

Institution: University of Reading
Unit of Assessment: 17A Geography, Environmental Studies & Archaeology: Archaeology
Title of case study: Improving public understanding of social diversity in Roman Britain
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research at the University of Reading has challenged popular perceptions of an essentially homogenous population in Roman Britain, changing understanding and improving awareness of ethnic diversity in particular. The research demonstrated that later Romano-British populations were much more diverse than previously thought, with up to a third of individuals classified as non-local. Migrant populations were also shown to include women and children, in contrast to the popular perception that it was mainly adult males who moved across the Roman Empire. Case studies highlighted mixed-race individuals, second-generation migrants and the diverse origins of the migrants and these cases had a very significant impact on reshaping museum displays (notably the Yorkshire Museum, with 94,000 visitors p.a.). The research also impacted on the Key Stage 2 school curriculum through a website and teachers' resource pack (funded through an AHRC Follow-on-Grant), produced in collaboration with a children's author and the Runnymede Trust, the UK's leading race-equality think tank. The research has thus prompted a significant and important correction to a highly popular historical topic.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research, carried out by University of Reading lecturers Hella Eckardt, Mary Lewis and Gundula Müldner, is an AHRC-funded project ('A long way from home - diaspora communities in Roman Britain': 2007-2009) that explored the cultural and biological experience of immigrant communities in Roman Britain through an innovative combination of scientific and archaeological techniques. Mobility in the Roman Empire was previously studied through epigraphy (the study of ancient inscriptions), but inscriptions on stone are very rare in Britain. The Diaspora project combined the analysis of archaeological data (grave goods, burial rites) with osteological and forensic ancestry assessment as well as oxygen and strontium isotope analyses to assess geographic origins. The research examined 150 individuals from late Roman Britain and identified significant numbers of migrants, including individuals of mixed-race ancestry, in particular in the important late Roman settlements of York and Winchester.</p> <p>The results show that a significant number of individuals sampled (up to 33 per cent) can be classed as non-local, that is coming from beyond a day's travel (30km radius) from the sampled site; a smaller proportion probably came from outside the UK. Ancestry assessment of the skeletons with local and non-local isotopic signatures revealed a complex picture of locals and newly arrived and second-generation migrants. There were also women and children amongst these migrants, a finding that challenges the popular perception that it was mainly adult males (soldiers and administrators) who moved across the Roman Empire. The project revealed the considerable diversity of people living in Romano-British towns and studied the ways in which immigrant and local communities may have differed, examining for example their diet, health, burial rites and personal adornment. Dietary assessment (through carbon and nitrogen isotope analysis) in particular highlighted individuals who had consumed millet, a crop not grown in Roman Britain, and/or significant amounts of fish (the Iron Age populations of Britain did not consume marine foods, but fish and oysters became important markers of high status in the Roman period).</p> <p>The research demonstrated scientifically, for the first time, that there was more diversity amongst Romano-British populations than previously thought. This is in contrast to popular perceptions, which portray 'The Romans' as homogenous (essentially Italian) peoples, especially in books and websites for primary-school children (e.g. http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/romans/; 'Usborne Time Traveller: Rome and the Romans'). Academic dissemination of the research findings took place through peer-reviewed publications (see below) and at academic conferences. Dr Eckardt joined the University in 2002, Dr Mary Lewis and Dr Gundula Müldner joined the University in 2004.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research All of the following papers and grants were rigorously peer-reviewed and assessed as of at least 2* quality; those marked ** are entered for REF:

**Eckardt, H. (ed.). 2011. Roman diasporas: archaeological approaches to mobility and diversity in the Roman Empire. *Journal of Roman Archaeology* Suppl. 78. Portsmouth, Rhode Island: JRA

**Eckardt, H., Booth, P., C. Chenery, Müldner, G., J.A. Evans & A. Lamb 2009. 'Oxygen and strontium isotope evidence for mobility in Roman Winchester'. *Journal of Archaeological Science* 36, 2816-2825. DOI: 10.1016/j.jas.2009.09.010

Leach, S., Lewis, M., Chenery, C., Eckardt, H. & G. Müldner 2009. 'Migration and diversity in Roman Britain: a multidisciplinary approach to immigrants in Roman York, England'. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 140: 546-56; DOI:10.1002/ajpa.21104

Leach, S., Eckardt, H., C. Chenery, G. Müldner & M. Lewis 2010. 'A 'lady' of York: migration, ethnicity and identity in Roman York'. *Antiquity* 84, 131-145.

<http://antiquity.ac.uk/ant/084/ant0840131.htm>

Müldner, G., Chenery C., Eckardt, H. 2011. "'The Headless Romans': Multi-isotope investigations of an unusual burial ground from Roman Britain". *Journal of Archaeological Science* 38, 280-290; DOI: 10.1016/j.jas.2010.09.003

Chenery, C.A., Müldner, G., Evans, J., Eckardt, H., Leach, S. & M. Lewis. 2010. 'Strontium and stable isotope evidence for diet and mobility in Roman Gloucester, UK.' *Journal of Archaeological Science* 37, 150-163; DOI: 10.1016/j.jas.2009.09.025

Research grants:

Eckardt, Lewis & Müldner: 'A long way from home – diaspora communities in Roman Britain'; AHRC; 2007-2009; £337,000.

Eckardt: 'Foreigners and locals in Roman Britain – painting a more complex picture for school children'; AHRC Follow-on-Funding; 2012; £62,000.

4. Details of the impact

The research findings have directly challenged popular perceptions of 'The Romans'. As part of the dissemination and impact process, the researchers constructed biographies for selected individuals from the project to make wider points. The 'Ivory Bangle Lady', for example, a mixed-race female from York buried with rich exotic and local artefacts, whose isotopes suggest that she came from somewhere slightly warmer than the UK, illustrates African (second generation) migration as well as female mobility and high status.

Three important areas of impact can be highlighted:

1 School curriculum

In 2012, the research team received AHRC Follow-on-Funding (£62,000) for a specific project to communicate their findings to school children, working with the Runnymede Trust, the UK's leading independent race-equality think-tank. This resulted in the production of a website and teaching resource (<http://www.romansrevealed.com/>, launched on 25 April 2013), which draws on the research findings to provide materials on the themes of migration, diversity and evidence. It shows how the concept of a diverse Britain is not new. As the introductory text explains, 'Links can be made between the way we understand modern multicultural Britain and the very diverse groups of people who lived in Romano-British towns such as York and Winchester'. The resource offers young children the opportunity to engage with ideas about migration and diversity, as well as teaching them about the use of archaeological science in history. It thereby makes cross-curricular links between Key Stage 2 History, Geography and Science, while the activities and discussion materials, in particular, will help develop and consolidate English curricular skills'.

The website features stories arising from collaboration with the established children's author Caroline Lawrence (author of *The Roman Mysteries*, a major book and BBC TV series) and with a visual artist (Aaron Watson). Lawrence provided four short stories about specific individuals, adding a creative twist to the scientific 'clues' provided by the University of Reading research team.

Impact case study (REF3b)

In addition to the 'Ivory Bangle Lady', for example, there is a girl from Winchester who has exotic grave goods but a local isotope signature, suggesting she is the child of migrants; a young man local both in terms of grave goods and isotopic signatures; and an older male from York who appears unremarkable in terms of grave goods but originates from a colder, continental part of Europe. This project is of relevance to the National Curriculum, in particular to Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11), as it enables teachers, especially those working with children from diverse backgrounds, to portray images of the Roman world that are not only more relevant but directly reflect new academic research on the topic.

The website, which was trialled with approximately 200 children at primary schools in London and Reading, received over 2,000 unique visitors in its first few months, and is already changing how children and teachers view 'The Romans', with both user groups reporting an increased awareness of diversity not just in terms of ethnicity, but also with regards to age and gender (**Corroborating Source 1, Ottosdir 2013**). The website's reach is expected to increase significantly through promotion at teachers' conferences and links through teaching-resource sites such as Primary Resources, Thinking History, Minimus, TES, History on the Net, My Learning and the London Grid for Learning. Moreover, Professor A. Kempe from the University of Reading's Institute of Education is organising an INSET day for primary-school teachers from the local region in December 2013 to explore how the use of the website can enhance history teaching, while the research team is distributing promotional materials at participating museums and selected schools.

2 Museum displays

The research directly contributed to the redesign of the 'People of Roman York' gallery at the Yorkshire Museum, as part of a complete refurbishment in 2010. The museum is visited by up to 94,000 people per year. The new gallery display features the skulls, facial reconstructions and 'life-stories' of six individuals studied by the research team, highlighting the diversity of the Roman population.

The curator of the museum stated that: "Having recently worked with the University of Reading investigating human remains found in York City in order to gain an understanding about where and how people lived, the museum wanted to reconstruct these people in a way which you and I today would feel a genuine affinity with....The vision resulted in the creation of a life-size interactive presentation where the characters were in fact real people telling their story through time."

The 'Ivory Bangle Lady', in particular, is now used for school workshops, is featured in a video and is the subject of interactive tweets, as a result of a recent (2012) collaboration by the project's Post-Doctoral Research Assistant (S. Leach, now at the University of Exeter) with the Yorkshire Museum ("I tweet dead people", funded by AHRC and REACT). There are also plans to develop a hologram.

On the basis of this research, Eckardt is also acting as an academic advisor for the redesign of the Museum of London Roman Gallery (opening 2015), which will similarly emphasise migrant individuals and their biographies.

3 Broader public awareness

The research findings have been disseminated through national and international media, including, in the UK, *The Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Independent* newspapers and BBC TV's *The One Show*. International coverage has been mainly on websites, sometimes linked to magazines (<http://www.archaeologie-online.de/magazin/nachrichten/afrikanische-lady-im-roemischen-england-9879/>; <http://www.spektrum.de/alias/roemisches-britannien/die-lady-von-eboracum-eine-reiche-afrikanerin/1024189> and <http://www.epoc.de/artikel/1024189&z=798890>).

Members of the general public, local amateur archaeologists as well as a theatre producer have responded to this media coverage about the project, and the 'Ivory Bangle Lady' in particular (see *Daily Mail* blog, 5.3 below). These responses indicate a fascination with 'black' history or, conversely, negative (and often racist) replies, but it is clearly difficult to quantify this impact.

In addition, the research team has run an active programme of talks to local archaeological societies including those in Yorkshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Henley and Surrey. Informal feedback from these events, typically attended by between 30 and 70 people, suggests that the audience had their perceptions of Roman Britain challenged.

Impact summary

In terms of **beneficiaries**, this project is changing understanding and improving awareness of diversity in the Roman period for visitors to Yorkshire Museum (94,000 visitors p.a.) and for children, teachers and parents using the educational resource, as well as for the general public. Despite only being launched in April 2013, the website has had more than 2,228 unique visitors to date, and is beginning to be used in classrooms as part of the Key Stage 2 curriculum.

The Romans are a popular subject for children and adults across Britain and the world, and the **significance** of the University of Reading's research is that it profoundly changes the way they are viewed. Rather than a simplistic contrast between essentially homogenous local and 'Roman' populations, the research and its outreach programme use specific case studies based on the latest scientific findings to highlight diversity. This project will alter public understanding of the period, and of populations in Roman Britain in particular.

In terms of its **reach**, the impact of the research affects diverse groups (of all ages and backgrounds) across the UK. This may be of particular relevance amongst an audience that either assumes the Romans were all 'white and like us' or those who have previously viewed the Romans as irrelevant (African-Caribbean, and other immigrant groups).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1 School curriculum:

- <http://www.romansrevealed.com/>
- Ottosdir, G. 2013. An initial assessment of the Romans revealed website. Unpublished report, University of Reading; based on interviews with school children and teachers.

2 The Yorkshire Museum:

- <http://www.yorkshireremuseum.org.uk/Page/ViewSpecialExhibition.aspx?CollectionId=27>.
- <http://www.react-hub.org.uk/heritagesandbox/projects/2012/the-ivory-bangle-lady/>
- Curator of Archaeology, Yorkshire Museum, to corroborate information on new museum display, visitor numbers and visitor feedback (contact details provided separately)

3 Media and blogs:

- <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1254187/Revealed-The-African-queen-called-York-home-4th-century.html> (with blog responses)
- <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/news/evidence-of-upper-class-africans-living-in-roman-york-1914553.html>
- <http://flavias.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/you-can-be-archaeologist-detective.html>
- BBC The One Show. Broadcast date: Thursday 28 July 2011; BBC1, 7.00pm
- A play inspired by a *Sunday Times* newspaper article on the Ivory Bangle Lady: <http://www.crosspath-theatre.co.uk/page2/page7/page7.html>