ARRC – Acculturation, Romanisation, Roman Culture: Processes of Integration Across the Roman Empire

Edited by László Borhy, Kata Dévai, Linda Dobosi, and Csilla Sáró

DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE
ex Instituto Archaeologico
Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



DissArch

Supplementum 5 | 2026

Dissertationes Archaeologicae
ex Instituto Archaeologico
Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae

Supplementum 5

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ISSN 2064-4574 (online)

Publisher
Lénárt Darázs

The journal is supported by the ELTE Journal Development Fund of Eötvös Loránd University.
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Budapest, 23–25 May 2025



Edited by
László Borhy – Kata Dévai – Linda Dobosi – Csilla Sáró

Budapest, 2026

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Foreword

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This volume presents a selection of papers delivered at the international conference *Acculturation, Romanization, Roman Civilization: International Conference on the Phenomena and Processes of Integration into the Roman Empire*, held in Budapest between 23 and 25 May 2025. The conference was organised by the HUN-REN–ELTE Research Group for Interdisciplinary Archaeology and the Department of Classical and Roman Archaeology of the Eötvös Loránd University, bringing together a wide range of scholars working on the cultural, social, and economic dynamics of the Roman world, with a particular focus on the mechanisms and manifestations of integration within the Empire.

The thematic framework of the conference was deliberately centred on the complex and much-debated concepts of acculturation and Romanisation. Rather than treating these as fixed or uniform processes, the contributions approached them as historically contingent, regionally diverse, and materially embedded phenomena. Through case studies spanning Pannonia and the Danubian provinces, as well as other parts of the Roman Empire, the papers explore how local communities, material practices, and social structures interacted with, adapted to, and reshaped Roman cultural models.

The programme reflected this focus through a series of thematic sessions addressing key domains of Roman provincial life, including settlement structures, burial practices, material culture (with particular emphasis on glass and small finds), economic networks, mobility, and identity formation. Together, these contributions highlight the plurality of pathways through which integration into the Roman Empire was negotiated and experienced.

With the present conference and volume, the organisers also aim to establish a long-term scholarly platform by developing ARRC into a recurring international conference series dedicated to the study of cultural interaction and integration in the Roman world. These questions—central to the contributions collected here—also frame the broader historical and interpretative perspective outlined in the following pages.

The conceptual foundations of both the conference and the present volume are closely linked to the long-term research activities of the HUN-REN–ELTE Interdisciplinary Archaeological Research Group.

In 1995, the MTA–ELTE Interdisciplinary Archaeological Research Group was established, financed by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and hosted by Eötvös Loránd University, under the leadership of academician Miklós Szabó (1940–2023). In the first years, the research group primarily conducted studies related to the Celtic excavations carried out at the site of Bibracte (today: Mont Beuvray) in France by the Department of Classical and Roman Provincial Archaeology of the ELTE Institute of Archaeological Sciences, founded in 1995. Excavations conducted during the following years brought to light, above the Celtic buildings, not only. A Roman *domus* with a *peristylium* but also a monumental *basilica* in the phase preceding it, which may have served as a model for Vitruvius himself. This discovery opened a new direction for research.

This shift marked the beginning of a more explicitly problem-oriented approach, in which processes later described as Romanisation and acculturation became central research questions.

From 1992 onwards, the excavations and epigraphic research I conducted in Brigetio (Komárom/Szőny) have set a new direction, namely the analysis of the processes of integration of the two geographically distinct regions into the Roman Empire, processes that may have taken place independently but are likely comparable. Both Gaul and Pannonia gradually became part of the Roman Empire at the end of the late Republic and the dawn of the early Imperial period. Gaul was conquered by Julius Caesar, who himself recounted the history of the campaigns—including the capture of Bibracte—in his work *Commentarii belli Gallici*, while the integration of the Pannonian tribes and the region then called Illyricum, bordered by the Danube River (Danubius), was initiated by his adopted son and heir, Augustus, and is recorded in the compilation beginning with *Index rerum a se gestarum*, commonly known as the *Monumentum Ancyranum*.

Seeing the results of parallel research, as well as the similarities and differences in the processes of Romanisation, the idea emerged that the group, which has by now grown into the HUN-REN–ELTE Interdisciplinary Archaeological Research Group, should review, in an international context, as many aspects as possible of the complex process that research used to call sometimes Romanisation, also referring to it sometimes as acculturation (primarily today), sometimes—obviously reflecting on the name of the *Imperium Romanum* and its military conquests—as imperial expansion, and sometimes—using a misleading but not entirely dismissible term, based on 15th–16th-century analogies and the names of cities with layouts resembling military camps, established by settled veterans—as colonisation. We can call it whatever we like, but there is no doubt that it is a multifaceted, nuanced, complex concept and process, through which—via acculturation and the culmination of processes related to Romanisation—territories that became part of the Roman civilisation in one way or another (mostly, however, through military conquest) became part of the Roman Empire.

In this context, the conference itself can be understood as a direct extension of these long-term research questions into an international scholarly dialogue. In the following, this complex phenomenon is approached through a combination of historical, administrative, and material perspectives.

The volume *ARRC – Acculturation, Romanisation, Roman Culture: Processes of Integration Across the Roman Empire* is hoped to be the first in a long and regularly recurring series of events, during which we will repeatedly review the phenomena and processes of integration into the Roman Empire in as broad a spatial and temporal perspective as possible. As Simone Pastor states in the volume, it is necessary to move beyond the previous understanding, which held that "the concept of 'Romanisation' used to describe the submission of a conquered society and territory to the forms of organisation desired by Rome" or that "(The) Roman imperialism had to be analysed in a 'civilising' perspective, while others, with more critical tones, focused their attention on its violent matrix". A new approach is needed: "to understand the phenomenon of Romanisation it is necessary to conceive a complex process of mutual acculturation regulated by bidirectional relations between centre and periphery."

This volume aims to meet this requirement, in which—naturally—special emphasis is given to Bibracte and Gaul, as well as Brigetio and Pannonia. There is no intent to solve or define the process in a single concept, but room is given to all those approaches that, alongside the concepts mentioned above, see integration into the Roman Empire as a consequence of military campaigns or within the framework of mediation, direct influence, or cultural interaction. This process also has socio-historical implications: the military, slaves, and freedmen played a role in it, but equally important was the involvement of women; besides, alongside the veneration of the traditional pantheon, the adoption of Roman gods and the alignment with their own gods also mattered. However, the studies touch on many other aspects as well. For example, they consider the appearance of brass—copper alloyed with zinc and with a golden shine—in Gallic coinage (and other fields of Gallic metallurgy) to be clearly linked to the Romans.

At the same time, these approaches underline that integration into the Roman Empire cannot be understood as a uniform or unidirectional process.

We do not limit the analysis of processes in either space or time: the studies span Greek- and Latin-speaking provinces from the Black Sea through the Mediterranean, all the way to the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, across river routes (Danubius, Savus, Dravus, Rhenus) and land roads (limes roads, Via Augusta, Via Egnatia, Amber Road). They cover, alongside the two focus areas (Gaul and Pannonia), Dacia, Thrace, Macedonia, Moesia Inferior and Moesia Superior, Noricum, Hispania, and Britannia, and repeatedly look to the peoples living outside the Roman Empire who were in continuous interaction with the Romans, such as the Iranian-origin Sarmatians and the Germanic Marcomanni and Quadi. Its temporal scope is not limited either, as the process did not end with the early Imperial period but accompanied the centuries of the Roman Empire, since the influence and memory of Romanised populations and their culture remained traceable up to the early Middle Ages.

This broad geographical and chronological scope reinforces the need to approach Romanisation as a flexible and context-dependent phenomenon.

Certain groups of materials and objects accompany the process of acculturation: special emphasis is placed on glassware, ceramics that preserve local traditions but gradually follow Roman patterns, attire, and jewellery. In many regions, not only stone carving and sculpture appear with the Romans, but also the custom of erecting tombstones with inscriptions—mostly in Latin.

These material expressions provide particularly valuable insights into the everyday manifestations of cultural interaction.

With the arrival of the Romans, settlements also transformed: although part of the rural population of indigenous origin continued to live in villages, the Romans organised these settlements in a Roman way, and if the inhabitants did not live on *villa* estates, they were divided into *vici*, which in fortunate cases can even be seen on aerial photographs. Some became residents of settlements with urban status—in *municipia* established at the centres of former tribal territories—while others resided in colonies founded following the model of the Roman *castra*, through the settlement *(deductio)* of retired soldiers *(veterani)*. Military land surveyors *(agrimensores)* did not leave the former tribal landholding structures untouched either: with the implementation of centuriation *(centuriatio)*, urban territories were also surveyed and divided.

These transformations are not merely structural: they reflect deeper social and administrative changes.

Construction techniques, house types, and the range of building materials also changed. In the centre of the Heduus territory in Gaul—far from the Mediterranean, north of the Alps—the terraced houses of the La Tène population (built of adobe and loosely bound mortar, sometimes with wooden structures) were replaced by real Roman *domus* with *peristylia*. Urban architecture was regulated by municipal law. In military camps, the *principia* and the *praetorium* acquired a special, symbolic significance. In the words of Agnieszka Tomasz, "the *praetorium* as a central element of the military infrastructure represented Roman authority and control over the soldiers and the surrounding territory, as embodied in the figure of the commander. (…) We can expect that the construction and decoration of the *praetorium* often relied on local artisans, who adapted Roman techniques and styles into their own work, blending Roman and local cultural elements".

In this sense, architecture offers a particularly clear lens through which processes of cultural transfer and adaptation can be observed.

The studies in this volume are inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinary. In many cases, scientific investigations have been carried out, whether for analysing the chemical composition of glass vessels or for examining Gallic Celtic brass coins using a portable X-Ray Fluorescence (pXRF) device. Traditional methods of cemetery analysis, in fortunate cases supplemented with epigraphic data, are aided by pathological and bioarchaeological analyses. Moreover, as it turns out, archaeology is not untouched by the application of artificial intelligence.

This methodological diversity reflects the interdisciplinary character of current research into the Roman world. The mentioned provinces of the Roman Empire are represented in the volume by researchers from the academies, universities, museums, and institutes of the modern states established in its former territory, including Austria (Vienna, University of Vienna, Department of Ancient History, Papyrology and Epigraphy; Vienna, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austrian Archaeological Institute; Innsbruck, University of Innsbruck, Institute for Ancient History and Near Eastern Studies), Bulgaria (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), Croatia (Radoboj, Public Institution for the Management of Protected Natural Areas of the Krapina-Zagorje County; Zagreb, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts; Zadar, University of Zadar), the Czech Republic (Prague, Museum of Decorative Arts; Prague, University of Chemistry and Technology; Brno, Institute for Archaeological Heritage (ÚAPP); Brno, Masaryk University; Brno, Masaryk University, Department of Archaeology and Museology; Olomouc, Archaeological Centre Olomouc), France (Dijon, University of Burgundy; Glux-en-Glenne, Bibracte EPCC, European Archaeological Centre; Orléans, Archaeomaterials Research Institute (IRAMAT); Mont Beuvray, Bibracte Museum), Germany (Münster, University of Münster), Greece (Rethymno, Institute for Mediterranean Studies), Italy (Ferrara, University of Ferrara; Rome, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali), Montenegro (Cetinje, Centre for Conservation and Archaeology of Montenegro), Poland (Warsaw, University of Warsaw), Republic of North Macedonia (St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Institute of National History; Stobi, National Institution Stobi), Romania (Cluj-Napoca, Romanian Academy, Institute of Archaeology and History of Art–Dacia; Iaşi, Romanian Academy, Iaşi Branch, Institute of Archaeology; Constanţa, Museum of National History and Archaeology; Bucharest, Institute of Archaeology "Vasile Pârvan"; Târgu Mureş, Mureş County Museum; Callatis, Museum of Archaeology), Serbia (National Institute of the Republic of Serbia, Institute of Archaeology; Novi Sad, University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy), Slovenia (Koper, University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities; Slovenska Bistrica (SLO), PJP d.o.o., archaeological research company (Slovenska Bistrica, Slovenia)); Spain (Cádiz, Cádiz University; Zaragoza, University of Zaragoza), Switzerland (University of Basel), and the United Kingdom (Oxford, Oxford Archaeology).

The authors of the volume represent the following Hungarian institutions: ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest; Department of Classical and Roman Provincial Archaeology, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities, Budapest; HUN-REN–ELTE Research Group for Interdisciplinary Archaeology, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest; ELTE Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest; Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest; University of Szeged, Szeged; Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest; HUN-REN Research Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences, Budapest; Aquincum Museum of the Budapest History Museum, Budapest; Hungarian National Museum, Budapest; Savaria Museum, Szombathely.

Acknowledgements

The organisation of the conference would not have been possible without the support of the Eötvös Loránd University.

Supported by the University Excellence Fund of the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary (ELTE), as well as by the Faculty Research Fund of the Faculty of Humanities (ELTE) and the Faculty Grant for the Organisation of International Conferences.

We also thank the ELTE Students' Union for their contribution to the successful realisation of the event.