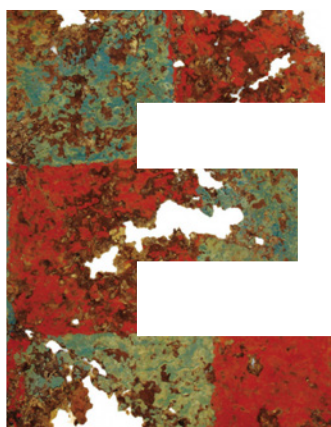
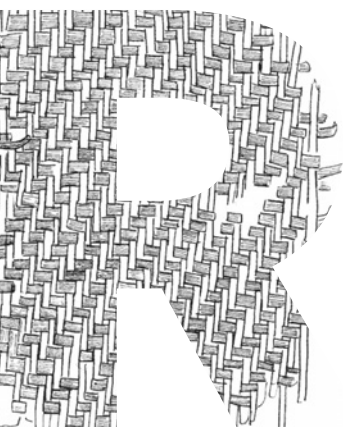


CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

(RE-)CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES

Culture, Communication and Exchange
in the Ancient World



Conference
February 11–12, 2021
Berlin–Oxford, Online

**(Re-)Constructing Identities
Culture, Communication and Exchange in the Ancient World**

**Conference, February 11–12, 2021
Berlin–Oxford, Online**

Proceedings of Papers

Organizers

Mette Bangsborg Thuesen, BerGSAS – Languages and Cultures of the Silk Road (Silk Road), Freie Universität Berlin
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Introduction

This volume represents the proceedings of the first Berlin-Oxford graduate conference that took place on the 11th and 12th of February 2021. This was an event organised by a team of doctoral candidates from the Berlin Graduate School of Ancient Studies and Oxford University in order to promote collaboration between the two research institutions. The overall topic was “(Re)constructing Identities – Culture, Communication and Exchange in the Ancient World” and the following abstracts present different approaches to address identities and identity formation processes in ancient societies within the fields of archaeology, philology and philosophy.

Originally the conference was planned to be held at the facilities at Freie Universität Berlin in April 2020, however, due to the unforeseen events of the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused national lockdowns and imposed severe travel restrictions, the event was postponed for a year and changed to an online format. This however meant that the conference was open for registrations for students and researchers abroad, and in the end the event attracted more than 80 participants from all over Europe.

The conference consisted of ten papers, which were divided into four sessions according to four themes; Identities at Borders, From Material Culture to Identity, Epigraphic Legacy: Inscribing Identities, and Constructing Identities in Roman Literature. Each day was concluded with a guest lecture presented by Prof. Dr. Susan Pollock and Prof. Dr. Nicholas Purcell followed by a general discussion.

The topics of the papers were aspects from the doctoral dissertations of the presenters. Since these dissertations are still work in progress, the presenters preferred to publish extended abstracts in this volume to allow a glimpse into their upcoming monographs. This volume can therefore be seen as a preview to upcoming research results in the diverse disciplines of ancient studies.

Conference Program

February 11, 2021

14:00 – Opening

Monika Trümper, BerGSAS,
Freie Universität Berlin
Tobias Reinhardt, Faculty of Classics,
University of Oxford

First session: Identities at borders

14:10 – The Dynamics of a Frontier Landscape:
the Lower Rhine from 50 BC to AD 500

Kai Radloff, PhD student in Classical Archaeology,
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

14:40 – The Oasis Identity: Turfan Basin before
Han Dynast

Xiaozhe Li, PhD student in Prehistoric
Archaeology, Freie Universität Berlin

15:10 – Dangerous Exchanges: Identity and Religion
in the Boundary Areas of Roman Italy

Alexandra Creola, PhD candidate in Classical
Art and Archaeology, University of Michigan

15:40 – Coffee break

Second session: From material culture to identity

16:00 – Cretan mercenary archers and the Neo-
Assyrian Empire

Konstantinos Markos, PhD candidate in
Classical Archaeology, Humboldt-Universität zu
Berlin

16:30 – Food and Identity on the Silk Roads
– Commensality in Sasanian Iran

Mette Bangsborg Thuesen, PhD student in Near
Eastern Archaeology, Freie Universität Berlin

17:00 – Keynote lecture: How are people made?
On subjects and identities in Mesopotamia

Prof. Dr. Susan Pollock, Institut für Vorder-
asiatische Archäologie, Freie Universität Berlin

18:00 – Discussion

Conference Program

February 12, 2021

Third session: Epigraphic legacy – inscribing identities

10:10 – From Individual Identities to Prosopographical Networks – A Case from Ancient Memphis
Anne Herzberg-Beiersdorf, PhD in Egyptology, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin

10:40 – Identity set in stone. The identity of benefactors through the physicality of inscriptions: a case study of bath euergetism in Roman Central Italy
Konogan Beaufay, DPhil in Classical Archaeology, Lincoln College, University of Oxford

11:10 – Problems and Politics of Writing Bactrian in Greek Script in the Kušān Empire
Stefan Härtel, PhD student in Iranistics, Freie Universität Berlin

11:40 – Coffee break

Fourth session: Constructing identities in Roman literature

12:00 – Identity Unconscious: Quintilian's Tabula Rasa
Henry Bowles, PhD, DPhil student in Classical Languages and Literature, Christ Church College, University of Oxford

12:30 – Writing away the truth in Propertius 3.6 and 3.23
Nikita Nicheperovich, DPhil candidate in Languages and Literature, Wadham College, University of Oxford

13:00 – Keynote lecture
Trading partners? Ancient 'cultural identity' and the problems of 'exchange'
Nicholas Purcell FBA, Camden Professor of Ancient History and Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford

14:00 – Final discussion

Food and Identity on the Silk Roads – Commensality in Sasanian Iran

Mette Bangsborg Thuesen

PhD student in Near Eastern Archaeology, Freie Universität Berlin

This paper discusses how commensality studies can be useful in the reconstruction of identities in ancient societies by looking into the past food ways of Sasanian Iran. The concept of commensality derives from Latin and means to eat and drink together. In recent archaeological research it has become a subject that goes beyond the underlying social and political dynamics occurring when people share a meal. It is generally accepted in the anthropological and sociological literature that shared practices are essential in regard to what builds larger communities – and thereby also what shapes a common identity. Probably the most common social act we conduct is food sharing, and therefore the meal can be seen as one of the areas, where micro-politics are negotiated on an everyday basis – both in modern times, as well as in ancient times.

At the current state of research, our knowledge on commensality in the Sasanian period is primarily constructed from historical sources that mostly deal with the high cuisine of the elite. These provide detailed accounts of the distinctive and elaborate dishes being served at the Sasanian court and which flavours were enhanced by spices and fruits that were brought from afar following the increased inter-regional trade on the silk roads. Having access to these types of exotic ingredients was a social marker for the elite and could also be used to impress visitors and display the influence of the empire. When it comes to the food traditions of other parts of the Sasanian societies the historical documentation is scarce, but this is where the potential of the material evidence comes through, while the repetitive acts of everyday commensality leaves a more visible impression in the archaeological record. As ceramic vessels were utilised in almost every aspect of commensal activities including food processing, storage, and consumption, they provide an excellent opportunity to study the commensality of everyday life. This is something I will investigate further in my PhD research through the study of the Sasanian pottery assemblages from three archaeological sites; Tappe Rivi, a multiperiod settlement that has revealed several architectural structures; Qaleh Iraj, a military fortress, and Tappe Mil, a Zoroastrian fire temple. These three sites represent different social settings for commensal activities to have taken place, and can therefore reveal more about the food production and sharing across the multiple and diverse layers of the Sasanian society.

Identity set in stone. The identity of benefactors through the physicality of inscriptions: a case study of bath benefaction in Roman Central Italy

Konogan Beaufay

DPhil in Classical Archaeology, Lincoln College, University of Oxford

In the Late Republican and Imperial periods, bath buildings became omnipresent across the Roman empire, used on a daily basis by the vast majority of the population. The construction, maintenance and restoration costs of these structures were often too high to be borne by city councils, and benefactions by private, wealthy individuals became the main way for a city to be fitted with a bath building; such acts of benefactions were recorded on inscriptions, commonly called ‘commemorative’ or ‘building’ inscriptions.

This paper examines a group of ca. 80 commemorative inscriptions connected to the construction and restoration of bath buildings in Central Italy between the Augustan period and the mid-3rd cent. AD. The focus is on the physicality, or physical characteristics, of the text—i.e., not only the shape of the carved block or the type of stone, but above all the layout of the text, the varying size of the letters, the punctuation and decorative elements, the gaps and indentations. Despite a relative neglect in traditional editions of inscriptions, the physical characteristics of the inscriptions matter, as they inform us on the way the message was communicated and received, and allow us to analyse the intentions of the benefactor.

The content of building inscriptions was fairly standardised, mentioning the name(s) of the benefactor(s), their filiation, the office(s) they held (we find representatives of most categories of the upper classes of Roman society, holding a wide array of political, religious and/or military functions), the nature of the benefaction and the origin of funds, with the occasional appearance of additional information.

Not all these elements were on an equal footing, and it is the physicality of the inscriptions that inform us on their relative importance. Elements written in larger letters were seen first and attracted more attention; the order of appearance of the information conveyed a sense of hierarchy; ideas could also be organised using gaps and indentations.

A close examination of the inscriptions’ layout reveals that a prominent position was almost always given to the benefactor, whose name appeared on larger letters on the first line. Conversely, the benefaction was almost never the focus of the inscription, and only rarely emphasised; in most cases, it was lost in the flow of the text.

The question of the reception of the message by the contemporary audience also needs to be examined. The architectural setting of the inscriptions — only rarely known but most likely in a prominent position, close to building entrances and in passageways — heavily influenced the way they were read and perceived. The text may also not always have been easily legible: beyond the question of the degree of literacy of the population, the letters were often small, on average 5 cm, complicating the reading of the inscription from a distance. One way to remediate this issue was to repeat the message on several inscriptions set in different places on the building or elsewhere in the city.

The lack of emphasis on the benefaction could tentatively be indicative of a greater interest, from the part of the benefactor, in the act of the benefaction rather than its nature—a benefaction that was long-lasting, visible, and used by many, was preferred. By the late 1st cent. AD, when most Italian cities were already equipped with the main public buildings (a theatre, a basilica, sometimes an amphitheatre, a first set of baths), baths — whether restorations or new constructions — may have become the go-to type of durable benefaction for wealthy elites, who might have cared little about the actual physical output of their investment; instead, their main interest laid in the association of their name with the benefaction, with the aim of reaping the associated social benefits — prestige and self-promotion — in the local community.

Dangerous Exchanges: Identity and Religion in the Boundary Areas of Roman Italy

Alexandra Creola

PhD candidate in Classical Art and Archaeology, University of Michigan

In ancient Italy, local inhabitants and travelers imbued boundary zones with meaning. Meeting places between the known and unknown were often ritually recognised through the placement of votive offerings or through the demarcation of areas as sacred by the establishment of religious structures. These places included areas such as crossroads, market spaces, and cultural or natural boundary zones. Within each of these liminal spaces was the inherent danger of encountering something unknown and unfamiliar. This paper explores how different local groups interacted with these liminal spaces in the ancient Italian landscape. These boundary places served as unique areas of exchange, where multiple cultural groups participated in similar ritual behaviors that, nevertheless, demonstrated diverse cultural identities and perspectives on how to mitigate danger in liminal zones.

Multiple Italic cultural groups located their sanctuary sites in boundary areas. These boundary sanctuaries were regional sanctuaries, in the sense that they were not attached to a specific city and served the surrounding communities of a particular area. In modern scholarship, there is a focus on identifying to which deity a particular sanctuary was dedicated. This determination of the deity's identity is then used to ascribe a cultural identity to the worshippers, who left votives at that sanctuary. However, the identity of the worshippers at the site was often more fluid and complex than this current classification system allows.

More analysis should be focused on the wealth of evidence that indicates a variety of people interacted with these boundary sanctuaries. In this paper, I examine epigraphic evidence of votives dedicated at boundary sanctuaries. Rather than conforming to the expected veneration of the main sanctuary's deity, many votive inscriptions show variance that is reflective of the identity of individual worshippers. I include case studies of different federal and regional sanctuaries, such as the Mefitis sanctuary at Rossano and the sanctuary of Diana near the Compitum Anagninum, among others. Located specifically in "neutral" territories in peripheral areas accessible by multiple groups of people, these boundary sanctuaries shielded visitors from possible conflict through the mediation and protection of a local goddess. Political meetings of neighboring leaders were held in these boundary sanctuaries in order to ensure peaceful discussion among potential rivals. Other regional sanctuaries often were located and connected to major areas of trade, again enabling a zone within which people of different cultural backgrounds could safely convene, interact, and transact business. Votive evidence from these boundary sanctuaries further demonstrates the variety of visitors and the fluidity with which offerings could be made to different divine beings in these liminal places. As a result of this study, the picture of a complex system of interaction among people of different cultural backgrounds emerges and further indicates the wide variety of worshippers who utilised boundary sanctuaries.

Problems and Politics of Writing Bactrian in Greek Script in the Kušān Empire

Stefan Härtel

PhD student in Iranistics, Freie Universität Berlin

The Middle Iranian language of ancient Bactria, despite being closely related to Sogdian and Parthian, is distinguished by the fact that it was written in Greek script. This is clearly an inheritance from the Hellenistic period, during which Bactria and Gandhāra were ruled by dynasties of Greek descent and used Greek as their primary imperial language. This Greek tradition is traceable in these regions, especially on coin legends, even after the Greek polities were replaced by dynasties of local origin or founded by invading nomad tribes. In the first century CE, the dynasty of the Kušān, who were themselves of nomad origin, established a new and prevailing empire and eventually introduced Bactrian as their imperial language. Although the Greek script was highly defective for writing an Iranian ideom due to the lack of many important phonemes, it was given preference by the Kušān over other scripts such as Aramaic or Kharoṣṭhī, which would have been better suited. Only one new grapheme was developed to write the /š/ sound, while the writing of other palatals and fricatives remained ambiguous. It is also apparent that some Greek spelling conventions were adopted, which suggests that there were still Greek speakers in Bactria, and one Kušān Bactrian inscription has a Greek colophon mentioning a scribe named Palamedes.

Evidence from the Rabatak Inscription suggests that the Kušān were aware of distinct Greek (ἰωνάγγο) and Iranian (απίαιο) identities. This is also reflected on Kušān coins, which suggest that there was at least a limited syncretism of Greek and Bactrian deities. Nevertheless, the Greek script appears to have been considered a “native“ way of writing in Bactria, and there are some indications that natives have even before the Kušān period attempted to write Bactrian using Greek script. Kharoṣṭhī script, commonly seen in Kušān Bactria as a script of Buddhist texts, may have been modified to write the native language of the Kušān themselves, as an undeciphered inscription from Dašt-i Nawur may suggest. Aramaic was gradually adapted for writing Parthian and Middle Persian in western Iran. However, the idea of developing a new writing system out of a pre-existing script seems to have been out of the question for writing Bactrian under the Kušān. The decision of using an only marginally altered Greek script must therefore have been a political one to emphasise a native Bactrian identity. Bactrian was used as the primary imperial language on coin legends and seal inscriptions distributed throughout the empire, although local administrations used local languages. This is one of the key factors that suggest an elevated position of Bactria in the empire similar to Fārs in the Achaemenid and Sāsānian empires, or northern Syria and Parthia in the Seleukid and Arsakid Empires respectively.

Oasis Identity--Turfan Basin before Han Dynasty

Xiaozhe Li

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The Turpan Basin is situated in central Xinjiang, on the northern edge of the Taklamakan Desert. It is surrounded by the Bogeda Mountains to the north, the Kalawucheng Mountains to the west and the Jueluotage Mountains to the south. The oasis proper covers around 7.8km² and is enclosed by the vast Gobi Desert. The Turpan Basin is in the arid warm temperate zone, making summer and winter distinct wet and dry seasons. The northern end of the Bogeda Mountain is called “Huoyan Shan”, which means “Flaming Mountain”, indicating the extremely hot and dry climate in this area. Streams fed by melting snow from the peaks of the Tianshan, Bogeda and Kalawucheng Mountains run out of the valleys of these mountainous regions and travel to the oasis, providing its fertile soil with plenty of water and contributing to the formation of an oasis culture.

The first appearance of Turpan in Chinese records was in the Hanshu (《汉书》), when the inhabitants were referred to as the “Cheshi” people. Only two Chinese dynasties directly ruled Turpan: The Tang Dynasty from 640 to 803 CE, and the Qing Dynasty from 1756 to 1911 CE. The government of the Turpan Basin experienced several switches among central Chinese, Xiongnu and other nomadic states in different dynasties. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Turpan (Turpan) was set as the Turpan City, which covered the whole Turpan Basin. Archaeological research in the Turpan Basin started in the 1880s. Russian, German, Japanese and British scholars have done several expeditions in the Turpan Basin. As for Chinese research, first there were some Chinese members in the Sino-Sweden scientific expedition from 1927 to 1935, when Huang Wenbi recorded his detailed findings in Turpan. Systematic research in Turpan started in 1959.

There are 10 sites in the Turpan region discussed in this article, including: 1. Subeixi 2. Yanghai 3. Yu’ergou-Alagou 4. Sangeqiao 5. Shengjindian 6. Aidinghu 7. Jiaohogoubei 8. Dongfengjiqichang 9. Wulapo 10. Chaiwopu.

These sites are all considered part of the Subeixi culture, the date of which is between the Bronze Age and the Western Han Dynasty; Yanghai cemetery, as the earliest site from the radiocarbon dating results, is between 1261-49 BCE. These sites have yielded grave goods and tomb structures similar to each other and to other regions, for example the pottery type and painted patterns, the bronze objects and woolen and leather products. The findings of these sites also indicate a relatively independent livelihood.

The grave goods and cemetery features suggested that there might have been early Scythian settlers from southern Siberia that arrived in the Turpan oasis and then settled down there. The similarity between the Subeixi and the Yanbulake Cultures from the east, and the Zagunluq Culture from the south also indicate the possible connection. Therefore, the Scythian settlers may have also kept receiving influence from the eastern migration and from the south. All these eventually contribute to the native Turpan culture, which was called the “Cheshi” people in the Han documents where they were first officially recorded.

Cretan Mercenary Archers and the Neo-Assyrian Empire

Konstantinos Markos

PhD candidate in Classical Archaeology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

The island of Crete was widely famous in antiquity for its local, highly specialized lightly armed warriors, especially archers, and it was an exception to the prevailing attitude of the ancient Greeks towards archery. Homeric poems are the first written sources that imply this specific ability of the Cretans and they are followed by an immense number of ancient Greek literary sources and inscriptions mentioning the presence of Cretan mercenary archers in almost every army and on almost every battlefield from the 5th century BCE onwards. However, in periods where ancient sources are either non-existent or provide insignificant information, our knowledge is based solely or mainly on archaeological finds.

Such a case is the site of the geometric and archaic cemetery of Orthi Petra in Eleutherna in Crete. In the so called “Tomb of the Warriors A1K1”, an ash urn with the cremated remains of a male individual contained eight iron arrowheads and a double axe likewise made of iron. The vessel, which was covered with a bronze cauldron, is dated in the Late Protogeometric A period, specifically between 875 and 850 BCE.

The choice of iron as the material for the arrowheads is of particular importance. Iron was more difficult to process than bronze, as well as rarer and more valuable. These elements are evidence to the relative wealth of the warriors who used them, the skill of their blacksmiths and of course the ability to obtain the material. On the other hand, they were suitable for close range shots and ideal for piercing due to their unique shape with their relatively large size and barbed edges.

The reliefs of the palace in the capital of the Neo-Assyrian kingdom Nimrud during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, which coincides with the dating of the urn from Eleutherna, depict archers in large numbers fighting against the Assyrians, whose style could be compared to similar cases in ancient Cretan art. The Aramaic and Neo-Hittite kingdoms of northern Syria would probably be in dire need of mercenaries to resist the powerful Assyrian war machine. The Cretan tradition in archery would certainly make them sought after, especially if they were equipped with arrows that provided such an advantage. The large number of imported artifacts from Near East, found in the Necropolis of Orthi Petra in Eleutherna, is an example not only of commercial and interpersonal relations but also of contacts related to military activities, such as loot or gifts and rewards. The dead archers of Eleutherna, possessing the best equipment of their time, may have sought fame and fortune on the battlefields of the Near East and survived to die later and be buried in their homeland.

These are extremely daring assumptions, and unfortunately difficult to confirm. Nevertheless, they can give food for thought in trying to understand war and societies in the Early Iron Age.

Writing away the truth in Propertius 3.6 and 3.23

Nikita Nicheperovich

Phil candidate in Languages and Literature, Wadham College, University of Oxford

This paper investigates the way in which Propertius toys with ideas of personhood and authorship in two poems, 3.6 and 3.23, so as to bring out the broader issue of the trustworthiness of his poetic medium. Both poems concern communicative mishaps and rely upon an intermediary for rectification: in 3.6, Propertius learns from his slave, Lygdamus, that his beloved is distraught, and dispatches him to convey a contrite reply; in 3.23, Propertius bemoans the loss of writing tablets which contained a reply from his beloved, before the poem becomes a notice to be put up on a column by his slave. Crucially, these means of communication between lover and beloved have a complicated identity – 3.6 brings out Lygdamus' materiality, while in 3.23 the writing tablets are personified – an issue which runs abreast with the question of their *fides* (3.6.6, 20; 3.23.4, 9), and ultimately forms part of the intricate interplay between elegy and the reality it purports to portray.

The idea that Propertius' *puella is scripta* and stands as much for the poetic collection as the beloved it represents is by now neither novel nor controversial, but it does serve as a useful foundation from which to examine Propertius' elegiac world. In her dual role she parallels Propertius, who is both a poet and a lover – both the self-conscious poetic *persona* which writes the world into existence and the protagonist who plays his part in it. Making a *persona* of oneself – and of others – is a topic treated in rhetorical discussions, where the fashioning of an oratorical *persona* is often compared to that of a poetic one – and its credibility was seen as critical in either case. This idea looms large over Propertius' collection, conceived as it is as an autobiographical account about loving a fickle beloved who cannot be trusted. Yet, if his beloved Cynthia is emblematic of Propertius' work, distrust between lovers extends to the level of poetics, the medium itself being part of the infidelity which colours its characters.

I begin with the closing lines of 3.23, arguing that Propertius' instruction to his *puer* – including that he 'write that [his] master lives on the Esquiline' (3.23.24) – represents in miniature the complex entanglement between authorship and the poetic medium, and foreshadows Propertius' excision of Cynthia in the next poem. I subsequently pivot to 3.6, where I outline the emphasis on Lygdamus' trustworthiness and point to his characterisation as both a messenger and message. This bifurcation recalls Cynthia's status as a *scripta puella* and parallels the two-facedness of Propertius, whose contrition belies the happiness with which he listens to Lygdamus. I then return to 3.23, where I show that the personification of Propertius' writing tablets – 'which know how to appease girls and speak choice words in [his] absence' (2.23.5-6) – remind us of the artificiality of his own *persona*, and in so doing, lead us to read the poem as one in which the tablets were never lost.

How are People Made? On Subjects and Identities in Mesopotamia

Susan Pollock

Institut für Vorderasiatische Archäologie, Freie Universität Berlin

I pose the question of how subjects are conceived and constituted, starting from engagements with this question in the social, historical, and cultural sciences. I favour an approach that focuses on subjects and subjectification as an alternative to a notion of identity. In archaeological discourse identity has repeatedly veered in the direction of essentialism, of questioning who one “really” is. I argue that instead, to paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir, subjects are made, not born.

Subjects are dynamic, ever becoming, and embedded in social and historical processes. They are subjected to constraints of the world in which they exist, but they also actively engage and interact socially and materially in that world. People in the same society are subjected to different constraints and have different spaces of possibility, connected to gender differences, age groups, and the like. In any given social and historical context, there are multiple subject positions.

I illustrate an archaeological approach to subjectification by examining early Mesopotamian states of the Uruk period (4th mill. BCE). I focus on the distribution of settlements and forms of public architecture; eating, drinking and the sphere of public labour; and anthropomorphic representations and gendered relations.

Settlement growth accompanying state development led to increased anonymity as well as to a major growth in tribute demands, both of which contributed to the emergence of alienated labour. The desires of a growing elite to exhibit their power and to discipline workers through constant demands for labour manifested themselves in the forms of new monumental buildings.

In the realm of the small scale and every day, eating and drinking and the commensal groups that arose from these activities were strongly rationalised. Labourers received standardised portions of food or drink in standardised vessels and consumed them in the presence of a group of people who, apart from their shared work, had few connections to each other. The beveled-rim bowls in which these portions were distributed were integrated into a new culture of discard, where fully intact vessels were disposed en masse.

Anthropomorphic representations in the late Uruk period illustrate the repetitive form of the new public work regime in Uruk times. Women were depicted as a labouring mass, whereas men participated at least to some extent in politico-ritual activities.

On these bases, subjectification processes and subjectivities of workers engaged in the Uruk public sphere can be sketched. They were supposed to engage in ever more repetitive and alienated labour, in a workplace that they were not free to choose, as parts of groups brought together out of administrative convenience rather than based on personal ties.

In conclusion, I argue that subjectification must always be examined historically, in contrast to the essentialist tendencies of the term identity. Identities are a politicisation of subjectivities, a transformation and fixing of them into exclusive “we vs. they” categories. The dangerous effects thereof are to be seen all over the world today; the emergence of nation-states in the modern era took such changes to the point of genocide.

The Dynamics of a Frontier Landscape: the Lower Rhine from 50 BC to AD 500

Kai Radloff

PhD student in Classical Archaeology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Our concept of identity is not only connected to belongingness; at the same time, it relates to what is conceived as being different. Hence, it is also about delimiting and eventually border making. In many respects archaeology is concerned with processes of differentiation and demarcation: while classifying find material, by defining so-called “archaeological cultures” or by describing their spatial distribution. However, correlating these results with political or ethnic entities is known to be controversial. But what kind of entities do we reconstruct then? When is it possible for us to infer past identities from our findings?

Archaeology is doing research on border situations known from written sources, too. One example are the Roman Frontier Studies. However, in this case, the lack of a theoretical discussion on borders in Roman Archaeology becomes apparent. Naturally, all available sources need to be recognised in the effort of reconstructing the past; but it is problematic that written sources are so dominant. Gaius Julius Caesar advanced, among others, the idea that the Rhine marks an ethnic and cultural border that separates Gallia from Germania. This view is not so much a description of certain past realities, but rather represents an “imaginative geography” in the sense of Edward Said. Within the geopolitical sphere, it served as a tool to legitimise military intervention and occupation of the areas along the Rhine to control central Europe; thus, it was eventually an outcome of the policies enforced by Roman elites. This illustrates that power is an integral part of any imaginative geography, for it is based on the notion of a subordinate category of “the Other” by the self, who creates it.

Instead of analysing the whole socio-political situation, the tendency in Roman Archaeology is to further naturalise the imaginative geography in their explanatory models. The clear “cultural” distinction between “the Roman Empire” on the one hand and “the Barbaricum” on the other, reveals that Roman Archaeology has also stuck to a container view of space typical for the imagined geography it reproduces. Consequently, research areas seldom “cross” the Rhine and research questions mainly deal with what happened within these entities. Here, the border is not the object of research, but rather a predetermining factor.

Furthermore, historic sources influence the self-concept of our scientific subfields, including Archaeology, indirectly by the way they have been received since antiquity. The way spaces, cultures and borders are conceptualised today resembles concepts of the modern nation state from the 19th century – the age when Archaeology became a science, also in order to support the legitimacy of the

respective “national identity”. Today, we not only notice a continuation of past cultural categorisations in archaeological data; the way Roman Archaeology is establishing a connection between cultures, territories and social or ethnic groups within one space and thereby forming one entity, still resembles ideas put forward by Gustav Kossinna. Being in this position, the main question is: which chances do we actually have to describe and understand past identities? Are we able to reconstruct them?

Instead of conceptualising the “Frontiers of the Roman Empire” as something static, it should be respected as a dynamic feature. The static container view of space needs to be abandoned, as borders are “not spatial, but sociological facts” following Georg Simmel. It is more important to reflect on how a border was conceived, rather than what it was. A landscape-based approach is useful for depicting the regional and highly dynamic socio-political situation in the frontier zone during the Roman age. By conceptualising it as a dynamic palimpsest of traces of different Doings and Undoings in different contexts, like communication networks, ways of interacting with the landscape, religious spheres, etc., we may not be able to completely reconstruct past identities, but we still get an insight in the structure of past societies and their way of life.