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2. Britannia, origin myths and the British Empire

by Richard Hingley

Introduction

This paper is written with the intention of contributing to a debate which has only recently commenced in Romano-British archaeological studies. This debate concerns the origin of the modern discipline and the motivation behind the development of the study of the archaeology of Roman Britain (Hingley 1991; 1993; Freeman 1991; 1993). I wish to argue that Romano-British archaeology will be able to move forward into the twenty-first century more effectively if we are able to assess critically the context of past and present work.

A certain amount has been written about the origin myths of the British (eg Piggott 1976). During the late medieval period attempts were made by many to link the Celtic inhabitants of Britain with Noah and Adam through the creation of imaginary genealogies in the search for a respectable Biblical ancestry (Piggott 1976: 57–9). Camden ignored these ideas when creating his *Britannia* (published in 1586). However, Piggott has argued that Camden had a different agenda: to destroy the myth of Troy and of Brutus, and to enable Britain to take its rightful place within the world of antiquity and international Renaissance scholarship. He aimed to 'establish Britain as a member of the fellowship of nations who drew their strength from roots struck deep in the Roman Empire' (Piggott 1976: 43). This Camden achieved through the provision of a detailed account of the Roman monuments and history of Britain.

I wish to study a particular aspect of one period of British history, with Piggott's comments about Camden in mind. This aspect concerns the origin of the modern study of Roman Britain during the first two decades of the twentieth century and the context of this study within the British Empire. I will suggest that, by some form of contorted logic, the Roman Empire provided an origin myth for the purpose and morals of the elite of the British Empire. I have already argued elsewhere that this perceived identity of interest between the British and the long-dead empire of Rome has distorted the history of twentieth-century research (Hingley 1991).

I shall attempt to make these points by providing a brief review of the ideology of Empire and the social context of knowledge in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth. I will then review how archaeology and classical scholarship were influenced by current circumstances and beliefs. Through a consideration of the concept of 'romanization' I shall review the suggestion that current research agendas mirror those of the early twentieth century and shall discuss why this might be so. I will also make some suggestions about how we may achieve a more enlightened archaeology of Roman Britain.

In the process I will draw on the works of a limited number of past and present scholars in the field of archaeology and imperial studies. My discussion of the works of these scholars is aimed to develop a general interpretation of the nature of twentieth-century Romano-British studies. Of necessity, many important works are ignored and, in addition, an in-depth analysis of the motivation behind the individual pieces of work that are considered is not possible in this

article. It is evident that the attitudes of the British to imperialism/colonialism varied greatly between classes and interest groups and also through time, and from place to place (N Thomas 1994). In this article I will concentrate on the philosophy of Empire as it developed during the late Victorian period and later. It is hoped that further, more detailed analysis of the origin of the discipline can be established on the basis of the present framework.

Victorian and Edwardian Imperialism: Britain's 'civilising mission' to the World

> Then, indeed, Europe could believe in her mission; she had hellenized the Asians; she had created a new breed, the Graeco-Latin Negroes
> (Jean Paul Sartre 1965: 7).

The agenda for twentieth-century Roman studies was set within the context of a wildly, uncritically pro-imperial Britain. By the mid-Victorian era Britain seemed truly great: it was the world's 'dominant sea power, the leading colonial power and the world's industrial giant' (Reynolds 1991: 9). Britain had imposed the so-called 'Pax Britannia' on the rest of the World and, as David Reynolds has remarked, like Rome before her, appeared to rule the world (1991: 9). The period of Britain's control lasted approximately until the end of the nineteenth century.

The success of Britain was built on firm foundations. Most academics and writers during the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of this century had a pro-imperial and uncritical view of Britain's role in world politics. Several scholars have addressed the all-pervading nature of this philosophy and the way in which individuals from a wide range of political and social viewpoints became drawn into adopting pro-imperial attitudes (see, for instance, Mackenzie 1984; Mackenzie (ed) 1986; Said 1993; N Thomas 1994).

Education was evidently important in the creation of this positive ideology of imperialism (Said 1993: xiv). The unifying force between the ruling upper and upper-middle classes in Britain at this time was a group of about 150 boy's 'public schools' (Cross 1968: 35). These were places at which 'gentlemen' received education and training. Amongst the most important items on the curriculum was the study of classical (Greek and Roman) language and literature. A close knowledge of these 'fundamental works of European civilisation' was generally felt to be adequate to qualify a public school boy for a university or an administrative career (Cross 1968: 35).

It was inevitable that those educated to be aware of classical philosophy, history and language would have drawn on the ancient concepts in the exploration of their own world. It is therefore unsurprising that some of the comments made by administrators of the Western imperial nations were similar in vein to the writings of Roman authors about the 'barbarians' on the periphery of their own empire (Stocking 1987). Sometimes these 'barbarians' included groups who were actually neighbours; Chapman and Merriman have argued a general continuity in attitudes to the 'Celts' from the writers of classical antiquity and those of eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Europe (Chapman 1982; Merriman 1987). Chapman has also argued that the latter were writing for societies which defined themselves as ordered, rational, civilised and right, and establishing the Celts as a mythical alter-ego which they used in pursuit of their own self-definition (1982: 129). The same might be argued for some of the

early anthropologists who studies native peoples within the Empire (Stocking 1987). The concept that civilised society and barbarians formed conceptual opposites is as old as civilisation itself (Said 1993); in the context of eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Britain it was reinforced by the classical nature of scholarship rather than resulting from any direct continuity of thought between ancient Rome and modern Britain (Chapman 1982).

A number of social anthropologists have outlined the ways in which ideas of civilisation and the primitive were linked with the new framework provided by approaches to biological evolution as they developed during the latter half of the nineteenth century in order to create the concept of progress (sometimes unfairly known as 'social Darwinism'; eg Stocking 1987 and Kuper 1988). The fundamental tenet of this philosophy was that the 'savage'/'primitive' was at the base of a social and moral trajectory, which led through several stages to the ultimate goal of civilisation, represented by Victorian England. A form of hierarchy was also evident in which some societies were so primitive that the achievement of civilisation could never be envisaged and the imperial powers considered that permanent political guidance was required (N Thomas 1994: 109). Interestingly, it has been suggested that the rise of this evolutionary theory of progress coincided broadly with the Victorian surge of imperialism (Kuper 1988: 7). Imperialism came to be viewed by some as a British moral campaign to promote international progress.

What is evident in these works is the extent of the ideology that was present, forming a sovereignty that extended over the forms, imagery and the very imagination of the dominators and the dominated (Said 1993: 2). The result was a largely unquestioned vision which affirmed the right and obligation of the European to rule. Mackenzie describes Britain's 'unique imperial mission', which was 'to regenerate not only the "backward" world, but also the British themselves' (1984: 2). This regeneration (or generation) of the non-western world would result partly through a form of imperial diffusion of English attitudes, morals and culture.

Said has argued that there really was very little active reaction to the pro-imperial ethos in Britain and what there was appears to have been tempered by a deeply-held belief in progress. Although we must allow for the ability of individual artists and scholars to actively create their works, these works were also actively 'policed' (eg Thomas 1994: 45; drawing on the works of Foucault). A belief in the fundamental nature of progress can be seen for instance in the works of two great novelists of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth who were critical of certain aspects of imperialism: Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad. Stevenson spent the final seven years of his life (1850–94) travelling in the South Seas. Although he became increasingly critical of colonial exploitation as a result of his experiences, he retained a belief held by even the most enlightened that progress from tribal society to 'civilisation' was inevitable (Calder 1987: xv). The novelist Joseph Conrad's writings on imperialism between 1896 and 1923 also resulted from direct experience. Said has argued that, while critical of imperialism, Conrad considered that the source of the world's significant action and life was in the West (Said 1993: 80–3).

Even though belief in the inevitability and morality of progress came to be questioned by some people during the early part of the twentieth century (Broks 1990) the concept remains a powerful force in many minds.

Roman studies in Britain during the early twentieth century: 'morals' for Britain's own Empire

> Do thy worst to me: my people spare
> whom fought for freedom in our land at home.
> Slaves they are not; be wise and teach them there
> Order, and law, and liberty with Rome.
> (Caractacus' speech to the Romans; HA Ackworth, libretto to E Elgar's Caractacus (1897–8, Scene VI)).

How do these observations about the pro-imperial attitudes of the British relate to the study of Roman Britain as it developed during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth? In the context of the late nineteenth century and the early years of this century, the Roman Empire constituted a form of origin myth in the minds of many of the British for their own Empire. For instance, in the libretto to Elgar's Caractacus, written by HA Ackworth in 1897–8, the defeat of the native Britons, who resisted Rome, is followed by a chorus extoling the British Empire under Queen Victoria, suggesting a direct continuity of purpose between the two Empires (Kennedy 1977)!

The educational context within which the British concepts of imperialism was created had a direct impact on Roman studies. Francis Haverfield observed in 1912 that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries those studying Roman Britain drew a distinction between the 'native' and the 'Roman' population. The Romans were considered to have been widely dispersed in isolated villas and stations, surrounded by uncivilised natives. Every time a Roman site was located it was identified as the home of a settler from the Mediterranean. Haverfield realised that this idea about the relationship of Roman to native in Britain was derived from the British Empire and the relationship between the British rulers and the rural peasantry of nineteenth-century India (Haverfield 1912: 24). In addition, Haverfield argued with force that this approach was not valid for the study of the Roman province. Knowledge of the current condition of the British Empire was evidently having an impact on the study of the Roman Empire and the unquestioned use of the analogy was not advancing the subject.

Haverfield's work raises the importance of considering the context within which academic study develops. His observations about the social context within which Roman studies of Britain developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can also be directly applied to changes occurring between 1900 and 1914, including Haverfield's own work. Reynolds has documented the ways in which Victorian Britain's position of international dominance became less secure during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century as the 'Cold War' with Germany developed. Following on from the disastrous Boer War of 1899 to 1902, and under the growing German threat, there was a serious drive toward greater efficiency in the running of the Empire (Reynolds 1991: 66–86). It is significant that fundamental progress in Romano-British studies occurred at this time of political and social stress, when there was a drive towards greater efficiency. At this time there was also a 'moral crusade' to regenerate the British working classes (Mackenzie 1984: 158–9).

During the first twenty years of this century, it was not uncommon for classically-educated academics and administrators to draw parallels between the empires of Britain and Rome (Brunt 1964–5: 227; Hingley 1991). It would also appear that these authors sometimes

considered Roman studies to be of direct value for the Empire in drawing 'morals', or lessons, for the British.

JC Stobart was an important figure in education and within the British Broadcasting Corporation (Mackenzie (ed) 1986: 171). He wrote in his book The Grandeur that was Rome, published in 1912, that

> he [the Englishman] is a citizen of an empire now extremely self-conscious and somewhat bewildered at its own magnitude. He cannot help drawing analogies from Roman history and seeking in it 'moral' for his own guidance. The Roman Empire bears such an obvious and unique resemblance to the British that the fate of the former must be of enormous interest to the latter ...
> (Stobart 1912: 3).

Lord Cromer, a major figure in British imperial history, wrote around this time in his Political and Literary Essays that imperial analysts were apt to compare the British with the Roman Empire and to seek

> in the history of imperial Rome for any facts or commentaries gleaned from ancient times which might be of service to the modern empire of which we are so justly proud.
> (Quoted by Brunt 1964–5: 227).

After reading a number of these accounts one actually wonders how the British would have defined their own empire had the Romans not set foot on this side of the Channel.

Some specific reasons for the particular interest shown by some academics and administrators in the Roman Empire are apparent in these works. Brunt has noted that some of the texts dating to the years between 1900 and 1914 concentrate on the administration and defence policy of the Roman Empire (Brunt 1964–5: 227). The publications of Haverfield enable a further range of points to be made. Haverfield was the major figure in archaeological studies of Roman Britain during the early twentieth century (Jones 1987). The most important academic development during this time was the publication of Haverfield's *The Romanization of Roman Britain*; this book was first presented as a lecture in 1905 and was published in full in 1912. It continued a basic structure for future research and set the agenda for Romano-British studies for the next sixty years. Among many other important points, Haverfield argued that many of the apparent 'Roman' sites in the province — the rich villas and walled towns — were the homes of romanized Britons rather than of socially and politically dominant immigrants from the Mediterranean regions of the Empire.

In 1911, during his inaugural lecture to the Roman society, Haverfield remarked that,

> The methods by which Rome incorporated and denationalised and assimilated more than half its wide dominions, and the success of Rome, unintended perhaps but complete, in spreading its Graeco-Roman culture over more than a third of Europe and a part of Africa, concerns in many ways our own age and Empire ... Even the forces which lay the Roman Empire low concern the modern world very nearly ...
> (Haverfield 1911: xviii).

Haverfield identifies methods of incorporation, denationalisation and assimilation as of interest. In his book of 1912, and in other works on Roman Britain, Haverfield outlined the concept of 'Romanization' to explain the gradual transformation of native Britain into a Roman province. It is important to realise in this context that romanization is not a classical concept, but one which was adopted by Haverfield and a range of modern authors. How did Haverfield view romanization? He wrote

> in material culture the Romanization advanced quickly. One uniform fashion spread from the Mediterranean, throughout central and western Europe, driving out native art and substituting a conventionalised copy of Graeco-Roman or Italian art ...
> (Haverfield 1912: 19).

Freeman has remarked that Mommsen and Haverfield defined a range of fields in which romanization was exemplified, including language, art, religion, urbanisation and villas. Haverfield was, however, working in what Freeman has defined as 'a limited, unitary concept of the Roman Empire, one conditioned by the climate of ... [the] times, the historiographical tradition out of which Roman archaeology developed, and the quality and quantity of data available ...' (1993: 443). Haverfield's intention was to stress the cultural homogeneity of the Empire and the common items that occurred across it — towns, villas, etc. — became 'Roman' (Freeman 1993: 443).

Romanization, therefore, appears to have been seen by Haverfield as progressive, swift and uniform. In fact, Haverfield's romanization is comparable in some ways to ideas of progress derived from the evolutionary and diffusionist theories that were common during his lifetime. Just as European civilisation was seen to be expanding and carrying new ideas and standards to 'primitive' cultures outside the orbit of Western powers, so romanization drove out the pre-Roman material culture in barbarian Europe. Mackenzie has discussed the ways in which Britain's 'unique imperial mission' developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (1986: 2), and Haverfield's work may be seen in this context: it exhibits the logic of the time, with the 'higher' culture replacing the 'lower'.

I am not arguing, as Freeman has suggested in a review of my previous article on this subject, that Haverfield was a 'dyed-in-the-wool' apologist of imperialism (1991: 102). I am arguing that, as with Conrad and Stevenson, Haverfield was a product of his own upbringing and shared elements of the dominant view of progress. I would accept that it is not totally certain whether Haverfield was consciously aware of drawing a parallel between romanization and the concept of progress, although his 1911 paper suggests that he was. In addition, in relation to the eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century works that he criticises, Haverfield's ideas may be seen to be part of a more general development within academic studies of a rather more 'liberal' attitude to certain native peoples within the British Empire, and also of the development of concepts related to the social duties and burdens of 'whitemen' toward natives (eg Mackenzie 1984: 63; 1986: 5). That he could even conceive of Roman sites in Britain as the homes of natives was in tune with broad changes in social thought that were occurring during his lifetime. Presumably the process of romanization, by which the native British became more like the Romans was also conceived by Haverfield as a testament to the fact that the idea of

progress had real validity in his own world; if Rome had succeeded why should the British not also?

Haverfield's 1911 paper, therefore, suggests that the British might profit in the running of their own Empire from a consideration of Roman methods of incorporation, assimilation and denationalisation. Roman archaeological studies developed at a time when Britain remained the World's dominant military power, but it is significant that Britain at this time was coming under increased international pressure. Classical education and ideology led to an association in the minds of many between the Empires of Britain and Rome. The pressures that were developing both within and outside the British Empire caused some academics and administrators to feel that classical studies provided them with 'morals' and lessons for their future.

Romano-British studies since Haverfield: continued 'civilising missions'

> Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreements about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms.
>
> (Said 1993: 1).

What happened to Roman studies after Haverfield? His *The Romanization of Roman Britain* provided a framework of study for many other authors who adopted many of his ideas and approaches (Jones 1987). The success of the concept of romanization is indicated by the fact that it has been adopted very widely (eg Collingwood 1923; Richmond 1954; Rivet 1958; Frere 1967; Millett 1990; Potter and Johns 1992).

In many of these works the concept of romanization remains broadly positive — the Roman conquest is considered to have been 'a good thing'. This is evident in publications such as ALF Rivet's *Town and Country in Roman Britain* (1958), IA Richmond's *Roman Britain* (1954) and SS Frere's *Britannia* (1967), in which terms such as 'progress' and 'advance' are used to describe romanization. Occasionally it is suggested that the process of romanization is that by which 'civilisation' improved the lot of primitive natives (Frere 1967: 342). The impression that some works create is that, by civilising the British, Rome was making one further step possible — the civilising of the rest of the world by the British! That this view remains current may appear a rather ridiculous proposal, until one considers some of the comments made by senior academics on attempts to discuss the aims of Roman imperialism (see C Thomas 1990: 184).

In many of these works of twentieth century Romano-British archaeology a direct connection remains between ideas of romanization and progress. Over the past sixty years, however, a great quantity of research has been undertaken which suggests that the Victorians' notions of progress and social evolution are no longer valid; indeed some Victorians were critical of the notion (Bowler 1989). The quantity of this critical discussion has increased since the 'fall of the British Empire'. Much of this criticism derives from those studying the subjects of recent imperialism, but some of the more recent criticism derives from colonised peoples themselves (eg Diamond 1974; Scholte 1981; Hoogvelt 1974; Kuper 1988; Ashcroft et al. 1989; Said 1993; N Thomas 1994). Hoogvelt has written that

> Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evolutionism expounded an optimistic idea of human progress which the twentieth century, having witnessed two world wars, the atom bomb, and the ruthless extermination of entire races, could no longer accept.
> (Hoogvelt 1974: 12).

As a result evolutionary theory in the social sciences gave way to neo-evolutionary theory and other more critical forms. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that Western imperialism in many areas created a state of 'underdevelopment' which assisted in their economic exploitation (Amin 1976; Taylor 1979).

In the context of these philosophical and political changes, a number of authors over the past fifteen years have argued that the academic framework of Romano-British archaeology has moved on little from the perspective outlined by Haverfield. These authors have argued a variety of perspectives but there is a general view that there has been a lack of development in the theoretical underpinnings of the subject (Jones and Miles 1979; Cunliffe 1984; Reece 1982; Jones 1987; Hingley 1991). It appears that the vast majority of books and academic publications show very little willingness to engage in lively debate and their authors appear to consider that the answers to our Roman past are straightforward and knowable.

I find it of particular interest that Freeman, in a review of Martin Millett's book, *The Romanization of Britain* (Millett 1990a), has argued that the study of romanization has hardly progressed at all (Freeman 1993: 443). Millett, widely acknowledged as one of the most influential of the new scholars who wish to rewrite Romano-British archaeology, has expressed a wish to adopt a post-imperialist and more 'neutral' view of Roman imperialism (Millett 1990b: 37). Freeman has argued, however, that Millett adopts a model for romanization which is derived from works written in the middle of this century (1993: 443), a model which ultimately originates in the writings of Mommsen and Haverfield during the great years of European imperialism. Although Millett's use of the concept of romanization is distinctly different from Haverfield's, there would appear to be some interesting areas of continuity in the study. For instance, Millett's book concentrates attention on the elite of Roman Britain to the virtual exclusion of the majority of the population; in addition, it focuses attention squarely on the South and East of Britain. These biases are also evident in earlier work which discuss romanization (eg Rivet 1958). Against this we may record recent suggestions that the process of change in Roman Britain cannot be understood without a consideration of the whole social spectrum across the whole of the province (Hingley 1991; Freeman 1993). I should also perhaps mention that, in the context of later twentieth-century Romano-British archaeology, it is unfair to select this single work out for particular criticism, since most recent books show the same, or a greater, bias.

With these comments in mind, it is of interest to speculate why the collapse of the British Empire has not resulted in a more critical general reappraisal of the nature of Roman imperialism and the effect of this contact on conquered territory. Why do many still view change/romanization as a positive development? Why is the process of change considered to be a fairly simple and predictable process when social anthropology and sociology have been suggesting for many years that in the modern world this is not the case? In addition, why does the attention of Roman archaeologists remain focused on the elite at the expense of the majority of the population?

At least three interrelated reasons are apparent for the current state of study. First, the gradual transformation of the British Empire into the Commonwealth allowed a slow change in attitudes to take place within Britain rather than a swift revolution of thought (see Reynolds 1991 for discussion of this point). Indeed a vital element in the arguments of many critics of imperialism is that many insidious concepts remain dominant in the modern West even though the empires have gone (Mackenzie 1984; Reynolds 1991; Said 1993; N Thomas 1994). This argument provides the context for a continuity is Romano-British academic thought. Secondly, classical education remains and, in addition, Roman scholars deal mainly with classical historical sources and archaeological evidence which relates mainly to the elite (Hingley 1991). Unlike social anthropologists and literary theorists, Romanists rarely, if ever, hear the voices of those subjected to imperialism. Thirdly, as Brunt has argued forcefully in his paper 'Reflections on British and Roman imperialism'

> Comparisons between the two empires were ... always rather forced: there were more points of contrast than likeness ..
> (Brunt 1964–5: 267).

The British and Roman empires were very different in organisation and development and the British Empire does not form a relevant analogy for the Roman Empire, or the Roman for the British (see also Collingwood 1934: 7). Why, therefore, should Roman scholars take note of what is being written about British imperialism by social anthropologists, literary theorists, sociologists and modern historians?

Conclusion: What civilising missions?

> We need to consider the ways in which we delude ourselves
> (Kuper 1988: 14).

My intention in this paper has been to demonstrate that Romano-British studies have been actively created within the constraints of past society. During the period when Britain ruled a vast empire, the classical nature of education and scholarship deeply influenced British academics and administrators. It appears from some of the work reviewed in this article that classical Rome provided a form of origin myth for some of the British. Rome and Greece were fundamental to European civilisation, and the British considered that they were carrying the most evolved form of European civilisation to an ever-expanding empire. It is not surprising, in the general academic context of the mid-, to late-twentieth century, that these views have not been seriously challenged in Romano-British archaeology: the subject has not lost its pro-imperial roots.

This is why it is necessary for us to take serious note of the works of critics of modern imperialism. Past Roman studies have been deeply influenced by an implicit connection between the imperial missions of Britain and Rome and the classical origin of modern European civilisation.

A number of further observations are also relevant to the building of a post-imperial Roman archaeology. First, the approaches that we have learned at school and university require to be critically assessed — was the Roman Empire really 'a good thing'? Were the Romans really more enlightened in their dealings with others than the British? Several authors have

used these arguments (eg Collingwood 1934: 7; Millett 1990a: 3), but can we really believe this? Within the Roman Empire we have only the words of Roman authors to suggest that this was the case (Brunt 1990: 506); would modern social historians believe the views of motivation expressed by Victorian explorers and administrators in relation to our own empire? The answer to this question is clearly that they would not (N Thomas 1994).

We require a critical reassessment of our discipline in the light of post-colonial studies. At the same time we must remember that the empires of Britain and Rome were not the same, there is no universal imperial culture (N Thomas 1994). We need not remodel our concepts of Rome to mirror critical post-colonial interpretations of the empires of Western nations. My aim in this article has been to stress that our approaches are biased because of a largely unquestioned parallel which has been drawn between two quite distinct periods of imperial expansion. The Roman Empire represented a unique and different conglomeration of societies.

Secondly, as I have argued elsewhere, the very nature of the archaeological record that is available to us to rewrite our subject has been constructed by previous generations. Past scholars have created the available data through the action of choice applied to the archaeological record. For instance, we have a very marked bias in the proportion of villas excavated and this results directly from previous research interests (Hingley 1991). Future study should address this problem directly, but we should also be aware of our own potential to create the archaeological record of the future.

Thirdly, we need to develop a more subtle analysis of the process of change in Roman Britain. Currently, most accounts of Roman Britain suggest that the archaeological evidence indicates a fairly consistent and cumulative development. This concept of romanization should not survive the emphasis on critical examination which is currently developing in Romano-British archaeological study. What appears to me to be required is a less centred and less deterministic account of the process of change in the Roman Empire. In this process of change, individuals must be allowed to have exercised creative imagination in the adoption and manipulation of concepts that were derived from a wide variety of sources. The process of change was not monocentric and our explanations must allow for a plurality of responses (N Thomas 1994: 50).

Finally, the Roman Empire can be viewed as a vast cultural laboratory and we should seek to study the wide range of differing responses occurring in different areas of Europe and North Africa at this time. Understanding the past history of our subject is part of this process. There is a good case for extending the approaches outlined in this article to consider the political context of Roman studies beyond the confines of Britain. Many British scholars have worked abroad and have taken their perspectives travelling. In addition d'Agostino has shown how in Italy during the late 1930s and 1940s the fascist state used Roman remains to draw an ideological connection between the Roman Empire and a new imperial venture (1991). In another age and place, for many French Algerians of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, the study of the Roman past was stimulated by more than simple antiquarian or scholarly interest. In the colonialist ideology of the day the French colon was seen as the natural heir to Roman Africa. French academics and administrators in Algeria studied the Roman past in order to provide direct and practical assistance in the running of the country (Pringle 1981: 4–5). However, perhaps as a result of former colonial status, the attitudes of at least some contemporary Algerians and Moroccans to the Roman Empire are more critical than those of the Italians and the French (eg Benabou 1976).

All this writing provides contrasts to the British approach. In addition, it is important to realise that individual British authors were attempting to achieve differing objectives by undertaking research and writing about the Roman past. A detailed historiographical survey of Roman studies in various areas of Europe, North Africa, the Near East and America would constitute a fascinating topic for future research. I consider, however, that if we wish to be truly post-colonial, it might be preferable to leave these studies to the native scholars of the respective countries (Lawrence 1994: 9).

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