

André Carneiro, Cláudia Teixeira and Paulo Simões Rodrigues  
(Editors)

## An Empire of many faces



CLÁSICOS DYKINSON



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## An Empire of many faces

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# INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

The volume titled *An Empire of many faces* is a direct result of the activities within the project *BioRom – Rome our Home. The (Auto)biographical Tradition and the Formation of Identity(ies)*, specifically its task 3, focused on the problem of regional and local identities.

The various papers that compose it present case studies that, as a whole, reinforce the idea that the construction of cultural identities in the provincial and local environments was based on a set of relationships and dynamic negotiation processes, both in the time(s) and space(s) where Roman culture encountered other cultures. Following postcolonial studies – which brought to light a new way of looking at the relations between the occupying powers and the colonised peoples and, consequently, promoted the systematic distancing of the vision of Roman identity from an essentialist perspective – this volume's papers address the problem of the construction of identities in the context of the continuous and multiple interactions that determined the life of individuals and communities in the spaces where Roman culture became global, thus arguing for the complex character of these interactions and their consequences. We should never forget that the theoretical framework that fostered this new way of approaching the complex problem of the formation of identities on the provincial and local scales of the Roman world was supported by archaeological evidence and data relating to material culture. In this context, studies such as those by Greg Woolf (*Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul*, Cambridge, 2000), Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (*Rome's Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge, 2008), Richard Hingley (*Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire*, Routledge, 2005) and Louise Revell (*Roman Imperialism and Local Identities*, Cambridge, 2008) have explored how material culture was a key element in the construction of Roman identity in the provinces. It is no coincidence that all the above titles, essential for setting new paradigms in the perspectives of these research fields, were published within eight years, at a time when the challenges of the third millennium have led us to think decisively about these issues.

Such studies, among others, highlighted the potential of Archaeology for the reconstruction of the mosaic of cultural processes that took place in the various parts of the Empire, insofar as the information provided by material culture makes it possible to understand and evaluate the complex processes – not only of cultural

assimilation, but also of resistance and counter-culture – that took place in the Roman world. These findings have also changed the role of Archaeology, which is no longer seen as a science that corroborates the grand systemic visions that historiography and literature have conveyed over the centuries, but as a science that raises new problems for History. In fact, if, on the one hand, the evidence gathered allowed us to prove that the dynamics between the dominators and the dominated peoples comprised a multitude of complex and non-homogeneous processes, on the other hand, it brought to light an unknown world, as it was ignored by most literary sources, which focused above all on the great historical facts and agents.

This new perception ran in parallel with the theoretical perspectives formed within post-colonialism, which shifted the analysis from the monolithic identities of colonial empires to the processes of acculturation that determined the way in which the Others perceived themselves and were perceived in the multi-relational framework of the societies they were part of. Archaeology was fundamental to this repositioning of perspectives regarding the debate on the Roman world and, consequently, to the development of other perspectives of analysis centred on the Other and on its revaluation. The redefinition of the Other, or rather of the various Others who inhabited the Empire, was made possible by two circumstances: firstly, because the archaeological record allows the inclusion of all segments of society and, for the first time in a consistent way, of ethnic minorities, gender elements, and the excluded and marginalised; secondly, because the archaeological record brought to our knowledge a body of material and non-material evidence that tells us “genuine stories” of what occurred in everyday social experiences, a subject until then excluded from the great historical and literary narratives. In this regard, it should be stressed that the “archive of time” that Archaeology aims to restore and understand includes not only the world of the living, but also the complementary funerary world, which shows the intention to integrate all the moments that express social practices.

However, if archaeological information has the potential to contradict the narrative of the *Big History*, revealing other aspects that might go against the established discourse, the truth is that, like any other record, the archaeological one should also be subject to a hermeneutic process, in order to produce knowledge that goes beyond models, typologies and listings. The great potential that archaeological information presents must be questioned in a thorough and creative way, so that material culture may reveal all the stories contained therein – not only in terms of the structural elements that have reached us, but also in what concerns the huge information that has been lost and can be recovered indirectly or by cross-referencing data.

For this reason, Archaeology itself has changed: today we are less interested in recovering great monumental structures, opulent constructions, or centres of power, and it has become equally or more relevant to recover the small spaces of life and death made of humble waste such as rubbish dumps, layers of dumping and debris,

capable of bringing us fundamental information to know objectively all the elements of historical reality. Thus, more and more "detached" from the narrative of the *Big History*, Archaeology progressively seeks to record the spaces where the agents who created the lively and dynamic societies lived and were buried.

Starting, therefore, from the assumption that the realities evidenced in relation to the construction of this Romanised world do not reveal a monolithic and watertight character, the papers in this volume examine contexts of interaction that highlight the multiplicity and flexibility of the processes, focusing, on the one hand, around the mediations intended to promote the supra-unification of Roman culture and, on the other, on the multiple responses that occur within the framework of these interactions.

The contributions in this volume express the immense wealth of approaches that Archaeology, starting from material data and confronting them with literary records, allows itself to use for the construction of knowledge. The collected papers show a wide diversity of data, from the reading of humble ceramic fragments to the iconographic and informative potential of coins, or even by the statues that remained, allowing us to compare the figures. They allow us to recover the role of the "people without history", understanding phenomena of counter-cultural resistance conveyed in the identity forms of claiming the past against the new powers or, on the contrary, how military and diplomatic treaties recognise otherness. The journey is long, starting from the pre-Roman world as a remaining substrate, passing through the forms of identity construction and the creation of new connections brought about by the Empire, considering the various expressions of the material culture found in dwelling places and funerary environments, until we end up with the identity connections in a time when the Empire was becoming a mere memory.

The variety of approaches expresses the way in which we can extract the full potential of material culture. In the first section ("The incorporation of the Other: images, representations and material culture in the dynamics of imperial development"), **Jesús Bermejo Tirado** gives voice to the "people without history", analysing the testimonies of peasant communities and identifying them as essential agents in the construction of territories.

We then move forward into history, but back to the past: we see how, in two areas, the claim to be the original is taken as an instrument of differentiation in frameworks of identity homogenisation. **Francisco Machuca Prieto** shows us how the *Phoenician past* is used as an instrument of statement within a community, similarly to what **Mauro Puddu** writes regarding the claim to memory among the communities of Roman Sardinia. These are two examples of how tradition can be used against the current of uniformitarian movements.

In contrast, we see how the iconography established by imperial programmes was used for the construction of a collective identity. We know well how the Empire masterfully used the power of images in order to create a common conscience, bringing together distant communities, blurring their own notions and seeking to create images and iconographies that worked as a reference for the collective. This is how we find in two studies the way certain forms were seen as vital for such strategy: **Aura Piccioni** shows us one of the most emblematic, for statuary has the power to bring us face to face with the key players who, from afar, ran the Empire. Bronze statues were the tangible power of the imperial administrators while, on another level, coins would be the example of the dissemination of economic domination and, so, **Helena Gozalbes García** and **Noé Conejo Delgado** analyse the way in which the provincial coinages reflect the conveyance of images in one of the most effectively devices used by imperial power.

The second section of the book (“The fragmentation of unity and the loss of identity cohesion: between texts and material elements”) deals with the subject of identity in moments of loss of imperial cohesion. The way in which different communities claim and bind themselves to new groupings is studied by **Pilar Diarte Blasco**, who confronts literary information with known material data, increasingly bringing us new identities, whether from a religious or a cultural point of view.

At another level of analysis, ceramics also captures the changes of the *Big History*: **Mónica Rolo**, **Ana Martins** and **André Carneiro** study the circulation processes of ceramics in different routes of the Lusitanian territory, as well as the ongoing socio-political phenomena that had repercussions on material culture. For a specific universe, the funerary world, **Mónica Rolo**'s contribution shows us how the last resting place is, frequently, the space for full praise and claim to each person's identities. Finally, and contrasting this field of the individuality of the deceased with the more conventional sphere of diplomacy and military strategy, the study by **Rodrigo Gomes** leads us to understand how the Other was seen, in a period in which, in a progressive and unstoppable way, the Roman Empire was becoming increasingly distant, and the stage was now taken by protagonists who were paving the way for the medieval world.

In short, we have a series of approaches that show how the various dimensions of material culture can be addressed in order to include the immense diversity of the past in historical and literary discourse, proving how Archaeology has become a privileged area of knowledge for showing us the great diversity of cultural and social identities.

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