

Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (TRAC 91)
March 23 - 24 1991
Department of Archaeology
University of Newcastle upon Tyne

LIST OF DELEGATES

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In Defence of Comparative Evidence

Archaeology is limited in scope with regard to the questions it can provide answers for. Artefacts, building plans, burials, etc can tell their own stories, but often 'why', 'how' and 'to what end' are problems, which bare bones cannot elucidate. Comparative evidence used with intelligence can sometimes help in the interpretation of archaeological remains. The anthropological approach, comparing modern hunter-gatherers with the archaeological evidence, may not arrive at the truth, but can provide some useful pointers. Similarly in military studies, some attention to campaigns conducted throughout history in similar areas can be very useful, revealing that troop concentrations quite frequently occurred in the same locations at widely different periods, simply because territorial and geographical factors are of prime importance. Generally speaking, the later the historical period, the better the documentation will be, and such evidence should surely be examined, even if only to be rejected. Archaeology is composed of some evidence and much guesswork. Comparative evidence makes the guesswork more credible.

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The Romanisation of the Roman Army

What was Roman about the Roman army? The army is often invoked as a source or agent of Romanisation in the provinces. It is less often appreciated that, as soldiers were increasingly recruited from the provinces, recruits must have been culturally heterogeneous, having more in common with the local traditions of their home regions than with the dominant culture of the empire. This paper examines the cultural dimensions of the de-socialisation and re-socialisation implicit in the creation of a socially segregated military population. At issue are the mechanisms by which military society and military culture were created and reproduced, and the relationships between that culture and society and, on the one hand that of provincials, and, on the other, the culture of central Italy that provides the benchmark by which archaeologists tend to assess Romanisation.

The paper will discuss patterns of recruitment and veteran settlement and their implications for the social reproduction of the Roman empire. A certain amount is already known about the nature of Roman military society, from historical and epigraphic sources, and the material culture of the army provides a rich source for uncovering the extent to which the military did share a common culture, distinct from that of the populations within which they were stationed. The evidence used will be drawn mainly from the northwest of the Roman empire but the question of change over time will be examined. On the basis of these broad conclusions about Roman military acculturation, the role of the military in broader acculturation patterns may be assessed from a new perspective, one that employs the concepts of contact culture and the mutability of cultural identity, and one that sets the creation of provincial Roman cultures in the context of the conflicting interests of state and soldier, as well as of military and civilian.

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Studies of Roman Britain in Context of British Society

Dr Tim Champion has argued in a recent, unpublished paper that it is important to study and understand the forces which have shaped the current state of Iron Age archaeology, and that the attempt to explore a critical and self-reflexive history of archaeology has hardly begun for any period of British prehistory or history.

This paper is intended as a start to the process of understanding the forces that have shaped Romano-British archaeology. The past history and philosophy of Romano-British studies are critically assessed, and it is argued that they are based on a philosophy which was developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of this century and derived directly from the historical context of the study within the British Empire. It is then argued that the same philosophy remains dominant in contemporary Romano-British studies. It is vital that contemporary scholars develop new research interests and a new analytical framework. The paraphrase J D Hill, the Roman period - like the Iron Age - needs to become more prehistorical.

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Theory and Roman Archaeology

By following through a research aim to make a settlement map of Roman Britain an attempt is made to find the point at which theory properly enters Roman Archaeology. I suggest that theory enters inevitably with interpretation and try to discuss three levels of necessary theory.

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When (and what) was the end of Roman Britain?

Studies of the archaeology of Roman Britain tend to regard the early years of the fifth century as a watershed, with the Rescript of Honorius in 410 AD being singled out as the point when formal Roman Britain ended. On the other hand, the archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England is often given a fifth-century date for its commencement (usually c.450). Consequently, this means that relatively little attention has been paid to the interface between the two periods; indeed, the earlier fifth century, a period of no less than half-a-century, is usually completely overlooked. For descriptive, historically-orientated accounts of Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England, such a watershed might be convenient; but as an aid to understanding the society and economy of the two periods, it is not helpful.

Economic sophistication is regarded as a useful model for such 'ahistorical' analysis. This is closely linked with stability of the political system. The internal factors affecting political stability are race, religion and politics. In addition, the impact of neighbouring political units, and such natural influences as climate and disease must be considered.

The decline of the Romano-British socio-economic system needs to be seen in a wider perspective; its origins earlier in the Roman period, the external influences affecting it, and its impact on the succeeding system warrant analysis.

In conclusion, the use of a historical framework to explain the demise of Roman Britain (and to break the entire first millennium A.D. up into convenient periods) must be rejected, in favour of economic and political models that refer to political control only as a factor.

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Creed, Immorality and Settlement Hierarchies: Archaeological Explanations of the Rise and Fall of the Roman West

The Roman West's adoption of Roman ways has been much discussed and documented. The development of Roman-style settlement hierarchies, economic systems and forms of cultural expression have been explained in variations of core-periphery terms - of advanced core being followed by underdeveloped periphery. The dynamic of change is seen as greed, the urge for individual advancement, or at least the imitative desire to be like the powerful and successful Romans. More broadly, explanations have been put forward for the rise of Rome through various conjunctions of social forces and favourable circumstances, as in the work of Michael Mann.

The decline of the Roman West has exercised imaginations for centuries and been explained by immorality, economic collapse or disease. Most archaeologists now would reject too simplistic explanations. We have also shown ourselves outstandingly successful at documenting the processes of change in the archaeology record around the time of the political end of the Roman Empire in the west. Yet recent attempts by Tainter to understand the archaeological data for the collapse of complex societies have failed to reach satisfying conclusions.

This paper will examine models for dynamic change in the Roman Empire and consider whether the examples of modern Great Powers are comparable. It will lead to a discussion of how far archaeology can make a distinctive contribution to the human sciences, and how far it is limited to providing information to fit other disciplines' theories.

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Roman peasants in central Italy: an archaeological perspective

The area taken into consideration is the coastal plain of the River Pecora that runs into the Gulf of Follonica (province of Grosseto, central Italy). The period considered is from the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD. The sites registered for these centuries by the Scarlino survey have been the subject of a 'functionalist' analysis (point pattern-analysis, rank size-graph, correlations with features of the natural environment) in order to construct a site hierarchy and to understand economic relations between the sites.

On the basis of these results it is possible to concentrate on the topics of production and exchange in this small rural area. Through identification of the modes of production and exchange that were prevalent in the coastal plain during the earlier Roman period, a model of the organization of the Roman agriculture in this area is proposed which also takes some aspects of the social organization of the population in the coastal plain into account. It is argued that during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC Roman agriculture was dominated by a relatively large number of peasant farmers. Social hierarchization seems to have been rather limited in the coastal plain during these centuries. The situation changed radically in the 1st centuries BC and AD, when in the southern part of the coastal plain a rigidly organized, highly hierarchical so-called villa-system arose. Most of the coastal plain, however, seems to have been relatively unaffected by this development, as peasant farmers continued to till the soils in these parts.

An interpretation of this situation in terms of independent peasant farmers, tenants and landlords and share cropping is proposed to understand this particular situation. As a conclusion, some more general remarks about peasants and tenants from an archaeological point may be made as a result of the above analysis and model.

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*Republican dependent settlement with most
winter dependent & not clear demarcation
Early Imp (IBC/1AD) shows stronger dependence
& a marked decrease in the number of settlement - more
like villa's*

Researching Roman Market Exchange Systems

This paper is based on the author's PhD thesis "Market Exchange Systems within the Roman Economy of the First and Second Centuries A.D." submitted at Newcastle University in 1986.

The importance or even the very existence of market exchange systems within the Roman economy was the subject of much debate in the 1970's and 80's. A thorough analysis of previous theoretical work on the subject, combined with an analysis of archaeological data led the author to conclude that market exchange systems were a crucial factor in the functioning of the money tax system imposed by the Roman state.

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*note that any settlement has a bit of TS
but very large villas only c. 2% as do native
- the rest c. 4.8% in the middle range of
villae. Sees this as typical for market
exchange systems (using Hobsbawm for 17/18 that
where notes that though had a head of a few, many more
involved in tenancy arrangements & even more so
for laborers)*

A Theoretical Framework for the study of Romano-British Mosaics

Studies of Romano-British mosaics have tended to be restricted to description, classification and typological survey. Little attempt has been made to go beyond the ordering of data to address the question of the relationship between the mosaics, the villa, and the nature of the society itself. The quest to order and classify has become an end in itself. It will therefore be suggested that the study of Romano-British mosaics could benefit quite considerably from a new theoretical approach.

This paper will be concerned particularly with various aspects of structuralist and post-structuralist thought, and will aim to show the relevance of these perspectives to the study of mosaics. It will be proposed that material culture, and therefore mosaics, be seen as an active, communicative, symbolic field. Mosaics therefore, could provide a new insight into the nature of social relations and ideological practices in Roman Britain.

On the basis of the above, a new framework for interpretation will be outlined. Within this framework, the collection and presentation of the data itself will be seen as an integral part of the analysis. Further stages in the analysis involve a consideration of; the nature and 'meaning' of the designs and compositions; the relationship between the mosaics and their architectural context; who would have seen the mosaics, and the effect of the social position of the interpreter on meaning, and finally, the significance of the mosaics in the broader social/political/economic context.

It will be suggested that such a framework for the study of Romano-British mosaics could have a considerable impact on our understanding of the Roman period in Britain.

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The Pre-Industrial City in Roman Britain

By detailed examination of the location of different types of building within a range of urban sites, the functions of Roman towns are considered. This paper rejects the suggestion that the form of the Roman town can be explained solely as the imposition of an alien culture. Indigenous social forces must be considered primarily responsible for the maintenance and adaptation of an institution which survived for over three hundred years within the province. Various theoretical models of the pre-industrial city are considered. With these in mind possible explanations are sought for the variations in the form of Romano-British urban topography. The differences in size and amenities offered between early civitas capitals and small towns are considered the product of radically different social conditions in each. This is quite contrary to the still frequently expressed opinion that small towns simply represent a later version of urbanism which had discarded as unnecessary the trappings of classical civilisation. The possibility that general principles exist which may extend throughout all periods is suggested by parallels in the medieval period.

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Stonemaster - low density of building, dominated by temple, forum
baths, theatre = possible scatter of temple. Served as a
replacement of oppidum at Bokerley. The old central urban centre
Relatively restricted industrial activity. In contrast to the small
town without central focus = more traces of industry, irregular
planning - more as the economic towns. Public towns are central
to the villas, but not clustered around small towns - have a
different purpose & so could be classed as 'frontier towns' - never
were economic towns. Clarke distinguishes between small
town as industrial centre & public town with other planned
grid (inefficient use of space, but seen as appropriate to function)
Stonemaster has a primary site, but commercial activity is very
low & emphasises the concentration of elite residences & public
buildings within the walls, but with a 'small town' outside the
walls, along the road, with shop buildings & some industry.
Distinguishes the classical 'works' fulfilling needs of elite, religious & public
works & the economic town for the Brit. The 2 town forms remain
radically separated.

The Theoretical Development of Buildings at the Orsett 'Cock' Enclosure, Essex: an unparalleled approach

The Orsett 'Cock' enclosure, Essex was excavated in 1976 and produced evidence of occupation from the Middle Iron Age to the Saxon period. An interim report was prepared by the excavation director Hugh Toller (Britannia IX 1980, 25-42). This report presented a conventional analysis of the evidence for buildings and structures by reference to previously recognised types. As a result, only 4 Saxon sunken featured buildings, 3 roundhouses and a four-poster could be positively identified.

Although only an interim report, it illustrates the failings of an approach to interpretation which relies on parallels, in that it did not address the majority of the structural evidence, - c. 1000 postholes.

However, if some basic theoretical assumptions about the nature of building carpentry in these periods are made, it has proved possible to define, in three dimensions, 64 structures. Over 30 of these are buildings, many are previously unrecognised types, including 2 large Romano-British domestic buildings. Having defined the buildings, their spatial relationships with each other, and with their enclosure, becomes evident and a proper analysis of the development of the site is possible.

In addition, by analysis of the setting out processes of the buildings, it is possible to demonstrate changes in measuring systems, and in perception of space during the development of the site from the Conquest to the later Romano-British period.

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Villas as a key to social structure ?

In recent years an influential paper by J.T Smith has come to have wide currency in the literature on Romano-British villas and indeed other settlement forms. Entitled 'Villas as a key to Social Structure' (Smith 1978), it suggests that Celtic social relations based on the extended family survived into the period after the conquest and may be discerned in building plans recovered from a number of sites. A critique of this notion will be offered in which it is noted that however suggestive Smith's ideas may be, they are actually rather poorly grounded and equally poorly elaborated. A particular weakness is seen to be a lack of elaboration of what it is that villas, or houses in general, mean. Thus, an alternative approach will be outlined in which Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' is taken to be a useful starting point for analysis and some tentative examples of its application outlined (Bourdieu 1977).

Refs:

Bourdieu, P. 1977: Outline of a Theory of Practice

Smith, J.T. 1978: Villas as a key to Social Structure, in Todd (ed) Studies in the Romano-British Villa 149-86

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Roman Technology in Context

Many classical scholars approach Roman technology in the light of its Greek background, without necessarily adjusting the context from city-state to empire. A persistent stereotype contrasts Greek theory and invention with Roman practical application. This view tends to overlook the fact that much of the engineering associated with 'Greek science' was Roman in date, developed in Alexandria, and was extensively applied, for example in irrigation agriculture.

In the Roman empire, there was a general application of effective technology to industry, transport and farming. The inventions that were either made or applied included items for use in essential activities such as mining, and, above all, in the single most important industry - agriculture. The application of technology will be assessed in most detail in contexts where new evidence has led to changes in perception.

None of this application of technology caused, or resulted from, a Roman industrial revolution; the form of economic growth that took place was proliferation and intensification, in the favourable circumstances of an expanding empire. The phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution has only really happened once, initially in Britain and then in parts of Europe, and can therefore hardly be considered to be a 'normal' path of economic development.

This paper will examine some of the conceptual issues raised by the study of Roman Technology in the last decade of the 20th century, now that the issue of appropriate use of global resources has finally displaced an unquestioned desire for economic growth.

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Duress and Durées: The Short and Long-term Impacts of Roman Exploitation in Agriculture

One of the great potentials of studying the Roman period is to be able to examine changing human societies on a whole range of scales from the very short-term historical time scale through to the very long-term millennial time scale allowing some access to the relationship between change in those two scales. In the case of agriculture, there are qualitative and quantitative developments that are now fairly well documented for a number of parts of temperate Europe and it is possible, in some cases, to link those changes to quite specific episodes in the history of the Roman Empire. In this paper, I hope to explore the possibility of examining short-term change in agriculture and speculate on its relationship with some of the longer term patterns in the way crop production unfolded over the subsequent two millennia.

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Stimulant or Tranquilizer? Scale and the Interpretation of Roman Impact

Recently much discussion has considered the nature and effects of the impact of Rome on indigenous societies. This paper will review a range of different types of impact from across the western empire and will concentrate upon the impact of variations in scale on the pattern seen. It will be argued that considerably more attention needs to be paid to the detail of data analysis and presentation before we are able to assess when and where Rome acted as a Stimulant or Tranquilizer on native societies. Much of the current debate reflects no more than our historical preconceptions.

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Spaced out Sanctuaries: The Ritual Landscape of Roman Greece

The human landscape as social document is currently a 'hot property' in numerous anthropological, geographical and archaeological circles. One major element in this trend has been an increasingly sophisticated treatment of the ceremonial or ritual landscape: the distribution of sacred places in space. Such landscapes must now be accepted as both culturally constructed and historically sensitive, deeply implicated in any change within the larger social and political context.

This paper will briefly review the theoretical literature behind such an interpretation of the sacred landscape, before exploring the case of early imperial Greece. The degree to which Greece was affected by Roman conquest has long been severely underestimated, with 'captive Greece' celebrated as the cultural victor over Rome. Archaeological, epigraphic and literary evidence (notably the second century A.D. traveller Pausanias) can be marshalled to produce an alternative view of provincial conditions and political re-organisation. Signs of continuity or change in the Greek ritual landscape provide unusual but convincing testimony about processes of incorporation - or resistance - to Roman rule.

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Inplaced cults: removal of cult places to new areas. As a result
Roman incorporated areas of Greece cult images removed
& placed in new 'homes' built by Rome - old entities broke
up & amalgamated by Rome. Old cities depopulated
Ancients removed cult statues as a matter of policy - not just
lost, but deliberate tactic of domination. Disrupt of local
symbols

Central cults: imperial cult & urban is most prominent place

Rural - great rural improvement in early Roman times
- few settlements & even fewer rural sanctuaries
but for many other isolated temples remained even if an
empty countryside linked by procession to the urban
centres as a 'land defining' ritual - rural sanctuaries
& urban related type survive, but the 'private' cults & village
cult tend to disappear from rural scene.

Domestic Organization and Gender Relations Among Iron Age and Romano-British Households

In this paper a tentative model for the organization of Iron Age and Romano-British households is explored. It is argued that all Iron Age and many Romano-British houses were created according to the same conceptual model and that this model is expressed in spatial terms by the division of the house into a 'public' and 'private' area. Ultimately the model forms an analogue of the organization of the landscape among individual communities and the same conceptual model can be identified in the archaeological record for Iron Age and Romano-British settlements and patterns of settlement.

Particular emphasis is given to the explanation of the organization of Romano-British houses and compounds that deviate from the general model and it is acknowledged that the development of at least one alternative interpretative model is required.

Finally, some potential methods for exploring gender relations and age group divisions are explored. It is argued that a completely new approach to the spatial organization and social analysis of the Roman household and community is required. Studies should avoid the reduction of the settlement record to a single oversimplistic model. Greater complexity and more imagination are required in the study of the social organization of Iron Age and Romano-British communities.

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