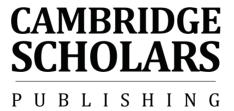# The Edges of the Roman World

The Edges of the Roman World

Edited by

Marko A. Janković, Vladimir D. Mihajlović and Staša Babić

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

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Foreword
Edges of the "Roman world", imperialism and identities

Vladimir D. Mihajlović

Marko A. Janković

The initial idea of this volume was sparked during the conference *Imperialism and Identities at the Edges of the Roman World* (IIERW), held at the Petnica Science Center (Serbia) from 20th to 23rd September 2012, and organized by the Department of Archeology, Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, Department of History, Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad and the Petnica Science Center. The main motive to organize the conference has been derived from the need to open a discussion on theoretical and methodological issues of the studies of the dynamic social processes taking place in the contexts of the Roman imperialism. Consequently, the aim was to connect the professional interpreters of the past from various academic backgrounds and theoretical-methodological traditions (see Hingley, this volume). While conferences of similar agenda already exist and operate for a long period of time and on regular basis, the specific aim in Petnica has been to address the gap between the academic communities that accelerated the discussion on the theoretical issues of the Roman archaeology and history, and those performing a more passive attitude in this regard. Undoubtedly and with good reason, the important processes of rethinking the approaches within the "Roman studies"[1] are strongly associated with the academia in the Western Europe, with Great Britain at the forefront. On the other hand, the proceedings of e.g. Theoretical Roman Archeology Conference may illustrate the limited extent of topics and participants coming from the rest of Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas and Australia. Although the "western theoretical revolution" influenced the researches in other parts of the world to a certain extent, with the growing number of scholars reconsidering traditional views, the overall intercommunication remains modest in scale, with limited exchange of ideas, studies and perspectives, as well as constructive discussions on further development of theory and methodology.

In this respect, IIERW was aimed to conceive a wide network of scholars "haunted by conundrums" of different possibilities for approaching the Roman past, as well as its reception in the contemporary world. The conference was conceptualized to cover the broadest possible area in terms of geography, questions/topics concerning the Roman imperialism and perspectives employed in the study. In this way, it opened the opportunities to discuss general approaches, raise the awareness of each other's researches, present particular case studies and agendas, and summarize the similarities/

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1 By this term we try to sum various types of intellectual endeavors (history, archaeology, art history, literature, linguistics, law etc.) to study and interpret the sequence of history often regarded as the Roman past/period.

differences within the multitude of ways in which we conceptualize and interpret the effects of the Roman imperialism. As it has been shown in the course of IIERW, this was welcomed by participants, who crucially contributed to further development of the ideas posed in the conference agenda. Among other things, the lively discussions and mutual networking resulted in the decision to publish a special volume – a collection of papers best representing the subjects that kept recurring during the conference, as well as demonstrating the variety of possible perspectives and covering the broad geographical scope.

As in other cases of naming (something), the selection of words in the syntax engaged could lead to various readings or even complete misunderstanding of the initially intended message. In this regard the title of this volume (and the conference) needs certain explanations, especially because it was coined to target the widest possible range of topics, approaches and scholars from different meridians. First we address the concept of the Roman imperialism which was a gathering point for the conference and, although absent from the title of the volume, represents the theme addressed by almost all the papers presented here. While the comprehensions of the concept have been changing over the last century and are still debated, there is a consensus that some sort of phenomenon signified with the term existed and operated during several centuries of the history of humankind (Webster and Cooper eds. 1996; Woolf 1998; 2001; Champion ed. 2004; Dietler 2005; Morley 2010; Mattingly 2011). Our position on the matter supposes that the Roman imperialism(s), in the broadest sense, could be regarded as a string of ideologies, politics, narratives and practices under constant (re)constructions, (re)negotiations and changes over time, but nevertheless constituted a certain social structure which enabled the maintenance of a system of hegemony. The manifestations of domination, its immediate/long term or direct/indirect consequences of course varied, but the point is they facilitated the privileged social positioning for some and simultaneous marginalization of others, not only by the deprivation of certain social rights, but also by the complete denial of full-scale humankind capacities (*humanitas*). The ideology of domination and specific perspectives used by the Roman elites created imperialistic discourses/narratives which were not mere metaphorical elaboration of elusive philosophy, but represented a worldview which had direct practical repercussions for many people who lived within, on the borders of, or even out of the Roman socio-political structure (see Langerwerf, Janković, Džino, Roymans, this volume). The Roman imperialism, however seen/defined/explained, influenced and participated in shaping the lives and social realities of a vast number of people, triggering perplexed processes operating for at least six centuries (circa 3rd c. BC – AD 4th c.) in the Mediterranean and continental parts of Europe, Asia and Africa. The number of papers in this volume shows a portion of diversity of imperialistic encounters with local societies and the complexity of their outcomes, at the same time demonstrating the mechanisms by which Rome's imperial aspirations were articulated (see Dudziński, Matić, Irvin, Madsen, Ruscu, Egri, Mihajlović, Džino, Roymans, this volume).

Additionally, the Roman imperial era became a powerful historical-ideological concept in the periods following the collapse of the Roman Empire and continued to inspire people worldwide up to this day (see

Hingley, this volume). Numerous social groups and individuals have been relating to it through various sorts of reception, and made it relevant for a whole range of spheres in the contemporary world. Even in the extreme case of a complete rejection of Roman imperialism as an "objective historical category", centuries of its understanding as such incarnated the concept and established it as "real" through the extensive usage in the modern contexts. In this process, "Roman studies" (especially in their traditional forms) were not just another variant of how moderns saw the Roman Empire and its rule, but one of the crucial actors for "embodiment" and legitimization of the concept (of Roman imperialism). Since they have played a pivotal role in the construction of the official professional knowledge of the "Roman past", dominantly interpreting it in the key of the "Roman imperialism" by engaging the one-sided biased perspective, the concept became "objective" both in terms of "historical truth" and a distinctive field of research. Moreover, the Roman imperialism acquired the status of a meta-narrative inside the Roman studies, which has direct consequences until today. Having this in mind, our usage of the expression the *Roman imperialism* does not only imply the research of the period in which the socio-political power was centered in Rome, but also the reflexive study of the history and epistemology of our disciplines which have constantly manipulated the notion and its content. Some of the problems regarding this level of the Roman imperialism are discussed by several of our contributors (González Sánchez, Langerwerf, Vranić, Babić, this volume).

Perhaps the most problematic term used in the title is the *Roman world*. This definition is value-laden if understood in the sense that certain territory, people and time-span were strictly and unquestionably "Roman". A centric and unilateral view are the last things we want to promote as a perspective for approaching the past, and it is therefore important to underline that the notion (*Roman world*) does not presuppose the Roman homogeneity nor absolute supremacy of any kind. Even though there were people who indeed saw the whole world as Roman, other had completely different positions on the matter, not to mention the series of situationally defined perspectives in between. Hence, there is a serious problem of how to name in a laconic way the social, political, cultural, economic and other phenomena which existed not only within the immediate sphere of control of the Roman Empire but also in the areas affected by it. Labeling something with a relatively simple term which is to cover the profound complexity is a dangerous task indeed, so we propose an extremely loose understanding of the Roman world, that implies various sorts of heterogeneities (both within or out of the Empire) which were somehow (directly or otherwise) related to Rome's socio-political system and its impacts. In other words, the term *Roman world* is used here tentatively, conditionally and relationally in order to encompass various sorts of ties/connections of different entities and the dominant socio-political and military structure at the time.

Another word in the title needs clarification. The term *edges* primarily targets geographical areas which were at some point the boarder zones of the Roman Empire, but does not exclusively cover this meaning. The "peripheries of the Empire", with a myriad of interactions and socio-cultural dynamics involved, are unquestionably at the focus of the Roman provincial studies for decades, and a great number of papers took this connotation of the *edges* in addressing the particular case studies. However, as shown by several

authors in the volume, the concept of imperial border zones may acquire the meaning far removed from the traditional vision of a strict delimitation and a highly controlled frontier setting apart and protecting the "civilization" from the sinister "barbarous" populations (also compare Whittaker 1994; 2004; Wells 1999; 2005; Burns 2003). Instead, the perspectives employed draw on the ideas of entangled and changeable possibilities of interactions between the actors included in the process (Matić, Egri, Mihajlović, Džino, Roymans, this volume). However, the term *edges* also refers to other types of margins such as different status, cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, age, professional, resident, economic etc. groups which existed inside the Roman imperial structure. Often, such communities have been at the fringes of what could be regarded as the network of dominant imperial elites, but they constituted the majority of population whose destinies, on the other hand, are far less clear from the sources at our disposal (Knapp 2011). How various types of such collectivities experienced the world around, how they created or were designated with the sense of "sameness", what were their behaviors in various settings, what was the role of material culture/written words in communicating different social attitudes, and similar questions constitute a tremendously important area of contemporary researches of the past. For this reason, papers dealing with the aspects of such communities (Janković, Hervás, Walas, this volume) or artifacts which were used in certain social practices (Mudd, this volume) represent useful insights into the problem.

Understandings of a character and social dynamics of different groups brings us to the next term which was utilized during the conference and in the papers of this volume. *Identities* is the word in constant use within social sciences and humanities for decades and is loaded with meanings. In the last c. twenty years the concept of identity acquired more and more "followers" among archeologists, historians and art historians as an adequate means to approach the questions of collective and individual sense of belonging. Since these phenomena were under the strong influence of traditional deterministic perspectives that favored ethnic, national and cultural "togetherness" of people as the most important and almost naturally given ways for social gathering, the "theory of identities" offered new and fresh opportunities for studying and understanding the past (cf. Insoll ed. 2007; Díaz-Andreu *et al*. 2005; Casella and Fowler eds. 2005). Roman studies, although somewhat slow in accepting the new conceptual framework for analysis, eventually joined the trend and made some visible progress in changing the ways we look at the "Roman past" (among many others Jones 1997; Woolf 1998; Wells 1999; 2001; Huskinson ed. 2000; Webster 2001; Roymans 2004; Hingley 2005; Creighton 2006; Pitts 2008; Revell 2009).

However, there has been serious criticism of the concept of identity in general, and many academic voices have been raised to warn that the term became yet another "buzz-word" which experiences semantic inflation due to overuse and usually undefined specific meanings. The critics pointed to the fact that identity doesn't have an analytical value, since it could stand for too much or nothing at all, could have very vague ("weak") meaning or indeed extremely strict ("hard") one, which make it markedly ambiguous both in terms of theoretical content and methodological use. The problem lies on the level where "identity" has been taken as a trendy cover word for traditional essentialist comprehensions of social life, and

started to be understood as a pervasive feature of every individual and group almost in a sense of an inner *Geist*, the sole essence of the being whatever that might be in particular cases. Put it bluntly, there has been a tendency to use the "I-word" only as a new and "theoretically" more acceptable determinant instead of the old reifying ones (nation, ethnos, culture, religion, sex), without actually giving up the pretension to explain collectivities in generalistic and normative ways. Even in the cases when multivalent, fluid, situational characters are emphasized, identity is sometimes understood as one and single "something" which only changes/ switches manifestations depending on contexts, but in its core remains the ultimate sum of these varieties. No less problematic are the weak uses of the "identity" as they often stretch its semantic limits in order to downplay the essentialist connotations, simultaneously depriving it of almost any specific and clear content (Broobaker and Cooper 2000, 10–14). These general problems are addressed by the use of more precise expressions (such as identification, categorization, self-understanding, social location, commonality, connectedness, groupness), allowing for clearer referring to/ definition of the analyzed phenomena, and the inclusion of both relational and categorical aspects of individuals' and groups' social determinations (Broobaker and Cooper 2000, 14–21). Admittedly, these objections to the use of the concept of "identities" are sometimes valid, and indeed there is a tendency of the notion's uncritical manipulation. However, the question arises whether the concept of *identities* is nevertheless a suitable means for interpretation of the past? In our opinion, the use of the concept inside archaeology, history and art history is a reasonable theoretical strategy at the moment for several reasons.

Interpreters of the past do not have the privilege of working with live informants who could offer particularistic perspectives on themselves and the world they live in. Quite the contrary, we handle indirect, limited/ biased (written sources) and silent evidence (material culture), often nearly impossible or very difficult to interpret and always misleading if taken at face value. In other words, we deal with circumstantial data to approach the almost completely unknown area (the past), and always work with generalities of a grand scale (especially when it comes to the topic such as the "edges of the Roman world"). Hence, the detailed comprehensions of how different identifications, categorizations, self-understandings, representations, connectedness, social positioning operated are usually beyond our reach. For example, judging by material culture, it is possible to assume that some kind of social gathering existed and some people might have belonged to a common group, but only on very rare occasions it is possible to reconstruct in detail how some collectivity really was established, maintained, changed, functioned on different levels of social practices, what were the criteria and socio-cultural aspects that built it etc. Similarly, we are deprived of the possibility to directly research the dynamics and situational causalities of expression/performance/display of any of the "roles" (i.e. identities) that people from the past had and lived. In this respect, the warnings about no analytical value of "identities" due to general and unspecific meaning do not stand as unavoidable obstacle, since the generality of "identities" is satisfactory as an initial framework in the process of narrowing down the almost infinite unfamiliarity of the past. "Identities" could be a constructive first step in researching the past societies

as neutral enough umbrella-term which delineates the correlation between the material culture/written accounts and some sort of "togetherness" without implicating its character in advance. However, this doesn't mean that essentialist or completely vague understandings of identities are favourable theoretical positions which would simply explain away all the complexity of various social gatherings. Rather, the generality of the concept is only fit for initial phases of the academic speculations about the past, after which it should open the possibilities for a more detailed development of an argument and eventual increase of the "image's resolution". Thus, it is of crucial importance to focus upon particular identities and modes of their expression, as well as upon the conceptual tools we use in the interpretation. This is especially true when it comes to the pitfall of replacing traditional notions (such as ethnicity and culture) with the new ones (identity with no specifications of the meaning of the term) without the actual change of theoretical perspective (cf. Pitts 2007). To sum up, utilization of what has been developed inside the framework of the concept of identities in general can result in great benefits for the studies of the past, but it is necessary in our opinion to couple the endeavor to get a more nuanced comprehension of different social entities with more elaborate and precise theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Furthermore, "identities" are a valid theoretical position within the Roman studies because they enable moving away from the traditional means of understanding this part of the history. This is particularly valuable regarding the narrative of "Romanization", dominating the field for nearly a century and a half. As many authors rightly pointed out over the last couple of decades, "Romanization" is a heavily biased concept, with a number of theoretical and methodological problems, extensively criticized and almost completely rejected in some contemporary studies. In this regard the concept of identities proved to be a useful analytical tool as it enables *multidimensional-thinking-about* instead of *two-dimensional-reduction-of* the "Roman world". Rather than to understand the Roman Empire as a political, social, economic and military dominator, who thanks to these kinds of alleged superiority "naturally" and "unavoidably" initiated cultural and ethnic changes, the new possibilities are opened to comprehend the period on more complex grounds. These include taking into account mutually connected various partakers of different scales, capable of active/changeable life strategies and with numerous levels of disparate (or indeed discrepant) experiences. In other words, self-explicatory and one-sided theoretical position is now being replaced with more elaborate approaches that trigger the opportunities of nuanced and more advanced interpretations. Thinking through the concept of identities facilitated the discussion of a variety of types of social positioning and connectedness. Consequently, simplified notion of binary division of "Roman" vs. "native" and "civilization" vs. "barbarity" gave place to the questions of legal, social, economic, ethnic, resident, local, regional, gender, age, professional, religious etc. (self)determinations that were fluid, interwoven and situational. Additionally, this kind of thinking also provided a sense of constantly changeable character of the Roman world, previously often neglected due to the static features implied by the "Roman civilisational mission" or overall "Romanization". In general, this theoretical development enabled a better insight into many different levels, ways and

practices according to which the Roman world and the surrounding areas were actually operating, and how this "superstructure" was constructed and maintained with all of its volatilities, complexities, similarities, differences and discrepancies. The beneficial outcome of the concept of identities could be immediately realized by the state of academic discussions on the character of changes caused by the Roman imperial expansion. The current theories involving the concepts such as globalization, connectedness, social networking, hybridization, creolization, bricolage, in their essence revolve around the notion of complex and dynamic character of various identities, whose possession, communication, performance and interplay (within and between the groups involved) were resulting in infinite outcomes, some of which were crucial in building up what we vaguely define as the "Roman world" (Millet 1990; Woolf 1997; Mattingly 1997; 2011; Hingley 2005; Webster 2001; Pitts 2008; Versluys 2013; to name but a few). For this reason, we argue that the concept of identities can and does bring important changes in the theoretical and methodological course of Roman studies. Although these fresh perspectives are still "work in progress" and often have serious flaws, the general state of our disciplines shows dynamics and a move away from the passive and nearly "autistic" air of a conservative intellectual attitude. Exactly because of this it is of uttermost importance to accelerate the process by engaging in an open discussion both in the context of professional meetings and by publishing the papers offering a "gaze from new angles". As demonstrated by the conference and papers in the volume this general agenda is welcomed and nearly all works stem from, or at least touch upon the complex problems of various identifications in the contexts of the Roman imperialism.

The IIERW conference was, in fact, organized as the first step in that particular direction. We tried to organize a meeting where different issues of the "Roman past" would be addressed in order to outline some methodological and theoretical flaws and to engage in a process of active debate on the modes of overcoming them. One of the main goals was to breach the traditional demarcation lines between the different disciplines, in order to gain a clearer perspective on the pressing issues when dealing with the "Roman past". We tended to put together the scholars from different disciplines, fields and perspectives addressing the same subject – the Roman imperialism and its emanations and implications in the local contexts. It was not our intention to find a "correct" methodology or perspective, but to challenge different points of view in order to understand the differences and maybe find a way to overcome them through a constructive debate. Scholars from traditionally divided fields of archaeology, history, art history, law, architecture and classics were trying to find a common ground in achieving their research goals. Such organization of work gave a new and fresh insight into the subject.

The differences among the participants and their presentations concern not only their disciplinary affiliation, but also their research background, theoretical and methodological perspectives, and sub-discipline divisions (especially within archaeologists). The participants came from more than twenty different countries, those where the theoretical perspectives shifted more than twenty years ago (like Great Britain, USA or Australia), as well as those where that process has been somewhat slower (Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Italy, Denmark, Poland or Macedonia). This was not an attempt

to "reintegrate the SE Europe" into the debate, but rather an exchange of opinions within the same academic context (Babić, in press). The conference, and this volume, has demonstrated that we have passed that point some time ago. Nevertheless, the volume is also important for making those results visible outside of our own academic communities.

Yet another very important obstacle was overcome – the division inside the field of archaeology. For a long time, on one side, we had praehistorians dealing with the material culture of the Iron Age populations until the very moment of the Roman conquest and, on the other side, Romanists who focused their interest in material culture exclusively from that moment onward. There were few attempts to understand the populations who at the certain point interacted with the Roman army and administration as a whole. Their histories were usually split between the Roman archaeologists and praehistorians, who presented their results respectively at different conferences and in different publications. Furthermore, the artificial divisions of individual populations according to the geographical or chronological specializations of scholars implicated that the differences between them were much deeper in political, cultural, economic or ethnic sense. The lack of communication between the scholars dealing with the same problem approaching it from different standpoints and the insistence on the differences between their subjects of research, provided a fertile ground for misleading interpretations of cultural changes. The gathering of scholars from traditionally different fields of research at the IIERW conference contributed to blurring their divisions and thus a better understanding of their research subjects.

The conference *Imperialism and Identities at the Edges of the Roman World* raised significant attention among the academic community. This fortunate outcome resulted in the decision to organize a biannual conference series from now on. The topics of the conference will change in order to respond to actual issues, but the main goal will remain the same – to get together all the scholars dealing with the Roman past, in order to exchange the opinions, results and perspectives. Since the first conference resulted in an inspiration for some other projects linking the colleagues from different countries and disciplines on the same task, we hope that this will be the place where more important initiatives of the kind will be negotiated.

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Introduction

Richard Hingley

This edited volume originates from the conference held at the Petnica Science Centre in Serbia from 20th to 23rd September 2012. This was one of three successive conferences within two months that addressed the edges and the frontiers of the Roman Empire. The *XXII's International Limes (Roman Frontiers) Conference* in Bulgaria slightly earlier in September and the Petnica conference were swiftly followed by the Discovery Programme's meeting on *Ireland in a Roman World* (late October). These conferences demonstrate an increasing focus on the character of the borders of the Roman Empire and the peoples who lived along them. Indeed, scholarly interest in the frontiers and edges of the Roman Empire appears to be expanding, with recent publications taking different approaches (e.g. Breeze 2012; Hekster and Kaizer (eds.) 2011; Hingley 2012; Totten and Lafrenz Samuels (eds.) 2012 and Mills (ed.) 2013), a focus of interest that coincides with research on borders across archaeology and in other disciples (cf. Mullin 2011; Richardson 2013).

Historically, the *Limes Conference* has concentrated on the infrastructure of Roman military control and evidence for the soldiers' lives along the frontier (James 2005), although the agenda is gradually beginning to shift to consider additional topics, including management and interpretation (e.g. Mills (ed.) 2013). The Discovery Programme conference explored the contacts between Ireland and western parts of the Roman Empire, reviewing their significant project (http://www.discoveryprogramme. ie/research/late-iron-age-roman-ireland.html). By contrast, the Petnica conference had a very different agenda, to 'bring together different research areas and connect them with the same research problem — social and cultural relations within the Roman Empire and its fringes'. This meeting attracted a range of scholars, including PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers and established academics, and included a wide variety of contributions delivered by 53 participants from eighteen countries across five continents. Sixteen of these papers have been updated for publication in this volume.

The papers delivered at the Petnica conference and those published in this volume vary considerably in approach, subject matter and geographical focus. Significantly, several participants have taken on board the theory-driven agendas that have been developing in Roman archaeology in England and elsewhere over the past 25 years (for recent reviews of archaeology and theory, see Laurence 2012: 61-73; Gardner 2013). Innovative papers draw upon these perspectives and adapt them to fit new geographical and thematic territories. In this regard, the Petnica conference followed a series of earlier meetings that have addressed theory and classical civilization. In Britain, it has been more than twenty years since a group of archaeologists, led by Eleanor Scott, launched their campaign to introduce theory to Roman archaeology at the first *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference* (Scott

1993). They were seeking new ways to break out of the restrictions created by over-definitive and inflexible accounts of the Roman past. The creation of *TRAC* directly resulted in the development of another new initiative, the Roman Archaeology Conference, which first convened in 1995. *RAC* sessions helped to spread the theoretical agendas under discussion at *TRAC*, increasing the visibility of new approaches (cf. Mattingly (ed.) 1997; Hingley (ed.) 2001; Scott and Webster (eds.) 2003). *TRAC* has continued to meet in the UK and overseas, and new directions of study have been developed at subsequent meetings. The *Critical Roman Archaeology Conference*, held in Stanford (California) in 2008, was an offshoot of *TRAC* that developed an explicitly theoretical focus for the Roman archaeology of the Mediterranean (Totten and Lefrenz Samuels (eds.) 2012).

The Petnica conference supplemented and extended this geographical focus through a series of papers, while also including sufficient time for a lively discussion of various conceptual issues from which disagreements at the core of current discussions in Roman imperial identities emerged.

A significant part of the *TRAC* agenda has been to critique the Romanization models that the author's generation inherited from earlier researchers, since many felt that this approach has projected too simple a conception of identity and social change. Some contributors at the Petnica conference appeared determined to continue to draw upon the concept of "Romanization", although the term appears, on the whole, to have been avoided in the published papers; others roundly rejected it. This is familiar ground from discussions at Roman archaeology conferences in Britain and elsewhere over the past two decades. This discussion and disagreement is a positive aspect of our current academic situation and perhaps indicates that Roman specialists are spreading their wings to think in new ways. The theory-driven agenda that has arisen from Roman archaeology in England and other parts of the world developed as a response to former attempts to control research, and innovation and transformation should always be encouraged. One of the issues stressed by the author's paper given at Petnica is that we need to open up the academic agenda and should support and encourage disagreement and reasoned discussion across academic and geographical boundaries (Hingley in press). If Romanization can be made to work in particular places and at particular times, it is important to hear why it should be the preferred approach (cf. Versluys 2014).

This author's particular focus addresses the ways that Roman concepts and materials have been reused in deeply political ways in subsequent societies (including our own) and the relevance of this issue to how the Roman past is created (cf. Hingley 2005; in press; Lafrenz Samuels and Totten 2012). Since the Roman past can be seen to represent a deeply political topic in all the different countries in which we live, we should not expect everyone to agree on how to research and comprehend the surviving texts and materials. In this published volume, several papers explore the historical and political context of current understanding of the classical past, such as the problems raised by the use of classical knowledge in ethnic nationalism and the relevance of contemplating ancient acts of protest and revolt. Too little research has been undertaken on identities outside the Western extremities of the Roman Empire and there are important new studies in this volume. These include Vranić' analysis of the problems with the adoption of the concept of "Helenization" in the Iron Age of the Balkans,

and Madsen's articulation of some aspects of Greg Woolf's approach to "Becoming Roman" (1998) to build a more complex conception of multiple identities for communities of Roman-period Asia Minor. These are topics that would benefit from further cross-disciplinary and international research in the face of increasing nationalism across Europe and the Mediterranean (cf. Hsu 2010).

The most positive aspect of the conference was the indication that a healthy, open and questioning approach to the Roman past is drawing in archaeologists and ancient historians from across a vast geographical territory, networking ideas that can help to continue to revitalize Roman studies. This is not to say that all the papers represented at the conference or published in this volume seek to develop a new theoretical agenda. Some are more traditional in focus and ambition, but all make relevant and important observations. The proceedings of the *CRAC* and Petnica conferences contain significant papers from younger scholars and, taken together, these volumes indicate the vibrant state of Roman archaeology and that new approaches and methods are spreading throughout an increasingly international academic community.

Nevertheless, we may have to wait some time before these perspectives are well represented at the Limes Conferences. That the Petnica conference followed on so soon after the Limes Conference emphasized the theoretical orientation of a number of the papers since the latter conference has been very slow to adopt comparative approaches to address frontier populations (cf. James 2005). By stressing frontier processes at the edges of empire rather than the tangible remains of Roman military imperial infrastructure, the Petnica meeting helped to contribute a number of original perspectives to the new agenda that is addressing past populations on the margins of Roman imperial control.

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Roman-barbarian interactions and the creation of Dutch national identity: The many faces of a myth

Sergio González Sánchez

Many publications, conference papers and hours of discussion have been devoted to the subject of the Batavians and, more specifically, to the role of this first-century, lower Rhine-based tribe as forefathers of the Dutch nation, *i.e.* to the "Batavian myth" (Schöffer 1975; Brandt and Slofstra 1983; Willems 1986; van Driel-Murray 2003; Roymans 2004; Roelofs and Swinkels 2004; Derks and Roymans 2009). It is with good reason that Nico Roymans argued at this very conference that "the Batavians rank among the best-studied frontier peoples of the Roman Empire", and in fact, there are very few conferences on Roman provincial archaeology or Roman frontiers studies lacking a paper on or reference to this tribe/topic[1]. However, there are many aspects of both the tribe and the myth that have not been addressed adequately or sufficiently, namely: how has society fed the myth and, conversely, how has the myth fed the common identity of Dutch society? What is the social and cultural background, not just of the myth itself, but also of its origins and development? Is there a unique interpretation of the myth? How well does the post-colonial framework work for a nation lacking a recent colonial past?

Post-colonial deconstruction, such as the one carried out by British archaeologists of their own colonial interpretational discourse (Mattingly and Alcock 1996; Mattingly 2011; Freeman 1996; Hingley 2000), opens the door to a much more comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon, although with some limitations, as will be shown later in the paper. However, to my knowledge, such an approach to the topic has not been applied to date to the Dutch interpretative tradition.

As part of a broader study that I am currently developing in my doctoral thesis, this paper will present two case studies in a comparative way: the humanist birth of the myth and a colonial/imperial variation of it; two of the many facets that we encounter when we deconstruct the historical and archaeological discourses formed around the Batavian myth over the last five centuries within Dutch territory. The aim is to break with the traditional uniformity identified in the interpretations and analyses of this myth carried out so far, but first we need to frame this study with a few basic considerations.

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1 A statistical analysis of the occurrence of the word "Batavian" (or related variations) in paper titles and abstracts from the main international Roman archaeology conferences is being prepared right now by the author. However, preliminary results show that in the last five years the average occurrence is of two papers per conference, which in the author's opinion represents a high Batavian thematic presence given the small size of the Batavian territory in the Roman World.

Myth, history and national Identity:
"fatal attraction" in a changing context

The first thing to be taken into consideration is the relationship between myth, history and national identity. As said by the author elsewhere, this paper will define "national identity" as the characteristic features of a nation (*e.g.* language, traditions, culture, history and, within history, myth)[2], accepted and shared by the majority of its people—defining the nation's self-image—and determined in opposition to other nations and their identities—defining the external or international image of the nation.

"Historical myths", understood as being those past deeds, with or without historical foundation, perceived by the collective memory as real history, are one of those features which relate to a common ancient ancestry of the greatest importance for the creation and reaffirmation of a sense of national identity (Burkert 1979: 23; Cruz and Frijhoff 2009: 1; Frijhoff 2009: 117).

Therefore, the relationship between "myth" and "history" is based on a complex dichotomy, in which we strive towards exposing the truth of the historical fact behind the artful fabrications of the myth. It sounds simple. However, tracing the foundations and makings of a myth is much more complicated than that, mainly because no one lets facts get in the way of a good myth; we simply love myths. The question is: why are we so attracted to them?

Firstly, myths thrive on the society that created them and thus, society finds recognisable features of itself in the myth, making it much more familiar, attractive and powerful. Powerful myths can convey multiple meanings and are flexible enough to adapt and mutate as the needs of their audiences change. Therefore, the important thing is not to discover the truth or untruth behind a myth, but to dissect its meaning(s) in context, a context that is in constant change.

Secondly, because myths are multilayered and alive—multilayered like archaeological stratigraphy that we can only see when we look at a trench's section; alive because they are not a fixed entity, instead, they transform themselves alongside the historical context—acknowledging a changing historical context is the only thing that could reconcile myth and history, and the only way to observe the different layers in a clear cut way.

If we are to understand and illustrate in words the effects that a changing historical context has on myths, Lindsey Allason-Jones's opening lecture in *TRAC* 2011 (Newcastle) seems a very appropriate example (Allason-Jones 2012). Among other things, she showed different artistic expressions of Queen Boudica's myth, from a very classical representation to modern fantastic reinterpretations, including Queen Boudica's statue in central London. Among the conclusions that she drew that day, she stated that:

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2   Other aspects such as biological descent (*i.e.* genetic commonality) could also be included but are highly complex issues, with too many implications, as to be discussed here. While the features listed above are directly related to the evolution of national cultural identity, biological descent or racial commonness, despite having been used in the past for cultural exclusivity and nationalistic claims of racial uniqueness (*e.g.* Nazi Germany), are not, in the author's opinion, of much relevance for the current discussion.

"each generation had their own idea of what these women looked like, depending on what was happening politically and socially at the time...each generation brings its own attitudes to its studies" (Allason-Jones 2012).

These views can also be backed by Loewenberg's remark (1985: 15) that "each historian and each age redefines categories of evidence in the light of its needs, sensibilities, and perceptions".

For the purposes of this paper I would like to expand and combine these ideas by saying that each generation produces its own interpretation of the past depending on their given political and social context, bringing their own attitudes to their reading of the collective past.

Down post-colonial lane

The second framing consideration to bear in mind is related to the approach applied to this study. The author's take on Allason-Jones' and Loewenberg's views is well described by and consistent with the post-colonial mainstream of British archaeology. Borrowed from the field of cultural anthropology and from the works of Edward Said (1993), a post-colonial analytical deconstruction was applied by Hingley (2000), Mattingly (1996; 2011) and Freeman (1996), among others, to the colonialist framework in which Roman archaeology developed in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century with regard to the theory of Romanization. This method has proven most effective in addressing this issue of a changing historical context and discourse. However, two dangerous realities have to be acknowledged.

The first is that, aware of the biases behind the colonial perspective, we need to acknowledge that we are deconstructing it from our own perspective, the post-colonial perspective, which is in itself equally biased. This seems obvious but it needs to be restated, just as much as I need to acknowledge that I am already subconsciously bringing my own political and social biases to my works. In the same way we are capable of looking back into the past and identifying what biases shaped the understanding that our predecessors had of the way in which the relationship between the Roman Empire and its subjects and neighbours worked, we need to identify the variety of backgrounds (*e.g.* national, academic, personal, etc.) from which our ideas arise, in which they are formed and formulated. We cannot escape our own biases but we can try to be aware of them.

The second is that we should not treat post-colonialism in Roman archaeology as a unitary theoretical mainstream. In the same way that we may accept the existence of "discrepant colonial experiences" (Mattingly and Alcock 1996), we also need to acknowledge the existence of "discrepant post-colonial experiences", *i.e.* a variety of post-colonial perspectives arising from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences mentioned earlier. A detailed analysis of the historical backgrounds in which various recent European archaeological traditions have been formed is currently being developed by the author as part of his doctoral research. This could give us the key to understand this principle. The cultural and historical precepts upon which post-colonial approaches have been consolidated in the UK are not always traceable in other European nations. However, the

UK's theoretical framework has been generally accepted by many other nations. In order to explain this phenomenon, it is important to highlight here the idea of "intellectual fashion" developed by Pluciennik (2011) in the controversial work *"The Death of Archaeological Theory"*.

The use and misuse of Roman-barbarian interactions: the exegesis of the Batavian myth

After these framing considerations let me now develop one of the core ideas of the paper: how barbarian myths have been consistently used in the creation and reinforcement of national identities, and how the dichotomy between Roman Europe and barbarian national heroes has actually worked.

A significant number of European national identities are partly based on myths inspired by Roman-barbarian clashes. This aids the transformation of some "local" barbarian leaders into national heroes. Such are the cases of Vercingetorix in France (Amalvi 1988), Ambiorix in Belgium, Boudica in Britain (Allason-Jones 2012), Arminius in Germany, Viriatus in Spain/Portugal, Civilis in the Netherlands or Decebalus in Romania (Popa, in press). As I have commented elsewhere,

> "It is the interaction with and antagonism to Rome—which was idealistically depicted in the sixteenth century as a powerful Empire—which makes them valuable tools for the formation of national identity, as it increases the positive impact of their deeds on the psyche of the nation" (González Sánchez 2012, 88).

This Roman element is always present in the origin of "barbarian" ancestry myths. The state promotion of these "barbarian" characters can be seen, for instance, through the observation that statues of most of those barbarian leaders adorn very central locations in their countries, normally in the capital cities' centres. Thus we can observe a double sphere of interaction between these myths and society: abstract, in the collective memory, and physical, in public spaces.

That is certainly the case with the tribe and myth under study in this paper, the Batavians in the Netherlands. The Batavian myth is an interactional myth necessarily connected with its Roman counterpart. Batavians, like many other ethnic labels of Germanic cultural or tribal groups, could in fact be considered a Roman construct. The only surviving descriptions of the Batavians are Roman, and therefore it is a Roman projection that has been inherited and developed in our scholarly and literary tradition. Thus, the Batavian myth comprises not only Batavians but also Roman elements, completing the Roman-barbarian dichotomy on which it is based.

But what do we mean by "Batavian myth"? This term, coined by Ivo Schöffer (1975), refers basically to the Batavian tribe being depicted since the sixteenth century, and throughout the following centuries, as forefathers of the Dutch people, playing a central role in the origin and evolution of Dutch national identity.

During the Western classical Renaissance and its rediscovery of Roman texts, some European territories that would eventually become

nations started to identify their primal forefathers among the "tribes" that, to a greater or lesser degree, interacted with Rome, following the typical sixteenth-century appropriation of ancient deeds. For the Dutch, the source for the exegesis of the Batavian myth lay in Tacitus' work, rediscovered in the late fifteenth-early sixteenth century by Dutch humanists (Hessing 2001: 131), and read from a very patriotic perspective (Leira 2008: 673), which would enormously impact the development of the future nation's identity.

Tacitus' account of the Batavians, collected mostly in his Histories and Germania, shows a twofold description of their interaction with the Romans: on one hand, he praises their unique features—brave, warlike people, lovers of liberty (Tacitus, Annals II, 6; 8;11; Agricola, XVIII, 4)—and highlights their special relationship with the Roman Empire—allies and friends, exempt from taxes and reserved for war as auxiliary troops (Tacitus, Historiae IV, 12; Germania XXIX, 1). On the other hand, he pays much attention to a more combative side of their interaction, in the Batavian revolt of AD 69 under Julius Civilis' leadership, against an oppressive Roman Empire that did not respect the terms of their ancient treaty and heavily levied troops among their population (Roymans 2004; Nicolay 2007: 247; Tacitus, Historiae IV, 14. Tacitus' extensive description and analysis of the revolt can be found in Histories II, IV and V). Despite ultimately being defeated in the conflict, the Batavians apparently retained all the privileges derived from their special relationship with Rome through a new treaty (Tacitus, Germania XXIX, 2).

Both sides of Tacitus' accounts are identifiable in the formulation of the early modern myth concerning the Batavian "forefathers" of the Dutch in the sixteenth century. The mainstream interpretation of the myth is based on these first stages. However, the myth has traditionally been regarded by Dutch scholars (and society) as unique and unchanging. Interestingly, as will be discussed below, a closer analysis and deconstruction of this myth within its developing historical context reveals the many different faces it had.

The Batavian myth(s)

Against the background of the aspects outlined above, the following analysis will try to identify and compare two of the many lives that the Batavian myth has had in the course of five centuries of development. The key to understanding the complexity and longevity of this myth lies in the variety and flexibility of its interpretation. As a result of this flexibility we can identify, not just a unique interpretation of the myth but many layers of it, some of them running parallel for centuries. I will analyse here two of those transformations that the discourse around the Batavian myth has undergone, leaving the rest of them for further development in my doctoral research.

Humanist birth of the myth

The analysis of the ancient past has often informed and influenced the formation of post-medieval national identities in Europe. It is normally argued that national

identities did not appear in Europe until the 19th century (Geary 2002). However, most German and English medieval historians discuss how nation-building in Europe goes back to the late Roman and early medieval period. In the case of the Dutch territories, we can already appreciate in these very initial stages some kind of common identity or sense of belonging, triggered and promoted—just like in many other instances—by common opposition to an external enemy or threat[3].

It is clear, as expressed by many authors (Beyen 2000: 494; Hessing 2001: 132 ; Blanc 2009: 244), that the Batavian myth is mostly based on the parallels drawn by sixteenth-century Dutch humanists between their historical context (*i.e.* Dutch revolt against the Spanish Habsburg rule in the second half of the sixteenth century) and the one Tacitus described for the Batavians in their struggle against the Roman Empire[4]. What caused such parallels to be seen by these Dutchmen in the sixteenth century?

Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, had among his many territorial possessions seventeen provinces on the early modern Dutch territory. In the summer of 1549, Charles V introduced his Dutch subjects to his heir, Prince Philip, through a trip to the main towns of their Dutch possessions that would soon have to swear obedience to him as Philip II of Spain. Jac Geurts (2009: 55) states that the Dutch provinces considered Philip nothing like his father, as he was seen as a foreign ruler, brought up in Spain, in contrast to his father's "local" origin and education. Each major city or town prepared welcome festivities (*Blijde Inkomste* or *Joyeuse Entreé*) and decorated their main streets and buildings deliberately using images and myths extracted from classical antiquity and the history of the Low Countries in an attempt to establish a dialogue full of symbolism between the Spanish/Habsburg rulers, depicted as Roman Emperors, and their subjects (Geurts 2009: 63).

It is again a change in the historical scenario that brought the variation of the myth towards the emphasis on the rebellious Batavians. The rule of Philip II initiated a process of centralization over the seventeen Dutch provinces under the Spanish crown. Paradoxically, this also was the seed of rebellion and the first evidences of a proto-national identity against a common oppressor (Cruz 2009: 160; Cruz and Frijhoff 2009: 12).

Once more, Tacitus served as a reference, although this time a new aspect of his account of the Batavians was emphasized: the Batavian Revolt against an oppressing Roman Empire that did not respect the terms of their ancient treaty. Parallels and analogies were conveniently and rapidly drawn between Tacitus' idealized description of the Batavians fighting the Romans and their modern counterparts: the Dutch and the Spaniards; Civilis and the Roman Emperor (Hessing 2001: 155). The sixteenth-century

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3   Napoleonic interference led in 1808 to an uprising that would, according to Elorza (2005), provoke the birth of Spanish national consciousness. Likewise, we can see in the colonial British interference the origins of American national self-awareness.

4   The immediate question that arises is whether the 16th-century Netherlanders thought that the Batavians were literally their ancestors or just predecessors (*i.e.* previous inhabitants of the same lands facing similar external threats). It is unclear in my opinion, but it could definitely be argued that there was a conscious use of their name to label early modern Netherlanders (*e.g.* Erasmus' use of the label in his writings or the use of the term "Batavian" to name people from the province of Holland).