' *Chronical of the Trojan War*

- ▣ An “account” of a Greek soldier who fought at Troy – companion of Idomeneus and Meriones.
- ▣ Prologue with details of the discovery:
 - Nine books on linden wooden tablets written in Phoenician, buried with Dictys in his grave at Knossos inside a chest of silver and lead alloy (*stannum*).
 - In year AD 66 earthquake revealed contents, discovered by a shepherd.
 - Makes it way from shepherd to Eupraxides, to Rutilius Rufus to Nero.
 - Nero has it translated – from this the true events of the Trojan war became known.
- ▣ None essential details an effective way of transmitting a lie.

“The winds drove our whole fleet toward Mysia... Telephus, though terribly pained by his wound, answered their charges politely. What had happened, he said, was not his fault, but theirs. He had not know that they who had come were closest friends and cherished relatives...” (2.1, 5).

“Our leaders were urging Aeneas to sail along with us to Greece and promised to give him a kingdom as powerful as any they ruled.” (5.16).

“After our departure, Aeneas, who had been left behind at Troy, tried to drive Antenor out of the kingdom. Leaving the city, he approached all those who were inhabitants of Dardanum and the peninsula nearby, and begged them to help him. He was unsuccessful, however; and when he tried to return to Troy, Antenor, who had learned what was happening, refused him admittance. And so Aeneas was forced to set sail. Taking all of his patrimony, he departed from Troy and eventually arrived in the Adriatic Sea, after passing many barbarous peoples. Here he and those who were with him founded a city, which they called Corcyra Melaena (Black Corcyra).” (5.17).

Antonius Diogenes' *The Wonders Beyond Thule*

- ❑ “Autobiography” of the traveller Deinias the Arcadian.
- ❑ Retires to Tyre – Cymbas the ambassador records the story of his adventures (written down by Erasinides the scribe) on tablets of Cypress wood – inscription saying he lived to 125.
- ❑ Two copies made, one stored in a box near Deinias’ tomb.
- ❑ Text prefaced by a letter from Diogenes to Isidora claiming the rediscovery of an autobiography of a Deinias.
- ❑ “Proof” – ancient letter (332 BC) of Balagrus (soldier of Alexander) to his wife Phila, daughter of Antipater – contained within Diogenes’ letter – reporting discovery of catacombs after the sack of Tyre.
- ❑ Box discovered by Alexander, Parmenion and Hephaestion.
- ❑ Text transcribed by Balagrus in letter to his wife, this forms the basis for Diogenes’ work (c. 500 years later).

“And, in fact, Diogenes, who was also called Antonius and who has told the story of Dinias recounting all these marvels to Cymas, wrote at the same time to Faustinus that he was in the process of composing a work on the marvels to be found beyond Thule, and that he dedicated his romance to his sister Isidora, who loved this sort of book. On the other hand, he is called the narrator of an ancient intrigue and even while inventing these incredible and untrue stories, he pretends to use the testimony of older authors on the fables he tells; it is on these witnesses he would throw the responsibility for all the mischief in the story he wrote; he even cites at the head of each book the authors who have treated the subject before him so that his incredible stories do not lack the air of witnesses.” – Photius, *Bibl.* 111a 30-40.

Lucian *The True Histories*

"I think they will consider the present work something of the kind. They will find it enticing not only for the novelty of its subject, for the humour of its plan and because I tell all kinds of lies in a plausible and specious way, but also because everything in my story is a more or less comical parody of one or another of the poets, historians and philosophers of old, who have written much that smacks of miracles and fables. I would cite them by name, were it not that you yourself will recognise them from your reading. One of them is Ctesias, son of Ctesiochus, of Cnidos, who wrote a great deal about India and its characteristics that he had never seen himself nor heard from anyone else with a reputation for truthfulness. Iambulus also wrote much that was strange about the countries in the great sea: he made up a falsehood that is patent to everybody, but wrote a story that is not uninteresting for all that... Their guide and instructor in this sort of charlatanry is Homer's Odysseus, who tells Alcinous and his court about winds in bondage, one-eyed men, cannibals and savages; also about animals with many heads, and transformations of his comrades wrought with drugs. This stuff, and much more like it, is what our friend humbugged the illiterate Phaeacians with! Well, on reading all these authors, I did not find much fault with them for their lying, as I saw that this was already a common practice even among men who profess philosophy." (1.1-2).

“But my lying is far more honest than theirs, for though I tell the truth in nothing else, I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar. I think I can escape the censure of the world by my own admission... I am writing about things which I have neither seen nor had to do with nor learned from others--which, in fact, do not exist at all and, in the nature of things, cannot exist... The guides told the life of each, and the crimes for which they were being punished; and the severest punishment of all fell to those who told lies while in life and those who had written what was not true, among whom were Ctesias of Cnidos, Herodotus and many more. On seeing them, I had good hopes for the future, for I have never told a lie that I know of... (1.3, 2.6).

Authenticating the Fantasy

- ▣ Embedded “Pseudo-Documentarism”
- ▣ Wine Island – stele of bronze
 - “Thus far Heracles and Dionysus came.” – *V.H.* 1.7.
 - Two gigantic footprints in the rock (*ibid.* – cf. *Hdt.* 4.82 – Heracles’ enormous footprint in Scythia).
- ▣ Island of the Blessed – beryl stele inscription:
 - “Lucian, dear to the blessed gods, saw all these things and went back again to his dear homeland.” – *V.H.* 2.28.
- ▣ Conflict between Isle of the Blessed and Isle of the Damned – former win – Homer writers an epic poem about it (joke about autopsy?).
 - Lucian lost it but quotes first line “Now tell me, Muse, of the battle of the dead heroes”.

The Novel

Characterising the Novel

- ▣ Idealising vs. non-idealising
 - Idealising:
 - Heliodorus *Aethiopica* – chastity, providence, optimistic renewal of life.
 - Non-idealising:
 - Petronius *Satyricon* – aimlessness, amorality, humour.
- ▣ Greek Romance novels:
 - Reciprocal heterosexual love between two protagonists.
 - Travel and return – reunion.
- ▣ Emergence of “novel” in first century AD:
 - Chariton *Callirhoe* – first century AD
 - Xenophon *Anthia and Habrocomes* – first or second century AD?
 - Achilles Tatius *Leucippe and Clitophon* – second century AD
 - Longus *Daphnis and Chloe* – second century AD?
 - Heliodorus *Aethiopica* – fourth century AD?
- ▣ Reasons for the emergence of the Greek Roman novels:
 - Expression of self-hood, self-discipline, outcome of political insignificance?
 - A “new erotics” of heterosexual mutuality – move away from phallocentric domination?
 - Context of the “second sophistic” – anti-Roman reaction or sophistication?

Daphnis and Chloe

“While hunting in a grove sacred to the Nymphs, in the island of Lesbos, I saw the most beautiful sight that I have ever seen: a picture representing a history of love. The grove itself was pleasant to the eye... But the picture itself was even more delightful: its subject was the fortunes of love, and the art displayed in it was marvellous: so that many, even strangers, who had heard it spoken of, visited the island, to pay their devotion to the Nymphs and examine the picture... I was seized with the desire to describe them in writing. Accordingly, I diligently sought for someone to give me an explanation of the details: and, when I had thoroughly mastered them, I composed the four following books, as an offering to Love, the Nymphs, and Pan...” – **Preface.**

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