Oh! The Places You'll Go: Avenues for Mapping in Religious Studies

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Oh! The Places You’ll Go:

Avenues for Mapping in Religious Studies

By Kim Vilimas

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University of Redlands, 2013

ESRI

“To live is to change, to acquire the words of a story, and that is the only celebration we mortals really know.” Barbara Kingsglover, The Poisonwood Bible.
**Introduction**

The reason for this work, and for my passion for this area of study, can be traced back to a class I took with my now-advisor simply entitled ‘Christian Scriptures.’ Some students were under the impression that the class was going to be some sort of church study group—this couldn’t have been farther from the truth! Instead what followed was a wonderfully critical engagement with the realities faced by the early Christian communities and how they related to their world.

I relished thinking in terms of ‘conversations’ and ‘dialogue’—particularly with regards to those voices that weren’t heard for some reason or another in early Christian history. I found myself especially drawn to texts that somehow didn’t make their way into the official Christian scriptures. Why were they excluded? What did they have to say that might have caused the exclusion? What were some of the points of tension?

The most surprising aspect of the class was that I found out more about these questions through the use of mapping than by solely plowing through texts. A large portion of the course was focused on geography, travel, and interactions among communities. Somehow, when the ‘data’ was there on the map, for the first time I could make the decision myself about what I was seeing. No one was telling me what was ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’ Instead, I was able to observe and draw my own conclusions. This felt like an immense amount of power I had never felt before. It was in this context that I first met Thecla.

Thecla soon became one of my heroines. I thought her defiance was simply riveting. Her story is one of repeated clashes against societal norms. Her feats include declining the societal restrictions of marriage and child-bearing and daring to travel in a time when travel was quite dangerous, more so for women. In addition, she survived a princely molester, being burned at a
stake and being offered to vicious animals in an arena in the process. Why hadn't I or anyone else I knew ever heard of this early Christian woman? I quickly decided that it was a travesty that so few people knew about Thecla. But I didn't know what to do about it exactly.

It was a few years later, in the realm of Historical GIS, when I found the tools to engage these questions. The field of HGIS has produced a spectrum of provocative scholarship—with examples of research range from constructing an atlas of medieval England's agriculture, to georectifying the *Nolli Map of 1748*, to retelling Civil War stories, to constructing a Salem Witch Trials archive. Over a little more than two decades, scholars in this field have demonstrated that HGIS should be taken seriously, because it has a certain unique potential for changing the way we engage with history.

In reflecting on the field, historical geographer Anne Kelly Knowles suggests that:

> The ability of GIS to integrate, analyze, and visually represent spatially referenced information is inspiring historians to combine sources in new ways, to make geographical context an explicit part of their analysis, to reexamine familiar evidence, and to challenge long-standing historical interpretations.¹

Knowles’s observations have been confirmed again and again in my own research. While attending a poster session regarding mapping colonialism in Africa, I listened to historian John Glover give a brief introductory talk. One of his statements stuck with me: "I think that in doing these projects, my students have learned more about what we don't know then what we do know about history."² This observation betrays an overall trend in HGIS—it can sometimes be exasperating how little data there is to work with! In a later work Knowles confesses that "Some scholars are frustrated by the inconclusiveness of this approach. The fragmentation of argument

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² John Glover, professor of History at the University of Redlands, 2013. Dr. Glover taught a class in the Fall semester of 2013, centered on mapping issues related to colonialism in Africa. At the end of the class, the students were able to present their research posters to the public, to which I attended. Despite the fact that most of the students in the class had never worked with GIS before, their work was both engaged and provocative.
between Web pages, like the inconsequential storytelling of postmodern novelists, leaves the work of final synthesis to the reader."

Lillian Larsen and Steve Benzek build on these views by highlighting some key advantages of HGIS in their paper *Cartographic Re-Presentation: Aesthetic Refractions of Ancient Texts*. Larsen and Benzek observe how HGIS offers an experimental 'lab' environment which is a quite useful tool for people trying to 'play around' with data and analyze patterns. HGIS likewise invites interesting juxtapositions among datasets because of how easy it is to map sets of data against other sets of data.

Each of these scholars underscores that not only does HGIS force students and scholars to examine history in new ways, it also empowers users to make their own choices in representing historical data. When evidence is presented in the form of maps, the audience is free to analyze, discern patterns, and draw conclusions in an intuitive manner.

Building on the work of Glover, Knowles, Larsen and Benzek, this project moves a step in a new direction. I suggest that not only does HGIS afford new insights and empower the reader, but it offers another, crucial service. HGIS can be used for this unique, perhaps unforeseen, purpose: It can help shed light on those 'lesser heard voices' from history, in particular the voices of women, in such a way that other methods cannot. This paper intends to highlight what this might look like by drawing on examples from my research under the KECK Foundation in map construction.

My three-point argument can be summed up in this way: The first two points, which I have in common with several scholars, are that HGIS forces a re-evaluation of historical sources which constructs empowerment. The next point is an unforeseen consequence of HGIS which I

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think should be added to the conversation: that HGIS can afford unique insight into explorations of the ‘lesser heard voices’ in history. This also constructs empowerment.

**De-Familiarizing the Familiar**

In introducing their research on biblical texts, Larsen and Benzek “…initially sought a tool that would simply involve students in re-imaging the familiar figures and places encountered in Christian Scripture, in a less familiar, but perhaps, more realistic frame.” To demonstrate what it might look like for GIS to provide this tool, consider the Jewish Diaspora communities after the fall of the Temple in around 70 CE.

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Because Christianity arguably started out as a sect of Judaism, and because many of Christianity’s earliest proponents were Jewish—including Jesus—in assessing the maps that result, it comes as no surprise that many early Christian communities ‘overlapped’ with Jewish Diaspora communities. Above is a map locating some Jewish Diaspora communities in the first century CE, where the larger dots represent more prominent communities, the two largest communities being in Antioch and Alexandria. It may be surprising in itself to see just how dispersed the Jewish Diaspora communities became. Where were some ‘loci of investment’ for early Christian communities?

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6 Communities are adapted from the Harper Collins Atlas of Bible History, 2008. These two maps do not have written place names for aesthetic purposes and for easier viewing.

7 ‘Loci of investment’ is phraseology from Larsen and Benzek’s Cartographic Re-Presentations.
Above, we can see that there is a degree of overlap between these two groups, which confirms the scholarly consensus. However, there are also some outliers, for example a Christian communities appear on the island of Cyprus. Their presence without a corresponding Jewish locus raises interesting questions. Why was the Jewish presence absent in Cyprus? Did this cause the Christian communities there to take on a different ‘character’ than others at the time?

Upon further research this new question offers additional insights—there was a Jewish community there to begin with, which would explain how Christian communities became rooted there. However, historical sources document that there was a revolt there that changed things from then on. Martin Goodman remarks that, “When Lucius Quietus, the Roman general, stopped the revolt (hence probably the designation used in rabbinic texts for this uprising, the “War of Quietus”), Cyprus enacted legislation prohibiting Jews from living on the island, even in case of shipwreck. All record of the sizeable Egyptian Jewish community comes to an end after 117.” 8 The Jewish community in Cyprus was literally wiped off the map. These are the sort of details that may surface on a map but can be easily effaced in reading.

Conclusions

This example shows how HGIS can provide a useful tool in ‘experimenting’ with different data sets fairly easily in a sandbox-like environment. The atmosphere of this tool naturally makes for easier historical juxtapositions. Simply mining through mountains of primary sources perhaps wouldn’t as easily portray the interplay between these types of communities as mapping them together could. This example also shows that the unexpected aspects of the maps we make, the ‘outliers,’ provide jumping-off points for new questions and research.

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This is only one example of the ways HGIS can offer new resources to scholars. In this way, scholars are finding ways to ‘de-familiarize the familiar.’ Scholars have begun to reevaluate established sources—perhaps sources that have been interpreted in a certain way for a long time—in new ways as though they were encountering them for the first time.

**Re-Telling the Story**

Historically, the map most associated with early Christianity has been the map of the Apostle Paul’s missionary journeys. The map is a direct spatial representation of the canonical Acts of the Apostles, “portraying a seamless narrative, reflecting three, or sometimes four itineraries”, in which “the range of Paul’s travel encompasses the Mediterranean world.”

Below is such a map, dated from 1856.\(^9\)

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\(^9\) Larsen and Benzek, 4.

\(^{10}\) This map, along with other antique maps that have been made digitally available, can be found at [http://www.hipkiss.org/data/maps.html](http://www.hipkiss.org/data/maps.html).
This ‘traditional Paul map’ depicted in the map from the mid-1800s above continues to be ubiquitous today, and remains the most well-known and dominant ‘picture’ of the early spread of Christian ideals. This map has been used in scholarly sources such as the HarperCollins Bible Atlas\(^1\), popular sources such as National Geographic\(^2\), and as didactic tools in the classroom, such as the map depicted below\(^3\).

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Pages 50-51 display the map entitled “Spreading the Gospel,” which outlines Paul’s four missions.

\(^{3}\) This is a picture taken of a pull-down map located in Larsen Hall, Room 222, University of Redlands, CA. This map, along with other historical maps in the same room, were almost destroyed during recent renovations. However, the maps were saved for their antique value and for their insight into traditional ways in which the Bible has been mapped. Like many ‘traditional Paul maps,’ this is a composite map which layers multiple journey’s of Paul onto one.
In their article, Larsen and Benzek have worked to “trouble the linear narrative reported in the Acts” regarding Paul’s travels by distinguishing the undisputed letters of Paul as primary sources and the Acts as a secondary source. On the authority given the traditional map of Paul, they remark:

In fact over time, these maps have come to functionally embody the story of Paul’s itinerancy. As journeys are mapped and re-mapped, their representational contours have become increasingly authoritative. Few questions are asked about the relative historicity of the sources utilized, fewer still about the layered character of the material that undergirds the linearly linked landscapes and refractions of Paul’s travels.

In order to further destabilize the authority of the traditional map of Paul, this research maps the Apocryphal travel accounts in conversation with canonical accounts in the Acts using GIS.

The Apocryphal Acts provide lesser-heard voices on the subject of the early travels of the apostles. Putting these maps in conversation with another—the dominant one that maps the Canon, and the other ones that represent Apocryphal texts—allows us to examine for ourselves a more diverse story about the early Christian communities. But first, it could be helpful to explore what the Apocryphal texts are before thinking about mapping them.

What is the Apocrypha?

The New Testament Apocrypha—commonly abbreviated NT Apocrypha—is a term used to label the broad array of extra-canonical writings that derive from early Christian communities. The NT Apocrypha encompasses four main genres: gospels, apocalypses, acts, and letters. It is generally agreed upon that most of this literature was formulated during the

14 Furthermore, Larsen and Benzek map each of the generations of Paul’s letters, starting with the undisputed letters and then treating the Deutero-Paul letters, making for a nuanced analysis.
15 Lillian Larsen and Steve Benzek. 4.
16 Apocrypha: from Greek apokryphos meaning ‘hidden things.’ David M. Scholer argues that the term “NT Apocrypha” is a “general term that has no clearly agreed upon traditional or scholarly meaning.” However problematic this label may be, the term will be used for practicality purposes in this paper.
window from the second to the ninth centuries CE\textsuperscript{17}, though the question of more precise dating is a topic of scholarly debate.\textsuperscript{18} The discovery at Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945 of many previously unknown apocryphal documents has contributed to the interest in this area, but some of the NT Apocrypha still require the most basic scholarly attention, such as critical editions and translations.\textsuperscript{19}

Modern publication of the New Testament Apocrypha is generally agreed to have begun with Friedrich Nausea’s collection of the ‘Lives of the Apostles’ in 1531 (in Latin). Scholars who built upon Nausea’s efforts include Michael Neander (1564), Johann Albert Fabricius (1703) and Thilo (1832) as well as others in the latter half of the nineteenth century such as Tischendorf, Lipsius and Bonnet.\textsuperscript{20}

From these building blocks, Edgar Hennecke published his first complete edition of the New Testament Apocrypha (in German) in 1904. This monumental work has defined the field ever since. The first cohesive English NT Apocrypha came in 1924 by M.R. James. This was the only edition available in English until the work was edited in 1963 by Wilhelm Schneemelcher. When Hennecke died in 1951, Schneemelcher took over his work and constructed his latest edition in 1989. This work was translated into English by R. McL. Wilson in 1991\textsuperscript{21} and this two volume work remains the classic authority in the subject today.\textsuperscript{22}

J.K. Elliott, Professor of New Testament Textual Criticism at the University of Leeds, UK, has recently built upon the Hennecke-Schneemelcher work by collecting and organizing


some of the major texts, and placing them in one volume with helpful introductions, notes about translators, and commentary. Elliott’s volume is particularly valuable for newly minted investigators of these primary sources.23 The present research draws the bulk of its source material from this convenient volume.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1500s</th>
<th>1700s</th>
<th>1800s</th>
<th>1904</th>
<th>1924</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friedrich Nausea’s <em>Lives of the Apostles</em> (1531) Michael Neander (1564)</td>
<td>Johann Albert Fabricius Codex <em>apocryphus Novi Testamenti</em> (1703)</td>
<td>Thilo (1832) Tischendorf (1851) Lipsius-Bonnet (1867)</td>
<td>Edgar Hennecke’s first compilation of the NT Apocrypha (in German)</td>
<td>First English compilation of the NT Apocrypha by M.R. James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery at Nag Hammadi revitalizes field</td>
<td>First English translation of Hennecke’s work by R. McL. Wilson</td>
<td>Wilhelm Schneemelcher’s latest edition of Hennecke’s work</td>
<td>Schneemelcher’s 1989 work translated into English by R. McL. Wilson</td>
<td>J.K. Elliott’s one-volume compilation of selected NT Apocrypha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As suggested earlier, the Apocryphal Acts, which this research makes its focus, are a subset of the larger corpus of early Christian extracanonical literature. However, even this subset is generally divided into two categories. Of these, the first and earlier group has attracted the most attention by scholars. For the purposes of this paper, I too will focus on this group: 1) *The Acts of Paul*, 2) *The Acts of Peter*, 3) *The Acts of John*, 4) *The Acts of Andrew*, and 5) *The Acts of Thomas*.

**Generations of Scholarship**

The advent of more readily accessible translations of NT Apocrypha in the latter part of the 20th century has invited new generations of scholarship. In the 1980s-90s, scholars made the argument that apocryphal texts should have more weight in dialogues regarding early Christian

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communities. The late David M. Scholer, professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary put it this way:

"The NT Apocrypha are important early Christian texts. Although they provide significant information on the ideas, theology, social matrix, practices, and events of second- and third-century Christianity, they are often neglected in favor of the more "accepted" literature of that time, such as the apostolic fathers, Justin Martyr, Melito, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, martyr acts, and the like. A full understanding of early Christian history should make good use of the NT Apocrypha."  

Also during this time, scholars worked to place apocryphal texts in historical context with other genres of literature from similar time periods. Regarding the literary context of the Apocryphal Acts, Christian scriptures scholar Dennis R. MacDonald comments that "these authors were influenced by the Gospels, Greek novels, and in the case of The Acts of Andrew, Homeric epic and Platonic dialogues." In more recent scholarship, the Apocryphal Acts have invited comparison with five Greek romances in particular with which they are roughly contemporary and with which they share a range of motifs—Chaereas and Callirhoe, An Ephesian Tale, Leucippe and Clitophon, Daphnis and Chloe, and an Ethiopian Story." 

Judith B. Perkins of Saint Joseph College argues that the Apocryphal Acts were not only influenced by such Greek novels—but rather, in a sense they turn them on their head, commenting that "through the repudiation of the tropes of sex and marriage, these texts challenged the prevailing social structures and institutions [displayed in the Greek novel]." However, Christine Thomas’s oft-quoted, cautioning statement seems to be an apt qualifier here:

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"Though motifs do not a genre make, the ideal romances and the Acts are speaking the same narrative language."  

As the above scholars' comments suggest, the Apocryphal Acts portray gender roles in interesting ways. The predominance of women in the Apocryphal Acts led Stephan Davies to claim in 1980 that “many of the Apocryphal Acts were written by women” and had “an audience which was predominantly female.” The rich data related to women in the Apocryphal Acts is still a current topic of debate in the current scholarship. Regarding Davies claim from over two decades ago, Kim Haines-Eitzen has recently asserted that a close analysis of various papyri yields that the claim that Apocryphal Acts were predominantly ‘women’s literature’ is not backed by substantial enough evidence.

In addition to questions of women’s roles, current debates in Apocryphal Acts scholarship involve travel and comparisons to travels from the canonical Acts. This research aims to provide a counter-balance that has been missing in this discussion: spatial representations of the Apocryphal Acts to parallel the canonical Acts, or ‘traditional Paul,’ maps. These maps may be able to shed light on these questions of women’s roles in the process.

**Spatial Representations of the Apocryphal Acts**

The Acts of Andrew report that the apostle begins his travels in the province of Achaea. From there, he travels to Sinope. The passage describing this journey is a bit curious: "The son of Gratinus wrote to Andrew for help: he himself had a fever and his wife dropsy. Andrew went there in a vehicle." It is unclear just what is meant by the word ‘vehicle.’

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29 Steven Davies. The Revolt of the Widows. 95-96.


31 Elliott, NT Apocrypha, 273 ; emphasis is mine.
The arrows in the Macedonia area may at first seem ambiguously labeled. This is because Andrew traveled back and forth between Thessalonica and Philippi twice before “Many faithful from Macedonia accompanied him in two ships,” to Patras back in the Achaea area from the beginning of the text.\textsuperscript{32} After traversing around Achaea, Andrew is finally martyred in Patras.

The Acts of John offer an alternate itinerary. According to the text, John starts his travels in southern Asia Minor in Miletus. He then moves to Ephesus, and then Smyrna. John returns back to Ephesus before making the journey to Pergamum.

In contrast to the itinerary recorded in the canonical Acts of the Apostles, the extra-canonical acts of Paul report that Paul begins in Damascus and then from Antioch, Paul travels to Iconium and it is here where Paul encounters Thecla. Paul and Thecla both travel to Antioch, but here they separate when Thecla gets arrested and sentenced to the arena. Paul then travels to Myra, and when Thecla finally makes her way there in search of Paul, this is their last meeting in

\textsuperscript{32} Elliott, \textit{NT Apocrypha}, 279.
the Apocryphal texts. From there Paul returns back to the area where he began his journey to the 'twin cities' Sidon and Tyre. He then makes the long voyage by boat to Asia Minor again, then to Philippi, and then to Corinth. From here, the text is unclear where Paul journeys to; though it is most likely Rome.\(^{33}\)

In the Apocryphal Acts of Peter begins in Jerusalem, moves to close-by Caesarea because of a vision that appeared from God: “But do not delay. Go tomorrow to Caesarea, and there you will find a ship ready to sail to Italy. And within a few days I will show you my grace which is boundless.”\(^{34}\) He then proceeds to do just that, traveling from Caesarea by boat to Rome, where the rest of the text and Peter’s martyrdom take place.

The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas presents the first major deviation from canonical literature. From the set of texts included in this study, not many specific location names in India are cited. However, other scholars have used other tools at their disposal in order to paint more

\[^{33}\text{I did not put that on the map because Rome was not specifically cited by name like the other locations.}\]

\[^{34}\text{Elliott, NT Apocrypha, 402.}\]
of a picture. According to this text, Thomas starts out in Jerusalem, and arrives in India in the port of Andrapolis, a "royal city." The author(s) of the text portray Thomas traveling in India, but do not mention any more specific names of places other than Andrapolis. The authors use phases such as "When the apostle came into the cities of India with Abban the merchant, Abban went away to greet King Gundaphorus and told him about the carpenter whom he had brought with him" and "And the apostle took everything and divided it, going about in the cities and surrounding villages, distributing to the poor and needy..." that point to Thomas's many portrayed travels.

Most interesting with respect to women is the account of Thecla, a native to Iconium. After some trials, she and Paul traveled together to Antioch, at which place her infamous episode in the arena with the 'wild beasts' occurred. She then traveled, in search of Paul, to Myra. Her

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35 For a detailed analysis, see James Kurikilamkatt, First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India: Ancient Christianity in Bharuch and Taxila, Asian Trading Company Bangalore: India, 2005.
36 Elliott, NT Apocrypha, 448.
37 Elliott, NT Apocrypha, 454.
return to Iconium involves an attempted reconciliation with Thecla’s mother and old friends. The text ends with “And having thus testified, she went to Seleucia and enlightened many by the word of God; then she rested in a glorious sleep.” Seleucia would later become the pilgrimage site devoted to Thecla, called Hagia Thekla, to which pilgrims such as Egeria later traveled.

It should be noted that with these maps I do not aim to decide whether or not Thecla, or any of the others apostles, really traveled to these locations, or even if they existed. That question is quite beside the point for the purpose of this paper. The question I am more concerned with is ‘how was Thecla represented by others who told her story?’ How were the apostles Paul, Peter, John, Thomas and Andrew represented? Can we put those portrayals in conversation with each other?

**Conclusions**

One can look at these maps fairly quickly and surmise that perhaps the travels of the early apostles was not one, agreed-upon, official story, but a diverse range of stories and legends involving multiple figureheads. No more than the canonical Acts do they reflect reality ‘on the ground’, but nonetheless perhaps they can shed some light on the diversity of the early Christian communities. Now that each of these voices has a spatial representation, rather than only the traditional Paul map, a richer dialogue regarding travel in early Christian communities can ensue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canonical Acts</th>
<th>Apocryphal Acts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul is main traveler</td>
<td>Other apostles also travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only borders the Mediterranean</td>
<td>Thomas goes to India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No women apostles</td>
<td>Thecla is a traveling apostle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38 Elliott, *NT Apocrypha*, 372.
After mapping the apocryphal acts, I felt an immense amount of personal power. I was able to put data on a map—data which I thought should be added to the discussion. I didn’t just have to wait around until some scholar did it, I did it for myself. This experience was exhilarating. Not only was the actual mapping experience empowering for me, in the process I was also able to become even more engaged with the figure of Thecla, this time in a different way. Now I can not only visualize her empowerment in my mind while reading the apocryphal text, but I can also physically see her investment displayed on a map. It is perhaps as interesting that historically, I am not the only one who was inspired by Thecla.

**A Lineage of Empowerment**

There is evidence that Thecla’s life story became so influential that the inspiration if had for women became a topic of heated debate. In the late 2\textsuperscript{nd} or early 3\textsuperscript{rd} century, Tertullian, a bishop and native of Carthage wrote:

But if those writings which wrongly go under Paul’s name adduce the example of Thecla as license for women to teach and to baptize, let them know that the presbyter who produced this text, as though adding something of his own reputation to Paul’s, resigned his position, having been discovered, and having confessed that he did so out of love for Paul.\textsuperscript{39}

Not only had Thecla’s story extended through time, but it had also extended through space to northern Africa, by around the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century. A Christian woman by the name of Egeria from the late 4\textsuperscript{th} or early 5\textsuperscript{th} century traveled extensively and made pilgrimages to holy sites such as Jerusalem, Mount Sinai and Antioch.\textsuperscript{40} Her writings, commonly called the *Itinerarium Egeriae*, were discovered in 1884 by archeologist G.F. Gamurrini in the library of the

\textsuperscript{39} Kraemer, *Women’s Religions*, 260-61.

\textsuperscript{40} For an engaging and interactive introduction to Egeria and her travels, see [http://www.egeriapject.net](http://www.egeriapject.net). This website is an especially good tool for students.
Brotherhood of St. Mary in Arezzo, Italy. The text has since remained a crucial insight into the role of travel during this time period. In chapter 22, Egeria writes:

I then set out from Antioch and, after journeying for several days, arrived in the province called Cilicia, the capital city of which is Tarsus, the same Tarsus in which I had already been on my trip down to Jerusalem. Since the shrine of Saint Thecla is located a three-day journey from Tarsus, in Isauria, it was a great pleasure for me to go there, particularly since it was so near at hand.

The map below depicts this specific journey among Egeria’s many travels, highlighting her trip to Seleucia in order to visit Hagia Thekla. Egeria’s journey provides a case-in-point about how, even though she wasn’t formally included in the canon, Thecla nonetheless might have inspired Christian women to travel. A unique element that this spatial representation of Egeria’s travels brings is the ability to physically visualize investment. Although it was dangerous for both Thecla and Egeria to travel alone, they both did.

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While staying at the shrine of Thecla, Egeria met with another woman and Thecla devotee in a leadership role:

I met there a very dear friend of mine, and a person to whose way of life everyone in the East bears witness, the holy deaconess Marthana, whom I had met in Jerusalem, where she had come to pray. She governs these monastic cells of aputactitae, or virgins.43

It is interesting that Egeria displays empowerment through the means of travel, whereas Marthana is empowered in a sedentary lifestyle. By the accounts of these two contemporaries, it is clear that women continued to be inspired into self-empowerment by Thecla’s life story well into the 5th century.

Gregory of Nyssa’s Life of Macrina, written in Asia Minor in 380 CE, gives us another glimpse of Thecla devotion. Writing in praise of his sister Macrina, Gregory asserts that Macrina was destined for a holy life since her birth, whence Macrina’s mother declared that her daughter would bear the secret name “Thecla”, a name that would “foretell the life of the young girl and show the similarity of her choice of life by her possession of the same name.” 44 Macrina later established and directed a dual (that is, both male and female) monastic community at Annesi in Asia Minor.45

These three women—Egeria, Marthana, and Macrina—offer insight into historical ways in which the figure of Thecla held meaning and inspired empowerment. The lineage of Thecla’s influence has not stopped since then, but continues to this day, in various forms.

43 Kraemer, Women’s Religions, 237.
The quote from Gregory of Nyssa can be found in V.Macr. 2.33-4.
45 Davis, Cult of Saint Thecla, 56.
**Thecla Today**

Below is a map displaying the echoes of Thecla’s influence today. From cities that are named after Thecla, to monasteries devoted to her, to museums housing various artifacts related to Thecla devotion, Thecla’s impact has now become worldwide. An interesting case of a neo-Thecla inspiration is the Teachers of Ecumenical Contemplative Arts (THECLA) Interfaith Initiative, which is an “interfaith learning community committed to advancing contemplative practice of silent prayer as a basis for understanding across the faith traditions.”

![Map of Thecla's Influence](image)

**Conclusions**

The fact that Thecla isn’t part of the official canon hasn’t stopped her influence from becoming poignant and far-reaching. It seems absurd that a woman with this much influence is not depicted in the ‘traditional’ map of early Christian travels alongside Paul. Not only has
mapping provided me with a sense of empowerment, and also aided me in connecting differently
with an empowering figure, it has also allowed me to engage the echoes of Thecla’s
empowerment through time.

**Concluding Remarks**

The use of GIS in religious studies affords new insights into ‘old’ material in an
experimental setting, as evidenced by analysis of the Jewish Diaspora and early Christian
communities maps. HGIS also allows for a re-emphasis of the historical narrative, by shedding
light on the less-dominant voices from history, such as Apocryphal literature in the scheme of
early Christian history. Finally, mapping constructs empowerment in various forms—in the
actually process of mapping and bringing data to life, in the unique engagement of historical
figures, and the visualization of history through time and space.

This research has sparked more questions that it’s answered. Fortunately, HGIS naturally
lends itself to continual growth and reworking of research. Some present goals for future
research are as follows: mapping more stories, mapping more Diasporas, innovating more cross
disciplinary tools and approaches, and visualizing more women’s voices.

Recently I had the opportunity to present this research, and during the questions-and-
answers portion after the talk, I was asked this question by a woman in the audience: “I had a
Christian upbringing... why have I never heard of this Thecla?” Upon first learning about Thecla
in Christian Scriptures class, I asked myself the same question. How would things have changed
for me as a little girl if this was the sort of role-model I had? In light of this, attached is a highly
accessible version of the story of Thecla, in comic format that demonstrates what it might look like if Thecla was an alternative role-model for young girls today.\textsuperscript{46}

Larsen and Benzek comment: "As we have continued to pursue a path, perhaps most accurately characterized as trial and error, there has consistently been enough return on any given investment to warrant moving forward."\textsuperscript{47} I find that this research, too, has been a foray of trial and error. However, through it all, the personal rewards have far outweighed the uncertainties.

\textsuperscript{46} Here, I have strived to use 'alternative methods' as a means to simply get the word out about her, but in broader terms, to popularize, and to make more accessible to a wider audience, some pretty unfamiliar historical material.

\textsuperscript{47} Larsen and Benzek, 3.
THECLA PART 1

THECLA WAS A BEAUTIFUL, WEALTHY WOMAN FROM ICONIUM. WHEN PAUL CAME THERE AND SHE HEARD HIM PREACH, SHE WAS ENRAPTURED AND DECIDED TO FOLLOW PAUL AND TRAVEL.

SO THECLA THEN BROKE OFF HER ENGAGEMENT WITH HER FIANCE THAMTRIS.

HER EX-FIANCE, MOM, AND CITY WERE REALLY MAD ABOUT THECLA'S NEW LIFE DECISIONS. THECLA'S MOM FINALLY CALLED FOR THECLA TO BE BURNED.

BUT WHEN SHE WAS ON THE STAKE, THERE WAS A FLASH OF RAIN AND AN EARTHQUAKE THAT SAVED HER.

"BURN HER THAT IS NO BRIDE THAT ALL THE WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN TAUGHT BY PAUL MAY BE AFRAID!"

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When they got to Antioch, a man named Alexander saw Thecla and instantly fell in love with her.

Then Paul and Thecla traveled to Antioch.

Alexander tried to rape Thecla but she fought him off and stripped off his crown.

"And taking hold of Alexander she ripped his cloak, took off the crown from his head, and made him a laughingstock."

While in jail, a powerful woman named Tryphaena came to Thecla and asked if Thecla could pray for her daughter who just died to go to heaven.

Alexander turned out to be a prince, and put Thecla in jail. He also sentenced her to death in the arena by wild animals.

So she did, and Tryphaena felt much happier and from then on really loved Thecla.
THECLA WAS PUT IN THE ARENA WITH A FIERCE LIONESS. HOWEVER, INSTEAD OF EATING HER, IT ONLY LICKED HER FEET.

THERE WAS ALSO A PIT FULL OF WATER IN THE ARENA.

"AND SHE THREW HERSELF IN SAYING:"

I BAPTIZE MYSELF!

NOTHING ALEXANDER THREW AT HER IN THE ARENA HURT THECLA. IN THE END, THEY JUST LET HER GO.

AND THECLA LEFT AND BECAME A TRAVELER, TEACHER AND MIRACLE-WORKER FOR THE REST OF HER DAYS.
Works Cited


Goodman, M. “Jewish History, 331 BCE – 135 CE.”


