

**The 33rd Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference
TRAC-TiDA 2025 Sessions**

All paper abstracts (c. 200-300 words) should be sent directly to the session organisers.

The call for papers will close 31st August.

>>> 1

New Approaches to Roman Theatre Archaeology

Dr Jessica Clarke (UCL / British School at Rome - jessica.clarke.15@ucl.ac.uk)

The session aims to explore the archaeology of Roman theatre from new diachronic and cross-cultural perspectives. Too often studied through a Rome-centric and literary lens, theatre in the ancient world offers a diverse and complex archaeological record that demands fresh theoretical and comparative approaches. The session invites papers that examine any aspect of theatre archaeology between the Greek Classical period and the late Roman period in the Mediterranean and beyond, including northern/eastern Europe and Britain. This could include the architecture and decoration of theatre buildings or the material culture of theatre – such as the iconography of theatre performances, masks, and actors.

The focus of the papers should be on tracing developments over time and space, identifying moments of continuity or change in the archaeological record of theatre. This could encompass the emergence of regional theatre designs, changes in construction techniques, or shifts in the use and meaning of performance space. Alternatively, papers might focus on the development of theatre iconography and possible regional variations in theatrical imagery or the media through which it was presented. How did theatre architecture and visual culture differ between cities and regions? What do these variations reveal about changing local identities, political dynamics, or social priorities over time?

The key aim of the session is to move beyond teleological models that assume Rome was the driving force behind cultural change in the Mediterranean – a narrative which has dominated scholarly discussions of post-Hellenistic theatre archaeology. Instead, the intention is to highlight the agency of local communities across a wide geographic and temporal frame, and their role in shaping and developing various theatrical forms. In so doing, the session hopes to find fresh theoretical approaches to the archaeology of Roman theatre, reframing it not as a monolithic tradition but a vibrant, pluralistic, and morphic phenomenon with a complex developmental history.

>>> 2

The Power of Ideology on the Roman Frontier: Patrons, Clients, and Conquered Peoples of Colonized Landscapes

Mir Kameron Kashani – (UCL – kkashani72@gmail.com)

Many aspects of Roman frontier society, especially those of the Roman Northwest, have focused on the role of conquered peoples in the formation and occupation of frontier zones as part of imperial military logistics (e.g., Derks 2011). However, the modifications made to the material and mental landscape of the frontier zones of the Roman Northwest reveal complex interactions between economic, political, and ideological processes and policies tied to Rome's historical transition from a republic into an empire (e.g., Ando 2007). The particular patron-client systems of power organized under Roman administration reveal broader social

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and political impacts that penetrated the emerging melting pot of frontier societies along the Rhine-Meuse Delta and elsewhere in the empire (e.g., Roymans 2004).

The archaeological material collected from numerous frontier regions spanning the Rhine-Meuse Delta, to Britain, and the Danube presents evidence of ideological motivators being influential in what types of small finds (namely in militaria, coins, and pottery finds) were located at different Roman sites and fortifications (e.g., Nicolay 2007 and Pitts 2019). Such finds suggest an intersection of power relationships, defined under patrons and clients, that first emerged out of the framework of colonial subjugation deployed during Rome's territorial expansionism into outlying regions such as Gaul and Germany during the 1st centuries BCE and CE (e.g., Fernández-Götz et al. 2020 and 2024). The goal of this session is to continue building our understanding of the ideological practices behind Roman colonialism and how archaeological data can be deployed to further support research into Roman frontier society as the result of social and political power relations not unlike those currently experienced under contemporary imperialism (e.g., Mattingly 2011). The subjects encompass novel ways of interpreting archaeological finds from Roman frontier zones as part of the creation of socio-political structures in the frontier, reconstructions of how social class, tribal or client affiliations, and land usage by colonizing elites transformed the societies resettled on the frontiers into extensions of Roman cultural and state power.

Themes:

- Roman imperialism
- Frontier landscape archaeology
- Intersectionality of power and ideology
- Impact of colonialism in antiquity

>>> 3

Reclaiming Materialism: Marxist Tools for Moving Past Theoretical Binary Oppositions in Archaeology

Isabella Bossolino (ULB - isabella.bossolino@ulb.be), & Dario Monti (UCLouvain - dario.monti@uclouvain.be)

Despite its foundational role in critical social theory, Marxism remains marginalised in much of contemporary Roman and pre-Roman archaeology. Yet recent works (e.g. Vanni 2021; Milevski 2023) demonstrate a renewed interest in Marxist perspectives, not as a unified doctrine but as a dynamic strand of research. In this sense, Marxist archaeology emerges as a “third way” beyond the worn-out dichotomy between the rationalist and keen-to-generalisation processualism and the postmodern particularism of post-processualism. This session seeks to reclaim and expand the role of Marxist approaches as powerful interpretative tools for understanding ancient societies across the Mediterranean and beyond. Rather than privileging systems models or hermeneutic relativism, we propose to prioritise the analysis of material relations, while critically engaging with and further developing the analytical categories of Marxist thought in dialogue with the specificities of the ancient world.

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We invite contributions that reassess the socio-economic foundations of ancient communities, examining inequality, exploitation, surplus extraction, and ideological reproduction. Particular attention is welcome to approaches that integrate Marxism with post-colonial and feminist frameworks, expanding the notion of subalternity to encompass a plurality of marginalised subjectivities. How do colonisation, resistance, and social transformation appear when reinterpreted through a historical materialist lens? What are the limits and potentials of Marxist analysis in addressing the complexities of pre-Roman and Roman-period societies?

In addition to case studies focused on specific regions, periods, or social groups, we particularly encourage reflections that interrogate the theoretical and methodological implications of applying Marxist categories to the archaeological record. We invite not only the use of Marxist conceptual tools, but also their critical testing, refinement, and adaptation to ancient contexts. In particular, we view materialist analysis as providing a clearer, more grounded, and intellectually rigorous framework for interpreting Roman imperialism and the dynamics of intercultural interaction.

Contributions may range from re-readings of classical sites and material culture to comparative studies linking the Roman and pre-Roman worlds to broader global or longue durée frameworks. Analyses of subaltern lives, household economies, rural and urban production, and labour relations are especially encouraged. This session aims to provide a space for rethinking the theoretical foundations of ancient Mediterranean archaeology, and to explore how materialist approaches can yield deeper insights into the historical dynamics of power, economy, and social change.

>>>4

Integrating Ancient DNA with Archaeological Theory and Practice

Hannah M. Moots (Centre for Palaeogenetics, Stockholm, Sweden, hannah.moots@su.se), & N. Ezgi Altınışık (Human-G Laboratory, Hacettepe University, ezgialtinisik@hacettepe.edu.tr)

The rapid growth of the ancient DNA field has often meant that its integration with archaeological theory has not been widespread in the discipline as of yet. However, we hope that interdisciplinary settings like this will provide an opportunity to bridge archaeogenetic research with archaeological theory and praxis, and to explore how this integration can contribute to theory building. As one example, “migration” often serves as the dominant explanatory framework in archaeogenetic interpretations of past population change. Yet mobility has always occurred in diverse and context-specific patterns, encompassing a range of modalities and motivations. Migration-focused interpretations may, even when unintended, bring concepts with it across disciplines and from past theoretical approaches, such as culture-historical archaeology. We hope a deeper engagement with archaeological theory and existing archaeology scholarship and data will help ancient DNA researchers study identity, community, and mobility and the complex ways they shaped ancient societies, influencing kinship and family-formation practices, social stratification, cultural identity, and the development of urban infrastructure. Interpreting such diversity requires moving beyond reductive models and engaging with theoretical work that conceptualizes mobility as a socially embedded, multifaceted phenomenon.

This session invites contributions that explore the intersections between archaeology theory and ancient DNA. We welcome a broad range of topics that foster dialogue across allied approaches, including

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theoretical, archaeogenetic, biological, and historical. We welcome diachronic and cross-cultural comparisons that situate the Roman world within broader theoretical debates and consider the longue durée in relation to imperial and post-imperial transformations, especially those attentive to the political and epistemological stakes of reconstructing the past.

By fostering dialogue across disciplines, this session seeks to explore the intersection between archaeological theory and archaeogenetics, and examine how these nexus can contribute to the building and development of theoretical approaches.

>>>5

Beyond Binaries: Exploring New Conceptual Approaches to Cross-Cultural Interactions in the Roman Empire

Louise A O'Brien (University of Liverpool - hslobrie@liverpool.ac.uk) & Luis Maia de Freitas (Swansea University – 854214@swansea.ac.uk)

The Roman Empire was immersed in cross-cultural interactions which led to the influence and integration of diverse cultures within the empire and beyond. This cultural diversity has been studied through the application of various theoretical models and methodologies, including cultural entanglement (first proposed by Stockhammer, 2012), hybridity and third space (theorised by Bhabha, 1994, explored in archaeology by Steel, 2023), or the middle-ground (progressed by Richard White, 1991) to name but a few. However, such approaches have often been binary in nature, focusing on the classical (or Graeco-Roman) perspective of such assimilation and ignoring the reception or resistance of indigenous groups for a more nuanced and balanced perspective.

This session panel, therefore, welcomes papers that propose or discuss the application of new interdisciplinary concepts that decolonise and go beyond such binary methods to approach the study of cultural interactions, shared identity and syncretic material evidence between indigenous groups and the Roman empire. Papers must consider not only the Roman perspective, but also the reception or impact of indigenous peoples, or their role in cultivating or resisting cultural assimilation within the Roman state, as well as colonies and provinces and other empires Rome had contact with. This work will reconsider previous binary approaches to cultural contact, considering the introduction of Roman rule or culture not solely as a form of conquest but as a form of emulation. Such interactions, whether they be through art, religion, politics, or language, indicate that indigenous communities were active participants in the assimilation process, whether this be through the integration of Roman material into native culture or the cultivation of shared cultural identity in an environment which cannot be defined solely by cultural labels such as 'Roman', 'Greek', 'Egyptian', or 'Syrian'. This panel aims to foster a collaborative approach to cross-cultural interactions and the conceptualisation of identity within both Roman and indigenous cultural contexts.

>>>6

What do the monuments stand for? Materiality of Roman architecture

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Dr Ulla Rajala and Dr Therese Emanuelsson-Paulson (Stockholm University - ulla.rajala@antiken.su.se and therese.emmanuelsson.paulson@antiken.su.se)

What and how do the monuments communicate? In this session we want to explore the mediating role of Roman architecture. Objects mediate between people in a range of ways, and in so doing are essential from their part to the way that selves are constructed in relation to others - i.e. to intersubjectivity (for the full discussion, see Gardner 2003, 2-5). In recent archaeological, and indeed interdisciplinary, discussions objects are given agency, better repositioning of human is searched for and the white western nature of the 'human' is questioned; these discussions have reached Roman archaeology, too (Mol 2023). Nevertheless, the extent to which such 'material turn' would help archaeology has been questioned (Gardner 2021), even if the essence of archaeology as the study of 'things' cannot be underestimated.

Roman towns were full of buildings that created different kinds of urban landscapes that affected people's senses. The Roman architecture could be grandiose and massive, full of decorations and friezes. As monuments, the buildings stood for something and they conveyed different ideas and messages (e.g. Zanker 1990). But whose messages they communicated and what was their reception? Could the Roman monuments have unintended connotations? Do they still stand for something? And can we always understand their messages? Or is our perception of these monuments affected by older archaeological theories?

This session invites the interpretations and re-interpretations of pre-Roman and Roman monuments in the core and periphery of the Roman Empire. In addition, the assessment of their reception in the later periods can be explored as well. Especially welcome are contributions that discuss different ontological questions related to monuments.

>>>7

The archaeological genre image. Contemporary field photography and its place in Western visual culture

Dr. Julian Schreyer (Institut für Klassische Archäologie, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg - julian.schreyer@fau.de)

A central element of the external representation of almost every contemporary archaeological field campaign is a highly standardized iconographic repertoire of 'work in progress' and team photographs. In this aspect, a remarkable iconographic consistency can be observed within the entire spectrum from popular outreach to peer-reviewed specialist publications.

What is the source of the intuitive use of this category of images? A decisive factor seems to be a set of long-lasting visual and ideological traditions, with which any fieldwork photograph engages, at least unconsciously. Apart from an uncritically perpetuated 19th century excavation staging in the colonialist tenor of pioneering expedition imagery, we shall also discuss the extent to which genre representations of peasant field work, manual labor and early industrial production flow into today's archaeological image production, to name just a few possible examples.

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Contributions are sought that bring to light the historically grown sediments of forms, functions and values associated with this supposedly trivial image genre. Through exemplary analyses and iconological in-depth studies, the aim is to narrow down the position of the visual genre of fieldwork photography within the multifaceted fabric of Western iconology. The entire methodological repertoire of visual studies is expressly welcome; the use of other approaches, e.g., science and technology studies, affect theory, or postcolonial critique, might contribute to further clarification.

Responding to the increased interest in the role of photography and other epistemic media in archaeology in recent years (e.g., S. Kamm, *Bilder des Vergangenen*, 2017; O. Dally, *Zur Archäologie der Fotografie*, 2017; D. H. Sanders, *From Photography to 3D Models and Beyond*, 2023), the session undertakes to contribute to a critical examination of prevailing assumptions about, and self-perceptions of Roman and other Archaeologies. Ultimately, it aims to shed new light on the crucial question of what role Archaeology should play within today's society and its value systems.

>>>8

Bridging Theory and Practice: Critical Approaches to Heritage Management in and Beyond Roman Archaeology

Dr Sarah Scoppie (Landesamt für Denkmalpflege im RP Stuttgart/State Office for Cultural Heritage Baden-Württemberg, Sarah.scoppie@rps.bwl.de)

Heritage management today operates at the intersection of competing demands: protection and preservation, funding, access, tourism, and community engagement, as well as climate change to name just a few. This session invites contributors to explore how theoretical approaches can inform, critique, or reshape heritage management practices in and around Roman archaeology as well as beyond. We welcome case studies, conceptual interventions, or analytical perspectives that engage with the complex realities of heritage work — including, but not limited to, site management, digital heritage, community collaboration, curatorial practices, and the politics of designation (e.g. UNESCO World Heritage).

Theoretical grounding may include, for instance, critical heritage studies, decolonial theory, Actor-Network Theory, assemblage theory, phenomenology, or affect theory — but contributors are welcome to draw from any critical framework that helps illuminate the stakes and challenges of heritage management.

TRAC 2025 marks a new moment of collaboration: for the first time, TRAC joins with TidA (AG Theorien in der Archäologie), creating a space for cross-cultural, diachronic , and interdisciplinary dialogue. In this spirit, we particularly welcome contributions from researchers (including PhD students and ECRs) and professionals working outside Roman archaeology, including in museum studies, public engagement, Indigenous heritage, and landscape conservation, highlighting connections to or comparisons with Roman material, methods, or legacies.

By drawing together voices from across disciplinary boundaries, we aim to ask: how can theory help us do heritage work better? What frictions or opportunities arise when theory meets practice? And how might Roman archaeology serve as a productive point of dialogue in wider heritage conversations?

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We welcome regular paper presentations as well as shorter contributions and are open to the idea of opening the session towards a more interactive discussion format.

>>>9

The past is dead? Lived history, empathy and dark sides of Roman imperialism (and not only Roman)

Ljubica Perinić, (Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts - bperinic@gmail.com & Anton Ye. Baryshnikov (Independent Researcher - baryshnikov85@gmail.com)

Recent decades are marked by a significant change in studying and understanding of Roman imperialism both in history and archaeology. Scholars have started looking at the phenomenon of once paradigmatic Empire from other angles and now are paying attention to aspects that can be labelled as 'dark sides' of Roman imperialism: organized violence, exploitation, extraction of resources and many others. One can only praise focusing on those issues not only for they were neglected for a long time but because many of them are painfully familiar to us. Still, in most cases scholars tend to look at the past as if it is something dead and silent, a set of objective facts. Battles are presented as rationalized constructs; where fear and panic are just abstract concepts; where losses are numbers not real people. Hunger within such an approach is merely a fact of the critical food storage, and plague is not a human tragedy but a spread of *Yersinia pestis*. Of course, this modus operandi is rooted in the own nature of academic research with its cult of objectivity. But history is not only what happened, it is also how people lived through 'what-happened'.

We are interested in and welcome papers that deal with history and historiography, different perspectives on how specific events were represented in art or literature or on the inscriptions, and religion in general or cults.

This session invites papers that challenge the traditional boundaries of objectivity by centering emotion, ethics, and empathy in the study of Roman imperialism. How did individuals (soldiers, subjects, the enslaved) feel amidst conquest, displacement, or epidemic? How do we, as researchers, grapple with grief, guilt, fascination, or even numbness when reconstructing histories of exploitation? And how do ancient representations (in art, literature, inscriptions, or religion) mediate these emotional and ethical dimensions?

We welcome contributions that: examine the affective and ethical challenges of researching imperial violence, resource extraction, or forced labor; Reconstruct the sensory and emotional realities of Roman imperialism (e.g., fear in battle, despair in famine, resilience in cult practice); critique historiographical traditions that sanitize or rationalize suffering; explore methodologies for "humanizing" the past, e.g., through microhistory, narrative approaches, or collaborative work with affected descendant communities; analyze ancient artistic, literary, or epigraphic testimonies that convey subjective experiences of empire.

Key Questions:

How can we balance empirical rigor with empathetic engagement when studying oppression? What responsibilities do historians and archaeologists have toward the "voices" they reconstruct? Can attention to emotion reshape narratives of Roman imperialism—and if so, how? We encourage bold, reflexive, and interdisciplinary approaches that confront the past not as a detached puzzle, but as a visceral, morally fraught legacy.

>>>10

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They lived long and prospered ever after: archaeologists and historians as creators

Anton Ye. Baryshnikov (Independent Researcher - baryshnikov85@gmail.com) & Ljubica Perinić, (Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts - bperinic@gmail.com)

This is the third and final episode of the legendary (mostly among its organizers) franchise of TRAC sessions dealing with the reception of Roman Empire in pop culture and how pop culture influenced scholars. Scholars used to analyze (and often criticize for inaccuracy) movies, plays, video games and books. Such an activity is never boring because watching movies and seeing the wrong type of sword just cannot be boring. But how things should be done? How must pop culture represent the things we study? Now it is time to discuss how scholars *do* and *can* contribute to pop culture. It is a good moment to share artistic achievements and creative vision of future projects, as well as painful experience of interacting with creative industry be that moviemakers, game developers or playwrights. As one of many Marxes once said (we are sure that it was not Groucho): archaeologists and historians have interpreted the past in various ways; but the point is also to create it in various media.

We invite scholarly contributions that critically examine the portrayal of archaeology and history in popular media, including films, television series, and other cultural productions. Of particular interest are case studies that analyse specific instances where such representations have either succeeded or failed in their depiction of historical or archaeological subject matter. Submissions should explore how these portrayals have influenced public perceptions of the disciplines and, where applicable, propose evidence-based improvements for greater accuracy and educational value. We encourage contributions from archaeologists, historians, and interdisciplinary scholars that engage with methodological, ethical, or theoretical frameworks to assess and refine the relationship between popular culture and academic scholarship. We welcome rigorous, well-documented studies that bridge the gap between academic expertise and popular representation, fostering a more nuanced engagement with the past in contemporary media.

>>>11

General Session

TRAC Standing Committee (tracconf2025@gmail.com)

The General Session of TRAC-TiDA 2025 invites paper proposals that engage critically and creatively with any aspect of Roman archaeology, broadly defined. This session welcomes contributions that do not fall within the scope of a themed panel but nonetheless offer theoretically informed, methodologically innovative, or conceptually provocative perspectives.

We particularly encourage submissions that align with TRAC-TiDA 2025's emphasis on collaboration, cross-cultural dialogue, and diachronic comparison. Papers may explore Roman archaeology in relation to other periods or cultural contexts, engaging with themes such as decolonisation, sustainability, marginalised geographies, and underrepresented regions in Roman studies, as well as methodological experimentation in fieldwork, data analysis, or pedagogy. Work that brings Roman archaeology into conversation with wider theoretical debates—whether through case studies, comparative frameworks, or experimental methodologies—is especially welcome.