

**ROME BEYOND ITS FRONTIERS:
IMPORTS, ATTITUDES
AND PRACTICES**

edited by
Peter S. Wells

with contributions by

T. Grane, F. Hunter, C. G. Schmidt, J. Soderberg,
R. Tomber, P. S. Wells and N. L. Wicker

PORTSMOUTH, RHODE ISLAND
2013

JOURNAL OF ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGY®

JRA® SUPPLEMENTARY SERIES NUMBER 94

General Editor: J. H. Humphrey; Layout: C. Corey

This volume also belongs to the

International Roman Archaeology Conference Series

based upon the biennial conferences organized by

THE SOCIETY FOR THE
PROMOTION OF ROMAN STUDIES

with additional sponsorship from

The Journal of Roman Archaeology

ISBN 1-887829-94-6

ISBN-13: 978-1-887829-94-6

ISSN 1063-4304 (for the supplementary series)

Copyright © 2013 Journal of Roman Archaeology, L.L.C.

Printed by Thomson-Shore, Dexter, Michigan

JRA® and Journal of Roman Archaeology® are registered trademarks of Journal of Roman Archaeology, L.L.C.

This and other supplements to the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* may be ordered from:

JRA, 95 Peleg Road, Portsmouth, RI 02871, U.S.A.

Telephone (+USA) 401 683 1955

telefax (+USA) 401 683 1975

e-mail: jra@JournalofRomanArch.com

Web site: JournalofRomanArch.com

Reprints of all *JRA* works available at nominal cost by sending a message to jra@JournalofRomanArch.com

Permission to copy may be obtained only direct from *JRA*, by e-mail, letter, fax or phone.

Kindly note that the Copyright Clearance Center (USA), the Copyright Licensing Agency (UK), and other national Reproduction Rights Organizations are not permitted to authorize copying or to collect fees for doing so.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction. Rome beyond its frontiers: imports, attitudes, and practices <i>Peter S. Wells</i>	7
2. The lives of Roman objects beyond the frontier <i>Fraser Hunter</i>	15
3. Roman imports in Scandinavia: their purpose and meaning? <i>Thomas Grane</i>	29
4. Beyond the frontier in Europe: Roman imports, complex ornaments, and the formation of new polities <i>Peter S. Wells</i>	45
5. Just recycled? New light on the Roman imports at the 'central farmstead' of Frienstedt (central Germany) <i>Christoph G. Schmidt</i>	57
6. "Between Britain and Spain": Ireland in Roman-period Europe <i>John Soderberg</i>	71
7. Pots, coins and trinkets in Rome's trade with the East <i>Roberta Tomber</i>	87
8. Inspiring the barbarians? The transformation from Roman medallions to Scandinavian bracteates <i>Nancy L. Wicker</i>	105
9. Conclusion. Roman imports in a larger context: some questions for future research <i>Peter S. Wells</i>	121
List of figures	127
Index	129

INTRODUCTION

Rome beyond its frontiers: imports, attitudes, and practices

Peter S. Wells

Roman imports beyond the frontiers: common objects, local meanings

Among archaeologists and historians, there is much discussion about “globalization” of the Roman empire.¹ Many argue that models developed to explain processes in the 20th and 21st c. can be applied to the Roman world to explore the ways in which different parts of that vast empire became integrated economically, politically and, to some extent, culturally, into an extensive “world system”. Whether or not the globalization model is deemed useful and applicable in the end, this approach has led to numerous productive studies of ways in which communities throughout the empire came to be linked to regional centers and to the imperial capital.

Lacking in most of these studies has been systematic consideration of the relations between the Roman world and communities outside the imperial frontiers. In order fully to explore the possible applicability to the Roman period of the globalization model in all its aspects, regions beyond the frontiers that are known to have interacted with Rome and its provinces must be integrated into the discussion. Commerce between the Roman world and lands beyond has been extensively documented for well over a century, with evidence for interactions with places as far away as Ireland or India and China. Archaeological and textual evidence informs us that Rome depended upon such commerce for both bulk and luxury foodstuffs, raw materials, and soldiers; they also provide information and ideas about the diverse peoples who inhabited other parts of the world.

The clearest and most detailed evidence for interactions between Rome and the lands beyond the frontiers consists of “Roman imports” — objects manufactured in Italy or other parts of the empire that have been recovered in lands outside the imperial boundaries. Common among the imports are fine pottery, metal vessels (mostly bronze but also silver and gold), glassware and coins. Such imports have been well documented since the 19th c., and in the 20th and early 21st a great many studies have catalogued, analyzed and interpreted them, yet, with few exceptions, the approaches taken have been primarily from the perspective of the Roman world, identifying the chronology of the imports and their places of origin, and linking their arrival with events in Roman history or to the course of Roman-“barbarian” interrelations as they are known from texts. The tendency has been to understand imported objects from the perspective of the Roman manufacturers and consumers, assuming, without making a full critical evaluation, that the rôles they played in the receiving communities were similar to the rôles that such objects played at Rome.

The chief purpose of the papers in this collection, most of which were initially prepared for a session at the Roman Archaeology Conference held at Oxford University in 2010, is to investigate Roman imports in contexts beyond the frontiers from the point of view of the rôles they came to play in the communities that received them. Objects’ meanings to those with whom they came to be associated are examined by focusing on the associations

1 E.g., Hingley 2005; Geraghty 2007; Hitchner 2008; Pitts 2008; Jennings 2011.

of imports with other items and on the cultural contexts (graves, deposits, hoards). This can provide direct evidence pertaining to how the imports were regarded and used by the societies that received them, and sometimes hint at the attitudes of some members of those communities toward Rome.

Such imports can aid our attempts to conceptualize “globalization” in relation to the Roman empire in at least two respects. First, they represent the transfer of objects from the Roman world to societies beyond the frontiers, attesting to economic connections. Second, as they embody Rome’s culture in the broadest sense, they shed light on different aspects of interactions between the Roman world and other peoples. The presence of Roman-made objects in Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, N Germany and India shows that these regions were part of the ‘greater Roman world’ in the sense that people in those places were demonstrably in contact with Rome and its provinces, however indirect that contact may have been;² they acquired and used objects manufactured in that world; and, through the information that invariably travels with objects,³ they had specific ideas about that world and how they related to it.

Increasing evidence shows that the Roman objects recovered in non-Roman contexts played a variety of rôles in the communities that received, used and deposited them. Representing the Roman empire, they carried an aura of association with that large, complex and strange civilization. Many of the contexts in which imports have been found, such as the grave at Hoby (Denmark) noted here by T. Grane and that at Mušov (Czech Republic) cited by both him and myself, strongly suggest that the rôle of imports as representative of the Roman empire was particularly important.⁴

Aside from or in addition to the aura attached to affiliation with Rome, many imports were treated as status symbols on the basis of their foreignness and their visual appeal. This seems to be true of many of the Roman objects in burials in N Germany and in Danish bog deposits.⁵

When Roman materials pertaining to the army turn up in burials, they can be interpreted as signs of military prowess and thus of special status in the local communities. When such items are parts of sets of functional military hardware (e.g., the spurs in the burials at Putensen, Marwedel and Mušov [see Wells] or the Roman officer’s dagger at Hedegård [Grane]), they are likely to represent auxiliary service in Rome’s army on the part of the buried individuals. When they are isolated pieces of Roman military garments, such as have been recovered at the settlement at Frienstedt (C. Schmidt), they are likely to represent booty seized by raiders of Roman territory.

Objects imported from the Roman world frequently served as models or prototypes for the manufacture of local items for specific purposes beyond the purely functional. Imported metal vessels, pottery and jewelry (F. Hunter) and medallions (N. Wicker) served as the models for objects produced by craftworkers using local techniques for local purposes. As Wicker demonstrates, the bracteates, while clearly modelled on Late Roman medallions, differed from their prototypes in material, techniques of production, and purpose.

2 E.g., Wells 1999, 265.

3 Helms 1988.

4 Storgaard 2003; Peška and Tejral 2002.

5 Ilkjaer 2003.