

TRAVELSCAPES

Cristina Corsi | résidente à l'IMÉRA de Marseille

Cristina Corsi is lecturer and adjunct professor in Archaeology at the University of Cassino. She got her master degree in Archaeology at the University La Sapienza of Rome and her PhD at the University of Bologna. She got several postdoctoral fellowships and is Senior Marie-Sklodowska Curie fellow (Senior Researcher). From 2007 to 2013 she was visiting researcher at the Portuguese University of Évora. She coordinated and participated in large international projects, among which the European project "Radio-Past" on the application of non-destructive techniques to study complex archaeological sites (www.radiopast.eu).



Labyrinth designed on the floor of the Chartres Cathedral central nave (early thirteenth century). This symbol, often reproduced along pilgrimage routes, symbolises the long tortuous path that pilgrims followed to reach salvation.

Roads have always been addressed as formidable channels through which people, goods, news, ideas and cultures are transferred. They indeed constitute the 'circulatory system' of entities such as regions, states, or continents. They are means through which social, economic and cultural patterns are conveyed, and through which languages, traditions, religions, habits, fashions, musical practices and material culture are transmitted.

Medieval road networks have been studied mainly in their devotional meaning as pilgrimage routes. Innumerable publications investigated these aspects and highlighted the role played by these medieval 'highways' in building up the European cultural identity. The plethora of literature on the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela is a shining example of that. This approach has been central in setting up networks of cultural institutions and in disseminating research outputs (mainly through websites, such as <http://www.saintjamesway.eu/> and <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/669> for the S. James Way, <http://www.viefrancigene.org/en/>, <http://www.tastingeurope.com/routes/francigena> and <http://www.rivis-taviafrancigena.it/en/> for the

Francigena Way, to name but a few).

Most publications adopt an historical perspective rooted in the research of Johan Plesner, first published in 1938. This methodology was refined with the book of Thomas Szabó in 1992, and the works of Tiziano Mannoni (1983, 1992) highly contributed to a more structured archaeological-topographical approach.

Since the end of the 20th century, archaeologists and surveyors have given so much interest to ancient communication systems that the term 'Archaeology of Roads' has come into use. Ancient road networks have been studied from the technological point of view, as instruments of control and military domination, or as channels for trades and exchange, but a problematized approach was still missing.

More recently, the increasing influence of landscape theory in archaeology has triggered a revolution in research on communication networks. International scholarship has embraced a concept of landscape that bridges methodological barriers and regional differences, creating an adaptive analytical framework (Snead, Erickson and Darling 2009, 3).

In this approach, the 'context' is the theoretical framework where material and cultural elements merge to create the holistic dimension of our analysis. The latter is then focussed on cultural landscapes, conceived as the palimpsest where history and environment interrelate. Communication networks are the threads of the web that connects places. Trails, paths, and roads trigger interaction and generate social, economic and political trends.

Thanks to a renewed approach to landscape archaeology, a huge amount of archaeological data can be reprocessed to be part of a broader debate. Intensive prospections supported by remote sensing, GIS processing and predictive modelling allows the collection of heterogeneous archaeological evidence, whose interpretation emphasizes the physical and temporal context at multiple topographical and chronological scales.

This methodology leads to the tenet of "landscape of movement", intended as geographical—therefore physical—context where movement—therefore metaphysical action—takes place, generating patterns of mobility. These patterns are expressed by the concepts of 'inscription' and 'materialisation'. The first "describes the 'marking' of landscape both as inadvertent

result of people going about their daily lives and as a product of conscious action". And the other "is directly concerned with the relationship between ideology and material culture, of which landscape is a critical element" (Snead 2009, 46).

Finally, this theme of research has been approached in a more interdisciplinary way, tackling all facets of travel literature, framing the geographical context and investigating the archaeological evidence. This approach also takes into account elements connected with religion, anthropology, history of music and traditional cultures, and attributes a central role to 'hodoeporics' (travel literature and written sources).

Yet, the newest trends in Anglo-Saxon literature for the analysis of space. Disclose new scenarios for the study of communication networks by introducing a theoretical framework and a methodological approach rooted in anthropology and in several branches of environmental studies (environmental planning and environmental psychology).

The focus of the latter, initiated with the influential work of Kevin Lynch (1960, 1972), relies on the examination of how people acquire information about their surrounding environment, and how observers

understand the 'landscape'. This process, analysed by Lynch in a contemporary urban context, is driven by consistent and predictable behaviours, relying upon the construction of mental maps.

Indeed, the concept of maps as means of simply representing physical landscapes, as directional tools, as graphic methods of representing places respecting the conventions of scale, symbol, and legend, has been overcome by the idea of maps as resources to represent social, personal, and psychological connections among people and places. There are unexplored contents entrenched into maps that go beyond their practical use and their conventions for representation of space. Since the human body has to be considered the pivotal element (Tilley 2004), mapping is to be intended as a multisensory experience that is able to enlighten relationships between topoi, experience, and community. Maps are interwoven with experiences and stories linked to places. The visual experience calls forth hearings, touching, smelling.

Mapping can be used as research instrument to analyse cognitive processes, studying the way in which people sense the connections between space, place, and relational and physical features of the tangible environment. Here, particularly, the objective is the analysis of the relationship between space and behaviour, between physical action of travel and mental journey. This discloses investigation into "the cartography of psychological space, the body and the memory" (Powell 2010, 540).

This interpretative perspective was only exceptionally used to study roads and communication networks (see e.g. Malmberg 2009; Östenberg, Malmberg and Bjørnebye 2015), but it undoubtedly has extraordinary potential to understand the factors of 'movement' and 'navigation' through time and space.

Criticism on the application of this theoretical framework to archaeology has arisen, due to the fact that it is difficult to read the archaeological evidence in the light of the concept that experience is a social construct. Yet, this approach proved to be stimulating for discussion and generated interesting outcomes, like the study of Roman roads in Italy by Ray Laurence (1999).

In essence, the project *Travels-capes* aims at approaching the theme of displacement in the past in a very different manner, focusing on the way in which medieval travellers experienced their journey and navigated the surroundings. It also investigates the means through which they 'mapped' and internalised the space.

This study will be based on the individuation of the elements that, according to the theory of Kevin Lynch (*supra*), drive and influence the way in which one uses space, being the linear (paths, itineraries, edges, boundaries, etc.), the punctual (destinations, crossroads, nodes, intersections, loci...) and the volumetric (villages, agglomerations, worshipping buildings and sanctuaries, markets, resting places, etc.) constituents of the activity of displacement.

The goal is to extend to this type of cultural itineraries the theoretical approach developed by Frank Brown, who investigated the way in which Roman urban space was shaped by rituals, whether political or religious (Brown 1961), analysing the way in which spatial constraints and environmental characteristics influence movement and activities. In this way we will attempt to approach the subject from an Environmental Behaviour Studies (EBS) perspective. This can be considered as a stand-alone discipline, both humanistic and scientific, as it develops an explanatory theory of environment-behaviour relations (EBR) (Rapoport 1990).

Therefore, instead of studying a road merely as an artefact, as a physical structure enabling movement to a destination, we will try to apply a more phenomenological approach, stressing the subjective aspects of 'perception', of how human beings experience and understand their surroundings.

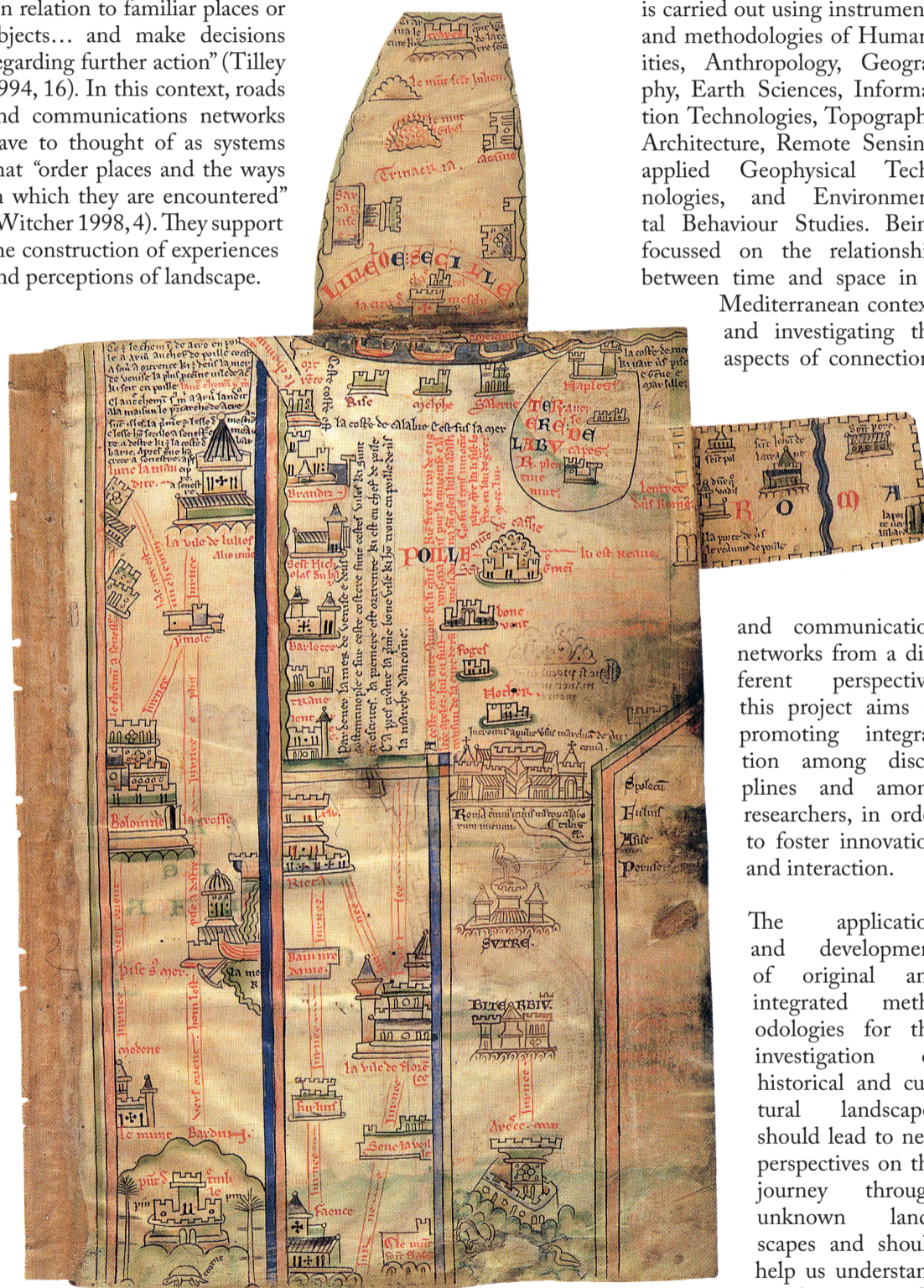
Roads and communication networks are much more than lines on a map. They represent and evoke aspects of ideology, power and identity. They are the scaffolding on which the social constructions of the world we live in is hinged.

This inherent anthropological approach relies mainly upon the work of the British archaeologist and anthropologist Christopher Tilley, whose publication entitled *Phenomenology of Landscape* (1994) was a ground-breaking event in the field of Landscape Archaeology. The core of this theory is that places are much more than physical locations;

they are the cornerstones on which individuals build their identity. The same place is different in each individual's perception. Therefore, the act of moving from one place to another acquires different meanings and feelings, and pathways turn into the skeleton of daily life and lived landscape. The latter can be described as the individual notion of landscape and environment in which a person moves, orienting himself/herself "in relation to familiar places or objects... and make decisions regarding further action" (Tilley 1994, 16). In this context, roads and communications networks have to be thought of as systems that "order places and the ways in which they are encountered" (Witcher 1998, 4). They support the construction of experiences and perceptions of landscape.

to which individuals could cling to avoid slipping into the unknown.

The flow of pilgrims along the medieval routes of Europe fostered the birth and spreading of artistic trends and musical traditions, which will be studied here in this new perspective, as tools for the construction of a 'travelscape'.



Schematic map in colours and gold of an itinerary from London to the Holy Land inserted in the parchment codex of the *Historia Anglorum* by Matthew Paris (1250-1259). London, The British Library.

At the same time, we can enlighten how road networks represented channels for spreading cultural elements, artistic styles, iconography, diffusion processes and performing aspects of music, and also for disseminating legends and etiological myths related mainly to the *Chanson de Geste*. Paths are indeed often marked by a *fil rouge* of symbols, replicas, relics, iconographies, the familiar legends: all represent the anchors

We have to focus on a particular aspect of the embodiment of medieval spirituality, permeated by religious sentiment and the attraction towards mysterious and magical worlds, in a relentless struggle between the search for redemption, the magnetism of the supernatural and the captivity of the sphere of darkness.

A medieval travel undertaken along these routes can be

defined as the materialization of a search, a displacement of the person, a journey of the mind. It is a journey through atonement and purification, where deprivation, unsafety and dangers of travelling are the means through which salvation is achieved.

Predictably, at any stage of this type of research, methodology is characterised by a multidisciplinary approach with interdisciplinary aspects. Research is carried out using instruments and methodologies of Humanities, Anthropology, Geography, Earth Sciences, Information Technologies, Topography, Architecture, Remote Sensing, applied Geophysical Technologies, and Environmental Behaviour Studies. Being focussed on the relationship between time and space in a Mediterranean context, and investigating the aspects of connections

and communication networks from a different perspective, this project aims at promoting integration among disciplines and among researchers, in order to foster innovation and interaction.

The application and development of original and integrated methodologies for the investigation of historical and cultural landscapes should lead to new perspectives on the journey through unknown landscapes and should help us understand in what way medieval travellers built their mental maps and lived the surrounding space, and how they constructed their landmarks and reference points.

This project also aims at spreading the awareness that, even if not comparable to the Roman Imperial road network in terms of extension, capillarity and efficiency, medieval routes also functioned as mediators of cultural, economic and political factors within Society.

The major outcome expected from this research is to disclose new avenues for the analysis of communication and exploration. In one word: pathfinding.

References

- Brown F., 1961. *Roman Architecture*. London.
- Laurence R., 2009. *The Roads of Roman Italy: Mobility and Cultural Change*, London.
- Lynch K.A., 1960. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge Massachusetts.
- Lynch K.A., 1972. *What Time is This Place?* Cambridge Massachusetts.
- Malmberg S., 2009. "Navigating the Urban Via Tiburtina". In H. Bjur and B. Santillo Frizell (eds.), *Via Tiburtina: Space, Movement and Artefacts in the Urban Landscape*. Swedish Institute in Rome, 61-78.
- Mannoni T., 1983. "Strade e vie di comunicazione". *Archeologia Medievale* X: 213-222.
- Mannoni T., 1992. "Tecniche costruttive delle strade medievali". In *La viabilità tra Bologna e Firenze nel tempo*, Bologna: 9-12.
- Östenberg I., Malmberg S. and J. Björneby (eds.), 2015. *The Moving City: Processions, Passages and Promenades in Ancient Rome*, London.
- Plesner J., 1938. *Una rivoluzione stradale del Dugento*, Aarhus - København.
- Powell K., 2010. "Making Sense of Place: Mapping as a Multisensory Research Method". *Qualitative Inquiry* September, 16 no. 7: 539-555.
- Rapoport A., 1990. *The meaning of the built environment: a nonverbal communication approach*. Tucson (2nd edition).
- Snead J. E., 2009. "Trails of Tradition: Movement, Meaning, and Place". In J. E. Snead, C. L. Erickson and J. A. Darling (eds.), *Landscapes of movement: trails, paths, and roads in anthropological perspective*, 42-60, Philadelphia.
- Snead J. E., Erickson C. L. and Darling J. A., 2009. "Making Human Space: The Archaeology of Trails, Paths, and Roads". In J. E. Snead, C. L. Erickson and J. A. Darling (eds.), *Landscapes of movement: trails, paths, and roads in anthropological perspective*, 1-19, Philadelphia.
- Szabó Th., 1992. *Comuni e politica stradale in Toscana e in Italia nel medioevo*. Bologna.
- Tilley Ch., 1994. *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments*, Oxford.
- Tilley Ch. 2004. *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*, Oxford.
- Witcher R. E., 1998. "Roman Roads: phenomenological Perspectives on Roads in the Landscape". In: C. Forcey, J. Hawthorne and R. Witcher (eds.), *TRAC 97* (Proceedings of the seventh annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, April 1997, Nottingham), 60-70, Oxford.