

# Travelling identities

SPACE AND SELF-FASHIONING IN FOURTH-CENTURY GRECO-ROMAN AUTHORS

In his autobiographical poem 'De Vita sua', Gregory Nazianzen calls Athens his "πατρίς", his fatherland. Yet, he was born near Nazianzus, went on to become Archbishop of Constantinople and lived in numerous other Mediterranean cities. So why did the church father decide to portray Athens as (one of) his homeland(s)? The question points to a broader issue which has barely been studied so far. In the fourth century, there were no nation states or nationalities that provided people with a clear-cut communal identity. So what I want to focus on in this presentation is how space and the creation of identity were connected in the works of late antique "immigrant" writers. Who were they, how did they conceive themselves and to what extent did place influence the construction of their identity?

But why exactly the fourth century? When considering spatial identity from a broad perspective, there could hardly be a more intriguing period. On the one hand, there are people like Ausonius of Bordeaux, carefully constructing an identity that is both locally anchored and globally connected. But on the other hand, it was also in this century that the first narrative recounts of pilgrimages emerged. Those stories inform us not only about how pilgrims wanted to portray themselves, but also about the readers back home who could join them on a "virtual pilgrimage". And last but not least, the center of the empire shifted from Rome to Constantinople, simultaneously with a shift from a pagan to a Christian society.

Only recently, historians have shown interest in late antique local historiography. Yet the creation of identity has not yet been thoroughly investigated. That is why this presentation aims to provide a glimpse into the rich history of wandering identities.

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