

Recreating coherence without reinventing Romanization

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There is a problem with the theory of Romanization and the ideas that lie behind it. The approach focuses study upon a theory that is implicated through its creation within the context of western imperial thought.¹ It was invented alongside, and interacted in various complex ways with the discourses of nationalism and imperialism that were developed by various western nations in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If it is true that we live in a post-colonial world, which is a debatable point and one to which I shall return, we ought to be able to move beyond the type of perspective that Romanization provided. It may have appeared to provide a relevant intellectual framework for the conceptualization of the Roman world at a time when certain western powers held territorial domination over most of the world, but with the collapse of western imperialism, it ought to have ceased to be relevant. Why has it not?²

Several authors have recently explored the ways that Romanization theory has responded to post-colonial forces in the modern world.³ Alongside other aspects of society it has become involved in deconstruction and fragmentation. The critical school of thought that has been directed against Romanization theory is one relevant area,⁴ but another is the localization of study. Excellent studies of the local context of the character of individual societies within Italy, the Mediterranean and the empire have developed.⁵ These usually show a concern with the relationship between Rome and the society but they also effectively atomize the Empire. Often these accounts

¹ R. Hingley (2000), *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen* (London); R. Hingley (2001a), 'Images of Rome', in R. Hingley (ed.), *Images of Rome: perceptions of ancient Rome in Europe and the United States of America in the modern age* (Portsmouth, RI, JRA Supp. 44), 7-22.

² R. Macmullen (2000), *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (London); S. Keay and N. Terrenato (eds.) (2001), *Italy and the West: comparative issues in Romanization* (Oxford).

³ S. Alcock (2000), 'Heroic myths, but not for our time', in E. Fentress (ed.), *Romanization and the City: creation, transformations, and failures* (Portsmouth, RI, JRA Supp. 38), 221-26; J. Barrett (1997), 'Romanization: a critical comment', in D. Mattingly (ed.) (1997a), *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism: power, discourse and discrepant experiences in the Roman Empire* (Portsmouth, RI, JRA Supp. 23), 51-65; D. Mattingly (1997b), 'Dialogues of power and experience in the Roman Empire', in Mattingly (1997a), 7-25 and J. Webster (2001), 'Creolizing the Roman provinces', *AJA* 105: 209-25.

⁴ Hingley (2000); Webster (2001).

⁵ For example, see papers in Keay and Terrenato (2001).

stress the agency of the élites of local social groups who are active in negotiating their relationships with the empire. Alongside this trend, we have the elements of a new perspective that may allow the relationship of the local to the global, particularly through the work of Greg Woolf.⁶ Effectively, and simplistically, it can be argued that models for classical Rome have followed the intellectual tradition of thought about the world system. If Haverfield and those who followed him wrote a theory of Romanization that reflected the concerns and interests of western imperialism, writers over the past ten years have started to draw upon ideas with a more contemporary relevance within the new global world order.⁷

Twentieth-century interpretations of Romanization often explored the value of Roman studies to the comprehension of current political systems.⁸ The past could provide interesting tales and morals for the present. In the early twentieth century Francis Haverfield openly argued the potential political value of Roman studies in several talks that he gave to audiences made up of members of the public, but he did not address the issue in his academic publications and others avoided the topic.⁹ In fact, as Freeman has argued, the academic tradition stresses objectivity and this has influenced scholarly accounts.¹⁰ Perhaps under what some people call the modern system of globalization a similar process is happening. The concerns of previous imperial generations have passed and seem outmoded. The idea of the spreading of Mediterranean civilization to the West through the medium of the Roman Empire no longer appears so significant. Neither does the concept that certain groups within the empire were homogeneous wholes (e.g., Romans, Greeks, Batavians, Britains). These approaches cannot enlighten us so fully any more. Other issues are beginning to form the focus of attention.

My purpose in raising this issue is to stress a point - the connotations of what tends to be called 'globalization' theory for Roman studies. Globalization in broad terms is the world system that many feel to have filled the void left by the cessation of

⁶ G. Woolf (1998), *Becoming Roman: the origins of provincial civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge); G. Woolf (2001), 'Inventing empire in ancient Rome', in S. Alcock, T.N. D'Altroy, K.D. Morrison and C.M. Sinopoli (eds.), *Empires* (Cambridge), 311-22.

⁷ R. Hingley (2001b) 'A comment on Ray Laurence's Roman narratives', *Archaeological Dialogues* 8: 111-13.

⁸ Hingley (2000); J. Webster (1996). 'Roman imperialism and the "post-imperial age"', in J. Webster and N. Cooper (eds.) (1996), *Roman Imperialism: post-colonial perspectives* (Leicester Archaeology Monographs 3, Leicester), 1-18.

⁹ Hingley 2000.

¹⁰ P. Freeman (1996), 'British imperialism and the Roman Empire', in Webster and Cooper (1996), 19-34.

western imperialism.¹¹ Romanization was informed by modern concepts of imperialism, but recent integrative accounts of Roman identity are evidently influenced by ideas of globalization.¹² So, where do we stand in regard to globalization? Perhaps we do have some of the elements of an effective replacement for Romanization, but how does this operate? Does the modelling of the past in the present in some way serve to support the modern world system, as has sometimes been argued for Romanization theory in relation to the early twentieth century?¹³ Alternatively, is the exploration of similarities and differences between the past and present actually an element in an attempt to critique the present and change the future? What can critiques of the history of the theory of Romanization tell us about how our current theory may operate in broader social and political terms? Is the parallel that is drawn fully conscious or is it unconscious? If the issue is unconscious, does this make it less damaging? There are perhaps no simple answers to these questions, but I feel that we make an advance by thinking about these issues.

Romanization

Romanization has been critiqued but still lives on in a number of different forms. The problem with Romanization, as I see it, lies partly with the judgmental aspects of the theory. Romanization forms a broad school of thought with a great degree of variation, but it has also often followed a number of common assumptions that condition interpretation. Many have written about these assumptions over the past twenty years and I shall not explore these in any detail. I shall stress one issue - that of teleology - our Eurocentric perspective tells us what is important about the Roman past in advance.¹⁴ We do not need to ask any questions. What is important is conceptualized in the useful concept of 'What the Romans did for us'. Effectively, the Roman mission was to spread a unique form of Mediterranean 'civilization' across Italy, the Mediterranean, and then the West. The West was able to take up the imperial banner and carry this 'civilization' overseas, eventually perhaps, to incorporate the whole

¹¹ J.X. Inda and R. Rosaldo (2000), *The Anthropology of Globalization: a reader* (Oxford); R. Featherstone (1995), *Undoing Culture: globalisation, postmodernism and identity* (London); M. Hardt and A. Negri (2000), *Empire* (London); and G. Rist (1997), *The History of Development: from western origins to global faith* (London).

¹² Hingley (2001b).

¹³ Hingley (2000).

¹⁴ For Eurocentricism see Hardt and Negri (2000); I. Morris (1994), 'Archaeologies of Greece', in I. Morris (ed.), *Classical Greece: ancient histories and modern archaeologies* (Cambridge), 8-47; T. Patterson (1997), *Inventing Western Civilisation* (New York); and E. Shohat and R. Stam (1994), *Unthinking Eurocentricism: multiculturalism and the media* (London).

world.¹⁵ The complexity of the deconstruction of this image is indicated by the fact that the perspective arises at least to a degree from a reading of some of the Roman historical sources – it is not entirely a post-Renaissance invention.¹⁶ The interpretation of the invention of this myth of social progress has a heavy hermeneutical element and this is why it is so long-lasting and difficult to challenge.

The degree to which Rome is thought to have undertaken this mission by direct force or encouragement, or the extent to which the adoption of civilization was voluntary on the part of native élites, varies from account to account.¹⁷ Also, some accounts have demonstrated the possibility that barriers existed to the spread of ‘civilization’ in certain local contexts and the idea of some form of resistance has been raised.¹⁸ The fundamental issue, however, remains the focus upon the process of the development of native society in the West within an imperial world system, the rules of which were effectively set by Rome.

These assumptions also, fundamentally - and this is a point that sometimes appears really difficult to conceptualize - condition the ways that we visualize, collect, organize, and interpret our evidence. This is true whether we are ancient historians, archaeologists, or people who try to keep a foot in both camps. Ancient historians, it would seem to me, are often more conscious of these factors than classical archaeologists. After all, we may select the ancient texts that are useful to us in writing our accounts but we do not actually determine what has been handed down from the past. In addition, it has been less common recently for ancient historians to argue that their texts are in some way value free, as it is evident that the majority of voices that we can hear are those of privileged and wealthy male writers.¹⁹ We create our understanding of the past through translations of texts and through the ideas that we develop through the use of these,²⁰ but the text remains in its original language as it has been handed down to us. It can be reinterpreted, even though frames of understanding to an extent condition these reinterpretations.

Ironically and problematically, within archaeology, we sometimes have something more of a hangover from a modernist myth of objectivity. It remains fairly

¹⁵ Hingley (2001a).

¹⁶ T.N. Habinek (1998), *The Politics of Latin Literature: writing, identity and empire in ancient Rome* (Princeton).

¹⁷ Contrast M. Millett (1990), ‘Romanization: historical issues and archaeological perspectives’, in T. Blagg and M. Millett. (eds.), *The Early Roman Empire in the West* (Oxford), 35-43 with C. Whittaker (1997), ‘Imperialism and Culture: the Roman initiative’, in Mattingly (1997a), 143-64.

¹⁸ S. Dyson (1975), ‘Native revolt patterns in the western Empire’, *ANRW* II.3: 138-75 and Mattingly (1997b).

¹⁹ M. Beard and J. Henderson (1995), *Classics: a very short introduction* (Oxford).

²⁰ J. Farrell (2001), *Latin Language and Latin Culture* (Cambridge).

common for archaeologists to argue that our excavation and survey results can talk directly to us. Perhaps this arises as a result of the scientific basis of much archaeological methodology. It ignores entirely the fact that in archaeology we have effectively created our database during the course of past research.²¹ The sites we study, the methods that we use to study them, the ways we publish them, and the academic response to these publications (which ultimately conditions the academic success of the individual researcher) are all related directly to the basic assumptions on which we base our research. The agenda remains firmly fixed on the élite and elements that are seen as relevant to Romanization (e.g., towns, forts, villas, roads, public buildings).

These points may be seen to be straightforward and self-evident and, as the papers that were contributed to this meeting and those at recent Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conferences indicate, they are coming to have an increasing influence upon our work. It is important to think hard about the context of our work if we are to move on and study in new and original and more challenging ways. To do this, however, we need to do more than merely consider the social and historical context of what has come before in a critical and constructive way. We do need a body of ideas that helps us to understand, or manage the information that we have for the ancient world. It would be naive to suggest that we can demolish Romanization theory and indulge in some form of atheoretical synthesis of the Roman past. I would accept that the Roman Empire was Roman because of Rome. How do we create coherence in the ways that we study Rome and its imperial system without at the same time recreating Romanization? This is a topic that has exercised the minds of many ancient historians and archaeologists over the past ten years.

Roman identity in a global context

Many of the interesting perspectives that have arisen during this time appear to me to draw upon theories that have been developed to explore the current global situation - ideas derived from post-modern thought and from globalization theory.

It is commonly suggested that we live in a post-modern world in which barriers are breaking (or have broken) down. The global flow of capital and the character of the world system has actually meant that the old national units that made up Europe and the world are having a major crisis of identity, even at this current time of global crisis. At the same time, monolithic ideas of identity are also being challenged. In a post-modern context the association of material culture and lifeways

²¹ S. Dyson (1993), 'From New to New Age Archaeology: archaeological theory and classical archaeology - a 1990s perspective', *AJA* 97: 195-206; for a specific example see Hingley (2000).

with any form of identity - ethnic, gender, etc. - has been contested. The certainties of modernism are collapsing, or have collapsed. In this context it is not surprising that critiques of Romanization have proliferated. How can we define Roman identity? Is it a monolithic thing that has clear material correlates? The answer has increasingly been that it is not.²² Native identities are multiple and variant and the character of what could represent 'Rome' or 'Roman' is at least equal in complexity.

One way in which study has moved forward is through the emphasis on the local. Rather than using simplistic notions of a directional process of Romanization that operates across wide areas of the empire, we can turn to a local study of individual societies and consider the distinct histories of individual peoples within the imperial system.²³ In post-modern theory the challenge to overarching theory leads to the breaking down of general concepts into more specific studies. There are lots of examples of this type of study now. Many do not as readily accept the teleological aspects of modernist ideas of progress, but at the same time they also atomize study. If we were to build up a consistent picture of the individual local social contexts across the whole of the Mediterranean, would we understand the empire? As several researchers have stressed for the modern world, atomization leads to a situation in which it is hard to conceptualize the unifying features of imperialism, or of the global system.²⁴ In a post-modern context local studies may often appear more valid to the researcher, but this very idea is based on simplistic definitions of concepts. Local studies are based on the idea that the local is the antithesis of the global, that the global entails homogenization and undifferentiated identity while the local preserves heterogeneity and difference.²⁵ In reality, both the global and the local are far more complex.

Increasingly we have also seen moves toward a form of theory that attempts to deal with the local and the global in a co-ordinated way. One obvious example is Greg Woolf's elegant work on *Becoming Roman*.²⁶ Roman identity is a flexible concept that differs from time to time and also from place to place. Its character arises in the context of the political/social value of the alliance between élite groups across the Mediterranean and later across the areas of the empire that extended further to the

²² Alcock (2000); P. Freeman (1993), "'Romanisation' and Roman material culture', *JRA* 6: 438-45, R. Hingley (1997), 'Resistance and domination: social change in Roman Britain', in Mattingly (1997a), 81-102 and Mattingly (1997b).

²³ Barrett (1997).

²⁴ Hardt and Negri (2000); G. Ritzer (1993), *The McDonaldization of Society* (London); and G. Ritzer (1998), *The McDonaldization Thesis* (London).

²⁵ Hardt and Negri (2000).

²⁶ Woolf (1998).

north and west. Roman identity is created in the context of the local through acts of accommodation, but there is also a clear unifying spirit to Roman identity, which operates through a complex series of mechanisms. Other theorists who have developed valuable accounts of identity and social change have used variants of the same type of account. Some still call this process Romanization, while Woolf refuses to use the concept.

I have provided a grossly generalized idea of this important work but it appears to me - and perhaps this is inescapable - that modern interpretations of the Roman world again mirror dominant ideas of the present.²⁷ Influential models of material culture under the global world system have stressed many of the aspects that are evident in *Becoming Roman*. The global world system has no clear boundaries and is expansive. It often effectively incorporates in an apparently voluntary manner, and is driven at least in part by the self-interests of those who benefit from the system. Sometimes force is necessary but common interests hold the system together. It is top-down, as certain interest groups have greater power and can influence global events. At the same time it is not entirely top-down, since it can sometimes offer marginal groups the opportunity to advance their interests.

In this context I shall explore an interesting idea about globalization that has been developed in a book called *Empire*, written by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.²⁸ This is a highly political work that tries to develop an agenda for a militant challenge to the current global world order. I find a lot of the section that deals with how to change the present oversimplistic. More interesting to me is what these authors have to say about the global world system and Roman republicanism. Perhaps surprisingly, the Roman Empire features in a major way in this book for a reason that is relevant to this paper. Fundamentally Hardt and Negri argue that the ideological founders of the USA were all inspired by the ancient imperial model. They believed that they were founding on the other side of the Atlantic a new empire with open expanding borders, where power would effectively be distributed in networks. Hardt and Negri argue that this imperial model, which was adopted through the use made of Roman republicanism within the USA, has survived and matured and has emerged on a new global scale in its fully realized form. The USA no longer controls this global system, but has a dominant part to play because of its economic and institutional power. The modern state of 'empire' that Hardt and Negri envisage works by spreading its culture and economy over an ever-increasing area; they liken this to a virus.

²⁷ Hingley (2001b).

²⁸ Hardt and Negri (2000).

Within this system, the local is generated through the factors that are global as well as indigenous. Indeed, the global system is not in any way opposed to localization - global interests are well served by the reproduction of the system in varied ways at local levels.²⁹ There has been a good deal of research within globalization theory into the ways that a global world system can effectively create local differentiation. Some have argued that global concepts come to operate by providing a structuring principle in a global system of local differentiation.³⁰ They provide local groups with a way of demonstrating local difference within a global system of communication and popular culture that ultimately is driven by others.

Critique

Much of this work on globalization is highly relevant to the modern world; but why am I exploring it in the context of the Roman Empire? My purpose is to ask whether these types of accounts necessarily form a valid way to study the Roman Empire, as I would argue that they appear to have been introduced to our studies without any explicit discussion. Hardt and Negri's contention, that the adoption of the Roman republican system by the founders of the USA has led to a modified form of a Roman institution spreading across the globe, is an interesting idea. Turning their observation around, I would suggest that we are replacing tired old models of Romanization as imperialism with a theory that fits the changing political climate. If the old ideas of imperial discourse are no longer seen as valid for the study of the Roman empire, we can reformulate our study to reinterpret the Roman empire in global terms. Therefore, some of the more integrative accounts of the Roman empire, including that of Woolf, appear deeply influenced by elements of globalization theory. As in the case of previous generations of scholars it is hard to find any one who openly admits the sources of inspiration. Perhaps modern thought is modelled onto the past without conscious thought, or perhaps the nature of our academic systems still acts to discourage people from explaining from where their ideas stem. Perhaps the teleological linking of past with present is unavoidable. As has often been observed, we study the past to understand the present but at the same time we create the past from a present perspective.

I wish now to come back to some of the questions that I asked above. Should we be concerned by the mirroring of the present in the past – the use of globalization theory to model the ancient world? I do think that we need ways of reconstructing a

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid; R. Wilk (1995), 'Learning to be local in Belize: global systems of common difference', in D. Miller (ed.), *Worlds apart: modernity through the prism of the local* (London), 110-33.

coherent theory for the integrative aspects of Roman imperialism. Without this our local studies have no broader context and local studies alone are not adequate, as we have seen. Globalization theory may have to fulfil a major role in providing the context for what happens at the local scale since the old imperial models that lie behind Romanization no longer appear to work. At the same time, there is another point of concern. Hardt and Negri also argue that the types of imperial and Eurocentric discourses are not dead within Western society; rather they are redefined to fit the changing global situation.³¹ Thus, they interpret empire as a modified form of earlier imperial systems. They suggest that our current system is still run by and in the interests of the West, although the rules have changed.

In the context of this image of continuity we have to be aware that the past is often used to justify the present. If we model the Roman empire on the current global system does this effectively provide a justification for the present in terms of an ancestry of inheritance? This is especially true if the Roman past is viewed as some form of previous ‘golden age’ as is often the case. Are we entirely happy to indulge in an unquestioned use of theory that some may feel reflects the present directly? By using globalization to model Roman social change, can we effectively challenge the present? I have no simple answers to these questions, but I do feel that we need to acknowledge the context of our thought as globalization, and that this is not necessarily an improvement on imperialism – in fact many view it in at least as critical a manner. The question of why we study the past is not often asked in Roman archaeology and the purpose of this contribution is seek to open a debate about the motivations behind the ways that we conduct this study.

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³¹ Hardt and Negri (2000).