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# TRAC Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

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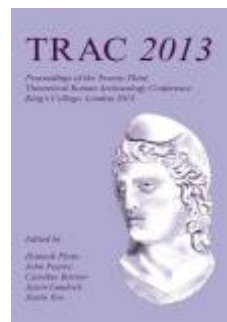
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# Introduction: TRAC Past, Present and Future: Where to go from here?

*Hannah Platts, John Pearce, Caroline Barron,  
Jason Lundock, Justin Yoo*

Since its inaugural conference at Newcastle University in 1991, the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference has been a yearly research and collaboration event in the calendar of many Roman archaeologists. The successful completion of its twenty-third annual meeting at King's College London from 4th – 6th April 2013 demonstrates the vitality of this conference, as well as emphasising its longevity. It is with the seeming durability of TRAC in mind that the editors of the current proceedings wish, like previous editors, to take the opportunity to consider the conference composition, and, for transparency's sake, to explain the editorial process and comment on the evolution and 'state of the nation' of TRAC. This allows us to present, as far as is practicable, the contextualising information requested by previous reviewers of the conference proceedings (e.g. Laurence 2006; Gardner 2012). We decline here the invitations of the Newcastle editors to review previous volumes (Duggan *et al.* 2012), but in reflecting on the 2013 conference, we find ourselves repeating some observations made by earlier editors and reviewers, as well as raising matters for consideration in succeeding conferences and their associated publications.

One of the most important aspects of TRAC to be reflected upon is the nature of participation. Since its inception, each year the health of the conference has been exemplified in terms of the desire of many to participate – thereby justifying its existence and boding well for its future. TRAC 2013 at KCL continued to highlight the popularity of the conference. To our surprise, our (theoretical) maximum capacity of 150 delegates (excluding KCL volunteers and participants and late registering panellists) was reached well before the conference took place. This is a testament primarily to the strength of Roman archaeology as a focus of postgraduate study; of the 150 participants 90 paid the reduced registration fee, the vast majority of whom were postgraduate students.

The health of the conference is also clear in the diversity of session and paper proposals put forward. Our decisions over whether to accept sessions were based on the coherence and theoretical relevance of the abstracts and on their having sufficient potential breadth to be likely to attract a range of speakers. For some sessions speakers had already been recruited, leaving approximately half the available slots for subsequent applicants; final

paper selection was delegated to panel organisers. We also held a non-themed poster session. In total, an eclectic mix of over 65 papers and thirteen posters was presented during the two days, with a wide variety of topics being covered. As well as the plenary lecture by Professor Simon James (*Imperial Rome and the Trousers of Time: Civilians, Soldiers, Barbarians and the Forging of New Romes, 100 B.C. to A.D. 30*) and the general session, nine thematic panels took place. Of these three had a focus on finds (*Minima maxima sunt: realising the theoretical potential of small finds; Deconstructing Roman material culture: new labels new narratives; New reflections on Roman glass*) and three on issues of identity in specific settings, geographical or ritual (*Migration and Social Identity in the Roman Near East: from method to practice (200 B.C.–A.D. 700); How the Dead Live: Identity and Funerary monuments in ancient Italy; National Perspectives on 'Roman' – 'Barbarian' Interaction*). Single sessions took place on the analytical frameworks for the Roman economy (*Neoliberalism and the Study of the Roman economy*), the formation of archaeological deposits in urban contexts (*Formational Processes of in-fills in Urban Archaeological Settings*) and on the status of a TRAC as a specifically theoretical or theorised enterprise (*Where's the Theory? A conversation about TRAC and the role of theory in Roman archaeology*). The articles gathered in these proceedings reflect, at least in part, the wide variety of subject areas discussed at TRAC 2013.

Following the conference, all speakers and poster presenters were invited to consider submitting their papers for the volume. As in previous years, only a minority did so, but still too many feasibly to be included in the volume. After a review of abstracts and first full paper submissions, eleven papers were selected for inclusion, which are presented here. It is unfortunate that the tightness of the publication timetable caused some contributions accepted at an earlier stage to be withdrawn by the authors. The editorial process for publishing TRAC proceedings involves scrutiny of all submitted papers by external reviewers (anonymously) as well as the editorial committee. Although papers published here are linked through their addressing of shared challenges or drawing on particular bodies of theory (see below), as in previous years they represent a somewhat haphazard subset of the papers given; most sessions are represented by only one or two papers, some by none at all. The inclusion of speakers on initial panel proposals may have helped the coherence of the programme as a whole, but it would appear that this has not fed through to publication (cf. Laurence 2006).

Although the papers in this volume address an eclectic range of topics, shared themes and connections nonetheless recur among them. The articles present varying degrees of direct engagement with theoretical approaches to Roman archaeology. Some expound close and explicit employment of theory, for example those by Jongman, Hobson, Lulic and Podavitte, whilst others develop their arguments within wider theoretically informed subject areas. Several of the latter paper examples (Ball, Prior, Dicus and Marchiori) contain a strong methodological strand focusing on context characterisation, quantification and site formation.

The variety of topics is mirrored by the diverse sources of inspiration for those papers that explicitly, or otherwise, engage with bodies of method and theory beyond Roman archaeology. These include development economics, cognitive psychology, the anthropology of religion, as well as the study of site formation processes and conflict archaeology. While several contributors situate themselves in a broadly post-colonial perspective, only in the debate between Hobson and Jongman over the value-laden character of quantification methods used for the study of the Roman economy does a contemporary political resonance for Roman period research advance more into the foreground.

Although the contributors to this volume rarely use the term ‘Romanisation’, interpretations of cultural change within an imperial setting remain at, or close to, the heart of many of the articles. As Heeren observes, implicitly or explicitly, the ‘Romanisation’ debate remains a key point of reference for many contributions. Nonetheless, the visible engagement with a broad spectrum of issues, including the Roman economy, religion, sexuality, cultural identity, consumption, warfare, urban social dynamics and historiography, demonstrates the diversity of areas for exploration. Given this wide array of topics, it is perhaps surprising that some subjects continue to have a rather limited representation. In particular, whilst gender was referred to during conference contributions, notably in the keynote address by Simon James which focused on masculinity, it remains underrepresented both in this volume, and more generally within TRAC conference proceedings in comparison to other areas of classical studies (cf. Gardner 2006: 131–2; Scott 2012).

One trend visible in this collection of papers is the shift towards working with finds assemblages. Ceramic and faunal assemblages have been a recurring source of case studies at TRAC, but other finds, here including glass, lamps and small finds, are now intensively exploited for insights into socio-cultural change. Given the fear a decade ago that some finds specialisms were perceived to run the risk of extinction, this represents a significant reversal (Gardner 2003). Nonetheless, the papers that are focused on finds employ diverse approaches. Some have a primary objective to improve methodology for characterising and quantifying assemblages, as can be seen with Prior’s examination of glass, Ball on conflict landscapes, or Dicus on taphonomy. Vucetic’s rather different approach to finds assemblages explores the insights into social practice, specifically sexual norms (and their potential regional diversity), which may be derived from artefact iconography. Podavitte and Lulic present two further approaches to finds assemblages both of which emphasise the agency of objects in their discussion of ceramics and cult representations respectively.

The first two papers in this publication represent the debate which TRAC seeks to foster. These papers by Hobson and Jongman respectively were presented in the panel entitled “Neoliberalism and the Study of the Roman Economy”. Both articles approach the problems of analysing the Roman economy through diametrically opposed theoretical lenses and, as such, they highlight the significant scope for debate. For Hobson, the application to the Roman past of modern economic models and constructs focused on growth, along with associated indices such as GDP, leads inherently to an embedding of (unacknowledged) colonial precepts in our understanding of that past. He argues that the emphasis on growth, on which modern economic theory relies, may not be suited to the study of the ancient past, arguing that comparisons between pre-industrial societies and contemporary ‘Developing Economies’ engender biases built upon an imperial worldview of economics and development. In contrast, Jongman’s view is clearly expressed by the title of his paper, “Why Modern economic theory applies, even to the distant Roman past”. According to Jongman, the principal mistake made by critics is in the confusing of aspects of modern economic theory having universal reference with some specific aspects of modern global economic practice and the operation of contemporary markets. Having stripped away such contemporary baggage, Jongman argues that modern economic theories become immediately applicable to our study of the Roman past and of the dynamics of the production and distribution of commodities. The style and presentation of these two articles is nearly as divergent as their theoretical approaches and exemplify the multiplicity of voices that maintain the vibrancy of TRAC.

The next paper once again brings theory to the fore but combines this with an investigation into the archaeology of votives, a case study from Roman Dalmatia of dedications to a god represented in image and text as Silvanus. Through this investigation Lulic exploits recent work in cognitive psychology and anthropology to assess interpretations of provincial Roman religion. She contextualises earlier readings of these reliefs as either an expression of resistance to Rome or of Romanisation and finds neither plausible, both being predicated on the passive repetition, among the creators and viewers of the images, of particular interpretations associated with these depictions. Instead she argues that the representations were integral to a dynamic religious experience, being both the product, and the shapers, of the cognitive framework within which the god's identity was continually re-made. This interdisciplinary approach to examining the formation of religious experience in the Roman provinces is a useful reminder of the value of applying varied theoretical precepts to the study of Roman material culture and Lulic's case study is a promising example of how cognitive psychology might aid our understanding of religion and religious experience in Rome's provinces.

The archaeology of finds assemblages is central to the following seven papers, yet their modes of engagement and exploration in this area present significant diversity. Particular interest in the processes of site formation is presented within the articles from Cousins, Dicus, Marchiori, Ball and Prior. Eleri Cousins' paper considers the spring deposits at Bath, and the worship of Sulis Minerva. Through a re-examination of the votive deposits found there, Cousins proposes a more rigorous theoretical model for deposition in water that acknowledges the motivation and personal choice of the dedicator, as well as the variety of the objects chosen as votives. Taking the curse tablets and pewter vessels excavated from the site as her evidence, Cousins demonstrates that a large part of the activity surrounding the dedications to Sulis Minerva relates literally or figuratively to issues of loss, decay and theft, creating a more nuanced understanding of the site, the goddess and her worshippers.

In his paper on sub-surface assemblages at Pompeii, Kevin Dicus seeks to dissuade us from the Pompeii Premise, which he argues still overshadows archaeological work at the site. Through investigation of the formation processes of two sub-surface house assemblages, Dicus proposes that such material remains should not be treated by archaeologists as evidence of systemic context; the assemblages should be approached, rather, from the point of view of their formation, allowing in turn for a better understanding of the construction and demolition processes that created them. Key to Dicus' paper is the recommendation that theories of formation process can only be compatible with Pompeian archaeology if they are applied to contexts which appear there regularly; to do otherwise is to continue to be misled by the Pompeii Premise.

In her paper on the joint Italian/Egyptian Archaeological mission's work in the Beheira Province, Marchiori considers the two sites of Kom al-Ahmer and Kom Wasit. Both have been recently excavated by the mission, giving more precise chronological information from finds assemblages on their development between the late Dynastic period and the later 1st millennium.. From these discoveries, Marchiori argues for local migration in the early Roman period between these two sites in the Nile Delta, an area long neglected in the study of Graeco-Roman Egypt. Situating her discussion within recent literature on the wider archaeology of migration, Marchiori argues that this population shift was triggered by local environmental change and was conditioned by the political geography of early Roman Egypt.

The next two papers of the volume have a specific focus on methods for quantifying and characterising finds assemblages. Ball uses Republican and Imperial examples to assess artefact assemblages from battlefields and she seeks to integrate their study with that of finds from

other contexts. She advocates an approach focused on a conflict-landscape and demonstrates the importance of taphonomic factors for assemblage composition and object distribution. Her work emphasises the significance of non-military objects within battlefield assemblages; in this respect her conclusions echo those of recent work on the material culture of garrisons. Only by taking such characteristics of an assemblage into account can 'battlefields' be distinguished from other artefact distributions.

Likewise, the focus of Prior's paper is primarily methodological. Within a general context of interest in the consumption of Roman glass he assesses methods for its quantification, fragment count, weight, estimated vessel equivalent and estimated vessel number. He rehearses the advantages and disadvantages of each and discusses the adaptation of methods developed for quantifying ceramics to glass. Examples drawn from the work for his doctoral thesis on assemblages from north-west Europe and Italy illustrate the methods and indicate preliminary results which show some preference for different forms between contexts, especially on military sites.

A consistent focus of TRAC has been the study of ceramic assemblages in terms of cultural identities. This interest continues in Podavitte's paper, which presents a case study in the archaeology of consumption from Roman London. She integrates post-colonial and agency-centred perspectives on culture change in an imperial setting with a close study of the material characteristics of a single ceramic type, Pompeian red ware, in order to explore its consumption, i.e. its acquisition, use and deposition. This first survey for London of its distribution, form and fabric types and contextual associations, reveals significant new data for the understanding of Pompeian red ware; the paper's modelling of the nuances of process and perception when objects enter a world of consumption different from that of their production will be of wider interest.

The penultimate paper in this volume from Vucetic is focused on iconographic aspects of artefacts. She investigates how the study of Roman sexuality might be put on a broader basis through the exploitation of a wider range of imagery. She analyses the distribution of sexual motifs on lamps from four sites – Ampurias, Carthage, Salamis, and Vindonissa – from the first to fourth centuries A.D. Her investigation integrates the art historical reading of specific images with a primarily quantitative approach, and presents data in support of an argument for region and site-based diversity in sexual iconography and, by extension, for a plurality of regional sexual ideologies.

With the exception of Lulic's paper, Heeren presents the only direct analysis of the term 'Romanisation' in this volume. After a brief summary of the historiography of Romanisation, Heeren uses the architecture and material culture of the Batavian settlement of Tiel-Passewaaij in the Netherlands as a case study in assessing the utility of the term and the proposed alternatives such as creolisation, globalisation and discrepant experience. Heeren highlights the variety of engagements of the Batavians with Roman culture, as observed through the evidence of settlement form, object assemblages and the social practices which they represent, including funerary ritual. Whilst acknowledging the value of alternatives, he advocates the retention of a 'weak' version of Romanisation (or 'romanisation' as he prefers), because of its value as a process term, since its use acknowledges that the diverse experiences of the Batavians were all taking place in a context where Rome 'in one form or another [was] the force that initiated the changes'.

While we hope to have brought to press a volume which will engage a wide readership, we note that some recurring concerns of past commentators remain relevant, and we pass the baton on to future TRACs and the standing committee to consider these further (several of these concerns were addressed in the *Where's the Theory?* session, sadly not represented in this

publication). The procedure for recruiting panels and papers lends itself to wide participation in the conference, but also to proceedings with considerable heterogeneity. A stronger central direction in the recruitment of contributors to speak and publish their contributions may remedy the latter but will compromise one of the great current strengths of the conference, its openness as a forum, even if it has not yet reached out evenly to different archaeological interest groups. As Laurence (2006) observed, the diversity of proceedings content is sometimes more reminiscent of a journal than a conference, but the timescale for publication, as mentioned above, puts considerable pressure on authors and editors. A less rapid publication schedule would allow more time for delegates to reflect on, and respond to, questions raised by their paper presentation at the conference itself as well as encouraging more papers to be put forward for inclusion in the proceedings. If the publication date of proceedings were to be made two years after a particular conference (for example TRAC 2014 proceedings to be published by the time of TRAC 2016), this would relieve pressure on both editors and authors. This, in turn, should encourage conference participants to submit their papers for publication when they might otherwise have found the current, shorter timescale impossible to meet. A longer publishing timescale would give editors the opportunity to reflect on some of the prominent themes of a specific meeting, with the aims of developing them considerably within a more focused publication, including invited submissions from conference delegates and non-participants. An alternative solution to this timescale concern might be to convert the annual publication from conference proceedings to a journal. This might include some themed work commissioned by an editorial committee with a greater insistence on explicit engagement with theory, as well as conference content put forward by individual contributors and other papers which were not presented at TRAC. The systematic archiving of abstracts using the TRAC website, launched at King's in 2013 ([www.trac.org.uk](http://www.trac.org.uk)) could serve as the formal record of the conference itself, as well as of the discussion.

Past commentators have also lamented that conference debate has not transferred to the page. In order to try to capture some of the spirit of that dialogue, we invited some contributors whose papers were closely linked to comment briefly in print on one another's contribution, but this was not a successful initiative, primarily because of time constraints. One intention of the TRAC website was to continue discussion initiated at the conference from one TRAC to the next. To date, this 'chat' has been somewhat limited, which itself perhaps suggests that it is difficult to replicate virtually the face-to-face dialogue that the conference enables. The topic of Romanisation seems also to have been one of the principal topics of discussion in the forums hosted on the TRAC website, further illustrating Heeren's observation that we have not yet learned not to talk about Romanisation. We will, however, be interested to see the reflection of editors on this in subsequent years.

Whilst, as has been observed above, the topic of gender has been limited as a subject of papers within recent TRAC meetings and publications, reviewers of past meetings *have* been concerned with the gender balance of TRAC itself (e.g. Gardner 2007: 131–2). For TRAC 2013 we note that women comprised the majority of delegates and that the female: male ratio among the participants (88: 61) is replicated in that of panel organisers, discussants, speakers and poster presenters (43: 30). Whilst equal gender representation is desirable within the conference participants, positive or negative discrimination on paper and poster selection is not, since the conference success revolves around providing a dynamic and challenging academic environment for scholarly enquiry. The imbalance in female over male participation at this conference is likely to reflect the gender ratio in the current postgraduate cohort in Roman archaeology. This

may in the long run lead to redressing of long-established imbalances within professional and academic archaeology (we note, for example, based on titles given at registration, that a higher proportion of male (20/61) than of female delegates had been awarded doctorates (21/88)). Of the 11 papers to be found in this volume, 6 are from female authors whilst 5 are from male authors. This might seem to reflect a more equal gender ratio in publication than may have been expected, however, the editors' decision regarding paper inclusion revolved solely around academic argument.

Previous proceedings from TRAC have emphasised the desire for the conference to continue to expand and develop a strong international base (Moore *et al.* 2009: viii). Analysis of the figures from 2013 gives a snapshot of the internationalisation of the conference. Of the participants, more than two thirds (113) were based in the UK, 26 in other EU countries (as previously the Netherlands being represented by the highest number), six in North America and five elsewhere in Europe and Asia. Although equivalent figures from previous TRAC meetings are not available, this ratio seems impressionistically similar to recent conferences held in the UK. Such figures, however, mask the internationalisation represented by the many students registered for postgraduate study in Roman archaeology in the UK whose previous education was in other countries. Questions might be raised as to how to maintain and develop further the intercontinental nature of the conference. TRAC 2008, which was held in Amsterdam, was the first meeting to be held as a full conference outside the UK. In 2009 one of two events took place at the University of Michigan, and in 2012 TRAC was held in Frankfurt. These latter two meetings were in conjunction with the Roman Archaeology Conference. This trend of events occurring outside the UK is likely to continue, interest having been expressed by Dutch and German universities in hosting TRAC 2015. The shifting of the conference location away from the UK alone has proven to be an important move to develop the international nature of TRAC, as Gardner predicted (2005: 132). The Netherlands, however, remains the only national contingent, beyond the UK, to be regularly represented at the conference by substantial numbers of participants (Gardner 2005: 132). Increased emphasis on publicising TRAC (via the new website, social media, university departments, archaeological societies and museums) both before and during the annual meetings of 2014 and 2015 might provide ideal opportunities to encourage prospective venues outside the Anglo-Dutch-German axis to volunteer to host upcoming conferences, thereby expanding further TRAC's international base and appeal.

We comment also on other aspects of participation. Numbers of participants as indicated above do suggest a healthy future for the conference. We aimed to encourage participation by charging as low a fee as possible, aided by the generous provision of bursaries by the TRAC standing committee, and the uptake by postgraduate students suggests this was successful. As the statistics reported above show, however, TRAC remains a university-dominated forum. Remaining delegates in the main were drawn from the university sector or interested public in approximately equal numbers. It is disappointing that only twelve were identifiably from the fields of curatorial or contract archaeology, principally the Museum of London and English Heritage.

The engendering of increased collaboration between academic, museum, curatorial and contract sectors of Roman archaeology would benefit from further consideration and development within future conference meetings. This is particularly important given the growing numbers of graduate and postgraduate internships available at museums (at least within the UK). While more might be done in terms of publicity beyond the university sector in order to broaden participation, anecdotally colleagues who work in curatorial and especially in contract archaeology report that participation in such events in work time without taking leave is difficult. As the vast majority



of new archaeological data are generated outside a university research setting, this does not aid cross-fertilisation and all the benefits that come with it. Although the university sector has become more diverse through widening international participation, the predominance of postgraduate students, some of whom now work on projects to which they have been recruited rather than topics of their own development, may make it less likely to be a radical forum (Mladenović and Russell 2011: vi; Gardner 2012).

On the basis of our experience in 2013, TRAC does not, in general, attract the ‘interested public’ to the same degree that other events, including museum exhibitions, talks and tours associated with archaeological societies and other conferences related to Roman archaeology in London, succeed in doing. Since this situation applies despite efforts (including bursaries) to encourage public engagement, TRAC’s impact beyond the university archaeological sector needs some reconsideration.

On the one hand, then, TRAC is assured a healthy future through the growing participation of university-based archaeologists, especially younger researchers, as we hope is demonstrated through these proceedings. On the other hand, its success is partly, perhaps, because of its role as a rite of passage for this group. Some rethinking is required in terms of how to achieve engagement with a wider body of opinion and interest, as well as reflection on the status of the publication as the sole vehicle for dissemination of the conference’s results.

The final, but most important, part of this introduction remains for the editors to express their gratitude to those individuals without whose help and support it would not have been possible to host TRAC at King’s. For their help in organising the conference we would especially like to thank our fellow committee members, Sally Cottam, Charlotte Tupman, Yukiko Kawamoto, Federico Ugolini, Lily Withycombe-Taperell (RHUL) and Will Wootton, as well as previous organisers, especially Darrell Rohl and Frances Macintosh, for their advice. For their indispensable contribution to its smooth running we also record our gratitude to the volunteers, current and former students from King’s, including Kee-Hyun Ban, Juan Chacon-Fossey, Georgia Clarke, Tim Dungate, Laurence Hall, George Maher, Tulsı Parikh, Simona Stoyanova, Emily Tye, Jeff Veitch and Valeria Vitale. For institutional support we also wish to thank the School of Arts and Humanities at King’s College London, Professor Henrik Mouritsen and Dr Hugh Bowden as successive heads of the Department of Classics, Professor Dominic Rathbone, the Department of Classics administrators, especially Elizabeth Barnard and Michael Broderick, and Becky Drayton and Jessie Hardcastle in the KCL conference office. We are very much indebted to Rachel Russell (HelloWilson) for the preparation of the conference abstracts and the formatting for publication of these proceedings. We would like to thank Kaja Stemberger for drawing the image of the head of Mithras from the Walbrook temple, London, used on the volume cover, based on an image supplied by the Museum of London. The anonymous referees are thanked for their prompt and insightful comments on the earlier drafts of papers for this volume. Lastly we thank also the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, Barbican Research Associates and the TRAC committee for their generous funding of bursaries for speakers and delegates.

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