The Roman Archaeology Conference, 27-30 March 2014

The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies' biennial conference will be taking place at the University of Reading. There will be a reception and keynote welcoming lecture on the Thursday evening, followed by two-and-a-half days of parallel sessions, ending on the Sunday afternoon with an optional excursion to Silchester Roman Town. This year the conference is joined by TRAC, the Study Group for Roman Pottery and the Roman Small Finds Study Group.

Website: http://www.reading.ac.uk/archaeology/Conferences/RAC2014/

TRAC Open Session: Landscape Exploitation, Urbanism and Religion
Session Organizers: TRAC Organising Committee

As well as sessions, TRAC also invites individual papers. This session draws together some of the interesting proposals, the first three all form a strong environmental archaeology group looking at the decisions made interacting with the ecosystem, with examples from Etruria and southern Spain. After the break we move into the towns and cities of the Roman world, with an overview of a large new project coming out of Leiden; then focusing down to look at suburbia, and finally zooming in on the individual within their home and how they are living life at the table.

Saturday, G10, Henley Business School

2.00 Resilience landscapes: conservative agro-sylvo-pastoral strategies in Roman Etruria, Edoardo Vanni

2.30 Characterization of exploitation of riparian vegetation in the Ulterior-Baetica Roman province, Daniel Martín-Arroyo, Pedro Trapero and J. Antonio Bocanegra

3.00 Roman intervention in a lacustrine environment: The Case of Fuente De Piedra Lagoon, Lázaro Lagóstena, M. Mar Castro Garcia and Ángel Bastos

3.30 Tea

4.00 The development of the Roman Empire’s urban network, Damjan Donev, Mathew Hobson, Pieter Houten, Paul Kloeg, K. Pazmany, Frederico Pellegrino, C. Tzanetea and Rinse Willet

4.30 Redefining the Roman ‘suburbium’ from Republic to Empire: a theoretical approach, Matthew J. Mandich

5.00 Religion and small finds in Early Roman Britain, Katrina-Kay S. Alaimo

Resilience Landscapes: Conservative Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral Strategies in Roman Etruria

Edoardo Vanni (University of Foggia, Italy)

Archaeological study of ancient landscapes in the Roman Mediterranean has traditionally focused on main economic factors as villa system, harbours, long-distance trade and settlement patterns. Questions about why people adopted specific agro-pastoral strategies have been left to historical analysis. We need to contextualize the decision-making processes of people from an archaeological point of view. Rich new archaeobotanical and zooarchaeological data sets from the Mediterranean, offer an opportunity to reconstruct agricultural and land-use strategies and to study diachronic changes in those practices in relation to contemporary changes in political economy. This article uses the case studies of Roman Etruria to illustrate new approaches for reconstructing agro-pastoral decision making from archaeological data and to contextualize diachronic changes in pastoralism and agriculture within their social and economic framework. I argue that several aspects of
landscapes are mainly conservative. Continuity does not concern the practices in itself but the network of natural resources and human choices. Natural resources are points of electrification and activation of strategies into the landscape. I conclude that farmers and herders are more likely to adopt environmentally sustainable land-use practices by activating ways in which landscape becomes conservative. Resilience theory as a conceptual framework will assist archaeologists in interpreting the past in ways that are interesting and potentially relevant to contemporary issues. Many aspects of this theory primarily concentrate on the relationships associated with patterns of human extraction of resources and the impacts of those human activities on the continuing condition of the ecosystem.

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Characterization of Exploitation of Riparian Vegetation in the Ulterior-Baetica Roman Province
Daniel Martín-Arroyo, Pedro Trapero and José Antonio Bocanegra (Universidad de Cádiz, Spain)

Our Riparia project examines the interaction between society and the environment in the riparian settings of the Roman world, especially in the Ulterior-Baetica. In this case we propose the study of the vegetal cover in the riparian environments from the perspective of economic utilization. The interest that could arouse certain riparian wild plants or crops, has gone unnoticed by current researchers compared to other activities (wine and olive oil production or fish salting). Although the usage of such plants could leave an associated archaeological record, to address this lack of archaeological data collection we proceed to compilation of classic literary testimonies, ethnological information and toponymy. On the one hand, it is intended to interest the scientific community about the material forms, tools and structures, as consequence of the exploitation of the riparian vegetation. On the other hand, a first classification of riparian areas is proposed according to their natural characteristics and possible models of anthropization. As an example of extensive farming systems we identified those associated with livestock and network linked by glens (cattle trails). We include the silviculture of the species of rushes (genus Juncus and others) among the intensive exploitation systems, based by demand for canopies, sail or other articles, reflected in the construction of farmhouses and villae.

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Roman Intervention in a Lacustrine Environment: The Case of Fuente De Piedra Lagoon
Lázaro Lagóstena, María del Mar Castro García and Ángel David Bastos Zarandieta (Universidad de Cádiz, Spain)

Riparia as environmental concept is applied to human's relationship with the riverbanks and shorelines spaces from historic times. The environmental characteristics of these transitional spaces generate a certain socionatural systems. Wetlands are representative of Riparia, and are subject to different perceptions, ranging from the occupation and settlement of the territory, to their production or tax function, in relation to the possibilities of communication, to their perception as part of the marginal and not ordered landscape, or under the consideration to their importance as cultural, geographical and political boundary limits. Our research group has undertaken a project that aims to study the territorial articulation of these spaces in the area of the Hispania Ulterior Baetica province. Fuente de Piedra Lagoon is the most important wetlands of Andalusia (Spain), and presents historical elements that allow characterizing this entity as an essential structure of the territory that has been susceptible of exploitation in Roman times. The analysis of its settlement, the function of this space as confiniun of the civic communities Urgapa and Singilia Barba, the economic exploitation aimed at the production of salt, or the analysis of the communication paths, has allowed us to understand the role of this area in Roman times.

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The Development of the Roman Empire’s Urban Network
Damjan Doven, Matthew Hobson, Pieter Houten, Paul Kloeg, Karolien Pazmany, Frida Pellegrino, Chrysoula Tzanetea and Rinse Willet (University of Leiden, Netherlands)

This paper offers a critique of current attempts to understand the processes behind the formation of the Roman Empire’s urban network. The sheer number of urban centres within the Empire has always been a major obstacle to formulating broad explanatory models tackling this subject directly. Current literature focusing on ancient urbanism at the macro level falls into two categories. The first, making up the vast majority of studies, employs quantitative or abstract methods of analysis, reducing the problem of urban development to a limited number of factors (such as city area, population, degree of connectivity, etc.), which can then be managed more easily and analysed statistically, often missing certain qualitative nuances present within the data (Bekker-Nielsen 1989; Bowman and Wilson 2011). In recent times these works have been increasingly concerned with the issues of demography, the performance of the economy, urbanization rates, and so on (Scheid et al. 2007). The second group attempts to understand the social processes involved in the construction of the urban landscape (Laurence et al. 2011; Revell 2009), but is often overwhelmed by the complexity and individuality of different regional case studies. Our ERC-funded project, An Empire of 2000 Cities: urban networks and economic integration in the Roman Empire, starts from the conviction that a team effort, completing a systematic study of the huge amount of historical and archaeological data accumulated over the past fifty years, can produce more satisfactory explanatory models at the Empire-wide level of analysis.

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Re-defining the Roman ‘Suburbium’ from Republic to Empire: A Theoretical Approach
Matthew J. Mandich (University of Leicester, UK)

Studies on the suburbs of Rome (commonly referred to as the ‘suburbium’) have long been hindered by the ambiguity of the zone, as the majority of attempts to set boundaries on this realm have tended to be more arbitrary in nature. This is chiefly due to the lack of direct primary source material, as no specific demarcations for this space exist in ancient literature or epigraphy. In fact, the term suburbium only appears twice in known classical sources (Cicero, Philippics 12.10.24; Schol. ad Juvenalium 4.7). Instead, approaching the subject from a modern perspective offers scope to reignite the debate: by examining Rome from an Ekistical standpoint, as a dynamically expanding polis (see Doxiadis 1968), new theoretical approaches may be employed to assess, track, and delineate its hinterland. Specifically, the use of isochrones and time contours can provide new ways by which to map Rome’s ancient suburbs, in the process elucidating extra-urban zones with specific functional characters. From this it will become possible to model how these zones fluctuated across various periods, and how the functions of the sites within them (especially villas) were dictated by such changes.

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Religion and Small Finds in Early Roman Britain
Katrina-Kay Alaimo (University of Exeter, UK)

The relationship between archaeology and religion is a complex situation laden with complicated definitions and theoretical debates. In order to take the study of temple assemblages and material finds forward, we need to look to the archaeological evidence on the sites. Likewise, small finds is also a growing field, and their abundance on temple sites lends us a hand in analysing the practices of the people participating in the rituals. Both of these fields - that of small finds and the archaeology of religion - contain the potential to inform us on the relationship between material culture and ritual through further discussion. I look to integrate small finds studies and that of religion in the context of early Roman Britain.
Approaches relying on the literary evidence of this province can only take us so far. In order to effectively address the issue of religion in Roman Britain, as mentioned above we need to incorporate the material evidence while paying attention to the context of each individual site. The temple sites at Great Chesterford and Harlow, as well as other temples in the vicinity, are piloted using an approach reliant on how the finds draw out patterns and what this can tell us about local practices. Understanding the social practice of these peoples helps explain what activities were performed at the temple sites, and in turn how these sites may have been used differently throughout the year.

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