
The eight articles in this collection, whose theme derives from a 1999 conference,

...explore the uses of images derived from classical Rome in a number of countries in Europe and in the United States of America. Individual papers focus upon different periods, but the emphasis is on the 16th c. to the present day. (7)

The authors consider literary traditions, popular writing, education, art, architecture and antiquities. Many of them also consider traditions of archaeological research in the various countries considered, 'and how these have related, and continue to relate, to popular images' (7). This emphasis upon the role of archaeology in creating and perpetuating national myths seems the most innovative aspect of the volume.

In the first chapter, 'Images of Rome' (7-22), Richard Hingley gives an overview of the eight papers and asks archaeologists in particular to reflect upon agendas and assumptions that might underlie their work. Chapter 2, 'The Image of Rome in Spain: Scholars, Artists and Architects in Italy During the 16th to 18th Century' (23-55), is by Gloria Mora, who shows that members of the Spanish elite used classical images to further their political power. Early archaeology in Rome was conducted to underline the sponsors' claims to have inherited a superior civilisation. The Spanish Crown supported architects in drawing Roman buildings and funded excavations at Tivoli, Pompeii and Herculaneum for the same purpose (24, 49-53). Indeed, the kings and patrons identified by Mora were following in the footsteps of the new Spanish monarchy of the fifteenth century, which found the image of classical Rome useful as a political model after its conquest of territories formerly under Islamic control. The new Spain was likened to Roman Italy and the Catholic monarchs saw themselves as successors of the Roman emperors through the Visigothic kings (34). Beginning in the sixteenth century, scholars, architects and artists used the image of Rome in the development of
In ch.3, ‘Rome in America’ (57-69), Stephen L. Dyson demonstrates the power of the classical tradition in the education of the American élite in nineteenth and twentieth centuries and argues that America has drawn upon classical symbols ‘to give historical reference and cultural status to its most important public and private structures and monuments’ (57). Rome presented a grand and powerful image that was drawn upon in various areas of American life. Dyson concentrates upon cultural products that would leave a trace in some future archaeological record, and argues that this record could be interpreted as showing a line of continuity from Athens to Alexandria, to Rome, to modern American towns and cities of the western Atlantic shore. Roman cultural influence is far more pronounced than Greek in the United States, partly because Rome was associated with power, stability, good government and enduring success. In addition, Rome seemed more appropriate to American imperial ambitions (65).

In the fourth chapter, ‘Ancestor Cults: the Perception of Ancient Rome in Modern Italian Culture’ (71-89), Nicola Terrenato argues that classical sources are used in support of origin myths by various distinct groups which today coexist in the Italian peninsula. ‘Rome’ is no monolithic idea for the peoples of modern Italy. Terrenato notes in particular that classical sources draw a distinction between Romans and non-Roman or native peoples. While communities in the Italian peninsula from the early Middle Ages onward have emphasized the Roman imperial past as a ‘golden age of prosperity and centrality’ (74-5), they have also found useful the image of the ‘barbarian other’. Classical texts and archaeological remains have been interpreted with heavy reference to this concept. Concentration upon the native peoples of Italy justifies a modern mosaic of highly independent communities, distinctive in various ways, who nonetheless acknowledge the unifying and civilising influence of ancient Rome. Terrenato points out how archaeological interpretation has been subject to this underlying political concern. It was also fundamental to the work of historians like Niebuhr and Mommsen, who interpreted Roman Italy in the mid to late nineteenth century in ways helpful to the creation of nation-states in Germany and Italy (77-8). In the early twentieth century, Mussolini justified imperial claims, especially in North Africa, by recourse to classical history and archaeology. As is well
known, the Fascists also employed a variety of Roman monuments, notably the Ara Pacis, in creating a capital for their new Roman Empire (80).

Manuela Struck has contributed ch.5: ‘The Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation and Hermann the German’ (91-112). Here too the influence of Roman and native images, and a certain tension between them, is detectable. From the ninth century the Germanic empire, which included a large part of modern Italy, was regarded as the successor to imperial Rome (94). There was thought to be an inheritance from classical Rome through the Holy Roman Empire (105). In the nineteenth century Struck describes the rise of ‘political Germanism’, whereby Arminius’ victory over three Roman legions in the Teutoberg Forest in AD 9 was glorified as a great national event, and the myth of Hermann the German rose to special prominence. Arminius/Hermann provided a national figurehead for armed resistance against imperialist forces, especially the French. Struck points out that Hermann's statue near Detmould (erected in 1841) faces westwards in the direction of France (99). Germany’s own imperial ambitions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries were articulated through Roman images (94). There is also a valuable discussion of the development of archaeological research, especially under the Nazis and the post-war reaction, showing that Greek identity can be used as a contrast with Rome (104-9).

Chapter 6, ‘Vercingetorix, Asterix and the Gauls: Gallic Symbols in French Politics and Culture’ (113-25), is by Anthony King. It investigates the image of Vercingetorix as national hero against Rome and the relationship between this image and that of Rome as civilising influence. A certain tension is once more discernible. From the eighteenth century an origin myth has held that peasant Gauls and Gallo-Romans were ancestors of the contemporary French population (113-14). Yet Napoleon III used Julius Caesar, conqueror of these peasants, as a means to bolster his personal political power (115). The attention given to Vercingetorix in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is seen as a product of the French need for a symbol of resistance against Germany. King argues that the cartoon character Asterix is a product of the same process. Asterix reflects descriptions of Gauls in nineteenth century school books (122-3).
In ch.7, ‘Foreign Oppressor Versus Civiliser: the Batavian Myth as the Source for Contrasting Associations of Rome in Dutch Historiography and Archaeology’ (126-43), Wilfried Hessing maintains the theme of contrasting images of Rome. He observes that the Dutch Republic employed Tacitus’ account of the Batavians both for its picture of national solidarity and in support of the argument that the Batavians had learned and profited from the civilising power of Rome (131-5). Dutch historiography and archaeology from the sixteenth century developed the ‘Batavian myth’: spiritual strength is attributed to the Batavians, whose culture was enhanced by contact with Roman civilisation.

In ch.8, ‘An Imperial Legacy: the Contribution of Classical Rome to the Character of the English’ (145-65), Richard Hingley considers how, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the English often defined themselves by contrast with a Celtic ‘other’ who lived in Scotland and Wales (148-51). By contrast, the English supposed that they were descended from the Romano-British inhabitants of Britain, so that they had inherited the best features of both peoples. Their Roman heritage became especially important during the heyday of British imperialism, justifying British claims (154-60). The image of Boadicea was nurtured as a figure of resistance against all comers. Her statue erected in 1902 on the Embankment in London was designed to symbolise protection of the House of Commons from an attack over the Thames from the south (151-2). Hingley also argues that the concept of ‘Romanisation’ within Roman archaeology during the twentieth century has helped to supplement this notion of Englishness (146-8). The idea is that Roman culture was passed down from the ancient Britons to the contemporary English. Archaeologists have too often accepted this picture uncritically, lacking an awareness of the modern political agenda. Western powers in general have made claims to superiority on the basis of a myth of cultural descent from the ancient Near East to Greece to Rome to the Christian Middle Ages to the Western European Renaissance to the modern European industrial nations. The West, as Martin Bernal’s Black Athena pointed out forcefully, appropriated the East for the sake of its own advancement. Hingley argues that the idea of Western dominance was a vital component of Western imperialism (153-4).

The ninth and final chapter, by Stasa Babic, is entitled ‘Janus on
the Bridge: a Balkan Attitude Towards Ancient Rome’ (167-82). The
basic argument is that Rome has not been as important for forming a
national myth in Serbia as it has been in much of Western Europe. In
contrast to the idea of Western dominance based on Rome, countries of
Eastern Europe have been inclined to stress their cultural inheritance from
classical Greece. Serbia and the Balkans are seen as a crossroads between
West and East, something like Trajan’s Bridge across the Danube (167-8).
Whereas Romania nurtures a Roman myth of origin, neighbouring Serbia
fosters a complex set of influences, in particular from classical Greece.
Yet again the matter is complex: there is a strong Serbian interest in
Rome as a result of the desire to share in Western European traditions and
success. On the other hand, Roman archaeology is rare in Serbia because
it falls into a conceptual gap between East and West (171). The remains
of Trajan’s Bridge, for instance, lie unattended in an open field on the
Serbian side of the Danube; on the other side, in Romania, they are well
conserved and displayed (168-71). Furthermore, the Romanians do not
emphasize their figures of national resistance against Rome. The Dacian
leader Decebalus, for instance, is commemorated only in the name of a
Romanian department store in Turnu Severin (169).

This book, therefore, gives eloquent testimony to the use of images
of ancient Rome by various countries of modern Europe. These images
have proved extraordinarily powerful in helping modern nation-states
justify their cultural and territorial claims. Classical texts and symbols
commonly lie behind national and imperial claims, and are also important
in areas like bureaucratic training and race relations. It is plain that
countries affected by such claims need to maintain scholars who can
interpret the appropriate texts and symbols with skill. Such scholars are
insurance against tendentious renderings and interpretations. Another
point to emerge is that popular and academic images may diverge
considerably, and it should not be assumed that the latter will prove more
powerful in debate. So there needs to be a general awareness of the
agendas that can be operating in (say) comic books or movies as well as
academic publications.

More specifically, the role of archaeology is highlighted in quite a
new way. The reader is forced to contemplate the preconceptions and
nationalist biases which at present hamper and underlie archaeological
excavation and reporting. In France, Iron Age sites are more popular than
Roman, whereas the reverse applies in Germany and the Netherlands. British excavations are often interested in military sites, a fact at least partly due to the identification between Roman officers and English gentlemen, to quote the title of Hingley’s earlier book (2000). Classical archaeology is not popular in North Africa because it is associated with colonial domination by the French and Italians. Many excavations concentrate upon national or cultural origins, but origins should only be part of the story. Continuity tends to be emphasized rather than change, or the view of artefacts as products of a particular social relationship. Research interests and the reasons for funding an excavation can provide the thesis before the evidence is uncovered.

We can agree with Richard Hingley that archaeologists must now become involved alongside ancient historians and art historians in considering how their work proceeds from agendas and assumptions which have dictated the course of much recent Western scholarship (19). Rome is used variously, and various images hold sway, in many parts of the world beyond Western Europe, including Eastern Europe, India, North Africa, South Africa, Central and South America, Japan and China, and even in Oceania.

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