

Whither Roman Archaeology? Or Wither Roman Archaeology! A London Perspective – A Final Response

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I enjoyed reading the responses to my paper and learnt a lot from them. Of the writers, three are fellow academics, and one, Jenny Hall, works in the Museum of London. I found Jenny's 'Report from the Real World' particularly valuable. In it she emphasises the responsibility of museums to their public. I would agree and add that this is perhaps true – if less obviously so – in the academic world. It is tax payers' money that to a greater or, now one should say, to a lesser extent, subsidises the universities, and why should the tax-paying public subsidise something that they do not consider to be worthwhile? And she quite rightly pulls me up for not mentioning the Museum of London and its archive when listing the advantages that London enjoys as a centre for the study of the Roman world: the Museum and its store in Mortimer Wheeler House constitute one of the great collections of provincial Roman artefacts, and is surely a great resource for teaching and study.

She also touches on the situation regarding Roman archaeology in both the British Museum and the Museum of London, where the term 'Roman' seems to have become unacceptable. At the British Museum, the Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities has been replaced by the Department of Prehistory and Early Europe, while at the Museum of London, the Prehistoric and Roman Department has been replaced by the Department of Early London History and Collections. The term 'Roman' has become invisible, just as it has at the Institute of Archaeology (IoA) where our old Roman (sub-)department, along with the other period- and area-based departments, were replaced some time ago by our current research groupings, such as Complex and Literate Societies, which includes lecturers in Greek and Roman archaeology. There is a lot to be said for such thematic divisions. In my own case, I currently teach a course on the 'Archaeology of War: A Comparative Approach', which effectively replaces a course I used to teach on the Roman Army and the Frontiers. I can see the strengths and weaknesses of both, with the newer course being perhaps too generalised and the original one too specialised. Perhaps there is room for both approaches. Jenny also has interesting things to say about schools and curricula with the "inclusion of Roman Britain at Key Stage 2 (7-9 year olds) and the popularity of Classical Civilisation in secondary schools" (p. 9), but she might have added that this should be contrasted with the demise of archaeology as a subject available at A-level. Finally, I was previously unaware that the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) had "ring-fenced post doctoral research grants for 2004-6, in Ancient and Medieval Materials and Artefacts, specifying "archaeological small finds, particularly those of the Roman period"" (p. 10).

Turning now to the responses of my three academic colleagues in the order in which I read them. Andrew Gardner warns me to beware of taking too partisan an approach in defending the interests of Roman archaeology: either the subject is worth studying or it is not, and part of this is not so much the subject matter but the *way* in which Roman archaeology is taught. Here he doesn't seem to quite approve of my 'back to basics approach' – which I take to mean that I put too great an emphasis on written sources. But, claims Andy, there is (theoretical) light at the end of the tunnel! There is a genuine difference of opinion here between Andy and myself, but let's not exaggerate – even I have been known to dabble in theory (Hodder and Hassall 1971). *However*, I am concerned generally about the gulf between academic theoretical archaeology and grassroots archaeology. When did you last see a programme about post-processualism on TV, or read about metaphor, meaning and identity in *Current Archaeology*? Why should this gulf exist? I see it in part as the result of the use of a technical language by theorists, accessible only to theorists, to describe concepts that are usually quite simple. I think this has resulted in the creation of two archaeological worlds between which there is little or no communication. I believe this to be bad for archaeology. Even among academics there is sometimes a lack of communication and a danger that form may sometimes conceal lack of substance, as demonstrated by the infamous Sokal hoax (Sokal and Bricmont 1999). But theoretical archaeologists – Matthew Johnson (1999) for one – *can* write in an accessible way.

Next, the Laurence Professor of Classical Archaeology at Cambridge: I liked the way Martin highlighted the relative strengths and weakness of other university departments in Roman archaeology and in particular of the relevant departments in other colleges of the University of London. Here there is clearly room for more cooperation. Of course, this already exists at seminar level with Ian Haynes currently organising a 'Rome in Bloomsbury' series at Birkbeck, and our own Alan Johnston, together with Alexandra Villing of the British Museum, organising another on Classical archaeology. But is the holding of joint seminars enough? The list of course options available to undergraduates at the IoA already includes four Classical archaeology courses taught at King's College, but shouldn't we actively encourage students to attend even more such 'inter-collegiate courses'? Why fly in teachers on a weekly basis from Rome to teach courses in Roman archaeology – as we have been doing (no offence to the admirable Lisa Fentress!) – when we have such a talented pool of experts in the field on our doorstep? Even if a truly intercollegiate degree based at the Institute of Classical Studies (ICS) would run counter to the centrifugal tendencies of the University of London and would therefore be neither practical nor desirable, there could be more liaison between King's College, Royal Holloway, Birkbeck and ourselves, with perhaps more courses in Greek and Roman archaeology taught centrally at the ICS – or 'virtual courses' sent via cyberspace to the various participating departments. How would this be facilitated? What about the formation of the University of London Consortium of Classical Archaeology Departments? This is the sort of thing I meant by saying that the International Centre for Chinese Heritage and Archaeology might provide a model for the way forward; I could also have cited *Accordia* (for Italian Archaeology), even closer to home.

Perhaps I was most pleased of all by Peter Ucko's contribution. It is certainly the shortest, but from my perspective it is also certainly the best. I had obliquely referred to the Strategic Plan when talking about the possibility of my replacement – "...the word on the street is..." (p. 5) – because I thought that our strategic plan was not yet in the 'public domain'. I clearly need not have been so mealy-mouthed, and it is great news that here at the IoA we have an open and public commitment to the future of Roman archaeology. Even the resuscitation of the Yates Chair – as Martin Millett advocates – is on the cards, for it is one of the goals of the recently-launched 'Campaign for UCL'. So I remain optimistic for the future of Greek as well as Roman archaeology at the IoA, even if there are still some unanswered questions.

References

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