

Roman port societies through the evidence of inscriptions

**An ERC-sponsored international Conference to be held at the British School
at Rome on January 29th-30th 2015**

The ERC Programme

This conference forms part of the *Portuslimen Project* (<http://blog.soton.ac.uk/portuslimen/>), which is funded by an ERC Advanced Grant *Roman Mediterranean Ports* (RoMP) and is directed by Simon Keay and Pascal Arnaud. It addresses specific questions relating to the capacities of and inter-connections between a range of ports across the Mediterranean in ways that will allow us to better understand their role in promoting the cohesion and integrity of the Roman Mediterranean during the Imperial era. These concern (1) the layout of Roman ports, (2) the organization of commercial activities focused at them, (3) hierarchies of ports, and (4) pan-Mediterranean commercial and social connections between ports. In order to meet these goals, the project is applying suites of existing techniques in archaeology, ancient history and palaeo-environmental studies to a range of ports sites.

The Conference to be held at Rome, January 2015

Our dossier of surviving evidence for the administration of Roman Mediterranean ports, whether from Portus, the Italian ports or those in the provinces, has not been supplemented by any major new discoveries over the last decade. However, recent research has resulted in significant advances in our understanding of port-based societies and an extension of the field of study beyond Portus and Puteoli. This has made it possible to clearly define several original aspects of port societies and their organization. The organization of these societies, whether institutionally-based or not, and the professional or communal relationships that structured them are of fundamental importance. It formed the framework upon which the everyday life of individual ports depended, within which economic activity was played out, and out of which commercial networks were developed. This understanding represents an importance advance at a time when there is a tendency to model networks in the abstract sense. Indeed, since many details of port administration still elude us, the organization of relationships between key actors in the every-day life of ports is key to understanding how ports worked. Furthermore, if we gain a clearer understanding of port societies, we will be in a better position to understand the various forms and levels of intermediation in merchant practice more generally in the Roman empire.

This meeting aims, as far as possible, not to limit itself to the evidence from Portus, Puteoli, or the Italian ports, and to extend the perspective to the principal provincial ports.

The meeting will broach four principal themes :

1. Cosmopolitanism, its forms (multi-culturalism and multi-culturality), its institutional organization (foreign civic sanctuaries, *stationes*, and civic or provincial identities), and its role in port-based activities
2. Social interaction : the *collegia*, the *copora*, civil and Imperial administration, upper classes
3. Sociology and the social legibility of the merchants, the shipowners and the other key actors in port life
4. The character (family, fellow-citizens, worshippers, etc...) and structure of commercial networks and the roles of the categories of performers within them

Organization

The number of contributors to this conference will be limited to twelve and will be joined by key established authorities in the field who will help coordinate discussions and develop partial syntheses of each of these themes.

Presentations will last 40 minutes each.

The speakers should prepare a pre-text for circulation to other conference participants giving papers and discussants ; these, the discussants comments and the discussions will be subsequently published in full.

We kindly invite speakers to submit a proposal with a summary to pascal.arnaud@mom.fr with a copy to S.J.Keay@soton.ac.uk before may 15th. Proposals must be in close relationship with one of the four themes.

With kind regards,
Yours, sincerely

Pr. Dr. Simon J. Keay,
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