

International Conference – Finding the Present in the Distant Past: The Cultural Meaning of Antiquarianism in Late Antiquity.

1. Seeking antiquarianism: problems and perspectives

Antiquarianism in antiquity has generally been considered as a scholarly study of the past, in which the cultural phenomena of the present are explained through their origin in the days of old (Rawson 1985, Stevenson 2004, Bravo 2007). The antiquarian shuns literary or rhetorical treatment and chronology is abandoned in favour of a systematic treatment of the subject matter (Stevenson 2004). Such a definition of antiquarianism is mainly based on the known antiquarian production in different periods of antiquity, as, for instance, the classical and Hellenistic period, the late republican period and the imperial period (Momigliano 1950, Rawson 1985, Stevenson 2004, Bravo 2007). Yet it becomes highly problematic when we consider late antiquity (4th - 8th centuries AD).

Although we can perceive a revived interest in antiquarian writing in late antiquity, the antiquarian tradition as a whole has not yet been unearthed, let alone traced for this crucial period. One of the causes of this gap is the fragmentary survival of many late antique texts (Janiszewski 2006). As a consequence, the tradition remains absent in overviews of late ancient historiography (Rohrbacher 2002, Marasco 2003, Treadgold 2007).

Moreover, explanations for the continued interest in the genre in this period tend to fall in two groups: (a) a religious interest is emphasized, either for pagans wishing to preserve their heritage or for Christians wishing to rediscover the classical past and argue with it (Ando 2001; Dillon 2007; Ratti 2010); (b) political motives are detected, as the description of past customs and states permitted veiled critique on contemporary absolutism (Maas 1992; Kaldellis 2004).

Interest in late ancient antiquarianism is therefore limited and one-sided. In particular, questions about continuity with classical antiquarianism are rarely asked, and the tradition as a whole has not yet been traced for late Antiquity. This renders claims about antiquarianism as an essentially religious or political enterprise in late Antiquity fragile and provisional.

2. Phenomenology of antiquarian production

The aim of this conference is to set the study of late ancient antiquarianism on a new footing by situating the genre in its proper socio-literary contexts. Important elements to be considered are the relationship of antiquarian texts with the earlier literary tradition of antiquarianism, the various historical and geographical contexts in which antiquarian texts were produced, and the socio-cultural profile of the antiquarian authors. These perspectives offer diverse possibilities of analysis.

a) Literary forms of antiquarianism

Ancient authors did not consider antiquarianism as a proper literary genre. Therefore it is necessary to examine how antiquarian elements permeated other types of late antique texts. Such an analysis covers a wide range of possible genres. Antiquarian attitudes, methods and preferences in subject matter could be found in various genres ranging from classicizing history

to scientific and grammatical treatises. An analysis of the interface between antiquarianism and other, more established genres will not only be useful to investigate the nature and form of antiquarian production in late antiquity. It will also shed a new light on the functioning of other late antique genres close to antiquarianism.

b) Different models for different contexts

The antiquarian production was influenced by the author's social, cultural and geographical contexts. In this regard, the heterogeneous panorama of late antiquity offers a plethora of starting points for research. One could compare the particularistic traditions of Greek communities (Hermeias of Hermoupolis) with the universal perspective in Roman antiquarianism (Palladius of Methone), which is maintained in the 'New Rome' of Constantinople (John of Lydia). Another illuminating comparison could be made between antiquarianism at the iconic centres of the Roman empire on the one hand, and the multiple peripheries of the empire on the other hand. In the west, a study of antiquarianism in the barbarian successor-states can highlight the ways in which people tried to preserve the heritage of Rome in contexts of change (Cassiodorus, Isidore of Seville). Antiquarianism could be the crucial key to understand the otherwise enigmatic instances of scholarship at the fringes of the classical world (Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, Aethicus Ister). In the east, the emergence of local identities has to be taken into account (for instance, the city of Antioch will determine the outlook of authors as John Malalas). The cultural *humus* is another important element: the link to the pagan tradition (Macrobius), or the connection with the winning Christian religion (Augustine) could be clear examples.

The identification of antiquarian influences in late antique literature, along with the analysis of its general context, will constitute a proper framework for reassessing the cultural meaning and function of antiquarianism in late antiquity. Does antiquarianism teach us something about a changing perception of past and present? How is this to be explained?

The conference will be organised at Ghent, 19-21th of May 2016. The organisers will provide accommodation and the refunding of travel expenditures (within reasonable limits).

3. Bibliography

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