

Imperialism and Identities at the Edges of the Roman World 4, Petnica Science Centre, September 20th-23rd 2018

After four biennial meetings, Imperialism and Identities at the Edges of the Roman World (IIERW) has rapidly established itself as a crucial and dynamic forum for the advancement of Roman archaeology. While the discipline has made considerable advances in the decades since 1990, particularly thanks to the discussions enabled by the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (from 1991), there is a sense that some of the energy of the initial injection of post-colonial theory and other progressive agendas has stalled, at least in the UK – from which perspective I write this account. IIERW offers at least two ways of revitalising the continued transformation of Roman archaeology into a more mature discipline, which engages seriously with the complexity of the Roman world and its place in the present. One of these is the harnessing of the energy of a more diverse range of scholars engaged in research across Europe and beyond, breaking away from the parochialism to which TRAC has sometimes fallen victim, particularly in its emphasis on Roman Britain (cf. Gardner 2006, 132–133). Secondly, an explicit focus on the place of interactions between the Empire and the world beyond the frontiers, and between different groups within the Empire, helps these scholars to focus on social processes, and heterogeneity, in direct challenge to the traditional, monolithic and static images of Rome which have underpinned earlier conceptions in the academy and in the public view. It is also true that the comfortable scale of the meetings, and

the fantastic dedicated facilities at the Petnica Science Centre, help to afford fruitful discussions. The vision of the organisers, Vladimir D. Mihajlović and Marko A. Janković, in making these events so successful in all of these ways is much to be commended.

The 2018 meeting comprised seven sessions over three full days, with 32 presentations overall. Although several papers understandably dealt with the provinces of south-eastern Europe, the geographical range covered the entire Empire, from Britain to Egypt and from Spain to Germania and beyond. As the organisers intended, the ‘edges’ of the Roman world referenced by the title of the meeting were not just the frontiers, though they were certainly much discussed, but also social boundaries within the Empire, or ones which cut across the societies of later Iron Age Europe and the Mediterranean – between slaves and free, between gender groups, between elites and others, and so on. Theoretical perspectives from postcolonialism, globalisation, border theory, Marxism and more were all debated, and in the closing discussion at the end of the conference considerable attention was devoted to some of the problems we now face in communicating about the Roman past and its relevance to modern audiences, when our world is much divided, including on the issue of the value of scientific knowledge. Individual papers addressed a great range of topics. In the first session, themes of self and other in contacts between Romans and diverse peoples were much in evidence. Filip Doroszewski (Warsaw) discussed the representation of Crassus’ campaigns in the East by Plutarch, in the context of the cultural milieu replete with images of

Alexander and of Dionysus. Aleksandar Simić (Belgrade) explored constructions of barbarity in the accounts of contact between Rome and the Illyrians in the mid-Republic. Uroš Matić (Münster/Vienna) stepped to the other side of the mirror to see how the people of the Meroitic kingdom depicted northerners, which included Romans, though not as straightforwardly as has often been supposed. Finally, Dario Nappo (Naples) examined the complex interactions between the Empire and the desert people of Egypt, the Blemmies, highlighting important nuances in a relationship often seen as simply hostile.

The second half of the first day included several papers dealing with the theme of the global and the local, not least in language. The first of this session, from Dragana Kunčer (Belgrade), discussed the outdated concept of 'Balkan Latin', and argued for that while there is micro-variability in Latin usage, larger blocs have more to do with more modern scholarly traditions and other factors. Ivan Radman Livaja (Zagreb) then showed the significance of particular sets of epigraphic data in understanding local communities, presenting evidence from inscribed lead tags relating to the textile industry in Siscia, Pannonia. Our hosts, Vladimir D. Mihajlović (Novi Sad) and Marko A. Janković (Belgrade) then presented a paper on the utility of a globalisation framework in understanding the Serbian site of Židovar, eschewing the simple categorization of the site along traditional cultural lines. Antonija Ropkić Đorđević (Belgrade) examined economic themes in a similar vein, looking at the identification of new rural villa sites in Serbia, while Andreea Drăgan (Cluj-Napoca) used the evidence of a very

'global' product in the Roman world, amphorae, to understand interactions across the Danube. The last paper of the Thursday's sessions was presented by Aleksandar Gajić (Novi Sad), examining also the Danube frontier but rather from a historiographical perspective, using the lens of the cartography of the region in the 18th century as a means to consider the early Modern reception of Rome's frontiers and their influence on more recent geopolitical thinking.

Papers on the second full day of the conference were equally wide-ranging and thought-provoking. Kala Drewniak (Bonn) commenced the proceedings with an excellent discussion of the nature of frontier economies, influenced by recent work in border studies, and applied particularly to the limes in Germania Inferior. Very much developing similar themes, the paper by Marjanko Pilekić and a range of collaborators (Bonn, Frankfurt, Warsaw) looked at coinage moving across the Rhine frontier and examined the shift from monetary to more symbolic significance of this material. The next three papers also addressed aspects of the economics of imperial exploitation, production and consumption, with Brigitta Péterváry (Pápa) and colleagues examining villa patterning in Hungary, Almudena Orejas (Madrid) looking at the workforce in Roman mining, and Paul Erdkamp (Brussels) investigating the relationships between transport networks and market integration in the later Roman Western Empire. Before the break in the middle of the day, our attention was drawn east to consider glocalisation processes in the wider Hellenistic Mediterranean (Ljuban Tevdoski, Štip) and in Palmyra (Leonardo Gregoratti, Durham). The particular dimension of the interaction

between local and 'global' cultures that shapes ethnic identities preoccupied a number of the speakers in the second part of the day. Luca Mazzini (Exeter) looked at how Macedonian identity was articulated by people in Blaundos in Phrygia in its dealings with Rome. Valentin Bottez (Bucharest) examined Greek identity in Black Sea cities in the Roman period, and Anastasios Kakamanouidis (Thessaloniki) used the temple at Kalindioia, in Roman Macedonia, to look at the connections between local and imperial cultures through the specific figure of the emperor Gordian I. Finally, two papers in the last segment of the Friday evening explored manifestations of imperialism in Spain (Francisco Machuca-Prieto, Malaga, and Francisco Javier Sánchez-Palencia, Madrid), while the contribution of Sebastian Knura (Cologne) concluded the day's proceedings with an overview of gender divisions in the Roman world and some specific case-studies from the German frontier.

Saturday, the final day of the conference, comprised two fairly distinct groups of papers. The first session was largely concerned with broader theories of Roman imperialism, focussing somewhat on their intellectual history as well as their current applications. Neville Morley (Exeter) presented a clear and thorough overview of the issues surrounding the use of globalisation theory in Roman studies, much in evidence at recent conferences including our discussions in Petnica. The second speaker of the morning presented the enlightening and refreshing history of scholarship concerning Rome in the Soviet Union – Anton Baryshnikov (Moscow) highlighting the importance of the anti-imperialist strands

in Marxist thought. Kaja Stemberger (Ljubljana) raised significant issues with how archaeological terminology can reproduce embedded assumptions about past lives, not least with regard to gender and other aspects of identity. And finally in the morning the author of this review presented a paper on the ways in which recent work in border studies might inform Roman archaeology – and vice versa. In the afternoon, papers focussed on religion as, of course, a fundamental aspect of life in the Roman world and a medium through which many interactions were articulated. Aaron Irvin and Jason Lundock (Murray/Ocala) presented a fascinating paper on the symbolism of dogs, and dog sacrifices, in the Roman provinces, followed by Sara Igljić (Ugljan) looking at cultural interaction via religious cults in Liburnia, Illyricum. Dafni Maikidou-Poutrino (Thessaloniki) used the Egyptian sanctuary at Marathon, near Athens, to tease out aspects of local and different 'global' spheres, while Nina Mazhjo (Montreal) focussed on the inherently hybrid Mithraic cult. Alessandro Esposito (London) analysed the significant evidence of structured deposits for religion in Roman Britain, and the final session concluded with papers dealing with aspects of the development of Christianity in the later empire, including the development of anti-Semitism in the 4th century (Douglas Furth, New Haven), and the impact of religious change in urban landscapes of Illyricum/Dacia Mediterranea (Gordana Jeremić, Belgrade). As noted above, the last formal acts of the conference involved a closing discussion, pulling together the threads of all of the excellent contributions made over the three days of the meeting and looking outwards

to how the communication of new understandings of the Roman Empire might be made to have a deeper impact in the wider world. Overall, the sheer range of topics and perspectives on the complex phenomenon of Roman imperialism was extraordinarily impressive, and while I should declare at this point my place on the Advisory Board of the IIERW, I found the meeting enormously refreshing and inspiring. It is to be hoped that the organisers continue to develop the agenda framed at the four conferences they have put together so far, and push

the boundaries of Roman archaeology long into the future.

References

- Gardner, A. 2006. The future of TRAC. In B. Croxford, H. Goodchild, J. Lucas and N. Ray (eds) *TRAC 2005: Proceedings of the 15th annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Birmingham 2005*, 128–137. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

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