Britons abroad : the mobility of Britons and the circulation of British-made objects in the Roman Empire

Ivleva, T.A.

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Маме и папе
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Introduction

The idea for the present thesis was born out of personal experience: being Russian by birth and moving to the Netherlands at the age of 22 in pursuit of an academic career, I understand well enough what it meant, and means, to be an immigrant. While we are often told and taught that all experience in the modern world is strikingly different from the ancient, movement from one place to another, and the experience of displacement, whether voluntarily or forced, is a universal human experience.

Studies on mobility have for a long time been popular topics in archaeological research; yet archaeological interest in migration has had its ups and downs. Archaeologists have either approached the subject of migration positively as a signifier of cultural change, or have tried to retreat from 'migrationism' theories, discussing the negative effects of theories of migration on our understanding of cultural change in the material record. The movement of people and objects has been attested in all periods of human history. In the Roman Empire the evidence for such movement is abundant, and issues of mobility and migration have played some role in archaeological and historical discussions. Conquests of various territories first by the Roman republic and later by the Roman Empire resulted in a wide range of individuals and communities being on the move, with both voluntary and forced migration being common. In recent years, the mobility within and outside the Roman Empire has started to be approached from the perspective of ethnic identity, i.e., research into the ways the movement to a new territory influenced the (re)formation of the ethnicities of the host societies and the newcomers.

This book is a study of ancient mobility over a period of three centuries, from the early first to the late third centuries AD. The main focus of the study is the mobility of materials and people, and the ways objects and people interact dialectically when brought to a new environment. The spotlight is cast on one of the most well-researched provinces, Roman Britain, and on its inhabitants.

In recent decades publications have appeared in the UK concerning the presence of migrants of various origins in Roman Britain (cf. works of Clay 2007; Leach *et al.* 2009; Swan 2009a; Leach *et al.* 2010, to name a few). In view of the number of contemporary projects that focus on the presence of foreigners in Roman Britain, a question that is worth asking is if there has been any research on the presence of Britons overseas. Apart from an attempt by Romanian archaeologists to investigate the presence of British auxiliary units in Roman Dacia (cf. work of Marcu 2002 – 2003) and one publication looking at Britons in the Roman army (cf. work of Dobson and Mann 1973) there has not any research. The major obstacle is that "there were not many Britons abroad", a response that this author has frequently had from scholars when mentioning her project[1].

This study attempts to close the gap by looking at Britons who, voluntarily or forcedly, moved overseas in the period of the first to third centuries AD. The primary questions are as follows:

1. Is it possible to trace the Britons abroad and in what ways can we identify their mobility?

[1] Another almost equally common response to being told about the project is the fact that the migration of Britons to the Continent is being approached by a Russian studying in the Dutch university, which indicates that the Romano-British scholarship is too focused on the internal issues within the Roman province of Britannia, acknowledging movement to Britain but refusing to see Britons themselves as migrants.

2. How did Britons, who had settled abroad, identify themselves? What changes can be seen over time in terms of personal and communal identification? What are the factors of such changes?
3. Was there a unified element in the (ethnic) identities if we compare those people who stayed put with those who migrated? In other words, where did their 'Britishness' lie?

We must also acknowledge the possibility that other people lived in, moved to or traded with Britain and, at some point in time, chose to return to their native lands on the Continent. These people might also be called immigrants, as opposed to emigrants, since their native land was somewhere else. Three terms will be used in this thesis: (i) 'mobile Britons' to denote the native Britons who moved to somewhere else in the Empire; (ii) 'immigrants' to point to more or less anyone who lived in Britain and was not native to the British Isles; and (iii) 'migrants' to denote the two aforementioned groups of people in general. While the first group of people could also be called 'emigrants', I have deliberately chosen to refer to them as 'mobile Britons' for reasons of convenience, since the terminology applied to any community on the move varies between notions of emigrant or diaspora, which cover two completely different experiences of living in a displaced condition, a subject discussed in Chapter 1.

Another term that needs clarification is 'Briton(s)', as it is of central importance in the present work. Technically speaking, in the modern sense, 'being British' applies to those people who were born in the British Isles, i.e., in Scotland, Wales or England. It is, therefore, a modern construct. The word 'Britons' is used somewhat loosely in many contexts to describe the population of Roman Britain in modern scholarship in the same way that the ancient document, the Vindolanda tablets, refers to 'poor wretched Brits' or *Brittunculi* (Vindolanda 164), used there as a pejorative term representing the point of view of the invaders and colonisers. Both notions are constructs, whether modern or ancient, to denote the population using generalised terms. The convenience of generalisation allows the use of the word 'Britons' to mean all peoples who were born within the physical boundaries of the modern British Isles in the period of the Roman Empire and in this meaning it is used here. In essence it refers to all 'British-born', even second generation immigrants from the Continent.

The chronological boundaries of the present work are a period of three centuries from the early first to the late third centuries AD. This time span has been chosen for the following reasons. Britain officially entered the orbit of the Roman Empire in AD 43, when it became one of the Roman provinces after the invasion of Emperor Claudius. Yet, a century or so before AD 43 Britain had already enjoyed a dialectical relationship with the Continent in terms of trade, and various aspects of foreign relations, and admitting migrants from Gaul and military troops of the late Roman republic (cf. description of Britain at that time in Caesar *De Bello Gallico* IV 20-35, V 1, 8-23; cf. also Morris 2010, 51-52, 151-152). Britain began to be mentioned in a variety of literary sources (see here chapter 2), and from the mid-first century, mobility between Britain and the Continent started to increase, reaching its peak in the late first/early second centuries when troops from Britain were summoned for the wars of AD 69, for the Flavian campaigns and the Dacian wars of AD 101 – 106.

The final period, from AD 212 to 260, was a period when it ceased to be common for people to mention their origins in written documents. The year AD 212 was marked by an edict of Caracalla, whereby Roman citizenship was granted to all freeborn men and women of the Roman Empire. As a result, the documents which had been given to those granted citizenship, the so-called military diplomas, where place of origin had been usually recorded (see chapter 2), ceased to be issued. This makes it impossible to search for mobile Britons and to investigate changes in the naming of the origin beyond that date. It was also a period of instability marked by disturbances in political,

economic and social life within and beyond the borders of the Roman worlds. The years around AD 260 saw the incursion of groups of people across the borders of the Roman Empire resulting in the failure of the Roman provincial borders. These events provided a fertile ground for the birth of the period known as Late Antiquity, with its very different political and social order.

The geographical scope of the present work does not have strict borders: the whole Roman Empire with its numerous provinces is considered. This research approaches the study of mobility and social changes in moved communities through a province-by-province study of archaeological sites and their assemblages. The research area is not limited to the physical borders of the Roman Empire, but goes beyond them to the territory known as *Barbaricum*.

The research deals with a number of concepts. The three most important ones - identity, migration and diaspora - are the subjects of Chapter 1 ('Identifying identities in material culture'). This chapter discusses the concepts' definitions, their material aspects (archaeology of identity, migration and diaspora) and charts the development of each concept within Roman studies, covering, in addition, the existence of identities, migrants and diasporas in the Roman context.

The data collected and analysed for the present book came from a variety of sources, broadly ranging from ancient literature to artefactual evidence, as discussed in great detail in Chapter 2 ('The sources'). The potential of these sources to inform us about the mobility of Britons on the Continent and the variety of their identities as well as the movement of immigrants and their relationships with Britain are covered there. The data itself is included in Appendices II, III, IV and VI.

This thesis charts the mobility from Britain to the Continent, which also includes the mobility of troops raised from the population of this Roman province, the subject of Chapter 3 ('British auxiliary and *numeri* units'). Because the units were named 'British', one would assume the presence of Britons in significant numbers serving among them. In order to be able to gauge the level of mobility of and the effect of living abroad on Britons, it is important to trace when, how and why particular British auxiliary units were raised, discuss the recruitment pattern and understand the social conformity within these troops. Due to a variety of ways the contemporary scholarship in various countries has approached the topic of the Roman army, the first part of Chapter 3 presents a review of previous work and outlines trends within the study of the Roman military ('*Forschungsgeschichte*'). The main body of Chapter 3 is devoted to the analysis of the epigraphic and archaeological material relating to the presence and service of 15 British auxiliary units and 13 *numeri Brittonum*. The epigraphic database, which includes military diplomas and various types of inscriptions mentioning these troops, is placed in Appendix III. This chapter is a unit-by-unit study, where each unit is discussed in a similar way, starting from the reconstruction of the unit's history, received awards, and the unit's garrisons, followed by the names of the personnel and a discussion of the personnel's (possible) origins, and ending with the presentation of the archaeological finds from the sites of that unit's stations.

Chapter 4 ('Britons in legions and non-British auxiliary units, and civilians') traces the occurrence of Britons who were enlisted in non-British units as well as the civilians spread across the whole Roman Empire. This chapter updates the lists of Britons living abroad presented in Dobson and Mann (1973, 198-205) and Birley (1980, 101-106). The mobile Britons are listed according to their status, starting from those who served in the legionary forces and followed by auxiliaries; the final group discussed includes traders and civilians, i.e., those whose professions were not recorded on the inscriptions.

The artefactual evidence for the presence of Britons abroad is analysed in Chapter 5 ('British-made objects as indicators of the presence of migrants from Britain'), whilst the data is included into the catalogue placed in Appendix VI. The catalogue itself does

not have drawings of the artefacts themselves, but rather provides a detailed description of the objects' type and state of preservation. Particular British-made objects are the focus of this chapter, namely British-made brooches, though other British-made objects reported from various sites in the Empire are also covered. This chapter is a province-by-province study of archaeological sites and their assemblages, starting from the British-made objects recorded in Germania Superior and ending with the artefacts found in North Africa. Various approaches are taken in this chapter in order to gain a comprehensive view of the spread of the British-made objects abroad and the ways they reached their final destinations. To fully explore the presence of Britons overseas, one needs to combine the epigraphic and archaeological records, because the data from these two different types of sources can be combined and contrasted in order to shed light on the complexities thrown up by the evidence as well as by the absence of such evidence.

A comparison of the results from chapters 3, 4 and 5 is undertaken in the penultimate chapter, Chapter 6 ('*E pluribus unum*: Britons abroad through the textual and artefactual evidence'), in order to link the findings from all three chapters and to assess: 1) how 'Britishness' and British identity operated on a variety of levels, i.e., communal and individual, 2) how human mobility and mobility of the artefacts relate to each other, and 3) the level of movement of British-born and continental-born people to and from Britain.

A general summary and final conclusions are offered at the end of the thesis, showing how the findings discussed in Chapter 6 contribute to our knowledge of personal and communal mobility within the physical boundaries of the Roman Empire and beyond it.