

Dover Fund Report The Hellenic Society

Conference *Penn-Leiden colloquium on Ancient Values VIII: Landscapes of Value*
19-21 June 2014, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Use of the fund Travel expenses

The eighth Penn-Leiden conference on ancient values, which is held biannually, took place this year at the beautiful University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. The topic was “Landscape of Values”, which explored the meaning and values given to natural as well as humanly constructed landscapes, and how both of them interact with each other on the levels of visualization, discourse, and imagination. The papers given were of a very high quality and investigated topics all over the ancient world, from Greece to Rome, from the Near East to Africa, from the point of view of literature, material and visual culture, and religion.¹

Thursday 18th June was the opening day, featuring three keynote lectures exploring ancient landscapes from the point of view of urbanism and cognitive psychology (Richard J. Weller, UPenn); the interaction between scientific discourse and myth (Richard Buxton, Bristol); and the practical and imaginary constraints that led to the choice of a particular space to build a sanctuary in ancient Greece (Margaret Miles, American School of Classical Studies Athens – UC Irvine). These three lines were then investigated further in the eighteen papers that were presented over the following two days.

The first topic to be researched by speakers was the importance of sight in structuring a landscape, which was evoked in R. Weller’s lecture. Christina Williamson (Brown-Groningen) insisted on the importance of sightlines and visual connections in her talk on the monumental landscape of Pergamum, while Betsey Robinson (Vanderbilt) spoke about the visual and sensory experience of ancient pilgrims at Delphi.

Secondly, the cognitive psychology approach was further investigated by Elizabeth Minchin (Australia National University). She presented through the example of the hero tombs in Troad how landscape features prompt memories that are further included in stories that impact on landscapes. Jason König (St Andrews) complemented nicely R. Buxton’s talk by investigating stories of civilization associated to mountains in Strabo, whereas Rianne Hermans (Amsterdam) presented the fresh archaeological finds made at Nemi and the discovery of a cave with, perhaps, the remains of a the statue of a giant snake as

¹ This reports is inspired by the wonderful wrapping up session made by Ineke Sluiter (Leiden).

featured in the myth of the Alban Hills. Kathrin Winter (Heidelberg) linked imaginary landscapes of the Underworld as imagined by Seneca. Greta Hawes (Australia National University) explored the mythical map of Gate's Seven Gates, and Bettina Reitz-Joose (Leiden-UPenn) the interaction of physical landscape and literature through the monumentalization of landscape features at Actium after the eponymous battle in 31 B.C. Then, Christoph Pieper (Leiden), Annemarie Ambühl (Leiden-Mainz), Masa Culumovic (Foundation of the Hellenic World) and Barbara Weinlich (Eckerd College-Cincinnati) researched more deeply the interaction between text and landscape through Propertius', Pindar's and Ovid's poetic writings, and how the landscape can be invested with layers of meaning and reshaped through text.

Thirdly, the importance of imagination in structuring and adding value to a landscape was explored by Julie Baleriaux (Oxford) with a paper on how scientific observation of subterranean rivers in Greece may have led to a narrative description of the Underworld as a wet place. Following her paper, Lissa Crofton-Sleigh studied who/what the "landscapes agents" were, and how the interaction between human intentionality and landscape was conveyed in Vergil's description of the *domus* of Cacus (*Aen.* VIII).

Finally, broader questions and appeals to re-consider our conception of the ancient world were made by Irene Polinskaya (KCL), Clara Bosak-Schroeder (Michigan), Katerina Volioti (Reading) and Danielle Kellogg (Brooklyn College). I. Polinskaya raised the question of how polytheistic religion may have dealt with the dissonant concept of honouring one particular god in a space where virtually all of the other gods are present. C. Bosak-Schroeder introduced the audience to the Unsuffering Fisheaters of the Red Sea coast and how they integrate within their natural ecology. On the other hand, the two last papers were strongly focused on material evidence. Volioti's invited the audience to reconsider the economic landscape of Thessaly through the finding of new trade routes and networks thanks to ceramics. Similarly, D. Kellogg's prosopographical study of the Attic demes led to groundbreaking conclusions urging to re-evaluate the population statistics in the demes outside Athens.

Altogether, although several aspects of landscape studies in the ancient world were not investigated in the colloquium – such as health issues provoked by the landscape, large-scale manipulation of the landscape by rulers or the points of contact between the landscape of the gods and that of the mortals – the gathering was highly fruitful. Ideas and fresh research results were shared across countries and universities, and the study of landscape in the ancient world will undoubtedly benefit from such encounters propitious to knowledge exchange and facilitating informed conversations on the topic. And indeed, the proceedings of the conference will be published by Brill (Leiden) in 2016.

As a conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Hellenic Society, whose Dover Fund grant allowed me to travel to Philadelphia and participate in such a wonderful, and useful, opportunity.

