

Reflections of Roman Imperialisms

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Edited by

Marko A. Janković
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REFLECTING ROMAN IMPERIALISMS

VLADIMIR D. MIHAJLOVIĆ
AND MARKO A. JANKOVIĆ

The object on the cover of this book (and Fig. 1) is a marble panel with a relief representation from the Petrović-Vesić collection owned by Verica Dettmar-Scherler who we thank for the kind permission to use her photographs in this volume. According to Ivana Popović (2006, 15), the first publisher of the object who had an opportunity to closely examine it, the tablet has a shape of a *tabula ansata* with maximum dimensions of 47.5 x 26 cm and the relief field of 38 x 18.5 cm, which gives it an impression of a framed picture. The most prominent fact about the relief is it closely follows the well-known scene from the upper frieze of the *Gemma Augustea*, a sardonyx cameo curretted at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. However, as Popović (2006, 16-17) puts it, contrary to the Augustan cameo which can be regarded as "the work of a first-class artisan intended for imperial propaganda," the marble relief panel "was made by a stonecutter of mediocre quality originating from some local workshop." Style, proportions, details, execution, etc. "drastically deviate from the canons... on the official works of Roman art in the time of Augustus, thus the marble tablet relief composition looks like the naïve work of some unskilled provincial artisan" (Popović 2006, 17). Whereas there is a problem in this view as it implies a value-laden judgment of the object understood as a copy of the superb work of art, accompanying classification of official/unofficial, first-/second-/etc- class of art(ists), and relying on the Roman elitist comprehension of taste and visual preferences (cf. Scott and Webster eds. 2003), the marble panel could indeed be regarded as some sort of an echo of the famous scene in *Gemma Augustea*. This, of course, does not mean that the object is in any regard less valuable than the "original" - quite the opposite, it poses as many, complicated and interesting questions as the Augustan cameo itself.

To begin with, there is a problem of chronology, i.e. the period of creation of the relief. Taking into account the manner of completion, probable provenance of the Petrović-Vesić collection (approximately the

area of modern Serbia, especially major Roman urban sites such as Sirmium, Naissus, Viminacium) and presumed historical context, Popović (2006, 7, 15-19, 98-99) suggested the representation was made at the beginning of the third decade of IV c. and had something to do with Constantine's stay in Sirmium. According to her view, the explanation can be found in Constantine's propaganda efforts to fashion himself as a new Augustus:

...[the] reason for production of the marble relief could be recognized in Constantine's attempt to find the support for his rule in the representations of so-called good emperors from earlier times on the monuments erected in his honor... The reign of this emperor was characterized by prominent aspiration for a retrospective, which could be the reflection of the nostalgic notion for the past but also the testimony about cultural continuity... Such a cultural climate was very favorable for reproduction of ancient works of art, first of all, those from the already idealized time of Augustus. In such a way Constantine's political and propagandist concept *imitatio Augusti* was established. (Popović 2006, 18).



Fig. 1-1. Marble panel with a relief representing the scene from the upper frieze of Gemma Augustea, part of the Petrović-Vesić collection. © by Verica Dettmar-Scherler

Popović presumed that the *Gemma Augustea* was in the treasury carried by Constantine's court and thus could have served as a model for carving the relief in Sirmium on the occasion of the emperors' stay there (although she did not exclude the possibility of existence of a sketch

model according to which both the cameo and marble relief were made - Popović 2006, 19). While this interpretation stems from a problematic authoritative heritage discourse of contemporary Roman archaeology in Serbia which focuses on big historical events and especially the emperors (see Jovanović 2006; Korać, Golubović and Mrđić 2009; and Kuzmanović and Mihajlović 2015 for critical review and ideological implications), it does make excellent points on the usage of older visual models and ideologemes in chronologically, geographically and socially diverse contexts of the Roman world.

In this particular case, it is worth noting that the *Gemma Augustea* was probably made to commemorate Tiberius' celebration of triumphs in Illyricum and Germania, and there is a chance that its lower frieze depicts captured leaders of the Dalmatian-Pannonian revolt (6-9 CE) together with personifications of seized Dalmatia and Pannonia (Jeppesen 1994). In other words, the content of the cameo was directly related to what could be defined as the 'local imperial' history of Pannonia/Sirmium since the region/town was straightforwardly implicated in the events of the Batonian rebellion (for which see Džino 2009; Radman Livaja and Dizdar 2010; Šašel Kos 2011). If the relief was really carved and used in Sirmium or the area of Srem, it could bear the symbolism of local memory and reflection of Augustus'/Tiberius' victory and the "bringing of order", which indicate that the imperial version/tradition of events was the one alive and utilized as historical heritage a few centuries after the affairs took place. This could suggest that the reflections of imperial discourse were recreated in local context (cf. Woolf 1996a; Ferris 2000, 39-48, 69-70; Jiménez 2010), pushing aside or appropriating parallel mytho-histories of the event and becoming the dominant or more visible tale of the past, the one which was welcomed for display and reference - to some people at least. In other words, the intersection of regional/local and imperial (conflicting) affairs eventually resulted in the expression of a local past in an imperial way/standard by using the dominant ideological discourse and iconographic matrix.

Besides this possibility, it is perhaps not farfetched to presume there occurred the combining of stories and knowledge from the local/regional background with those of the imperial level (cf. Carroll 2002; Roymans 2009; Woolf 2009; 2011, 8-58; Lulić, this volume), in a way that the imperial narrative was specifically internalized/adapted and then attached to this kind of representations. This would mean that the representation did follow imperial visual and, to some extent, historical discourse but modified with the flavour of local tradition and readings of the episode. On the other hand, we also cannot exclude the possibility of a purposefully

distorted representation on the relief which could serve as a kind of subversive or parodic reflection of a dominant narrative of the imperial history (cf. Jiménez 2010, 47-49, 52-53). The blurring of the iconic image could have signified the relativization of the "official" message/ideology it was initially intended to convey, for whatever imaginable reason: refashioned or reemerged "local-patriotism", perceived irrelevance of the official imperial narrative, its marked contradiction in comparison to the current state in the provinces, revision of the role of the Empire's founding father, awareness of excessive over-idealization of the Augustan "golden age", etc. In this light it is very regrettable that we do not know if the panel was accompanied by a piece inspired by the lower frieze of *Gemma Augustea*, and how the images of subjugated and overpowered "locals" (which might have represented leaders and personifications of the mastered territories) were reflected upon centuries later in the very same area where the episode originally took place. In any case, the point is that the representation could act as a reflection of the *Gemma Augustea's* image in more than one way ranging from interpretation offered by Popović to suggestions briefly put forth here.

Nevertheless, there is also another instructive possibility to explain the meaning and the part played by this intriguing object. Since the exact origins and contexts of artefacts from the Petrović-Vesić collection are unfortunately not known and they were successively acquired during the eight decades of XX c. (Popović 2006, 6-7), the authenticity of the marble tablet is not completely certain. Popović (2006, 6) had presumed that the panel originated in antiquity on the grounds of the not so common forging and trading of antiquities in the period when the collection was formed, and the information provided by the current owner that the objects were still covered in dirt at the moment she inherited them. Crucially, however, Popović (2006, 17) points to the fact that the relief still bears elements of the image which are missing in the cameo due to damage the left upper corner suffered centuries ago (most probably before XVII c. when it was fixed in the golden frame). Since the marble relief has preserved the wing of the goddess Victoria and an object(s) in the right hand of the figure which steps out of a chariot (Tiberius), which are now absent in the *Gemma Augustea*, Popović rightly suspects the marble panel had to be made before the breakage took place. Instead of a commonly presumed missing figure in the cameo, who was supposedly holding Tiberius' right hand, in the marble panel there is a depiction that Popović recognized as a lying palmette and a miniature trophy Tiberius is carrying to Augustus and Roma (apparently a model of the *tropaeum* erected in the lower frieze of the cameo). As a result of this difference, there is a good chance that the

tablet was created by direct referring to an undamaged picture of the cameo or a sketch that existed in antiquity (Popović 2006, 17).

While this reasoning is right in underlining that the fully preserved image in the tablet could be used in assessing its authenticity, there is still no guarantee that we are dealing with an artefact from the Roman period. As the photograph at the cover shows (and Fig. 1-1.), the object in the hand of the figure stepping out from a chariot is not completely clear or immediately recognizable (though on a second look does resemble a trophy), which can raise suspicion that the obscuring was done purposefully. Namely, exactly because of a full awareness of the missing part of the Vienna cameo and the content of its lower frieze, there might have been a tendency to mask the forgery with making the appearance of the relief as authentic as possible by including something (i.e. a trophy) in Tiberius' hand, but smudging it in order to avoid precise definition of the objects' shape. Although there is the question of why would the forger acquainted with the subject of *Gemma Augustea* have gone to such lengths but not include the prevalingly assumed missing figure, for the sake of academic honesty it is not possible to completely exclude the option of a modern provenance of the panel. At any rate, even if the marble tablet was made recently, it opens a series of questions as to why it was produced, what inspired its making, why it was important to recreate the *Gemma Augustea* image in the form of "provincial" Roman art, and what aim(s) it tried to achieve. In other words, this artefact poses a question of reception of Roman imperial past and the relations that diverse social contexts and groups create with its understanding/image, from the supposed forger to the owners of the tablet, academic community, and the general public.

This somewhat long consideration of the marble panel serves as an introductory note to the topic of this volume as it epitomizes the main lines of thought sparked by the theme of reflections of Roman imperialisms. Thus, the first of the abovementioned interpretative possibilities is instructive for realizing that reflections of Roman imperialistic discourse could have been domineering and had large affordance thanks to their privileged position inside the imperial symbolic system comprised of beliefs, myths, words and pictures employed in constant, repetitive and nearly omnipresent manner. In this context, "official" imperial tradition, deeds and power served as perpetual frames of reference, legacy, and inspiration, and were reassessed in various contexts and occasions with diverse purposes and ideas. Secondly, as the other two interpretative options suggest, these reflections could have been quite different and even the opposite of what was intended by their affirmative and positive evaluation. The imperial symbolic system, or rather some of its elements,

could have been inverted to suite quite the contrasting intentions of mockery, subversion, irony, resistance or opposition of some aspects of imperial order and discourses. Lastly, in the case that the panel is a recent creation, it tells the story of modern reflection of how Roman imperialism is understood, connoted and related to. In all three ways of understanding the matters in question, the common denominator is the relation of some individuals/groups with the idea of the Roman world, and this is exactly what the contributions in this book are dealing with. To make our guiding ideas clearer, the next sections review the basic concepts we utilize in more detail.

Imperialism(s): useful term and approach?

The research perspective focusing on the problem of Roman imperialism has been at the forefront of Roman studies since their beginnings, albeit the relations and reevaluations of the meaning and utility of the term have been changing continually. Apparently, in recent times there has been a tendency to question whether the imperial order in Roman times was as encompassing as previously thought and if the term imperialism and the concepts it implies are at all fit for contemporary studies of the Roman and surrounding worlds. For instance, Greg Woolf expressed his doubts about the straightforward and strong impact of imperialistic discourse on ethnographic writings, suggesting that this link was much more complex and much less direct than usually presumed (2011, 59-88). According to his remarks, the works of ancient scholars were not guided by imperial priorities; their views were not formed through the experience of ruling the world more than using existent writings in libraries; they did not consult army commanders or provincial governors for their literary constructions as these types of knowledge were mutually incommensurable; Roman expansion did not put imperial vision at the center of ethnographic writing, but only reactualized some of the existing topics and made the acquiring of information easier (Woolf 2011, 60, 71, 76, 78). Following this reasoning, Woolf also negated the direct connection between literary ethnographic contents on the one hand and triumphal iconography, ceremonial/monumental art and administrative organization on the other, pointing out the limited scope of their precise overlapping and danger of analytical blurring of the limits between literary-ethnographic, administrative and propagandist orderings of space and people (2011, 79-85). However, we are inclined to join the scepticism expressed towards the nature of ethnographic discourse seen in such way (Bjornlie 2011; Mattingly 2017, 155), as the thesis of compartmentalization

of the ethnographic knowledge in several separate and mainly unrelated spheres seems too harsh. Although the idea about full semantic levelling of literature, propaganda-art, and imperial administration is indeed a simplifying one, it is equally harmful to negate the cohesion of the general socio-political and cultural context inside which all of these practices were taking place. To understand and cross-reference them better, imperialistic perspective (in the sense of specific *attitudes of mind* - Isaac 2004) and ethnographic imagination have to be taken as compatible aspects of Roman imperial culture, among which various ideas could easily and mutually spillover, merge and act in synergic ways. Since the members of groups in power were relatively well connected and limited in number, and the preserved written, iconographic and material evidence shows the existence of basically homogenous imperial elite culture (Woolf 1998, 54-76; Huskinson 2000; Hingley 2005, 49-90; Wallace-Hadrill 2008), both of these aspects can be viewed as an indication of commonly shared (elitist) cognitive dispositions, value systems, and worldviews. Thus, can we really imagine that figures such as Caesar, Pliny, Tacitus, Cassius Dio, etc. had "knowledge-balkanization" (as somewhat inappropriately defined by Woolf 2011, 37, 111) and clearly distinguished their writings from practical attitudes and behaviours towards social, ethnographic or cultural others? We think this scenario is not plausible and that the manners of speaking, writing and visual expression cannot be divorced from the ways of thinking and acting in the world. Such states of mind, with accompanying biases and stereotypes, must have had some impact on shaping relations which elite groups built towards different kinds of alterities in the Roman and neighbouring worlds.

An even greater amount of criticism can be addressed to the suggestion to "do away" with imperialism as an adequate term and interpretative framework (Versluys 2014, 8-10; Pitts and Versluys 2015: 20-21; Pitts 2015: 80), and instead embrace some kind of cleansed concept of Romanization (Versluys 2014) or theories of globalization (Pitts and Versluys 2015; Van Oyen and Pitts 2017, 16-17). While such views are well aware of the importance of power relations, they tend to see previous scholarship as too much relied upon and oriented towards imperialism as a top-down generalizing model that made the picture only seemingly clear but actually more obscure. Admittedly, an invitation to delve into the insights that globalization theories have to offer could really enrich our analytical tools and put us in previously unsuspected perspectives, which is why they are worthwhile as a source of ideas and inspiration. However, even with an emphasis on what are the difficulties and shortcomings of the utilization of globalization theories (Pitts and Versluys 2015, 21, 25; Pitts

2015, 92; Versluys 2015, 162-163), and even with the rightfully stated need to review the Roman past through a globalization perspective exactly because we live in an era of globalization and cannot separate the ideas of present from those about the past (Gardner 2013, 8; Hingley 2015), we think the danger implicit in the globalization viewpoint is not fully realized.

Despite the claims that globalization as a concept is more suitable than imperialism since it does not presuppose centrally enforced socio-economic and cultural processes in the Roman Empire, nor does it favor certain social structures and mechanisms as explanations for various sorts of changes and consumption practices (Pitts and Versluys 2015; Pitts 2015; Van Oyen and Pitts 2017), using the concept of globalization actually depersonalizes all of these processes, empties them from power and domination relations and implicitly makes them teleologically inevitable historical courses with no visible cause or driving forces. In broad strokes, although apparently more neutral and open to modifications as it does not presuppose one and essentialist form, this perspective in reality resembles western-capitalism common logic according to which economic flows are unstoppable, not decisively dependent on other social, cultural and economic factors, and people always behave in the manner "business/consumption as usual" regardless of specific contexts. Of course, we are not saying that economic, cultural or social aspects of life in the Roman world were centrally conducted by imperial entrepreneurship, but that the globalization perspective, as it now stands, generally downplays the importance of relationships of power structures (and groups that control them) within economic, cultural or any other sphere of life. All of these aspects were unavoidably interdependent, have mutually impacted each other and were deeply intertwined within the markedly hegemonic social order.

Hence, even the mass consumption or "spontaneously" emergent socio-cultural practices, behaviours, beliefs or categories of objects/materialities cannot be separated from the overall context of centrally and vertically structured relations in the Roman Empire. This kind of social organization was the overall setting which, at least indirectly, enabled the processes of connectivity and homogenization (or even, to some extent, unification) and provided the means for maintaining such unfolding. Connections and connectivity are unavoidably associated with power distribution which is why they cannot be explained with globalization without taking into account the geometries of power which pervaded them in so many ways. Therefore, it is very hard to imagine that organization of production, distribution of goods and ways/mechanisms of exchange (of technology,

knowledge, ideas or objects) had nothing to do with interconnectedness of individual/collective influential/ powerful actors who possessed greater socio-political and economic capacities, not to mention that some categories/kinds of goods (i.e. their manufacture, spread, and consumption) as well as practices/ behaviors/habits, were intimately linked to various levels of imperial elite-networks (cf. Morley 2015; Wallace-Hadrill 2008; Parkins ed. 1997). The entanglement of a variety of apparently autonomous spheres of the imperial structure can be comprehended well by using just a few brief examples. For instance, such is the case of the transportation system and toll service in which the imperial agencies and other power actors were directly involved in so many ways and levels that it can be even said the whole mechanism directly depended on them (cf. van Tilburg 2007). In turn, the functioning of roads, accompanying organization, support and custom service has to be taken into account as crucial if any of our globalization-scenarios are supposed to work as explanatory models. Another illustrative example of the degree to which imperial(istic) intervention could affect the great number of people in the apparently self-reliant domain of everyday consumption or routine practices can be found in the system of metals exploitation. Monopolized by imperial authority and under jurisdiction of the Emperor, organizational constitution of mining districts dictated specific administrative-juridical profile, particular economic dynamics, peculiar social composition, uncommon behavior of governmental actors, engaging of army and its staff, involvement of local municipal and peregrine entities, distinct immigration trends, tributary/forced/slave labor, specific supplying logic, etc. (see Dušanić 1989; 2000; 2003; Orejas and Sánchez-Palencia 2002; Hirt 2010; 2015; Mattingly 2011, 167-199). While the regular employment of these mechanisms and exact depth and extent of their reach is debated, there is little doubt they hit and defined the scopes of a considerable number of lives and could be judged as remarkably pervasive. In this light, they are excellent illustrations of both the seriousness and reality of imperialistic ideology/policy and its impact on seemingly independent aspects of everyday "ordinary people's" economic strategies, mass consumptions and choices (see Cvjetičanin, this volume). Something similar could be said about the variety of types of interference the powerful senatorial and equestrian families /individuals had throughout the Empire (including the mining business - Dušanić 2008; 2009), just like the *negotiatores* and entrepreneurial Roman citizens had a great potential to influence local affairs even before a given political entity was incorporated into the Empire (e.g. Shaw 2000; Purcell 2005; Ando 2006; Erskine 2010, 46, 75-76; Morley 2010, 26-33, 76). Additionally, the decisions, permissions, and prohibitions issued by the orders of emperors

or some lower officials have tremendously influenced the creations of networks of social/economic connectivity as well as the flows and circulations of what we now recognize as material indices of globalization. One telling example, among many prominent others, is Marcus Aurelius' politics towards the defeated Marcomanni, Quadi, and Iazyges who were allowed or denied certain privileges in respect of the settlement of land, trade, and travel (Burns 2003, 240-241), that must have impacted the patterns of connectivity and globalization, including the distribution and consumption of goods. Thus, the interference in peoples' lives was not accomplished by interventionist force in the sense of direct meddling in everybody's particular businesses, but through (more or less standard) imperialistic practices of land and population categorization, landscape control, redefinition of social positioning, census records, taxation, appropriation of resources, employment and exploitation of human labor, organized (re)settlements of people, grants of privileges, sale of concessions, etc. All of these, even if regarded as unconscious, accidental and unintentional, created specific environments for many (if not all) life activities, and must have resonated in patterns and logic of (mass) consumption or other globalizing issues.

Another problematic dimension of the suggested employment of globalization theories manifests in its inevitable projections of the dominant conceptual framework of the present into the Roman past. By this, we primarily have in mind the contemporary subconscious axioms of free/open market economy, profit-chasing, the standard of living, levels of development and accompanying ideas of "Western democratic capitalism" (or even neoliberal ideology). As an illumination of this shortcoming we briefly cite the case studies discussed by Martin Pitts (2015, 76-88) in which he heuristically compares the modes of contemporary consumption of oils and fats and the spread of Chinese porcelain by the Dutch and English East India Companies (in XVII-XVIII c.) with the supply /consumption (statistic) patterns of certain types of Roman period ceramic vessels in Britain, implying a formal analogy between the two. What we see as an obstacle here is that the former instances, originating from the pre-modern and modern world, clearly operated by a profit-driven market-economy logic which cannot be used as a ruling *modus operandi* in the latter case, no matter how close statistical results resemble. The contexts of distribution of resources in the global capitalist world or the activities of the early-capitalism entrepreneurial organizations in their efforts to win over the market clearly cannot belong to the same level of comparison as the (territorial/political) spread of the Roman Empire or distribution logic/mechanisms which existed within its socio-political setting (which

Pitts 2015, 86 in a sense hints but does not take in serious consideration). Therefore, we believe that the making of this association creates problems to otherwise relevant and rightly made points in Pitts' study. Namely, the comparison of the Roman London's modes of consumption to the late XX c. Western nations and the simultaneous correlation of Roman rural settlements with modern developing countries (Pitts 2015, 76), although tentative, immediately indicate that the idea of development (and the whole ideological baggage it carries) existed and operated in a similar manner in the Roman Empire as it does today. This is not the case, as the concept of development and related perspective of globalization belong to a contemporary, specific, value-burdened, ideologically infused, power related and politically connoted worldview (cf. Hobson 2014). Of course, knowing the sophistication and subtleness of Pitts' work in general, we doubt he has intended to convey this conclusion, and there is a good chance that we misunderstood the intended messages. But this is exactly the point: by using a globalization analogy many contemporary cognitive matrices are unwarily slipped into comprehension of the past creating a string of impressions of similarity between current and ancient contexts (cf. Gardner 2013, 6-11; Witcher 2015; Hingley 2015), and when M. Pitts could be (mis)read in that way we can only imagine what it would mean if someone not as informed tried to put the globalization theory to work.

The process of contemporary globalization is deeply power-rooted, and it is, without doubt, a discourse of power, which is exactly why it is so notably contested and ambiguously defined (Massey 2005). The phenomena, agencies, and mechanisms that keep it running are inextricably linked to (economic and symbolic) capital distribution and socio-political dispositions of might, meaning that with the directly borrowed toolkit from theories of globalization, we would also have to import an immensely great portion of questions about power, rule, domination, and control which cannot be separated from other aspects that globalization covers. It is therefore not wise to do away with imperialism. Nor we can do it under the overstated impression that every mention or discussion of it automatically entails overemphasized and uncritical anticolonial discourse/feelings of contemporary scholars (Versluys 2014) because that is simply not the case. The issue is also not "only" of a terminological nature or how we conceptualize the content of the term. It is first and utmost about reifications of hegemony that (certainly and beyond any reasonable doubt) did exist in the Roman world and which have to be addressed in one way or another and by one name or another. Hence, in the spirit of the Balkan saying "you may even call me a jug but don't break me", we would be fine with switching the term from

imperialism into "controlism" or any other suitable abstraction without "-ism", as long as we do not "throw the baby out with the bathwater".

So - imperialism(s), after all?

What the proponents of "leaving imperialism behind" are right about is the question of defining what is meant by the term power and how we exactly conceptualize its reifications, since the word itself, its connotations and reasons of usage are not neutral and value-free (Versluys 2014, 9-10). Therefore we wish to point to the possible ways of comprehending the Roman Empire's structure of power that we still further call imperialism(s) as the offered criticism and alternatives do not provide convincing argumentation for its abandonment.

First, we do not see Roman imperialism(s) as continual, planned and interventionist politics made by decision makers and power brokers who sat in some obscured and secretive rooms in Rome leaning over the map of *orbis terrarum* developing methods to win and control the world. The nature of Roman imperialisms was very different than this obsolete iconic image, much more haphazard, more complicated and notably less stable, as many recent studies consensually indicate (Richardson 2008; Morley 2010; Erskine 2010; Mattingly 2011; Hoyos ed. 2013). In other words, it is impossible to talk about a single Roman imperialism but rather a multiplicity of phenomena under the term, with a variety of manifestations, channels, and ways of operating throughout time, space and social contexts. What remained relatively steadily present, even though changeable and vibrant, is the idea of peoples' inherent inequality and hence variously determined individual/group identifications and positionings (cf. Shaw 2000; Isaac 2004). The differentiation of humans according to socio-political, economic and cultural capacities by birth, gender, age, status, ethnicity or other imagined entitlements to some and deprivations of other kinds of life and social roles, was the underlying social texture that was articulated in different manners from the Republic to late Antiquity. This ideology was especially held as generally valid by ruling groups and had a key role in structuring social relations in a spectrum from freedom/slavery and status distinctions to seemingly benign cultural preferences. In short, what we regard as a relative constant in the Roman social order is the centralized system of institutionalized power-/rule-sharing which was (re)negotiated by different participants in a variety of means. In short, life in the Empire was going on inside a structure of (if not more than at least loosely) determined social potentials and positions through value systems, conceptual frameworks, and

principles of behaviour which were (physically and symbolically) imposed by the imperial elites of different provenances and ranks. These leading individuals/groups were multilayered and functioned as interrelated and interdependent shareholders who acted in their spheres of influence but also mutually intersected and merged through a network of multidirectional connections. This, of course, does not mean that such groups were totally nonporous and strictly determined in the sense of their social immutability, but rather signifies the dynamic developments of individual/collective social trajectories and positionings inside what was a comparatively and only basically defined system.

The imperial order was changing previous social, political, cultural and economic arrangements by shifting relations in the direction of their vertical structuring and establishing new ties which functioned according to the "scale" of individual/collective social agency. These relationalities have resonated in various ways with the local/regional settings into which they were internalized and reflected key aspects of life (cf. Woolf 1995; 1996b; 1998; 2005; Huskinson 2000; Erskine 2010, 69; Morley 2010, 50-59). Hence, the Empire was constantly reemerging thanks to the ever-renewing frame of rule and web of power that included vertical power distribution and horizontal dissemination within the social levels/layers comprised of mutually similar power holders. Consequently, the practices of domination were reproduced starting from the network of higher layers of the imperial elite structure by their spread and absorption from the part of diverse levels of powerful persons/groups throughout temporal, spatial and societal settings. These practices of domination were reified in different ways, from legislation, administrative and political ordering to the spheres of physical or symbolic violence/domination, production of space (i.e. landscapes, settlements, and architecture) and economy. The point is that the driving force of many processes was the mindset of domination and specific ideology which affected a wide span of aspects in the Roman and surrounding worlds, at least indirectly if not directly. This kind of nesting imperialism(s) was of course not oriented only towards enemies and (as usually imagined) the "conquered natives." Rather, it should be problematized as generated through the attitudes of the socio-politically empowered (in any sense) towards the ones who were weaker, i.e. had more limited capacities to influence the courses of their choices and life. By accepting such a perspective we actually start to deal with strings of particularized, localized and modified reflections of general imperialistic discourse, which opens the opportunity to contextualize diverse levels and mediators of such relationalities, from central authorities and high imperial administration to regional, local, professional, status,

gender, age and other socio-cultural dimensions. In other words, we do not claim there was an awareness of the residents of the Roman Empire that they lived in this imperialism nor that the imperial authorities were interventionist in all domains of life. What we speculate is that the overall socio-political and cultural context was strongly associated with (and was determining) the setting in which life was going on, i.e. that the specific structure of power was producing, in more or less penetrating, invasive and visible ways, circumstances for the unfolding of different processes and aspects of reality. Seen in this way, the privileges of some individuals/collectives in the Roman world are not masked nor are the ruling/controlling formations blurred by referring to the process of accelerated connectivity as a *deus ex machina* or spontaneous development.

Why reflections?

The title of this book draws upon a very handy metaphor of reflection, and in this particular case invites the reader to think about reflections of Roman imperialisms. What we think of this term is of course not merely an exact mirror image of some strictly defined phenomenon of Roman imperialism or a sort of a "copy" of the stable social structure. As the exemplary marble panel has illustrated in a plastic way, we instead think of these reflections in the sense of various kinds of adaptations, redefinitions, and particular responses to the general socio-political framework set by and intimately connected to the Roman imperial structure and its gradual emergence and change. Reflections in our metaphoric shell of thinking stand for the almost infinite and multi-nuanced specific manifestations of relational links between the driving forces of overall socio-political structure and individual /collective actors who were joining it in the course of what Woolf (1995; 2005) has defined as the simultaneous formation of Empire both within its power-core and parts which were incorporated in the course of the last three centuries BCE. To push the argument further with an aid of another well known and elegantly named concept, what we mean by "specific manifestations of relational links..." could be also regarded as *discrepant experiences* which stand for the diversity (and often even ambiguity) of life courses and affairs within the Roman imperial structure (Mattingly 2011). Building on these ideas, as well as on the thoughts of interplay between global and local trends in the Roman Empire (Hingley 2005; Pitts and Versluys eds. 2015), we would explain our perspective as follows: reflections of Roman imperialisms refer to specific internalizations of different influences which came (from a variety of sources and directions) as the outcomes of

constitution and perpetuation of imperial network built by heterogeneous elite layers. These reflections, seen as reactions to a pervasive socio-political setting, considerably varied and hence produced very different manifestations and articulations of the general/dominant template of the order of power, social roles and **positionings**.

However, there is much more to the concept of reflections than yet another metaphor for the ties between general and particular social contexts in the Roman Empire. For some decades now the problem of reflecting and reflexivity has been in the focus of sociology and anthropology, making a significant impact on the ways we comprehend human individuals and groups in different societal environments, from contemporary "western" societies to the so-called traditional communities at the fringes of (post) modernity. The main idea is that individual and collective actors learn many things about themselves and their socio-political and cultural milieu by reflecting on self, the position they occupy or the role they play in particular socio-cultural surroundings or practice. This realization occurs in reaction to "inner dialogue," self-recognition and consideration of capacities, social localizations and relations with other entities inside the society, and produces self-awareness, consciousness as well as critical assessment of the social order and individual's/group's place inside the greater structure. The crucial thing about the reflexive assertion of an individual or collective self (in relation to other actors and social contexts) is it creates a response in the light of newly acquired cognition, which in turn can impact the future understandings, behaviors, and actions (see e.g. Adams 2006; Archer ed. 2010; Holmes 2010). As M. Holmes (2010, 139) finely puts it "reflexivity refers to the practices of altering one's life as a response to knowledge about one's circumstances." The field of reflexivity inevitably poses a question about relations and character of ties between actor and structure (Archer 2010), illuminating that even the practices usually seen as almost completely structure-conditioned, such as consumption and related habits, are actually intimately linked to reflexive perspective one has both towards self and in relation with others (Garcia-Ruiz and Rodriguez-Lluesma 2010). In this way, reflexivity emerges as central to questions of tensions and conflicts that persons and groups could have in respect to their socio-political and cultural surroundings, opening up the field of how and what answers arise to perceived and acknowledged roles/positions.

Hence, the concept of reflections and reflexivity as an interpretational framework (or potential inspiration for developing more elaborate approaches) in studying the past invites us to consider some of the following questions (inspired by the literature cited in the previous

passage): in what ways and contexts did the general socio-political structure or institutions affect individuals and groups of a given society; how were the impulses from overall societal order imported/appropriated in self-conceptualizations of individuals and cognitive maps shared by groups; did they spark some effects and of what kind; what was the range and nature of reactions to various social stimuli; what thoughts, attitudes, and practices were constituted (and "exported" back) in response to impetuses and how exactly; were they adopted, adapted, altered or rejected; etc. In all of these processes of reflection and their possible outcomes, various modes of reactions could have occurred, from those which were not immediately apparent and left no traces behind, to those which triggered more visible and tangible changes. For example, the responses could fall in domains of appearance, body posture/action, and verbalization which are observable only in a direct interaction/contact, but they could also encompass more permanent reactions reified by transformation of self through the involvement of revised verbal or textual discourses, visual means, and objects.

Therefore, our aim should be to investigate the available evidence from the past as elements of relationalities imbued with diversified, multidirectional, multifaceted and changeable reflections of various social actors (both individual and collective). For the sake of clarity, if we envision the social relationalities as a wave connecting two or more entities, the reflections should be seen as vibrancies or dynamics which made the relations possible and gave them qualitative features (i.e. nature/character). Reflections could be then regarded as (re)negotiations, (re)confirmations, (re)inventions, (re)evaluations, (re)definitions or (dis)continuations of relationships and ties some entity builds and lives within society. When understood in this way, it becomes clearer where the material, visual or verbal evidence from the past comes into the picture: reflective relationalities are created/conducted with and through them, and they (i.e. things, images and words) constitute inseparable fibers of any imaginable sort of links in the socio-cultural sphere (between humans, things, natural and supernatural entities, concepts, institutions, structures, ideologies or however we define them - cf. Olsen 2010; Hodder 2012; Van Oyen and Pitts eds. 2017). Since all of these categories of phenomena (material, visual, verbal) constitute the data-pools of Roman historians, philologists, art historians, and archaeologists, reflexivity perspectives come not only as relevant but very useful to us (as already pointed out by Morley 2015, 59-65). This is especially the case having in mind the abovementioned deep impact of the Roman imperial structure in the sense of its (in)direct interference in peoples' lives by favouring and establishing

specific power relations through the imperial network of privileged social categories/actors. It is therefore not hard to imagine that social changes and reactions had to come through and with reflections and awareness of one's position, not only in cases of the "native resistance" (which is possibly somewhat overemphasized in recent decades - see Versluys 2014), but also in terms of the vertical social mobility (cf. Woolf 1996b; Hope 2000) and the wide scope of other identity changes in the Roman Empire (cf. contributions of Isaac, Janouchova, Mihajlović in this volume). Of course, there are serious limitations to the full-fledged application of the concept of reflexivity for studying the Roman world. First what comes to mind is the fact that we, unlike sociologists and anthropologists, are not able to make inquiries and interviews with people of the past in order to get their reflective experiences and thoughts (except, to some extent, in the cases of written narratives - e.g. *The Golden Ass* and *Satyricon* immediately come to mind, but see also the contributions of Kemp, Li, Stepanyan & Mynasian and Pyy in this volume), and any speculation about this sphere could be regarded as extremely slippery and uncertain. On the other hand, this does not prevent us from looking at our circumstantial evidence taking the aforementioned perspective into account, not least because the contexts and mutual association of our data (in qualitative and quantitative terms) could and do suggest the reflexive ties among some individuals or collective entities and towards their social environment (cf. contributions of Gui, Lamb, Janković, and Županek in this volume). The marble relief which opened this paper (if genuine) is the closest association that springs to mind as it shows how the "simple schematic" representation which refers to "high-quality work of imperial propaganda-art" actually launches very perplexing questions of reevaluation of past, present, history, myth, ideology, etc. Even if regarded as a "naïve provincial copy of the masterpiece" it unravels the set of immensely complex ideas that stood behind it. However, if we think beyond the immediate example, it could be claimed that the reflexivity is already in the focus of our studies though, admittedly, not explicated in such a way and not directly informed with current social and anthropological theory (save for Morley 2015). Many case studies and topics in recent scholarship clearly demonstrate how we could additionally benefit from theorizing reflective relationalities: engendered objects and the roles they indicate, age and social positionings (e.g. Revell 2016, 105-146), status and professional positionings (e.g. Gardner 2013; Collins 2017), *lived religion* (e.g. Rüpke 2016), epigraphic, monumental and memorizing practices (e.g. Hope and Huskinson eds. 2011; Carroll and Rempel eds. 2011), relations between actors and structure (e.g. Revell

2009), agency of particular categories of objects (Taylor 2008), and a variety of other instructive cases (e.g. Matić 2014), indicate that this strand of thinking is not futile but a promising exercise.

Another very important line of reasoning which springs from the reflexivity theory takes into serious consideration the critical reviews of the academic process of investigation and interpretation of the social and cultural sphere. This aspect of reflexivity was (unsurprisingly) initiated in anthropology and sociology where investigators started to revise their role, influence, and participation in the process of acquiring data from informants and the subsequent production of interpretation and knowledge (e.g. Auger 2004; McLennan 2006). In simple words, the complex reconsideration of positions, presumptions, and manners we use as academics in interpreting social phenomena under study could inform us about our own prejudices, an impact which we unconsciously make to the final form and content of our conclusions, and subjectively constructed images we are creating for the use of general public. All of these reflexive realizations can help us to achieve interpretations of higher quality and clean our analytical tools, at least in terms of identifying the most problematic elements or sequences within the interpretational chain we perform. Unlike the previously mentioned connotation of the reflections/reflexivity perspective, this one is more widely used in studies of the past in general (see e.g. Kuzmanović and Vranić 2013 with bibliography), and Roman studies in particular (e.g. Hingley 2000; 2015; see contributions of Lundock and Bevivino in this volume). It is markedly important and necessary for the studies of Roman imperialisms because it can help us to refine interpretational elements which are biased and co-opted from recent or current (neo)imperial experiences and shape our understandings of the Roman past. By employing the honest and elaborated reflexive approach, we could develop constructive self-criticism and evaluation of our world-views and standpoints to avoid projecting into past perspectives, experiences, and emotions of the present, of course to the extent to which such an endeavour is possible.

Reflecting the IIERW origins

The first IIERW conference was held in September 2012, and at the time none of us could foresee where this conference was going to take us. Now, after five years, we have the score of three successfully organized conferences (in 2012, 2014 and 2016) and two published volumes – *The Edges of the Roman World* (2014) and this very one – *Reflections of Roman Imperialisms* (2018). Until this moment more than 160 scholars

directly participated in the work of the IIERW, by presenting their papers and debating on various issues raised by those same presentations. Most of the participants came from the European universities and institutes, but scholars from other parts of the world were also involved – North America (USA), Asia (Lebanon, Russia, Armenia), Africa (South African Republic) and Australia. What is more interesting regarding the scholar's academic background, is a variety of their fields of expertise – most of us were Roman archaeologists, but during the years papers were also presented by ancient historians, art historians, philologists, and scholars dealing with the ancient law. By widely spreading the general topics of the conference, we also ensured to keep the conference open for all kinds of theoretical and methodological approaches. We were guided by the idea that variety of those viewpoints will ensure the quality of the debate among the scholars involved in the conference. We think that it is safe for us to say that we fulfilled the basic aim we set up in 2012, and that was

“...to bring together experts from different disciplines, different theoretical perspectives, and different research areas and connect them within the same research problem – social and cultural relations within the Roman Empire and its fringes.”

(Babić et al. 2012, 7)

As organizers (together with Professor Staša Babić for the first IIERW conference), we felt an obligation to explain the very beginnings of the IIERW conference to the broader audience, especially to academic communities which are not familiar with the specifics of our local academic circumstances and contexts. Thanks to some scholars, the conference and the first volume (Janković *et al.* 2014) acquired some very positive attention in the past few years within local and regional academic publications (Lulić 2014, Ragolić 2015, Cvjetičanin 2015) but also with a wider international audience (eg. Hingley 2014; 2017). Each and every one of those reviews and mentions were pretty much laudable, and we were very much satisfied with such appraisals. Still, some of those reviews made us decide to write about our intentions, aims and attempts considering the IIERW conference. In a recent publication (González & Guglielmi 2017), Richard Hingley dedicated a part of his paper to “influences of TRAC” and wrote:

„The international influence of TRAC is indicated by two further ventures, the 'Critical Roman Archaeology Conference' (CRAC) held in Stanford (California, USA) and the 'Edges of the Roman World Conference' (EREC) held in Serbia in 2012 and 2014. Both initiatives

drew on TRAC for their critical and theoretical agendas (Hingley 2014a).“

(Hingley 2017, 1)

Although that mention in the paper was fully positive on the IIERW conference, we thought that it is necessary to correct those lines to make sure that our audience gets the right perspective on the events that made IIERW possible.

Archaeology in Serbia and the former Yugoslavia was heavily burdened with very traditional frameworks of interpretations, especially within the field of Roman archaeology. As archaeology students (not so long ago) we were mostly trained to think in such traditional frameworks with very limited knowledge of theory. Nevertheless, we were very fortunate to meet and work with our professors and mentors who largely encouraged our critical thinking and pointed us into directions of a very different spectrum of archaeological methodology and theory – professors of the Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy Staša Babić and Aleksandar Palavestra (neither of them are romanists). Their support in our efforts, even when our opinions were not completely in line with theirs, was crucial in defining our methodological and theoretical viewpoints and mostly thanks to them, we were able to reach out for different issues in Roman archaeology and to try to understand them in fashions extremely different to most of our other colleagues. Of course, we were not alone on that road, and many other colleagues were encouraged to embrace other theoretical concepts, which only expanded the generation of scholars very able to cope with various issues in different fields of the discipline. Both of them are "guilty" of supplying us with valuable publications and advice, both as mentors and senior colleagues, but also for our introduction to a broader world of international archaeological community.

Back in 2011, all of the organizers (Babić, Mihajlović, and Janković) participated in the *Fingerprinting the Iron Age (Approaches to Identity in the European Iron Age. Integrating South-Eastern Europe into the debate)* conference, held in Cambridge, MacDonald Institute. If any, that conference was the direct inspiration for organizing the first IIERW conference. Despite some tensions lifted by the very concept of the conference, which implied that scholars from South-Eastern Europe had to become “integrated” in the archaeological mainstream (Babić 2014), we became aware of opportunities that such an environment could provide for our local academic community. The other important thing was the “revelation” that our local academic context was not so unique and different in comparison to other European countries. The basic idea was to bring our colleagues from all over the world to debate their viewpoints