

EDITORIAL

Increasing International Perspectives in Theoretical Roman Archaeology

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The editorial of this second issue of the *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal (TRAJ)* celebrates diverse and innovative topics related to Roman theoretical studies and reflects upon new ways to stimulate more international participation in the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (TRAC). The data collected on the attendance demonstrates that Roman studies are becoming more diverse with delegates travelling from 27 countries. The guest editors of this edition consider how formative education differs in both Italy and the UK and how this may affect the accessibility of Roman studies. Moreover, the increasing homogenisation of Roman Archaeology Conference (RAC) and TRAC has been considered and it is suggested that in order to allow the two conferences to grow further, we need to develop a more constructive dialogue. The guest editors here seek to address these issues in order to encourage a better level of international contribution and attendance, as well as to consider the discussion of theory within RAC and whether jointly organised sessions may be productive.

Keywords: Roman Archaeology; TRAC; *TRAJ*; Education

RAC/TRAC 2018 in Numbers

Between the 12th and the 14th of April 2018, Edinburgh University hosted more than 400 delegates from all over the world, making the Edinburgh RAC/TRAC 2018 the biggest UK-based RAC/TRAC conference so far. The registration data has provided an opportunity to reflect on the international attendance and perspectives within this editorial. The Edinburgh conference represented the 13th joint RAC/TRAC and the 28th edition of TRAC. During this three-day event, many different aspects of Roman Archaeology were discussed across 28 sessions and three workshops. The themes tackled were many and diverse, with topics ranging from the design of Roman gardens to the analysis of writing equipment, to the perception and appearance of frontiers (for a full list of RAC/TRAC 2018 sessions [click here](#)). Delegates hailed from 182 different academic institutions and professional bodies. Unsurprisingly, the most represented universities were UK institutions, with a total of 182 delegates (43% of all attendees). The number of UK university-based attendees, combined with an additional 10% of attendees coming from other UK institutions and professional bodies, made a total of 53% – illustrating how UK-based attendees still represent the majority of delegates at RAC/TRAC conferences (see **Figure 1**). Independent scholars represented 10% of the total attendance, but we did not collect data on their home countries. The majority of UK-based delegates is much reduced in comparison with past attendance, giving the conference a much broader, international perspective. Although data is not available for comparison from all previous TRAC and RAC/TRAC conferences, we are able to see that individuals working in 27 different countries attended in 2018, compared to 15 at Amsterdam 2008 (Driessen et al. 2009), 15 at Oxford 2010 (Mladenović and Russell 2011), and 17 at Leicester 2015 (Mandich et al. 2016). Almost a quarter of the attendees in 2018 came from EU universities while an additional 5% represented EU research institutions and the commercial sector. It must also be noted that 8% of attendees came from international institutions ranging from Brown University to the University of Osaka City.

As partially already noted, an important percentage of attendees (25%) came from outside the university system – either from associations (mostly museums) and commercial companies (15%), or as independent

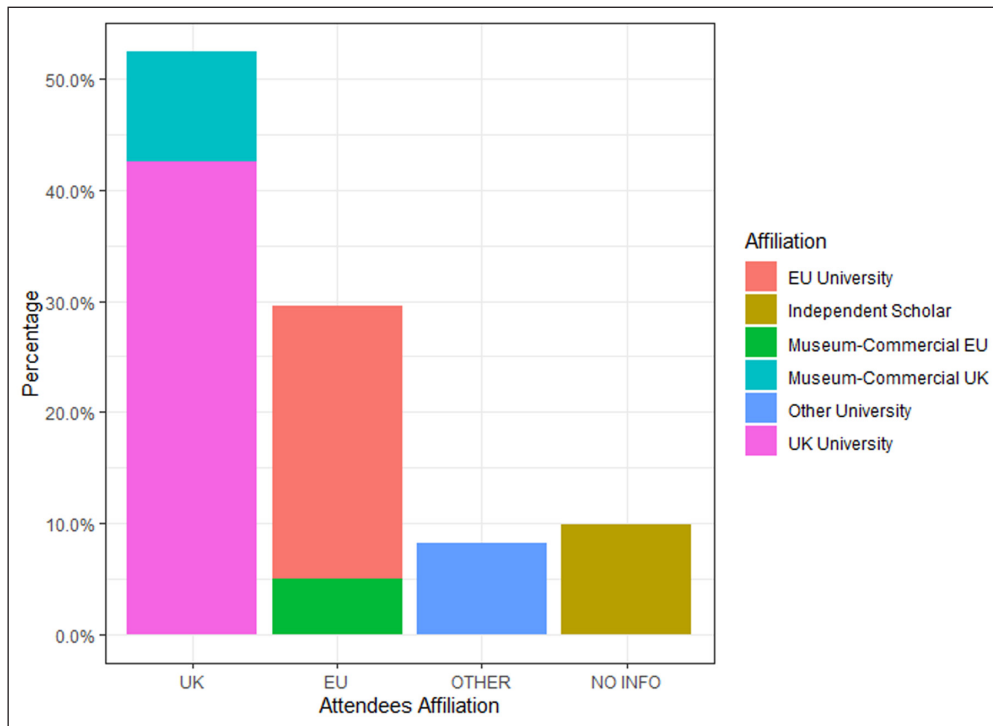


Figure 1: Percentage of attendees' home institution by region.

researchers (10%). This percentage is encouraging for the future of the discipline, and is interesting data in light of what was discussed in one of the conference workshops focused on the lack of dialogue between academia and the professional sector: 'The Praxis of (Roman) Archaeology: Alienation and Redemption' (see Weekes et al. this issue). Clearly, the path to a fuller dialogue between the commercial and research worlds is still emerging, but these data represent an encouraging assessment.

TRAC's founder, Eleanor Scott (1993: 7), organised the first conference to combat the status quo and a 'patriarchal hierarchy' that had developed in the discipline, and a final note on the attendees of this conference provides positive news on such issues. While male delegates still represent the majority (53%) of conference attendees, the discrepancy is very narrow which represents a positive result for equality (see **Figure 2**). Despite progress in attendance however, there is still more room for improvement in the balance of presenters as a majority of presentations were given by men (58%) compared to women (42%). The percentage of female speakers has decreased since the last conference which reported the speaker's gender. At Oxford 2010, 32 of 49 speakers were female (Mladenović and Russell 2011). It is also worth noting that these figures are based on first names (a method also used in – Eckardt 2019) and so this is an imperfect analysis due to missing data on non-binary researchers and other under-represented groups (Kelly et al. 2019).

Different perspectives on working in Roman Archaeology

The heterogeneity of nationalities and university experiences of our editorial committee has led us to consider the multiple facets of researching Roman archaeology. Here, we seek to address issues surrounding the native identity of researchers in Roman archaeology and aim to understand and identify differences in perspective between those working on Roman archaeology who were trained through the British education system and those from Italy. We have already described the makeup of national affiliations at the conference, which demonstrates the incredible international draw that RAC/TRAC has across the world. However, the majority of delegates are still based at UK institutions, and one wonders if a British background and education lead to a unique way of interpreting and understanding the archaeology of the Roman period. Despite attendance being slightly UK dominated, the local organising committee for the 2018 conference consisted of two Italian nationals, one Spanish, one American and one Scottish. Considering the international nature of the committee, we have taken this opportunity to reflect upon how educational systems in the UK and Italy impact the way in which archaeologists deal with the Roman past, and how high school education impacts research at the highest level.

TRAC has always provided an opportunity for UK-based researchers to present the best of their work to the broader community, showcasing new methods, innovative approaches, and budding ideas for further

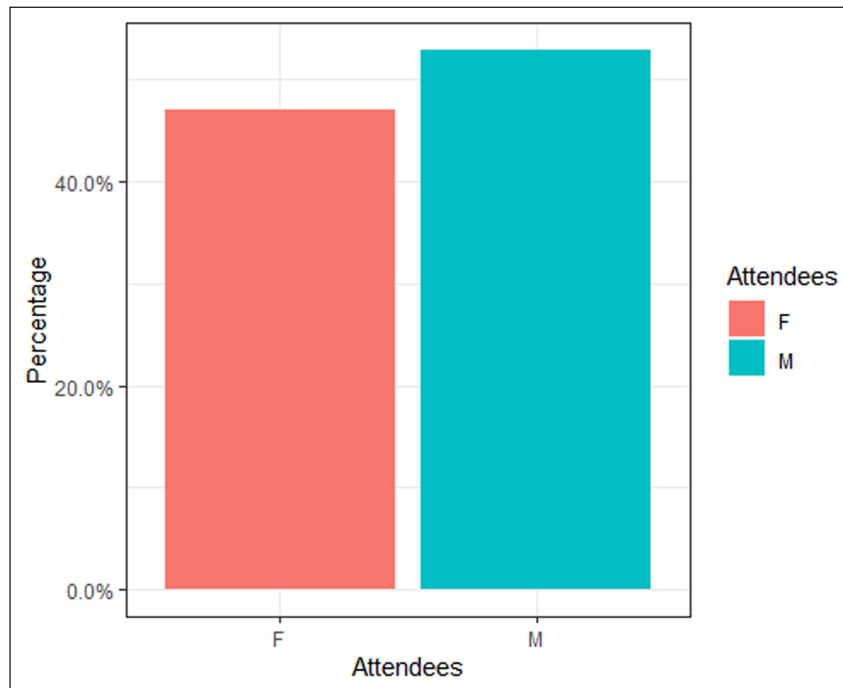


Figure 2: Percentage of male and female attendees.

research. An important component of TRAC has always been its vibrant community of postgraduates and early career researchers who use the conference to display the potential of their research and present alongside more established scholars. Diverse representation among presenting scholars is an extremely important aspect of these conferences, as one of TRAC's aims is to encourage students from diverse backgrounds to participate in shaping evolving research agendas (Scott 1993).

However, to some students, Roman archaeology (and more traditionally, Classics) can seem alienating and elitist. This problem likely stems from the early stages of education when students are divided into state-run or private education systems. Within the British education system, Roman archaeology comes under the subject area of Classics, which is a subject taught in very few state-run schools, but one that features more prominently in private schools (BESA 2019). The qualifications in classical studies in England and Wales include GCSE and A Level Classical Civilisation and Latin, and in Scotland; Higher Classical Studies and Latin. Figures for teaching in England show that only 18% of state-run schools offer Latin, but no data is available on the percentage of state-run schools teaching Classics (Tinsley and Board 2016). It is also essential to recognise the difference in the experience of Scottish students and students from the rest of the UK. Scotland is currently the only UK constituent country to fully fund all undergraduate degrees, which has led to 10% more Scots entering higher education before the age of 30 than English young people. This is likely to result in students from more diverse backgrounds entering the discipline; however, university access in Scotland is still worryingly weighted in favour of those from wealthy backgrounds (BBC News 2016).

While the British secondary school system still presents inequality in the instruction of Classics in the UK, the European and, more specifically, the Italian school system is somewhat different. State secondary school in Italy is free and, on average, provides students with better preparation than private schools. In Italy, private schools, while providing a more tailored preparation for their tutees, often lack quality. This is due to the difference in teacher recruiting systems between the two types of schools. State school teachers go through a long and difficult path to obtain the certification required to be appointed, while this is not necessary to be hired in private schools, thereby creating a much more variable level of staff qualification. In addition, secondary schools in Italy are divided into various categories and can be oriented towards science and technology, humanities, languages, or arts, which often means students are steered towards more specific types of work further down the line (Daws 2003).

Many differences are also attested at the university level. The first and foremost difference in Italy is that in order to enrol in an archaeology course, students need only to apply and they will be accepted upon payment of the fees. The average cost of a three-year undergraduate program in an Italian university ranges between £1240 to £5870 in total (depending on the course, their income, and the university chosen – data from Tinaba 2017). These two factors allow access to the University system to a much broader part of the student population.

Finally, the background of students matriculating in Classics and Archaeology in Italy is quite diverse since Classical culture is embedded in every stage of schooling in Italy (unlike in the UK), meaning that students can potentially come from very different childhood experiences. Since the 1999 reform of the University System, knowledge of Greek and Latin is no longer mandatory (Decreto 509/1999). This opened the doors of Classics and Archaeology courses to attendees coming from different educational backgrounds, enabling students from more technical and scientific studies to enter the archaeological discipline. Nevertheless, Greek and Latin language and literature are still an essential part of the curriculum, putting students coming from not humanities-oriented secondary schools at a disadvantage. However, because universities provide additional entry-level classes in Greek and Latin to help these students catch up to the others this is not a major issue. On the other hand, students from a scientific and technical background are pushing for a more comprehensive approach to the Roman world (e.g. Archaeological Science).

Yet there is still an element of inequality that impacts who is able to enter and remain part of the discipline of Roman archaeology. Fortunately, this seems to be a trend that is improving thanks to educational reform and improved representation at academic conferences. The varied experiences of students obtained through their education gives them unique viewpoints from which they understand the ancient past. As such, we need to continue to work towards increasing international engagement with theory through TRAC and, especially, encourage and facilitate students from diverse economic backgrounds to participate. However, before discussing a possible way forward for TRAC and RAC, we will first have a look at what is featured in this issue.

In this issue

This second issue of the *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal (TRAJ)* sees an increase in the number of articles published (from eight in the first issue to ten selected for the most recent one) and a broadening of topics investigated enhancing the TRAC's main purpose of widening the range of perspectives and voices on theoretical approaches in Roman studies. The articles presented reflect the theory-based vocation of the journal by focusing on different theoretical aspects of Roman archaeology, geographical areas and materials of study. The articles presented focus on the Western Empire (ranging from Britain to Italy) between the Roman Republic to Late Antiquity. Five main themes emerge despite the articles presenting different topics.

The first theme is on aspects of social and cultural identities. This theme includes four articles: "*Curing with creepy crawlies: a phenomenological approach to beetle pendants used in Roman magical and Medicinal practice*" by Parker; "*Same taste different place: looking at the consciousness of food origins in the Roman world*" by Rowan; "*Full archives, meaningless data? What artefacts can tell about age and gender at large-scale cemeteries (case study Colonia Iulia Emona)*" by Stemberger; "*Painting by numbers: a quantitative approach to Roman art*" by Brain. Within these articles, a number of different subjects are touched upon. The first analyses the use of stag beetle pendants in magical or medicinal practices in the Roman world and also includes comparisons with modern beetle pendants used in Mexico (Parker); secondly a study of sensory experiences of non-native soldiers investigates food origins through the analysis of archaeobotanical assemblages from Roman military sites in *Germania Inferior* (Rowan); thirdly the application of a quantitative approach in the study of representations of Venus in Pompeian paintings is evaluated (Brain); finally the identification of gender and age through the study of burial artefacts at the cemeteries of Colonia Iulia Emona in Slovenia is undertaken (Stemberger).

A second emerging theme gathers together articles which use postmodernist theories to interpret the Roman past: "*The limitations of water flow and the limitations of postmodernism*" by Roskams; "*Postnationalism and the past: the politics of theory in Roman archaeology*" by Hanscam; "*An archaeology of the subalterns' disaggregated history: interpreting burial manipulations of Roman period Sardinia through Gramsci's theory*" by Puddu. The first contribution looks at the use of Marxist analytical tools to explain water supply limitations in the Roman world and by setting these theories against two case studies from York (Roskams); the second article explores the history of scholarship and politics in Roman archaeology in Romania and the public reception of Roman studies in Britain through the lens of postnationalism by comparing the Roman empire and the European Union (Hanscam); the last one is instead focused on a case study from Sardinia and examines how the effects of the dominant class on subalterns are visible in burial manipulations and can be framed through the use of Gramsci's theory (Puddu).

A third theme is about the application of new methodological approaches to Roman archaeology which are addressed in two contributions: "*3D imaging as a public engagement tool: investigating an ox cranium used in target practice at Vindolanda*" by Williams et al. and "*Formal modelling approaches to complexity*

science in Roman studies: a Manifesto" by Brughmans et al. The first article investigates and tries to reconstruct Roman archery practices through the production of a 3D model of an ox cranium used for target practice at Vindolanda (Williams et al.); The second co-authored article investigates the use of complex scientific approaches in Roman studies that proves how the application of formal modelling approaches in Roman archaeology can be extremely effective to understand complex systems (Brughmans et al.). Finally, one contribution (Weekes et al.) discusses issues in the praxis of Roman archaeology in Britain tackled in different sectors (Universities, museums or in commercial units) in order to offer possible solutions.

The authors of this issue come from different academic backgrounds and Universities/Institutes across Europe from Great Britain (University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, Durham University, University of Edinburgh, UCL University, University of King's College London, University of Leicester, University of Southampton, University of York, Royal Holloway London, University of Bristol, University of Northumbria, University of Lincoln, Vindolanda Trust, Canterbury Archaeological Trust, Museum of London Archaeology and York Museum Trust, the Netherlands (Leiden University, University of Groningen), Spain (University of Barcelona, Barcelona Supercomputing Center), Germany (University of Cologne), Belgium (Leuven University), Italy (University of Roma three), and from the United States (University of Tennessee).

While the topics discussed in this issue are various and noteworthy, the discussion is still focused on the western area of the Roman world. Specific regions of the Empire such as the eastern territories, North Africa, Spain and France have not received attention. Nonetheless, new research areas have been examined. More emphasis has been given to the promotion and need of an urgent update of Roman archaeology in Britain. This is also accompanied by an increase in the number of multiple author articles which contribute to give the journal an interdisciplinary attribute that it always aimed to seek. *TRAJ* is always open to stimulate more discussion about Roman theoretical archaeology in general and more important are those areas which have been overlooked in the past and which we hope more scholars will aim to address in the near future. If you sympathise and feel the need to fill the existing gaps in the current scholarship, please do consider to submit an article to future issues of *TRAJ*.

RAC/TRAC: the Way Forward

RAC/TRAC attracts a more international attendance than TRAC alone and the importance of more international perspectives has been underlined throughout this editorial. Going forward, TRAC must continue to encourage the same level of international contribution and attendance. We also need to consider how to deal with the increasing homogenisation of RAC and TRAC. Much has been said in recent years about the differences and similarities between the two souls of these conferences. The core of the debate hinges on the necessity of keeping the two conference themes clearly separated or pushing for a higher degree of hybridisation between them (see, e.g. Mladenović and Russell 2011). One of the most striking issues from the overview of the themes discussed is a very high degree of overlap between the topics of RAC and TRAC sessions. For example, the concept of borders and frontiers was discussed both in TRAC (session 4e) and RAC (session 1a) with many points overlapping in the ideas presented. Likewise, the concept of social consciousness was analysed both in session 3c and 4d. In the RAC session (3c) the level of consciousness of the connectivity across the Roman world was analysed, while in the TRAC (4d) the consciousness of a defined social memory was debated.

This brings to mind the question of reflecting on the future of this conference: is it the time for TRAC to leave RAC or are they better together? It has been suggested in the past that TRAC could achieve its full potential more easily by separating from RAC. However, we strongly disagree with this statement for a number of reasons. Firstly, as just highlighted, the themes covered in the two conferences are very much intertwined and theory has become an integral part of Roman archaeology (in Laurence 2006: 117 'TRAC already won'). Secondly, RAC/TRAC conferences attract a much broader international audience. This is why rather than separating, we believe that TRAC would be able to grow further by building a more constructive dialogue with RAC. It may be more beneficial to have the biannual conference organised by one fully merged organising committee. This could possibly be achieved by having everyone working together rather than the TRAC being organised as an affiliate conference with a separate organising team. Additionally, some sessions could be organised by theme rather than by theoretical or technical focus – therefore being mixed RAC/TRAC sessions. This would help to solve an issue encountered while organising this conference, where scheduling was made difficult by having RAC and TRAC sessions running simultaneously on overlapping subjects.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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