

## Community Matters

As the founding editor of *Studies in Late Antiquity*, I want to expand on *SLA*'s stated goal to publish "comparative and methodologically innovative papers." Comparative and multi- or interdisciplinary work is difficult by nature. Disciplinary training both enables us and constructs formidable barriers to interdisciplinary work: the mastery of languages and historical narratives needed to do comparative work setting the Mediterranean in dialogue with the rest of Europe, Asia and Africa exceeds the capacity of most scholars. Thus collaboration is essential. But how even to find conversation partners for such joint ventures, much more to discern common ground? We hope that this journal will be a catalyst for this process in several ways.

First, *SLA* will expose you to a wide range of methodologies and theoretical concepts all in one place:

Archaeology, Cultural Geography (including Cartography), Economics, Gender and Sexuality, History (including Cultural History), History of the Arts (including Architecture, Art, and Music), Law, Literature and Rhetoric, Material Culture (including Codicology, Epigraphy, Numismatics, and Papyrology), Historical Demography, Philology, Philosophy, Religion, Science (including Medicine and Technology), and Theology.

Given the multi-disciplinary readership of the journal, we will ensure that the articles we publish are accessible to scholars familiar with the period, but not necessarily expert in a given perspective. We hope that reading papers that focus on your period of interest, but from a different viewpoint will naturally prompt new research questions and expose implicit assumptions while enlarging our understanding of Late Antiquity. Encouraging our authors to be candid about their assumptions and to write transparently about their methods and perspectives will, we believe, help our readers ask new questions about their own subjects of interest.

Engaging with different perspectives has certainly shaped my own work. For example, historian Tom Sizgorich's interdisciplinary study, *Violence and Belief*

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in *Late Antiquity*, led me to read “Monster Culture: Seven Theses.”<sup>1</sup> This essay by the scholar of English literature, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, explores “what monsters reveal about the times and cultures they haunt: as demonstrations, as admonitions, as bodies feared and desired.”<sup>2</sup> And Cohen’s writing, in turn, helped me think about why Roman Christian and “pagan” communities ca. 300 CE may have viewed Origen of Alexandria, the brilliant Christian theologian, with such suspicion.<sup>3</sup>

Such insights from other fields are becoming increasingly common in Late Ancient Studies, as Averil Cameron foresaw thirty years ago.<sup>4</sup> For example, historian Greg Fisher’s study of Arabs between the Roman and Persian Empires is inspired by anthropological theories originally developed to understand the Pakistani borderlands and then appropriated by historians studying the US Southwest.<sup>5</sup> And in his book, *Classifying Christians*, released just this year, the Religious Studies scholar Todd Berzon has found inspiration in literature and anthropology, linking Christopher Herbert’s elegant critique of nineteenth-century notions of “culture” to unpack our understanding of heresy and orthodoxy.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, thanks to the pioneering work of Elizabeth Clark and others, Religious Studies scholars have been at the vanguard of efforts to draw productively on a wide range of different perspectives, from critical theory to human geography.<sup>7</sup>

It is challenging to learn a new theoretical or disciplinary language. It is even more demanding to situate late ancient Mediterranean studies within a broader east/west context.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, a generation of scholars has now deepened our understanding of Rome’s engagement with her eastern frontier, from Armenia to Iran.<sup>9</sup> To study the Mediterranean within a global context, however, often requires collaborative projects such as the volume on *Rome and China* edited by Classicist and historian Walter Scheidel.<sup>10</sup> Although finding collaborators outside our departments and regional studies is difficult, readers of *SLA* will learn about the people engaging in research that complements their own: the contributors, the editorial board, the authors of books under review and the reviewers themselves are all people interested in broadening our involvement with the worlds of Late Antiquity. As scholars engage with the research published in *SLA*, this community will emerge. For example, in this issue Anthony Kaldellis, in a series of case studies, challenges the assumption that historians writing under an imperial regime never candidly discussed the reigning sovereign.<sup>11</sup> I would love to see a future article analyze similar cases in a Chinese context. Can we generalize about imperial historiography from comparative scholarship? Similarly, Michele Salzman’s study in this issue argues that, in the city of Rome,

civic euergetism and Christian charity influenced each other “in a dialectical relationship.”<sup>12</sup> What if an article in a future issue used Salzman’s work as a launching point to understand food distribution in other late ancient contexts?

A third area where community matters is in the Digital Humanities. This has become a burgeoning area of scholarship in late ancient studies. Some colleagues are bringing their scholarship to a broader public.<sup>13</sup> Others are engaging creatively with Geographic Information Systems (GIS).<sup>14</sup> Still others are creating web platforms that will host and nurture interdisciplinary research.<sup>15</sup> The unique attributes of *SLA* as a wholly digital publication will help readers learn about the range of tools on the web, in addition to presenting papers engaging with the digital humanities on a regular basis. Over time, we hope that these ideas will broaden and deepen readers’ insights into their own scholarship.

As this new pluralistic community forms, reaching out to scholars who may not currently realize that they already belong, *SLA* will truly exist at the cusp of new knowledge, and the journal will be greater than the sum of its parts. ■

#### NOTES

1. Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in idem, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3–25.

2. <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2015/10/monster-classroom-seven-theses.html?m=1> accessed 29 October 2016.

3. E. D. Digeser, “The Usefulness of Borderlands Concepts in Ancient History: The Case of Origen as Monster,” in J.W.I. Lee and Michael North, *Globalizing Borderlands: Studies in Europe and North America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 15–32.

4. Averil Cameron, “Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory after Foucault,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986): 266–71.

5. Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Fredrik Barth, “Introduction,” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Waveland Press, 1998), 15–38; James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

6. Todd S. Berzon, *Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2016); Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

7. For her efforts in this regard, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). For

an engagement with human geography, see e.g., Cavan Concannon, “Economic Aspects of Inter-City Travel in Pauline Assemblies,” in *Paul and Economics*, ed. T. Blanton and R. Pickett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), forthcoming.

8. Peter Brown, *World of Late Antiquity* (London: W. W. Norton, 1971).

9. See, for example, the work of Adam Becker, Matthew Canepa, Touraj Daryaee, Steven Sidebotham, Kevin van Bladel, Jacques van der Vliet, and Joel Walker.

10. Walter Scheidel, ed. *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

11. “How Perilous Was It to Write Political History in Late Antiquity?”

12. “From a Classical to a Christian City: Civic Euergetism and Charity in Late Antique Rome.”

13. E.g., Sarah Bond (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/drsarahbond/#450847ed18ea>, accessed 29 October 2016) and Roberta Mazza (<https://facesandvoices.wordpress.com/>, accessed 29 October 2016).

14. E.g., Lillian I. Larsen and Stephen Benzek, “Minding the Gaps: Exploring Ancient Landscapes through the Lens of GIS,” *Transformations* 25 (2014): 23–36.

15. See, for example, *Coptic SCRIPTORIUM*, a project created by Caroline T. Schroeder and Amir Zeldes which focuses on texts in Coptic (<http://copticcriptorium.org/> accessed 29 October 2016).