
TRAC Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

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Paper Information:

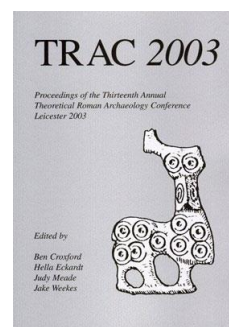
Title: Remembering and Forgetting in the Roman
Provinces

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Pages: 36–50

DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC2003_36_50

Publication Date: 26 March 2004



Volume Information:

Croxford, B., Eckardt, H., Meade, J., and Weekes, J. (eds.) (2004) *TRAC 2003: Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Leicester 2003*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

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Remembering and Forgetting in the Roman Provinces

Hella Eckardt

Introduction

Objects and monuments, like people, have histories. Through the meanings and stories associated with them, artefacts and monuments can serve to reproduce and manipulate the social memories of communities. The often ideologically charged re-use of Roman material culture in later periods has been much studied but we have only recently begun to investigate the ways in which Rome conceptualised her own past and that of the societies she encountered.

This paper will examine what role 'old' material culture played in the creation of Roman identities. Building on theoretical work in other periods, I will argue that the study of 're-use' is too simplistic an approach to memory and that we ought to expect a much more heterogeneous response to the material remains of the past in the Roman period. This study will therefore include processes of forgetting and review regional, chronological and contextual variability in mnemonic practices.

Memory in archaeological theory and practice

The study of how objects and monuments created in one period and culture are re-contextualised in another provides a fascinating insight into the active use of material culture and into attitudes to the past throughout history. It is no surprise therefore that the subject of social and individual memory and of its relationship with material culture has been studied in sociology, anthropology and history for some time (e.g. Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Hoskins 1998; Kopytoff 1986; Shils 1981; Weiner 1992). Within archaeology, the topic of memory in the past is beginning to be addressed in a systematic way (e.g. Alcock 2002; Alcock and Van Dyke 2003; Bradley 2002; Bradley and Williams 1998; Williams 2003). Most of the archaeological research on memory has focused on the understanding of past monuments and landscapes (cf. Bradley and Williams 1998; Williams 1997; 1998). Much recent work has concentrated on prehistory (e.g. Bradley 2002; Hingley 1996; Edmonds 1999; Stead 1998) as well as Mesopotamia and Egypt, two cultures which provide the added information to be gained from early writing (Assmann 1992; Assmann and Hölscher 1988; Jonker 1995). Studies of medieval perceptions of the past indirectly involve Roman remains, discussing the often ideologically charged re-use of Roman material in later periods (e.g. Eaton 2000, Eckardt and Williams 2003; Greenhalgh 1989; Higgitt 1973; Weiss 1969; Williams 1997; Wright 1844). This is not surprising, given that the rediscovery, appropriation and re-interpretation of Roman art and architecture in the later medieval period and especially the Renaissance has profoundly influenced the development of western culture and art. Even within this rich tradition there is, however, evidence for selective memory and forgetting. Thus Cooper (1999) discusses how eighteenth and nineteenth century visitors to Rome experienced a tension between the 'remembered and expected' and the 'real'

Rome while Howell (2000) shows how Roman remains in Caerleon may have been destroyed because of their association with Welsh kingship.

By contrast, until very recently, much less work has been done on the issue of how Rome itself viewed the material remains of the past. This is probably at least partially due to scholarly traditions which favour Roman remains over those of other periods, a prejudice affecting both those scholars actually working on the Roman period and those studying later periods. However, the topic is now beginning to be addressed within ancient history and classics (e.g. Nixon 1990; Woolf 1996; Farrell 1997; Small 1997; Small and Tatum 1995) and archaeology. Following an initial trickle of articles on specific groups of objects (e.g. Field 1965; Robertson 1970) and a series of more thematic papers (e.g. Adkins and Adkins 1985; Bradley 1986; Dark 1993; Ferris and Smith 1995) there are now two monographs on the topic (e.g. Alcock 2002; Mayor 2000).

To answer the central question of how Roman society regarded the material remains of its own past and the physical remains of the peoples and civilisations it encountered and conquered, a number of methodological and theoretical issues have to be addressed. Most importantly, rather than becoming too focused on the issue of re-use, we ought to think more about forgetting (cf. Forty and Küchler 1999; Lowenthal 1993; Carsten 1995). Forgetting is necessary and largely involuntary for individuals but often deliberate and purposeful for societies. 'Forgetfulness' can take very different forms and we have to be sensitive to nuances and potential contradictions. Woolf (1996: 367) distinguishes between forgetfulness as a repetitive action, a remembering-to-forget and deliberate forgetting. In the first case forgetting is necessary to maintain a certain social consensus while in the second it represents a deliberate erasure (cf. Howell 2000). This may apply to pasts which could be perceived as threatening the existing social order (e.g. Civil Wars). It is also possible that certain aspects of the past simply become socially irrelevant and are 'naturally' forgotten. While objects are often seen as permanent and solid repositories of memories, they can also become agents of forgetting (Forty 1999: 8–12; Shils 1981: 63–161). Of particular importance are processes of exclusion (Forty and Küchler 1999: 127–169; Boime 1990) and iconoclasm (e.g. Freedberg 1985).

Attitudes to the past can be very revealing about the politics of the present. The relationship between past and present is complex and old artefacts and monuments are always 'experienced in the context of contemporary culture and seen in relationship to it' in a process described as *actualisation* (Haug 2001: 111). Addressing the issue of power in relationship to control of the past as well as the possibility of radically opposed memories must be of primary importance in all memory studies (cf. Jarman 1999).

This paper will ask whether similar process of selective remembering and forgetting can be identified in the Roman empire. While I am keen to develop and apply the theoretical concepts of avoidance and forgetting, any argument from absence is clearly dangerous. Only where there is evidence for exclusion, tension or iconoclasm rather than mere 'avoidance' can we talk of a meaningful pattern. Rigorous source criticism is therefore essential. This can apply to the objects themselves (note the recent debate about whether an echinoid fossil from an Anglo-Saxon context in London was inscribed or not: Brown *et al.* 2001 vs. Notton 2002) or to the contexts in which they were found (e.g. Adkins and Adkins 1985 vs. Bradley 1986).

There is also a need to be specific about historic context. While it is legitimate to ask broader questions such as whether imperialism always destroys a conquered people's sense of the past, this paper will focus on historically specific and heterogeneous responses within the Roman empire. This emphasis on the contrasts between and within the Mediterranean and the north-western provinces is part of a wider theoretical shift within Roman archaeology as the

study of the Roman empire moves from stressing Romanisation and uniformity to more complex models.

The paper is structured around the theme of differences in the contexts of remembering and forgetting, which are discussed in three sections.

The first is concerned with differing memorial practices and conceptions of the past in different areas of the empire. This section will deal with differences between Rome's own past and that of the people she conquered. There are of course also differences between those conquered societies, in particular between the north-western and Mediterranean provinces. For each region, the particular significance of selective memories and forgetting will be discussed.

The second theme is concerned with chronological differences. This can refer to how and why different pasts are remembered and to the changing intensity of memorial practices (Why is the past important in some periods but not others?).

The third theme is the question of who is carrying out and controlling practices of remembering and forgetting. Differences clearly exist between groups of people, especially in terms of elite and ritual memorial activity. Focusing on the identity and status of those who carry out memorial practices may be a useful way of writing individuals or at least contradictory groups of people back into the study of memory (cf. Alcock 2002: 132–175; Crane 1997). Addressing the identity and context of past individuals also relates to the wider question of agency: is it the attitudes of the conqueror or the conquered that make a difference to what is remembered or forgotten?

Different Pasts in the Roman Empire: Roman pasts

Memory of the past played a central role in Roman society. The memory of ancestors was central to social, ritual and especially funerary practices; the *mos maiorum* was a strong political and social force and eulogies of an idealised rustic past are a literary cliché. Many rituals continued to be performed according to archaic customs – or at least according to what were perceived to be archaic customs (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) – and in a language that most participants no longer understood. Memory was also important as a rhetorical skill (Yates 1966). While the use of urban landscapes as mnemonic devices is interesting, it is not really relevant here, as the concept of *ars memoriae* is a device for individual and communicative memory as opposed to group or social memory (Assmann 1992: 20–34).

But what about material remains as markers of the Roman past? That the Romans did protect structures which evoked their own past such as the Lapis Niger and the Aedes Romuli is well documented (Greenhalgh 1989: 11, 239; Wace 1949). Thus the wattle and daub hut of Romulus on the Palatine was repaired whenever necessary in a form as close as possible to the original (Richardson 1992: 74). Damage to it was regarded as an evil omen (Cass. Dio 48.43.4, 54.29.8). Another example of symbolic engagement with old material culture is the deliberate and knowledgeable re-use of *spolia* on the Arch of Constantine (Peirce 1989; Berenson 1954).

The Roman period also provides examples of the tensions caused by the remembering or forgetting of politically charged events and personalities (cf. Moreau 1994). Tacitus (*Annales* IV, 32–38) describes the trial under Tiberius of Cremutius Cordus who had written a history eulogising Brutus. In his defence Cordus argues that charges of treason cannot apply when writing about historical figures and also points out the discrepancy between his trial and the



Figure 1: Painting of the Emperor Septimius Severus with his wife and two sons. Geta's face was erased after his murder by Caracalla in AD 212. Reproduced with permission of Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz

statues to the heroes of the Republic which are still standing in Rome. It should be noted, however, that even if Augustus and later emperors did not destroy statues of Republican *viri illustres*, they were moved from the Capitol to the Field of Mars (Haug 2001: 115). Reminders of a Republican past were thus physically removed from the centre of power, where henceforth imperial pasts were commemorated (see below).

Another good example of deliberate forgetting is the practice of *Damnatio Memoriae* (cf. Keppie 1991: 22). The removal of an unpopular emperor's name from inscriptions and the destruction of any statues or portraits represents quite literally the erasure of all physical trace of a ruler's existence. Paradoxically, the very blank often left by the erasure of a name or face acts as a more complex reminder of both the emperor and society's punishment (Fig. 1).

Memory could be manipulated in very subtle and surprising ways in the Roman world. Given our dependence on surviving texts, it is quite striking to consider that, following the rebuilding of the Pantheon, Hadrian quite deliberately had only Agrippa's name inscribed on the monument. While aware of the power of the written word in preserving memory, he clearly felt that his generosity and piety would be much better remembered by contemporary and subsequent audiences by avoiding a permanent marker.

Different Pasts in the Roman Empire: the Mediterranean Provinces

How did Rome approach the physical remains of other peoples' past? A contrasting picture can be drawn here between Rome's attitudes to societies which had both written accounts of their past and impressive physical remains and to those 'barbarian' peoples who lacked one or both of such reminders of a non-Roman past. The two examples which immediately spring to mind in the first category are Greece and Egypt.

The influence that Roman (and Greek) attitudes to the Greek past had on the development of the province is now well documented (Alcock 1993, 2001, 2002; Boardman 2002). Patterns of both commemoration and forgetfulness can be traced in urban, rural and ritual landscapes, with the Athenian Agora providing a particularly potent example of the active reworking of the past in the Roman period. Roman attitudes to the Greek world are not just relevant to monuments, landscapes, literary and philosophical traditions but also to art. Many Greek artworks were removed from their original context (sanctuaries) to be displayed in public and political as well as domestic spaces (cf. Haug 2001; Strong 1973), where they gain new symbolic meaning (see below). There are also some interesting accounts which must refer to more humble objects. Thus during the rebuilding work associated with the foundation of the Roman Colony at Corinth, some of the cemeteries of the Greek city were discovered and the antiquities found on these sites fetched high prices on the Roman art market (Greenhalgh 1989: 65; Wace 1949: 28). In some cases old objects were literally 'read' in new ways to make sense of them in the present. Thus under Nero a series of inscribed (presumably Linear A or B) tablets were found in a tomb and the experts consulted decreed that the texts were written in Phonician and represented memoirs of the Trojan war (Schnapp 1996: 54–56; Wace 1949: 26–27).

Ideas of authenticity, power and legitimisation are also important in Egypt, both in the Pharaonic and the Graeco-Roman period (Assmann 1992). A strong sense of a specifically Egyptian past is still very noticeable in the iconography of power adopted by Graeco-Roman rulers. The so-called Colossus of Memnon is a particularly striking example of the way in which the past was encountered in Roman Egypt. This colossal seated statue originally formed part of the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III in Thebes. The site was much visited in the Roman period as witnessed by the numerous inscriptions carved into the statue's legs (Keppie 1991: 116–117; Bernard and Bernard 1960). After it was damaged in an earthquake in 27 BC, the statue made a singing or whistling noise at dawn, which was interpreted as Memnon singing for his mother Eos (cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 36.58; Strabo, *Geog.* 17.I.46; Juvenal, *Sat.* 15.5). This striking monument was thus viewed through a Homeric lens by Greek and Roman tourists and only a very few were aware of its original pharaonic context and meaning (Foertmeyer 1989: 23–25, 109–110).

Much of this reworking was of course carried out by Greeks and Egyptians attempting to express visions of their own pasts. It has to be stressed that most of the evidence for 'Roman' views of the past is based on imperial propaganda and the senatorial literary tradition, thus obscuring more diverse responses by both the (lower class) Roman and the native populations.

Different Pasts in the Roman Empire: the north-western provinces

But what about Roman attitudes towards societies without written histories and towards the 'barbarian' peoples of north-western Europe? Is there evidence for the manipulation of

prehistoric monuments and material culture in the Roman period? Conversely, can we argue for a deliberate forgetting of pre-conquest pasts? A central issue is the question of who is carrying out the remembering and forgetting – how much control can the conquerors exert and how active is the indigenous population in the process?

In general, and especially in comparison with provinces such as Greece and Egypt, interaction with the pre-Roman period appears to be quite rare. Indeed, the absence of a clear sense of the pre-conquest past could be described as one of the defining features of the literary tradition (where it is known) of the north-western provinces (cf. Woolf 1996; Nixon 1990). Woolf (1996: 370) suggests that it is the views of the conqueror which determine how societies are perceived and consequently treated. Thus, while the *'humanitas'* attributed to the Greeks resulted in some special treatment, perceptions about the barbarian peoples of northern Europe (e.g. Cicero, *De Oratore* II 40.169) led to a situation where the 'Gauls lost their history because Romans thought barbarians had none' (Woolf 1996: 377).

The absence of a sense of the pre-conquest past in the literary tradition of the north-western provinces does of course not mean that there is no archaeological evidence for Roman period interactions with the prehistoric past.

Roman objects, presumably votive deposits, have been found on a number of prehistoric sites such as West Kennett Long Barrow (Piggott 1962: 55) and Silbury Hill. At the latter site, a Roman settlement of ca. 22ha just to the south and east of Silbury Hill has been known for some time (Corney 1997; 2001: 26–29) but of particular interest here is a series of 'wells' encircling the hill (Brooke and Cunnington 1896; Brooke 1910). The location (close to the River Kennett in an area prone to flooding) and content (undressed sarsen blocks, columns and coins) of these features in fact suggest that they are ritual shafts (cf. Pollard and Reynolds 2002: 178–179, Fig. 70), perhaps related to a temple thought to exist south of Silbury Hill (Robinson 2001: 147). The upper fills of the ditch at Silbury Hill also contained fourth century pottery, animal bone and more than 100 Roman coins (Whittle 1997: 24). Comparative evidence for interaction with prehistoric monuments has been found on many other sites in the north-western provinces (e.g. Dark 1993; Holtorf 1998; Vermeulen and Bougeois 2000).

Even more unequivocal evidence for deliberate interaction with a (in this case very distant) past comes from Northern Spain, where deep within the cave of La Griega de Pedraza Roman personal names are carved into the walls, often next to Upper Palaeolithic incised drawings of horses (Bradley 2002: 116–118). This cave with its ancient drawings of horses probably was a centre of cult activity in the Roman period.

In our search for evidence of Roman period attitudes to the past, we can also look for prehistoric objects apparently curated on Roman sites (Adkins and Adkins 1985; Bradley 1986; Dark 1993; Ferris and Smith 1995). But while this material is fascinating, issues of source criticism have to be addressed. With regard to the original body of material gathered by Adkins and Adkins (1985), Bradley (1986) pointed out that many sites had seen prehistoric activity, thus making it possible that some ancient artefacts occurred in Roman contexts by chance. Equally, while the nature of the Ivy Chimneys assemblage of forty-one Palaeolithic hand-axes (Turner and Wymer 1987) suggests that there was human selection, I am not convinced that these hand-axes would even have been recognised as man-made by a non-archaeologist. Given that they were found in gravel deposits in pits not associated with the Ivy Chimneys temples, is it possible that suitably sized pieces of flint were collected for some more mundane purpose?

Evidence of active re-working or deliberate deposition can be useful indicators in this context. Thus the eleven echinoid fossils found on the Romano-British rural settlement at

Studland, Dorset (Field 1965; 1966), all probably obtained locally, may well have had a ritual or superstitious function; such fossils were until the 1930s interpreted as 'thunderstones' and used as protective charms, in particular for keeping milk from spoiling (Oakley 1965: 117). But only in one case, where the echinoid was found to be deliberately buried beneath a roundhouse, can this be proven. A certain case of the deliberate ritual use of an echinoid comes from Roman Iron Age Denmark (Oakley 1965: 118, Fig. 8), where one such fossil was worn as an amulet. Worked flints and fossils are also occasionally placed into burials (Philpott 1991: 163–164). Good examples come from Canterbury (Frere *et al.* 1987: 263–298, Fig. 104.44a), where a flint barbed arrowhead was deposited in a mid second to third century AD burial and from Gatcombe (Branigan 1972) where an arrowhead and four pyramidal stones were found in an early third century cremation, perhaps that of a child.

The evidence for the active selection and re-use of ancient objects is much clearer on the continent (cf. Dark 1993; Ferris and Smith 1995; Bradley 2002: 116–119). Thus at the Romano-Celtic temples at Essarts (Horne and King 1980: 407–8), La Mare-du-Puits (*ibid.*: 429) and Saint-Aubin-sur-Gaillon (*ibid.*: 457–458) large hoards of polished stone axes and fossil sea urchins were found, sometimes deposited with Roman Venus figurines.

While there are doubtless many more instances of deliberate interaction with ancient monuments and material culture, we also ought to investigate cases of forgetfulness. That is much harder to do given the overall rarity of explicit memorial practice and the dangers of arguing from absence have already been discussed above. There are however a few cases, where Roman monuments appear to ignore and bypass prehistoric ones completely. A good example is the way in which the Ackling Dyke Roman road (from Old Sarum to Badbury Rings and Dorchester) cuts across the Oakley Down (Dorset) Bronze Age barrow cemetery (Crawford and Keiller 1928: 174–183, Fig. 39 and pl. 31; cf. Petts 1998; cf. Fig. 3 below).

Chronological Differences

The second main section of this paper is concerned with the question of how and why different pasts are remembered. I will first discuss differences between old objects (e.g. fossils vs. heirlooms) and whether those distinctions mattered in the Roman period. I will then address the changing intensity of memorial practices and the question of why different pasts appear to be more important in some periods than in others.

In the Roman world, most finds of very ancient material were explained in terms of legends and myth. This is certainly the case with fossils, which were frequently found and often displayed in sanctuaries in antiquity (Mayor 2000; Boardman 2002). In some cases the discovery of dinosaur bones may be related to legendary creatures such as griffins but one of the most striking results of Mayor's survey is the frequency with which fossil bones were interpreted as the remains of giants. In the absence of the concept of evolution and with no awareness of the antiquity of life on earth, interpreting these remains as essentially humanoid clearly enabled Greek and Roman observers to make sense of them. It is interesting that despite the wealth of literary evidence, there appear to be no fossil bones from excavated sanctuaries or indeed from any form of deliberate deposit; the only exception are fossilised sea urchins which commonly occur in the north-western provinces (Field 1965; Oakley 1965).

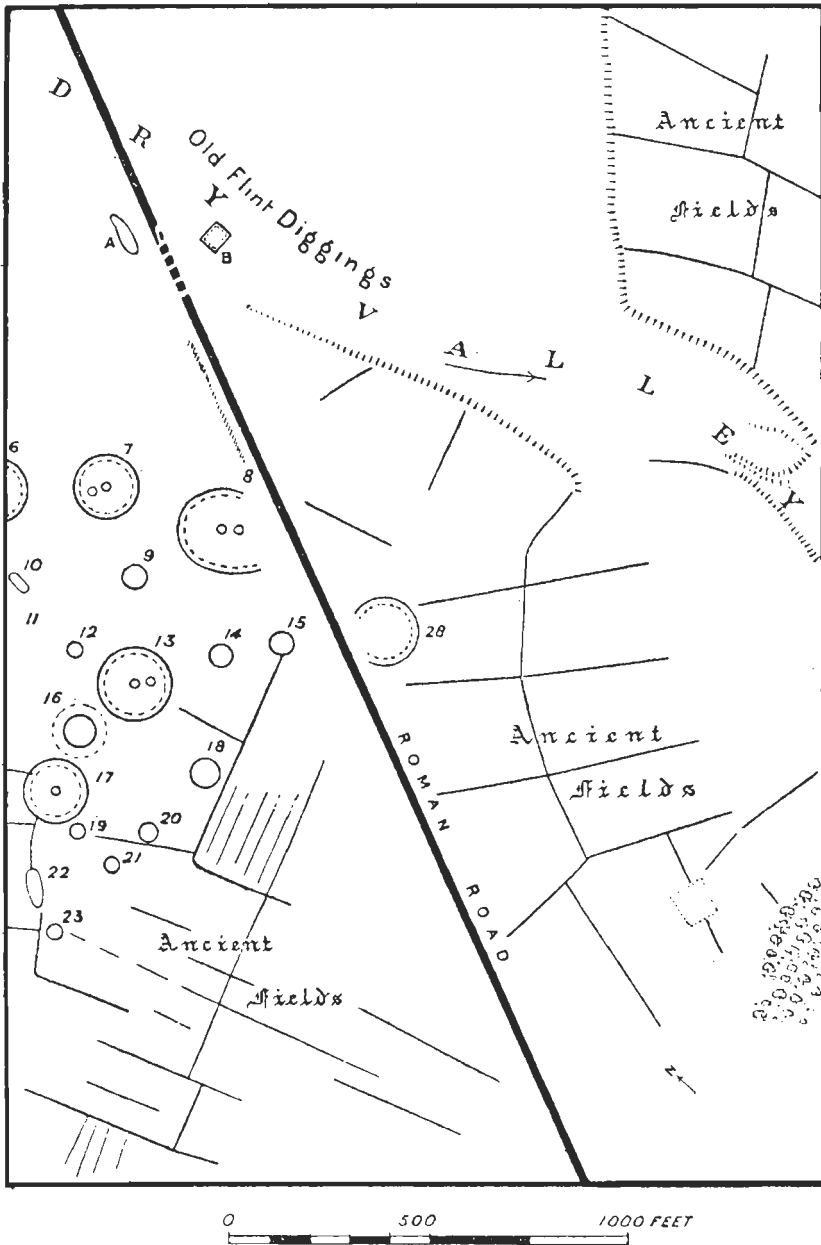


Figure 3: Ackling Dyke Roman road cutting across the Oakley Down Bronze Age barrow cemetery. After: Crawford and Keiller 1928, Fig. 39.

Like fossils, very ancient objects such as Neolithic axes may have been perceived as magical and powerful, a suggestion born out by the discovery of both together in French sanctuaries (see above). But even objects made in, for example, the early Roman period, may have been treated as significant by the late Roman period. Such objects may have been recovered from earlier settlement or burial sites or represent heirlooms passed through the generations. For example, among a group of late third to fourth century burials at Poundbury (Farwell and Molleson 1993: 41) was one grave (No. 1309, Fig. 27) which contained a first century headstud brooch. The brooch was placed on the left shoulder of a seven year old child, suggesting that this particular heirloom may have been worn in life. Other examples of old objects being used in later burials are known from many sites, for example London (Barber and Bowsher 2000: 8). Cool (2000: 52–55) suggests that one of the characteristics of late fourth century small find assemblages may be a preference for gaming counters and spindle whorls to be made from red and in particular samian pottery vessels. In many cases, the Samian vessels from which these objects were made were at least a century, possibly two centuries, old.

There are clearly also changes in memorial practices both in terms of the periods which are remembered and in terms of the periods in which the remembering and forgetting occurs. Thus Creighton's (forthcoming) study of late Iron Age/early Roman elite burials and their impact on urban landscapes shows how the memory of a particular local figure, ruling at a time of enormous social and political upheaval, can continue to be relevant for centuries to come. An interesting example of the selective remembering and forgetting of specific periods are the writing of fourth century Gaulish panegyrist and historians, who appear to lack an 'indigenous' sense of the pre-Roman past (Woolf 1996; Nixon 1990). Gaulish origins are conceptualised in terms of Hellenistic myths and historical accounts begin with Caesar's Gallic war, which is recounted from a Roman perspective. This may represent deliberate acts of erasure or reflect the social irrelevance of the pre-Roman past in an art form based on a thoroughly classical education. It is interesting to note, however, that the fourth century forgetting of a pre-Roman past in the literary sources can be contrasted with an apparent increase in interaction with prehistoric monuments. Ferris and Smith (1995: 183–184) suggest that in the fourth century there are renewed and increased interactions with very old 'ritual' sites, which are sought out at a time of great political and social change. Given that much of this discussion relies on coin finds, which increase dramatically in the later Roman period generally, it will be important in future to compare coin loss from prehistoric sites to the overall Romano-British sequence.

A period where the reworking of the past was especially important is the Augustan Age (Haug 2001; Walker 2000) as Augustus deliberately employed the past to legitimise and substantiate his power in the present. He frequently referred both to the recent (e.g. Actium, Caesar) and more distant (e.g. Venus, Aeneas) pasts and these memories were made tangible and present through monuments and temples. This actualisation served not just to remind the population of the past but acted as a normative and formative experience, shaping contemporary behaviour (Haug 2001: 113).

The reclamation of the past by Augustus (*renovatio*) is deliberate and selective and can be illustrated with the case of the temple of Apollo Sosianus (Haug 2001: 114; La Rocca 1988). During the 'renovation' the original Republican temple was completely destroyed and replaced with a new, larger building. Reference to the recent and distant past was, however, made in the temple's sculptural programme which showed a triumphal procession of Augustus (fragments of which survive) and a wide range of Greek statuary. Some of these Greek statues are described by Pliny (Nat. Hist. 36, 34–35; cf. Isager 1991: 162–3) while large parts of the mid

fifth century BC Amazonomachy, which decorated the pediment, survive. The Greek statuary was integrated into the Augustan sculptural programme and gained a new level of symbolism in the context of early imperial Rome, where it would have been easy to equate the conflict between Greeks and Amazons with that between Romans and Easterners/Egyptians, Theseus with Augustus and Hippolyte with Cleopatra (cf. La Rocca 1988). Similar use of ancient statuary is known from many temples in Rome (Walker 2000; Zanker 1988a: 240–263). It has even been argued that in the early imperial period specific ancient styles were deliberately selected to express specific abstract concepts, with, for example, archaic art signifying *pietas* and fifth century art signifying *auctoritas* and *maiestas* (Zanker 1988b; cf. Haug 2001: 116–117). As well as employing ancient statues, the use of a deliberately archaising style would have invoked a sense of antiquity, permanence and stability for both statue and cult (Fullerton 1990: 202–206). The Augustan period thus provides some very sophisticated examples of how very specific aspects of the past can be evoked to communicate in the present.

Contexts of Memories: Status and Power

We have already touched upon the status and identity of those who in the past carried out and controlled practices of remembering and forgetting but this section will examine the role of ritual specialists and elites in particular.

Ritual specialists often act to conserve memories as embodied religious practices can create a form of long-term memory (cf. Connerton 1989). In many cases, such long-term ritual activity on a site may re-invent or deliberately refer back to earlier cults on the same site, even if there have in fact been significant cultural breaks (e.g. Sapouna 1998). The symbolic significance of ancient objects in burials has already been mentioned (see above, cf. Philpott 1991: 163–4).

A very good example of the ways in which elites may refer to both the past and the present for sources of authority and legitimisation is the late Iron Age barrow burial at Lexden. Among the many finds was a worn but clearly treasured Bronze Age palstave (Foster 1986: 79–80) which may well have been a symbol of ancestral power. The way in which it is juxtaposed with new Roman symbols of power, including a medallion of Augustus, is a vivid reminder of the speed with which the political landscape of Britain is changing in this period.

Despite the fact that the memories and histories of an oppressed or conquered peoples are much more difficult to recover (cf. Alcock 2002: 132–175 on the Messenians), it is important to see the native non-elite population as active participants in the processes of remembering and forgetting. If we ignore the possibility of non-elite responses, any discussion of ‘Roman’ views of the past runs the risk of mistaking the monolithic front of elite writings for what must have been a much more contested reality.

In a number of cases it is possible to identify such non-elite views of the past. Thus the possible contrast between a literary forgetting and material remembering in fourth century Gaul (see above) may relate to differences in the agents of memory. While history and oratory must remain the domain of a very small elite, votive deposits and ritual activity would have been open to a much wider local community.

In a few cases during the Roman period, we can see how the imperial force of the new rulers literally cuts across the past (e.g. Ackling Road, see above and Fig. 3). While the attitudes of the Roman road builders are clear, it is difficult if not impossible to know how the

local population felt. There is some evidence for the encroachment of field systems in the late Iron Age or, perhaps more likely, the Roman period, which may suggest a wider disregard for these monuments (Crawford and Keiller 1928: 174–183, Fig. 39). While it may be difficult to prove, we should therefore perhaps be careful not to assume that all past objects and monuments had huge significance; it is at least possible that many older monuments had in fact been forgotten by the Iron Age.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the past was clearly an active force in the Roman period as old objects and monuments were placed in new contexts and became integrated into contemporary ‘horizons of significance’ (Haug 2001: 118). Both remembering and forgetting are active processes and require the reworking and authentication of old material culture in new social and symbolic context. Memory is seen as a dynamic process and a continuous dialectic between past and present. This discussion has been framed in terms of regional, chronological and contextual difference. Roman and local attitudes to the pasts varied across the empire and through time. Rome was clearly more willing to recognise and remember the histories of societies with a written tradition (cf. Assmann 1992: 73–86; Woolf 1996: 368; Small 1997) although even here the realities of imperialism very much determine the kinds of pasts that are remembered. Within the north-western provinces differences in the intensity and formality of engagements with the pre-conquest past are apparent between, for example, Gaul and Britain. Interactions appear to focus on the distant past (fossils, Neolithic axes and burial monuments) rather than the immediate pre-conquest period. These more distant pasts may have been both ‘safer’ politically and more easily malleable in terms of their interpretation in the present. There may have been a peak in such interactions with the past in the fourth century, perhaps reflecting wider social and economic changes in provincial societies. In general, I have argued that we should look not simply for re-use but for more complex interactions with the past, which include nostalgia, exclusion, destruction and forgetting. It is hoped that this paper and the TRAC session of which it was a part will make a contribution to the emerging field of memory studies in Roman archaeology.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Simon James for commenting on this paper and Margaret Mathews for preparing the illustrations.

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