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# TRAC Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference

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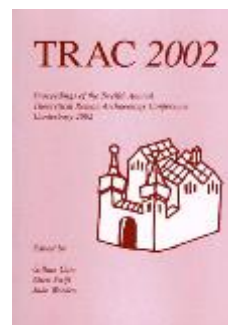
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# *TRAC 2002*

*Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual*

THEORETICAL ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGY CONFERENCE

*which took place at*

The University of Kent at Canterbury  
5–6 April 2002

*edited by*

Gillian Carr, Ellen Swift and Jake Weekes

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## Preface

The papers included in this volume are a selection of those offered at TRAC 2002. They illustrate a range of different theoretical approaches; one trend, though, is apparent; a wider engagement with interdisciplinary research, drawing theoretical ideas from many diverse fields of study, including philosophy, psychology, history of art, and consumer theory. The subject matter of the papers is similarly wide.

**Andrew Gardner** re-examines the relationship between humans and material culture in the Roman context, considering issues raised within recent debates in archaeology (as well as other disciplines) concerning agency. The paper looks at the materiality and intersubjectivity of human interaction; assessing the validity of universalist models of agency. Testing theory against specific artefactual examples, Gardner goes on to suggest frameworks for future research.

**Iain Ferris** discusses fragments of human bodies, from fragmentary statues and Roman busts and portrait heads, to anatomical *ex-votos* of eyes, sexual and internal organs, to depictions of beheaded individuals. Ferris looks for a pattern or trend represented by the fragmented images in terms of illuminating aspects of belief or value within Roman or Romanised societies which created and consumed such images, arguing that the *context* within which the images were used was the key to understanding them.

**Alfredo Gonzalez-Ruibal** takes a phenomenological approach to the study of Roman identities. He applies the philosophical ideas of Heidegger, specifically the question of 'Being' and the relationship between humans and objects, to both ancient and modern case studies: Roman Gallaecia in northwest Iberia, and Benishangul in present day Ethiopia. He suggests a new way to think about 'Romanization': as a process of dealing with uncertainty, and restoring and maintaining ontological security.

**Ellen Swift** considers artefactuality and cultural interaction with reference to dress accessories (in particular beads), which can be shown to be of 'Germanic' influence, but 'imported' into Late Roman contexts. The variant meanings of such 'Germanic inspired' objects found in burial contexts within the Roman empire are explored in relation to concepts of value and consumption, concluding that connections between the cultural style of objects and the cultural identity of the consumer should not be simply assumed.

**Ardle Mac Mahon** looks at the symbolic, ritual and spiritual significance of doorways into dwellings of the élite of the Roman empire, as emphasised by architectural embellishments to doorways, discussed here with reference to Pompeii and Herculaneum. Mac Mahon explains the significance of the transition over the doorway, which took place under the watchful gaze and domain of the god Janus.

**Dominic Perring** focuses on the dependence of current theory on the Classical heritage of Western ideas, arguing from this for the validity of a Hegelian reading (thesis, anthesis, synthesis) of the Frampton pavements. His paper puts forward a dialectical, Gnostic interpretation of the mosaic scheme which is suggested to represent a particular sequence: quest, mystery, and finally, revelation.

**Chris Martins** applies consumer behaviour theory to the subject of villa aggrandizement with reference sites in the east of Roman Britain in particular. Through a series of case studies, assumptions based on the conspicuous consumption model are challenged and further insights

into consumer behaviour are drawn from psychological approaches; finally, a close connection between villa variability and the rise of individualism is postulated.

**Paul Johnson** looks at the relationship between social organisation and economic activity. Following a brief study of previous scholarship on the Roman economy, he suggests a new approach to its study based on the relationship between social practices and modes of distribution of goods. The use of a social framework within which to contextualise economic activity is illustrated through a case study of Late Roman Ostia.

**Gillian Carr** investigates the usefulness of the concept of creolisation, putting forward another, related linguistic metaphor – that of ‘pidginisation’ – to understand aspects of early Roman Britain, specifically, unique or ‘pidgin’ artefacts. As a ‘pidgin’ is the equivalent of the first generation of those who used what later became a ‘creole’, this concept might allow us to understand the first use of ‘creolised’ artefacts. Carr illustrates the concept of pidginisation here with reference to artefacts in the ‘doctor’s grave’ at Stanway, Colchester.

**Stephanie Koerner** places the study of Roman Archaeology against a historical and philosophical background: that of the dominant meta-narratives of Western civilization. She focuses on the importance of the role played by the Roman Empire in the construction of historical and philosophical meta-narratives, and the implications for Roman archaeology of subsequent critiques. She then considers Roman archaeology’s relevance to the future development of a constructive critique of meta-narratives.

**Patricia Baker**, in response to the surprising lack of interest shown in the session on ‘Interdisciplinary approaches to Roman Women’ held at TRAC in 2002, traces the development and significance of gendered approaches to Roman Archaeology. The paper goes on to offer suggestions as to how such studies might be improved; in particular, it is argued that the historic ‘segregation’ of women’s studies is counter productive.

**Rebecca Redfern** looks at the health of women in Roman towns who suffered from a range of conditions, including infectious diseases caused by living in dense communities and in closely packed houses. Until a full comparison of health statuses between women in urban and in rural settlements has been made, the cause of ill-health of women living in towns cannot be shown to have been caused by urbanism; however, the main differences between rural and urban areas are through the modes of transmission and frequencies of disease only, not the diseases themselves.

We would like to thank the speakers who gave papers at TRAC 2002 and those who attended the conference and participated as session discussants. Thanks go to the organisers of the sessions: Patricia Baker, Ken Dark, Hella Eckhardt, Andrew Gardner, Stephanie Koerner, John Pearce, and Jake Weekes. Thanks also to the conference organisers, Patricia Baker, Gillian Carr, Ellen Swift, and Jake Weekes. We would also like to thank the willing and helpful cohort of student volunteers, staff in the Classical and Archaeological Studies Department of the University of Kent and UKC secretarial & technical staff including Charles Young, John Harris, Maureen Nunn, and Susan McLaughlin. Thanks also to UKC hospitality, Ken Reddie of Canterbury Museum, the Kent Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, and the Archaeology Committee of the Roman Society. Finally we would like to thank the referees, and Val Lamb and David Brown of Oxbow Books.

Gillian Carr, Ellen Swift and Jake Weekes