

EDITORIAL

Roman Archaeology in Lockdown

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The third issue of the *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal* (*TRAJ*) provides the opportunity to assess the structural issues in academia detailed in the previous editorials of the journal. The articles, and their authors, included in this volume were each affected by the worldwide pandemic. Throughout this period, however, the world has also become the theatre that enacted a renewal of social movements that amplified marginalised voices and experiences. Lack of representation was a key theme through TRAC 2019 and was emphasised by the conference's keynote speaker, Zena Kamash. This editorial examines the contemporary context of Roman archaeology, its engagement with social justice, along with the struggles and opportunities afforded to it by COVID-19. Also included is an introduction to the diverse range of subjects discussed throughout *TRAJ* volume 3, that moves beyond the traditional analysis of ancient Italy and other anglophone countries.

Keywords: TRAC; *TRAJ*; Roman Archaeology; decolonialism; COVID-19

Roman Archaeology's Engagement with Social Justice

The world has experienced great change since the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (TRAC) was held in Canterbury between the 11th to 14th April 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic has defined a lengthy period that has seen a great loss of lives, the temporary closure of most international borders, and heightened political and social tensions around the globe. Worldwide lockdowns have placed higher demands and stresses on many segments of the populations. The isolation felt by people throughout this period has, however, also given rise to renewed social, ethical, and political movements. These were fuelled by compassion, a critical awareness of social injustices, and the need to listen and learn from marginalised voices. The worldwide Black Lives Matter protests whose epicentre concentrated on the USA, is just one prominent example of this movement, with other collective efforts to highlight injustices including the Hong Kong human rights protests in 2019 and 2020. It is against this backdrop that this editorial reflects on TRAC 2019 and its discussions, Roman archaeology's continued growth as a field, and this resultant edition of the *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal*.

TRAC 2019 had hoped to build upon calls to action from previous conferences and editorials of *TRAJ*. In its first edition, Emily Hanscam and Jonathan Quiery (2018: 2–3) had noted the lack of ethnic diversity and gender representation in the field of Roman studies. In the following volume, Lucia Michielin, Kathleen O'Donnell, and Martina Astolfi (2019: 5) had further identified the need for TRAC to push towards better levels of international contributions and attendance. Unfortunately, the 2019 conference did not show a positive progression on both issues. Roman archaeology still requires better engagement with social justice and actions on infrastructures that inhibit accessibility (Hanscam and Quiery 2018: 4).

While 70 institutions from 16 different countries were represented by speakers and session organisers, most individuals came from European universities. These topics were discussed at length during TRAC 2019, with Zena Kamash's keynote lecture providing an insightful and thorough analysis of the current state of Roman archaeology. For instance, she has made a powerful case to highlight how men were twice more likely to organise sessions than women (further discussed in Kamash *forthcoming*). She further criticised the discipline for its current lack of action towards decoloniality and inclusivity. Two datasets – an assessment

of speakers and topics included in the Roman Archaeology Conferences (RAC) and Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conferences from 1991 to 2019, and Kamash's 2019 Roman Archaeology Teaching Survey – were used to reveal these key trends.

Kamash (*forthcoming*) clearly demonstrated a need for Roman archaeology to diversify, with weight placed on the need to improve the representation of individuals from minority ethnic groups in the UK and other western countries. Another issue presented was the need to diversify topics discussed at TRAC and RAC, beginning with a move away from sessions focused on Britain and Italy. This was also highlighted by Emily Hanscam and Jonathan Quiery in their editorial for *TRAJ* (2018: 4), in which they similarly emphasised the need to examine narrative constructions of the past, and issues that relate to accessibility, inclusivity, and other injustices impeding the field's growth. On these topics, TRAC 2019 made significant contributions, through both its sessions and papers, as well as its workshops on researcher self-reflexivity, multivocality, and the diversification of reading lists.¹ This is further illustrated by the geographical scope of the articles selected for this volume.

A particularly insightful point made by Kamash (*forthcoming*), that came from the Roman Archaeology Teaching Survey, was the identification of a reciprocal cycle. In this self-sustained loop, the research interests of Roman archaeologists stem from topics learnt as undergraduates that then become integral to what is then taught by the same teaching staff. As such, this then contributes to another cohort of students, and potential Roman archaeologists, who are then exposed to traditional topics and concepts discussed throughout the field of Roman studies. In this sense, scholars and teaching staff contribute to the solidification of an academic habitus that establishes set patterns that influence the behaviour, tastes, and meaning in the subject field (Decoteau 2016: 305). In the education of archaeology, ancient history, and classics at universities, this is done through the integration of subject-specific skills training in the classroom that instils standard practice into student behaviour and academic identity (Goodwin and Quinlan 2019: 3–4, 15).

As defined by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2007: 169–170), coloniality represents the perseverance of oppressive hegemonies throughout the modern world. The cyclical pattern formed through the education of Roman archaeology speaks to the situatedness of coloniality within the discourses that surround the field. In this regard, diversities of experiences and histories are shaped by Western hegemonies that control outputs (Oyedemi 2018: 1–2; de Loney 2019: 689; Vawda 2019: 74). The consequence of these outputs was seen in Zena Kamash's data and analysis, that demonstrated a homogeneity in both the topics discussed at TRAC and those who present on these topics. This was particularly noticeable at TRAC 2019 that had a visibly white audience.

A core theme was, therefore, established and ran through discussions of TRAC 2019 – namely, the need for individuals in the field of Roman archaeology, individually and as a collective to actively engage with action to make the field more accessible for diverse audiences. Within similar conferences to TRAC, there has also been a recognised effort to emphasise self-reflexivity. There was, for example, a roundtable event at the International Association for Classical Archaeology conference in 2018 that discussed issues of gender and racial diversity alongside aspects of social justice such as disability and care (Mol and Lodwick 2020). This year has also witnessed the establishment of new groups such as the European Society of Black and Allied Archaeologists, a united cohort of anti-racist archaeologists led by women of colour.

These discussions and groups, therefore, engages with foundational ideas introduced by early postcolonial theorists (e.g. Spivak 1988; Bhabha 1994; Said 1978 [2003]) and modern societies across the world that have become more adept to decode social situations through what Paolo Freire (1974: 14) defines as a critical consciousness. Furthermore, these actions and the formation of new groups shines a spotlight on where Roman archaeology is now, and where people want to take it in the future. The reflexive characteristic of the discipline and individuals within it is, therefore, extremely important to demonstrate ways in which archaeologists listen, interact, and learn from others in society. The Multiculturalism, Race and Ethnicity in Classics Consortium's solidarity statement and action plan in response to the Black Live Matter protests and associated movements just another example of this engagement that needs to continue.²

In this issue

This issue of *TRAJ* aims to illustrate Roman archaeology's continued progression towards the embodiment of a self-aware and critical field that is inclusive of many voices and regions. Included in this edition are nine articles that discuss a variety of regions, including Syria, Romania, Slovenia, Russia, Italy, Spain, Belgium, France, and Britain, through several archaeological approaches and perspectives. Three main themes can be identified across these articles, namely the identities of researchers, ancient individuals, and regions.

Two articles in this edition (Stemberger and van Thienen) follow on from the TRAC 2019 session *Who am I? And if so, how many?* that focused on the relationship between researcher-identity and that of ancient

individuals. Kaja Stemberger gave a presentation in this session that analysed the historiography of Roman archaeology in Slovenia. In Stemberger's paper, historical, political, and subsequent ideological shifts are discussed in relation to their impact on the perception of the Roman period and its research. Vince van Thienen's paper furthers these perspectives and uses Flemish archaeology as the case study. Collectively, these articles reveal how archaeological theory, particularly applied to the study of the Roman period, reflects and resonates with concepts in vogue in modern society, as well as broader contemporary academic trends (Sunstein 2001: 1265).

In extension to the previous theme, four papers (Haeussler and Webster, Moat, Power, and Rodriguez) pay particular attention to the development of identities for ancient individuals. Miller Power's article, for example, provides an insight into the archaeology of non-binary and intersex identities in Roman London with a case-study focusing on the Harper Road burial. His paper is well-connected with the first theme where Roman archaeology is placed under the scrutiny of critical perspectives to become more inclusive, especially about ideas concerning the ongoing discussion between past lives and the modern voices which examine them. Elsewhere, Ralph Haeussler and Elizabeth Webster's article emphasises the use of creolage – a blend of creolisation and bricolage – to examine the intricacies of ancient identities and how they are perceived by modern archaeologists. Stephanie Moat and Gretel Rodriguez both follow on from this theme to explore ancient identities with a focus on marriage in the Roman provinces for the first one and incised motifs from Gallia Narbonensis (southern France) for the second author.

The third theme, which again draws connections with the approaches exploited in the first and second themes, can be broadly described as discussions looking at the intricate identities of sites and regions. This includes four papers (Baird, Trentacoste, Castro Garcia along with Tentea and Olteanu) which examine specific areas of the Roman world such as the city of Dura-Europos on the Syrian Euphrates, the *Colonia Ulpia Traiana* in the province of Dacia, the ancient Guadalquivir river in Spain, and the agro-economy of Italian territories during the first millennium BC. Jen Baird's paper on *The Ruination of Dura-Europos* (this issue) in particular, examines the treatment of the city through times by various groups such as the Roman army or more recently the 'Islamic State', and reveals the complex links between archaeologists, their evaluation of the loss of archaeological data, and the destruction of archaeological evidence itself. Geographically closer, Ovidiu Tentea's and Bianca Cristiana Olteanu's article offers an illuminating picture of the multiple functions granted to a unique location throughout time by both its inhabitants and passers-by. Looking at a different province, Maria del Mar Castro Garcia's paper presents an initial review of the LiguSTAR project which develop innovative approaches to the study of the ancient *lacus Ligustinus* in Iberia. Finally, Angela Trentacoste's article develops an alternative approach to the examination of identity in ancient Italy through the study of agriculture, husbandry, and urbanism.

The papers included in this issue of *TRAJ*, therefore, focus on and perpetuate some of the key interests of Roman archaeologists and academics in the study of identity. This crucial research agenda has continued to gain prominence in the discipline since the 1990s, and as highlighted by Martin Pitts (2007: 693), has developed into a major concept that unifies the humanities. What this present issue specifically showcases, however, is the diverse range of topics, approaches, and theories that Roman archaeology has recently encompassed, on its journey to become a more diverse research field.

COVID-19

By way of concluding this editorial, we felt it appropriate to acknowledge the recent difficulties that have challenged the field of Roman archaeology in academia, but also the heritage and contracting sectors, due to the ongoing worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Almost overnight, everyone around the globe has had to face a sudden transition in their daily life with confinement policies being applied in most countries. For researchers, their workplace and other institutional facilities became suddenly closed, including libraries, museums and archives, while fieldwork activities were paused. Coupling the aftermaths of the pandemic with the long-lasting economic changes expected from Brexit, the future of academia in the United Kingdom, in particular, seems rather gloomy.

While the impact of these phenomena on people's work-life balance remains to be fully investigated, the transition to work from home had led to noticeable adjustments in our research activities. Teaching staff, for example, were instantaneously expected to switch much of their undertakings from face-to-face to online. While the epidemic has undermined our ability to carry on with regular tasks, researchers have had to adapt and sometimes delay their work projects. In our case, the 30th Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, due to be held in Split (Croatia) between the 16th and 18th of April 2020, has had to be postponed to spring 2022, leaving a three-year gap with the precedent event. This conference would have offered a great platform

for discussions on a broader range of voices and subjects in line with the plea for more diversity in the field of Roman archaeology by TRAC 2019 keynote speaker (Kamash *forthcoming*). It is worth noting that the extended adjournment of TRAC/RAC lines up with a list of conferences in the field of archaeology that have either been cancelled or further pushed back (such as the LIMES conference, the International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, and the Annual Meeting for the Society of American Archaeology).

In addition to changes in our routine, the pandemic has created new issues that have stressed divisions created by existent inequalities. No economic and social sector has been left unharmed by the effects of this global health crisis (Corbera et al. 2020: 191). As a consequence, university budgets have been squeezed, threatening jobs and research funding in the context of growing resistance from scholars to the neo-liberalisation of education (Corbera et al. 2020: 192; The Lancet 2020). The overly competitive field of archaeology in Britain – as reminded to us by Weekes (et al. 2019) – has not been left undamaged. The disparities between research-based archaeology and commercial archaeology have been heightened, particularly through the pausing of local and international research projects. Last spring, the AIA (2020) had already warned about the hardships that the COVID-19 crisis would create for institutions employing archaeologists all around the world. Finally, the lockdown measures widely adopted by countries around the world are already leading to high unemployment rates that continue to increase social inequalities, while fuelling the socio-economic divisions from the recent years (Vieten and Poynting 2016: 535; Corbera et al. 2020: 192).

We ought to acknowledge that not all of us have a safe and supportive home-working situation. Factors such as status, gender or race may influence how the confinement measures have been experienced through aspects such as changes to earnings and support structures (Corbera et al. 2020: 192). Furthermore, this pandemic has placed a spotlight on the privileges experienced by certain segments of society, intersecting systems of oppression that affect others, and heightens stress that can threaten the inclusion of equity initiatives within decision-making (Malisch 2020: 15379). Despite this, it has been argued that the pandemic could provide academia in particular with an

‘... opportunity to foster a culture of care, help us refocus on what is most important, redefine excellence in teaching and research, and in doing so make academic practice more respectful and sustainable.’ (Corbera et al. 2020: 191)

Similar arguments have also been seen in the field of museums studies. Elizabeth Crooke (2020: 308) has argued that the pandemic in combination with the rise in social consciousness, evidenced by the Black Lives Matter protests and prediction of further austerity, requires museums to rethink their roles for society. Academia, and Roman archaeology ought to rethink their practices, roles within society, and treatment of those inside and out of the field. This may be particularly valuable within an economic climate that currently forces institutions, and subdivisions of them, to justify their right to acquire funds and remain functional. It also advances a culture of care, however, that centres issues of social justice, equality, equity, and inclusion that is sustainable.

One of the surest positive outcomes of this epidemic, however, is its environmental repercussions from a restriction on travel. The reduced economic and social activity caused by localised and global lockdowns has prompted people to develop new ways of collecting and disseminating data through ‘environmentally sustainable and inclusive research practices’ (The Lancet 2020). This was a key discussion point in TRAC 2019’s unconference session *Roman Approaches to Nature* organised by Jay Ingate and Matthew Mandich. With the advent of COVID-19 came a need to retain widespread communication that corresponds with calls for TRAC to facilitate international engagement without the resultant burden on the environment that plane travel for instance may inflict.

A high number of workshops and conferences have hence been moved online, using various platforms. Filling the gap left by the delayed 2020 conference, TRAC has, for example, announced the running of a webinar series on Tuesday evenings from November 2020 onwards. Its first keynote was delivered by Chiara Bonacchi over Zoom and concerned an insightful examination of contemporary populist nationalism and its connection to Roman myths. Moving such events online can further counter and circumvent some of the structural issues related to the organisation of research events, such as access to funds and the obtention of visas (as detailed in Kamash *forthcoming* regarding TRAC). This difficult period, therefore, offers plenty of stimuli to reflect upon many aspects of Roman archaeology and its study, approaches to engagement and dissemination of research, and our responsibility towards the planet and one another. Consequently, we would like to acknowledge and thank the authors, editors and reviewers of this volume for contributing to this *TRAJ* and joining us in the continuation of the introspection and development of Roman archaeology in such exceptional circumstances.

Notes

¹ View the TRAC 2019 programme here: <http://trac.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/TRAC-2019-Digital.pdf> [Last accessed on 11 November 2020].

² View the solidarity statement and action plan by the Multiculturalism, Race and Ethnicity in Classics Consortium here: <https://multiculturalclassics.wordpress.com/> [Last accessed on 11 November 2020].

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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