Connectivity, roads and transport: essays on Roman roads to speak to other disciplines?

Ray Laurence

SUSAN E. ALCOCK, JOHN BODEL AND RICHARD J. A. TALBERT (edd.), *HIGHWAYS, BYWAYS, AND ROAD SYSTEMS IN THE PRE-MODERN WORLD* (The Ancient World: Comparative Histories; Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2012). Pp. xx + 289, figs. 66. ISBN 978-0-470-67425-3. $134.95.

Readers of *JRA* will be familiar with series "The Ancient World: Comparative Histories" edited by K. Raaflaub, with volumes previously published on War and peace, Household and family religion, Epic and history, Geography and ethnography, and the Roman empire in context. The present volume has 5 of its 12 essays (chapts. 10-14) focussed on the Roman world: J. Gates-Foster on roadways and cultural memory in Egypt; R. B. Hitchner on connectivity and economic performance; R. J. A. Talbert arguing for a failure of conceptualisation of a road system; M. Maas and D. Ruths on roads and the structure of empires in late antiquity; and A. Silverstein focussing on communication networks in Jewish history. Alongside these papers, readers will be able to take in essays designed to communicate the key findings of other disciplines that also deal with pre-modern transport networks — those in relation to Buddhism, ancient China and Japan, American Indian (Pueblo), Mayan and Achaemenid civilisations — along with a discussion of the Sahara as a highway. The book is a welcome addition to the growing number of multi-authored volumes on aspects of human existence such as the city in history. The present topic is an unusual one which has remained somewhat neglected, but is one that is gaining in interest, and we may note that recent "Companions" or handbooks are including chapters on roads and transport.[1]

There is a sense in the editors' preface of the excitement of creating this volume by inviting scholars (experts in their own disciplines) and asking them to interact with and write for a broader audience that includes individuals from outside their disciplines. As the editors suggest, most scholars have a limited experience of taking part in such an endeavour; indeed, many may have no such experience, which perhaps is unsurprising, given the specialised nature of journals (including *JRA*), but may equally be surprising given the traction of other journals such as *World Archaeology*. The stand-out piece, for this reviewer at least, was M. Nylan's essay on roads in China from 323 B.C. to A.D. 316. This is a masterpiece of summation as he also contemplates the reception of his thoughts within our own classical discipline. Nylan has clearly contemplated what is important and significant, less for those within his own discipline and more for those willing to venture into a wider context — and specifically in relation to the very different evidence available to Romanists.[2]

From the three essays (Hitchner, Talbert, Maas/Ruths) relating specifically to, and fully focussed on, the Roman world, readers should gain a fairly full understanding of the nature of communications under the Empire. However, a snag quickly emerges, as summarised by Talbert (who is one of the editors as well as a contributor) in the concluding section of his own chapter (250):

> Let me preface my conclusion by stressing that the claims and concerns articulated in this essay are not meant to call into question the approaches and insights of those scholars (notably Hitchner, Maas and Ruths, this volume) who treat Roman roads as an interconnected network … To be sure, the perspective they adopt for their purpose is a valid one, but at the same time a distinctly modern one. My concern, rather, has been merely to doubt whether we should assume the same conceptual awareness on the part of the Romans themselves.

1 E.g., J. DeRose Evans (ed.), *A companion to the archaeology of the Roman Republic* (Oxford 2013).

2 The skill required of editors and writers to produce syntheses for those not within their discipline is not mimimal; compare papers on the city in antiquity in P. Clark, *The Oxford handbook of cities in world history* (Oxford 2013).

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For anyone outside our discipline, it should be clear that there is a debate here that needs to be discussed by any reviewer who belongs to that discipline, however much Talbert wishes to avoid calling into question the work of Hitchner or Maas/Ruths — for effectively he calls into question their work at every turn of his own argument. He is even at pains to stress that:

> Even at the highest level, it seems the mindset, motivation, reference tools, and administrative resources to recognise the empire's highways as interconnected resources and to exploit their potential as such were **all** absent.

Nonetheless, within these parameters, in some ways his chapter succeeds in identifying the 'absences' in the sources at our disposal — from the *Res Gestae*, with Talbert's criticism that Augustus should have made more of road-building than simply that of the *via Flaminia* (243), to the discounting of the evidence of milestones (235-38), through to the relatively few occasions in which emperors are praised for the act of road construction (Dio Chrys., *Or.* 3.127; Stat., *Silv.* 4.3.20-23). And the élite did not, Talbert suggests, conceptualise the empire as "a single connected network", which he considers "a perspective unhesitatingly adopted by modern students of the Roman empire", or as "an empire-wide policy or strategy" (247).

However, these arguments about 'absence' would seem to miss some major pieces of evidence in scholars' quest for an (unreachable) "single network" or "unified policy". Much of the problem lies in the conceptual approach that seeks unity from evidence that is derived from a state constituted through a devolved power structure that necessitated the geographical division of space. This can best be explained if we go back to basics. The Roman empire was not a single entity; it was defined by its provinces, and by Italy as a separate region. Epigraphy reveals the relationship: a road was restored from point x to the boundary of the province as set out on numerous milestones (e.g., *CIL* VIII 22020, dating to A.D. 237, for the road from Carthage to *Fines Numidiae provinciae*). The very definition of *Arabia* as a province was linked to the building of a road from the edge of the province of *Syria* down to the Red Sea.[3] This connection between roads and a concept of area goes back to 27 B.C. and the commemorative arch at Rimini (242, fig 12.5) that connects road restoration with Italy as a geographical entity.[4] Roman roads were spaces linked by their milestones to the emperors (sometimes as many as 10 milestones from different reigns set in one place); indeed, the earliest inscription set up to Vespasian was a milestone in Judaea. Thus emperors and road building need to be linked, rather than disconnected or treated as 'absent'.[5]

The delegation of road building to the élite does not mean that there is an absence of interest on the part of the emperor. Indeed, because the act of road building or road repair is delegated to governors, there is no sense of any need to set out a single unified system. Legally, governors were expected to maintain the roads in their province and they were answerable to the emperor and/or senate. It should be added that senatorial careers at their most junior and senior stages embraced the management of streets and roads: careers could have begun in the vigintivirate focussing on street or road repair, with subsequent positions within the *cursus honorum* as aedile and governor of a province, supplemented by the 2nd c. A.D. to include the senior position of *curator viarum* connected to the maintenance of a road or a number of roads in Italy. In view of this system of magistracies, it is impossible to agree with the editors' suggestion (7) that "Roman emperors and their upper-class subjects showed little awareness of or interest in the much vaunted road network". Obscuring the picture is delegating by the emperor to the élite to maintain sections of the network. The fact that milestones are notable for their absence from Egypt is more proof of its direct rule by the emperor than anything else; milestones were set up by those with powers delegated to them by the emperor (including the power of road building). The recent appreciation that the presence of *stationes* along roads enforced the power

3 *AE* 1897.65: *redacta in formam provinciae Arabiae viam novam a finibus Syriae usque ad mare rubrum aperuit et stravit.*

4 *ILS* 84: *V[ia Flamin]ia [et reliquei]s* ***celeberrimeis Italiae vieis*** *consilio [et sumptib]us [eius mu]niteis.*

5 B. Isaac and I. Roll, "A milestone of AD 69 from Judaea: the Elder Trajan and Vespasian," *JRS* 66 (1976) 15-19.

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of the state and were places to station soldiers[6] is further evidence that the emperor's power to control the roads and the network was a fundamental feature of concern to the Roman state. It is worth remembering that the inscription relating to an edict of a governor on who should utilise the *mansio* at Sagalassos defines those individuals as the legate and members of his staff, military personnel from other provinces, and slaves and freedmen of the emperor. Those using the transport animals included senators and *equites* on imperial service too.[7] The Roman state devolved road construction and it facilitated the movement of those on state business with the power delegated by the emperor to senators, *equites*, imperial slaves and freedmen, and the military. The manifestation of the network is localised, made up of the units of the Antonine Itinerary or the Peutinger Table: measured distances, a maintained road that was subject to a delegated authority, and stopping points at *stationes* or *mansiones*. It is less about the collection of data on the road-system (as suggested by the editors [5]), and more about a concept of delivery, or about facilitating transport at a local level. To my mind, if we view the problem posed by Talbert from the local end, from the bottom up, as opposed to his global or 'top-down' perspective, we reach a very different answer, one that illustrates how the Roman empire could have a policy of delegating to the local in order to create a global network.

This fundamental disagreement with Talbert's concept brings into focus the views of Hitchner and of Maas/Ruths. Hitchner's come in a persuasive chapter which presents two case-studies — one from Gaul, the other from N Africa — to elucidate the relationship between transport infrastructure and economic performance. The first, on the Vocontii, is approached comparatively, looking to data from the 18th c. (226) that set out the region's poverty; the second, a view from the high steppe of *Africa Proconsularis*, suggests that the provision of long-distance transport routes could transform the region economically by way of the export of olive oil. Hitchner suggests that such intervention lifted provincial societies and economies out of "deeply localised and autarkic dependence" (230). Some will find these case-studies a little brief, while the argument for the economic impact of long-distance roads might appear in a different light viewed from the perspective of Development Economics funded by the World Bank, which over the course of the late 20th c. advocated that long-distance roads often extracted resources, whereas local roads might create more sustained economic development. Maas and Ruths build on S. Grahame's use of graph theory to analyse the Antonine Itinerary.[8] They suggest that, for travellers, the administrative division of the empire into provinces was largely irrelevant. Using a computer algorithm (adapting k-mean clustering technique), they have defined clusters of cities that show some convergence (60%) following Diocletian's re-purposing of the administrative divisions into dioceses. This aspect is taken up in Silverstein's approach to communication-networks in Jewish history as he leads us through late antiquity into the Islamic period. It needs to be remembered, however, that the algorithm used by Maas and Ruths suggested that: the non-convergent rate (40%) might suggest that the information lying behind the Diocletianic decision-making was less than perfect. As the authors state in their conclusion, these divisions provide researchers with a means to analyse how connectivity could affect political, social and economic change. But a question lingers in my own mind: how does the Antonine Itinerary function as a textual representation of the empire? Or, in other words, can the data really be used in this manner?

Perhaps, the major difficulty in the interpretation of our sources comes in the shift between the representations of travel/communication and the lived experience of travel/communication. Gates-Foster elides this division to suggest that transport systems carry a cultural memory in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt; this takes us away from road construction, towards a wider meaning of mobility that includes both spatial practice and the representations of travel. In

6 See the papers in J. France and J. Nelis-Clément (edd.), *La statio. Archéologie d'un lieu de pouvoir dans l'empire romain* (Bordeaux 2014).

7 S. Mitchell, "Requisitioned transport in the Roman empire: a new inscription from Pisidia," *JRS* 66 (1976) 106-31.

8 S. Graham, "Networks, agent-based models and the Antonine Itineraries: implications for Roman archaeology," *JMA* 19 (2006) 45-64.

many ways, the evidence posited by Talbert for an absence of policy is actually the remnants from which a cultural memory of travel may be reconstructed. Hence, we may wish to see the longevity of the transport system as in a state of falling, as the milestones say, *in vetustate,* and in need of renewal as this process of collapse and ageing takes place.[9] That renewal might also be informed by our understanding of the priorities of road building in other cultures — for example, the moral imperative of local élites to contribute to infrastructure in late imperial China, as N. Kim points out in this volume; or the transformation of landscape amongst the Incas that went far beyond the road itself, as Julien stresses.

There is much to learn from the essays in this volume. It may prove in time to be a jumping off point for the creation of a more intensive, interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach to the Roman empire with its own strong focus on communication and the delegation of responsibility from the global to the local context.

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9 Compare literary texts on the state becoming old by the late 1st c. A.D.: Florus 1.8; Seneca, in Lact., *Inst. Div.* 7.15.4.

Histoire et archéologie d'un lieu de pouvoir

Patrice Faure

JÉRÔME FRANCE et JOCELYNE NELIS-CLÉMENT (éd.), *LA* STATIO. *ARCHÉOLOGIE D'UN LIEU DE POUVOIR DANS L'EMPIRE ROMAIN* (Ausonius Éditions, Scripta Antiqua 66; Bordeaux 2014; diffusion De Boccard). Pp. 389, figs. ISSN 1298-1990; ISBN 978-2-35613-112-6. EUR. 25.

L'ouvrage dirigé par J. France et J. Nelis-Clément propose une réflexion centrée sur un sujet limité en apparence — la *statio* — mais qui se révèle en réalité d'une très grande richesse historique et archéologique. Cet état de fait, dont le livre rend bien compte au fil des pages, découle largement de la variété de significations que pouvait recouvrir le terme. Sans épuiser ici toutes ses nuances possibles, il importe d'en rappeler brièvement la teneur, en se limitant pour commencer aux sens exprimés par les deux éditeurs, dès l'introduction (p. 12-15). Le terme *statio* possède un contenu à la fois spatial et temporel, ancré dans une réalité matérielle. Associé originellement au fait de se tenir debout, le terme recouvre l'idée de garde, qu'il s'agisse du lieu et des bâtiments où elle s'effectue, ou du temps passé à remplir cette fonction. Il peut aussi désigner un service administratif, doté là encore de structures matérielles et concrètes. C'est dire s'il faut être particulièrement attentif aux contextes dans lesquels le terme se trouve attesté (ou son existence suggérée par des vestiges matériels), pour en proposer l'interprétation historique la plus adéquate. La tâche est encore compliquée par la nécessité de distinguer la *statio* d'autres réalités telles que la *mansio* ou la *mutatio*, sans parler des divers vocables modernes (tel celui de "station routière") employés par les historiens et les archéologues pour désigner des structures plus ou moins bien cernées. La nécessité de porter attention aux évolutions chronologiques, et les pièges sémantiques tendus par les langues modernes (pour beaucoup pourvues de mots dérivant du latin *statio*), achèvent de convaincre de l'ampleur des problèmes que l'ouvrage se propose d'affronter. Dans une certaine mesure d'ailleurs, son titre et son sous-titre peuvent apparaître quelque peu réducteurs par rapport à son contenu. Pour les raisons qui viennent d'être évoquées, la *statio* n'est pas la seule réalité questionnée par les auteurs, et l'approche n'est pas uniquement archéologique, même si le souci légitime d'aborder le sujet sous un angle matériel et concret est omniprésent. Le sous-titre "Histoire et archéologie d'un lieu de pouvoir" aurait peut-être été plus représentatif, mais là n'est pas l'essentiel. C'est plutôt la notion de "lieu de pouvoir" qui s'avère déterminante et permet d'envisager la question sous un angle pertinent.

Ce parti pris, qui traverse l'ouvrage tout entier, dénote une volonté d'approcher les réalités concrètes de la domination romaine en privilégiant l'échelle immédiate et le cadre quotidien. Il

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