

Lucian's *Icaromenippus* and the Absence of Rome

This paper is about the absence of the city of Rome from Lucian's *Icaromenippus*. Quite a few passages of this dialogue mention geographical regions and their inhabitants. There is one exception: Rome, Italy, and predominantly Latin-speaking regions. Can we find out something about the reason why Lucian left out the capital of his contemporary world?

At the end of chapter 10 and in chapter 11, Menippus states that his first attempt at flying originated on the Acropolis in Athens. He passes over the theater of Dionysus and safely lands on solid soil. Encouraged by the success of his flight, he chooses Mount Parnassus as his next starting point. This mountain shows that we are not only meant to think that we are in Greece, but also in the realm of the Muses. Furthermore, he undertakes flights from the Hymettus, which was known for the sweet honey of its bees, the cult of Zeus, Aphrodite, and also Apollo. Menippus even manages to fly to the Geraneia Mountains, Acrocorinth, Pholoe, Mount Erymanthus, and finally to Mount Taygetus. Then, Menippus climbs up Mount Olympus and starts his flight straight into the sky. All these mountains and mountain ranges are located in Greece. When Menippus reaches the moon, he imitates Homer's Zeus from *Iliad* 13 and looks back to Thrace, Mysia, Greece, Persia, and India. Menippus states that he had fun doing so. Yet, why did he not choose to look at Italy? Would it detract from the fun of looking back to earth?

A little later, in chapter 12, Menippus mentions that the colossus of Rhodes was visible for him as well as the lighthouse of Alexandria and the Oceanus. Why is Italy, why is Rome missing from this list? Even if he recognizes the ocean that surrounds the then-known world, Lucian in fact focusses on the Eastern Mediterranean only.

In chapter 13, Menippus meets Empedocles who had thrown himself into Mount Etna on Sicily and who had been catapulted to the moon by the column of smoke of the volcano. Sicily, therefore, exists on Lucian's map.

Chapter 15 paints a dire picture of all kinds of rulers on earth who misbehave: They all live in countries including, but not limited to Egypt, Thessaly, Libya, Scythia, and Thrace, but certainly neither in Italy nor in Rome. Yet not only nobles misbehave, but also average people, as chapter 16 shows. They are Getae, Scythians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Cilician, Spartans, and Athenians. Yet again, they live in all kinds of places, but neither in Italy, nor in Rome. Also Spain, Gaul, or any German provinces are missing from the list.

Chapter 18 deals with various quarrels between Greek people over Greek land. Since the entirety of Greece seems so small when looked at from the moon, Menippus censures the pettiness of the Greeks who fight so seriously over such small strips of soil.

Zeus asks Menippus a few questions in chapter 24. These questions concern Athens, Dodona, Pisa, Delphi, Pergamon, Egypt, Ephesus, Thrace, and Olympia. In Chapter 25, Zeus hears pleas from all regions of the earth. Although Italy and Rome should be included, they are, however, not explicitly mentioned. After that, Zeus gives out orders in chapter 26 for Scythia, Africa, Greece, Lydia, the Adriatic Sea, and Cappadocia.

Finally, in chapter 34 Menippus' voyage ends at the Ceramicus in Athens.

In addition to all the geographical detail, Zeus asks Menippus in chapter 24 whether the Athenians would intend to complete the Olympieion. It had been Hadrian, however, who saw to it that this colossal temple was completed after more than six centuries of construction in Athens in 131/132 AD.

These findings leave us somewhat puzzled. Was Hadrian considered to be Greek by Lucian? Was it in some way taboo to talk about Rome? Do we get a glimpse of Lucian's resistance to Roman rule (Elsner, Nesselrath)? At first sight, Lucian lets us imagine a world in which flying and space travel exist (Baumbach/Möllendorff, Ní Mheallaigh). On a second look, however, this new world is a world without Rome and with Athens as its center.

Works Cited

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