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How TC (Theoretically Correct) do you have to be to come to TRAC? Now in its fourth year, the round of papers reflected the loose way in which the term theory is applied to the proceedings. If you come looking for theory of the sort offered at TAG, you're likely to go away disappointed. Then again, theory developed around the fact that for prehistoric periods with poor data assemblages it was the only way of filling the pages, so to speak. The marriage of theory and Roman archaeology is apparently an uneasy one from the evidence here. If the initial purpose of TRAC was to try to give theory a rightful place in Roman archaeology then the attempt has failed. If it wasn't so long-winded, a better title might be 'The re-examining of the way we look at our data Roman Archaeology Conference'. Still, that's a worthy aim in itself, and so to the edited highlights....

J.D. Hill (*Probing Millett's absent bodies*) kicked things off with the immortal phrase 'I'm worried'. This immediately conjured up images of the poor man spending long, sleepless nights wracked with the mental pains of the search for one of those elusive truths we all undoubtedly crave for in our attempts to understand the past. So what was he worried about? Mainly that works such as Millett's *The Romanisation of Britain* fail to include the 'active agents' (i.e. people) of change in their discussion of the now horrendously unfashionable Romanisation process. The rather unfortunately named toilet probes were used as a case in point, Hill suggesting that their sudden appearance implies a fundamental change in attitudes towards the body as a result of the Roman presence. Maybe he's right; maybe their function changed instead. I personally think this sort of approach is more likely to provide mind food for the Cambridge symbolists than get us closer to what was going on between AD 43 and AD 410(ish).

More promising was Karen Meadows *You are what you eat: diet, identity and Romanisation*. This was very much a what-I-intend-to-do-with-my-thesis type paper, but the germ of her idea was a desire to understand changes in diet from the Iron Age to the Roman period and see if this had wider implications (e.g. a regional perspective). Did imported ingredients substitute traditional ones? On a more general level, can we detect changes in production and consumption patterns? It's very sad, and a problem which scuppers many attempts to ask questions such as this, that excavation reports fail to provide the data necessary to do so (the 'bone box' syndrome). Tim Williams however in *Indicators of status, economics, ethnicity, or a confused mass of typological dead-ends?* provided a chink of light at the end of the tunnel, at least for London and the huge database that MoLAS is sitting on. His work with Peter Hinge seems to be a thoughtful attempt to provide the sort of data framework which would allow questions like Karen's to be asked of it, rather than the data only being useful for the person who designed the database itself.

Mike Fulford questioned current approaches to the end of Roman Britain in

Power and society at the end of Roman Britain. He is concerned that the supposed rapid diffusion of Saxon material culture in the last decades of the fifth century AD is suspiciously rapid; he argued that it is entirely possible that Saxon migration could have begun at a much earlier date perhaps accounting for the paucity of 'Roman' evidence in certain regions (already indicated by Reece's east/west divide in the coin evidence). Food for thought, but little supporting data.

Martin Millett and Simon James addressed pertinent wider issues of Romano-British archaeology. Millett's *Treasure!* examined our attitudes to finds such as Hoxne, sparked off by the reaction of the British Museum to his televised, decontextualised (now there's a good TC word) comment about Hoxne *potentially* having a ritual aspect to its deposition. Interpretations were rightly criticised as being largely text-led, Millett arguing that hoards of late silver should be put into their wider chronological/regional/material context. And why, he asked, are there always so many spoons? Something that I've often wondered too.

Simon James's revelations in *What shall we tell the children?* concerning the text books used as part of the national curriculum in British schools were deeply disturbing. Did you know, for example, that Fishbourne was a typical 'Roman farmhouse'? That Christianity came to Britain in the second century AD? Such easily avoidable errors are bad enough, but the emphasis on Britain as a nation shaped by various waves of migrants is no different, as James pointed out, to the view of our early history taught in the 1930's. James's most salient point was the fact that the future of archaeology is surely dependent on getting this right, because those who receive this wisdom are the future potential investors in British archaeology. Setting new agendas has to start at an early age.

Richard Hingley, the sort of Albert Camus of Romano-British academia, thinks it's *Time for a change*. Practically speaking this constituted an examination of the way in which writing on Roman Britain used to be heavily enmeshed in British colonial attitudes, and is still heavily enmeshed in British colonial attitudes. Assumptions such as seeing Romanisation as a necessarily positive process were questioned. Whether or not things will change of course depends on the integrity of individual researchers, and in this respect Hingley was somewhat preaching to the converted.

Keith Matthews's sub-text was that Indiana Jones has an awful lot to answer for. In *An archaeology of homosexuality? Theoretical perspectives from classical civilisation* the audience was bombarded with a continuous stream of images from mainly twentieth century gay culture mixed in with classical gay iconography (mainly Greek vase painting). Meantime Matthews gave an intelligent, sensitive and lucid account of attitudes to homosexuality in this century as a means of assessing how we look at homosexuality and 'minority' groups in general in the past. He didn't try to prove that homosexuals represented a large sector of Classical society; he simply pointed out that we have to acknowledge that it was present. He suggested that we should re-examine, for instance, our interpretations of imagery like the phallus, which may have been a good luck symbol as is the usual explanation, but may have had other meanings.

Iain Ferris took a similar stance in one of the best, non self-gratulatory papers when he examined *Images of barbarians in military art*. Particularly thought-provoking was his re-interpretation of images of women (including Britannia),

often shown with one bared breast and being pulled by the hair. Ferris was keen to re-focus our attention on the whole composition, rather than defining symbolic roles for the participants. For instance he pointed out that the images strongly suggest sexual assault and potential rape. Hence a naked Claudius is not necessarily 'heroic', but may rather be a more narrative suggestion of what's likely to happen next.

A number of papers dealt with social space, a jargon-ridden subject last year, mainly free of it this time round. Joanne Berry's *The Roman house at work* was based not on an elite residence at Pompeii but for once on an average, unpretentious insula block, and looks like providing fruitful research. She shocked us with the revelation that the Romans (at least in Pompeii) were actually quite messy, cooking utensils lying around, their atria often full of amphorae, which obviously has to change our perspective of Roman life on a day-to-day basis. The large amount of furniture also meant that they couldn't see much of the decoration which we are so keen to eulogise.

Simon Ellis, on a different tack, looked at lighting, introducing the potential use of virtual reality to test out models of the effects of various light sources (natural and artificial). He emphasised that the blanket lighting we're used to bears no relation to the minimal source lighting in an average Roman house, and discussed the ways in which this should affect our perceptions of life in a Roman domus. Against the background of these papers (putting the people back in the home) Sarah Scott's paper felt like a backward step. 'Symbolic virtuosity' and 'tournaments of value' were terms used to discuss allegorical imagery on mosaics, but in the light of the above papers, could they see their decorations anyway? Maybe that's mean, but I found Scott's attitude towards the elite (depicted as intelligent, socially aware proper people) and the poor (rather squalid creatures) rather judgmental.

A few slightly apologetic classicists provided some useful ideas, Ray Laurence loudly showing us that the texts can be illuminating in assessing the Romans' (at least in Italy) attitude to roads and the landscape. He criticised the economists for assuming that the Romans' main aim in the transport of goods was to minimise costs, preferring therefore sea over land routes. He suggested that the itineraries imply that the Romans didn't perceive their landscape as we perceive it in our world of near perfect maps. Rather they may have preferred longer land routes simply for reasons of tradition or because such routes brought them into contact with more people.

The enigmatically named Raphael M.J. Isserlin actually did something with CIL (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum), in 'An archaeology of brief time'. He has begun to look at dates of dedicatory inscriptions in order to see if seasonal patterns in the times of year that dedications were made can be detected. Apparently they can; I haven't decided myself if this matters or not.

No two people will come away feeling the same about TRAC and liking or disliking the same papers. All I think would agree however that it provides an invaluable forum for post-graduates in particular to get some feedback on their ideas in an informal, unthreatening environment not dominated by the super professors. I hope it remains that way in the future.