

COLLOQUIUM

Urbanizing environments in the Roman World: Italy and beyond

Leiden, 12 June 2015

The city is, for good reasons, one of the most central phenomena in our conception of the Roman world. There is no doubt that the Roman era, both in the Mediterranean and beyond, saw a hitherto unseen degree of urbanization, an extreme expansion of the urban ‘vocabulary’, as well as the spread of urban phenomena far beyond the physical boundaries of towns. At the same time, socially, economically, and spatially the shadow of the city was increasingly looming over rural areas, as they were integrated into social, political and economic networks of which the rhythm was directly or indirectly dictated by cities. In a way, both city and countryside thus can be thought of as ‘urbanizing environments’, and both urban and rural landscapes show, from the Republican period onwards, clear signs of the expansion and intensification of the Roman urban network.

However, there is only a limited amount of overlap between scholars studying the archaeology and history of the countryside, and those working with the physical and written remains of cities. The former generally stand firmly in a tradition of Mediterranean archaeology, whereas the latter work predominantly with evidence traditionally associated with ‘Classical’ archaeology and ancient history. Yet, in the end, and increasingly so in recent years, many of the historical issues addressed by both groups are similar, and the social, economic and political factors (and actors) of change and continuity are often identical even if they tend to work out differently in different places at different points in time.

This colloquium therefore aims to bring these two groups together to discuss both the causes and the effects of the processes of urbanization and integration from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of spatial and historical contexts, predominantly focusing on Roman Italy, but also moving into other parts of the Mediterranean. Topics to be discussed include the role of colonization, the emergence and role of minor centers and secondary settlements, the blurring boundaries between city and countryside, developments in the density of the urban network, as well as the effects of urban growth on cities themselves, both in the metropolitan area of Rome and its port cities, and elsewhere in the peninsula.

It is hoped that the tension created by bringing together this combination of approaches will further intensify debate about what connects (rather than what divides) the study of the urban, suburban and rural landscapes of the Roman world.