Research Themes

ROME: HISTORY, PLACE AND IMAGINATION

Rooted as we are in the city, the research strategy of the BSR has to start in Rome, and in its cultural life and its intellectual history. Using the unparalleled resources of our Library, and close connections with the relevant city authorities built over a century, the BSR supports research on the city from the prehistoric to the contemporary.

It is undeniable that the impact Rome has had on the imagination of subsequent times is huge. Rome as a metropolis, a political and religious centre, and a city that has preserved, recreated and reinterpreted its past through monuments and architecture, art and literature, film and politics, remains a potent inspiration and a challenging model. Rome’s metaphorical and symbolic significance through its rise, fall, global reach and religious centrality make it a continuously relevant example for other histories and practices.

The City of Rome course retains an important role as a core research training ground for future historians of classical Rome, and regularly inspires new PhD work.

LANDSCAPES AND URBANSCAPES

The BSR always has been known for its contribution to the understanding of landscapes; from the pivotal work of Thomas Ashby (whose major legacy remains the important photographic archive in the BSR Library), to John Ward-Perkins’s South Etruria Survey (reprised in an externally-funded project, the Tiber Valley Project), to the recent work conducted by Simon Keay and Martin Millett. This strand builds on this work and in particular the Roman Towns Project, and re-emphasises the BSR’s commitment to the prehistory and protohistory of Italy, as well as to later periods.

The great advantage of landscape and geophysical surveys is that they allow for the widest possible understanding of the interaction between humans and their geography. Each micro-region can show different patterns at the level of detail demonstrated by survey, and taking territories at their widest extent allows us to explore the broadest issues of the relationships between states from their earliest phases into the historical period. These areas obviously
include towns as well as rural areas, and in this sense the BSR has always worked on urbanscapes within landscapes, where BSR geophysics has been extraordinarily successful. We will continue to explore methodological innovations in this field.

From villa to region, from hinterland to city, the BSR has developed a remarkable experience in some of the most exciting sites and areas from the ancient world, many fully contextualised within a broader chronological scope; BSR projects continue to lead the way in terms of rigour, complexity and scientific interest.

**LANGUAGE, VISION, TRANSLATION AND REPRESENTATION**

Individuals, social groups and states have long used language and images in ways that demonstrate mutual interpenetration and complex, fluid senses of identity. Now, in a time when the increasing pace of globalisation is everywhere apparent, the transnational and the transcultural define the world in which we live and, inevitably, we find ourselves translating one way of understanding reality into the terms of another. The act of translation is both linguistic and cultural; it is both a specialised activity and a habitual practice of the everyday as we move between media; between languages and visual cultures; between geographical, religious, cultural and social boundaries; and through different modes of considering the passage of time. Translation entails transformation: cultural meanings might change dramatically as a result of reception and translation, creating new knowledge and forms of inspiration. Translation is a reproduction, a remediation, a new presentation of events, circumstances and experiences through different cultural perspectives.

The BSR’s interdisciplinary community effects acts of translation and re-presentation in its own work, crossing disciplinary boundaries and finding new ways to combine separate but interrelated methodological approaches. The combination of scholars and artists studying over two thousand years of history and culture in a city which is both intensely local and symbolically universal is highly productive. The cultural dynamics of translation, interpretation, transfer, imitation, transformation and exchange bring together many areas of inquiry at the BSR, and also connect with the highly important theme of reception studies. Rome, a city whose internationalism is and always has been conspicuous, provides a perfect locale for this research theme on cultural mediation.

**CONNECTIVITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN**

Rome’s pivotal position within the Mediterranean encourages a focus on trade, exchange and connectivity.

The BSR hosts the Roman Port Networks Project, which aims to analyse the relationships between Portus and other ports in the Mediterranean from the perspective of the co-presence of traded amphorae and marble; this has culminated in the major ERC grant RoMP on Rome’s Mediterranean Ports.
The BSR will seek to sustain a broad interest in the Mediterranean, and is developing new collaborations in the Adriatic, building on the BA-funded Adriatic Connections programme. The BSR will also continue to have an interest in themes explored in the BA-funded project Rome and the World from Renaissance to Grand Tour.

ARCHAEOLOGIES OF KNOWLEDGE

The sense of knowledge as having a genealogy and a history has become commonplace with the rise of intellectual history as a key preoccupation, and within this the history of disciplines, the compartmentalisation of knowledge, and the phenomenon of the repeated call for interdisciplinarity as a counterpoint to the isolation of disciplines, are all important.

This research theme specifically aims to look at the historicisation of disciplines, and the often contested, and challengeable, roots of our current states of knowledge. The theme is intended to bring together many of the more specialised technical areas of interest at the BSR, from epigraphy to archival research to the detailed study of material culture, but also to underpin the integration of these themes and techniques in broader historical and cultural trends, such as the history of collecting. As we increasingly develop digital humanities as a core strength, we will reflect on its position as generating new knowledge and creating new bridges across academic disciplines.

CHURCH, STATE, FAITH AND NATION

Church, state, faith and nation are all expressions of identity, and sources of consensus and violent dissent. Current debates often co-opt history in their argumentative frameworks. This theme explores these interconnected discourses.

From early Christianity through the Reformation to the study of the modern Church, Rome’s centrality allows us to explore crucial and still relevant issues about the nature of religion and its relationship with politics.

The study of Italy as a nation, particularly inspired by the 150th anniversary of Italian unification, remains a fruitful area of research. This nationhood is bound up with images of the Italian past, back to the Roman period, and this symbolism has been hugely significant in shaping modern action, internally and with regard to neighbours around the Mediterranean. The clash of secular and sacred plays out interestingly in many of these interactions.

CONSERVATION, HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Herculaneum Conservation Project has been the BSR’s most significant engagement in the area of heritage management. It has brought with it substantial partnerships with scientific conservators, ICCROM, and local entities. The conservation agenda at Herculaneum must be seen in the context of the wider connections between cultural heritage
and sustainability more generally. At the same time, our work on digital humanities is opening new opportunities for conservation and preservation activity.

The BSR will actively seek to be a centre of excellence for the practical interaction of the deep historical understanding of landscape, the application of hands-on conservation activity within the broader regeneration role of cultural heritage management, and the nature of sustainable architecture for our future.

For further details of how our award-holders, conferences, workshops, lectures and outputs contribute to these themes, please see http://www.bsr.ac.uk/research/bsr-research-themes.

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