Introduction

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Is an anthropology of the ancient world possible? More particularly, is it possible to conceive of an anthropology of Roman culture? The essays collected in this volume intend to offer a positive – and very concrete – response to these questions. At the same time, we aim to confront certain problems of method that the specific contours of Roman culture impose on scholars who wish to apply anthropological perspectives to the study of classical antiquity. Indeed, because the anthropologist of the ancient world has no possibility of employing some of the standard methods of modern anthropology – in particular, participant observation and ethnographic interview – it is important to explore in greater detail the special challenges faced by any researcher hoping to study Roman culture from an anthropological point of view, in order to highlight the ways in which the contributors to this volume have confronted and – hopefully – overcome these challenges.

What, however, does an anthropology of Roman culture look like? In our view, it is primarily an approach that has as its object of study the system of signs and meanings that defines Latin speakers' ways of representing and understanding experience symbolically. Of course, since we share this basic notion with other culture-based approaches present in classical studies (New Historicism, for example), we can distinguish our perspective in terms of four special commitments.[1] First, by our commitment to explaining Roman culture as much as possible "emically", that is, in terms meaningful to the native point of view, rather than staying always within the conceptual framework provided by our own cultural horizon (see below). Second, by our commitment to focusing on a level of Roman society's meaning making that is shared, entrenched, and durable, rather than on the level of individual, contested, and ephemeral meaning. Third, by our commitment to exploring not only Roman society's shared

[1] Roller 2010 provides an overview of culture-based approaches.

meanings, but also how those meanings recur throughout and interconnect its symbolic activities. Fourth, by our commitment to utilizing comparative evidence (from Greek culture above all) to reveal the essential specificity of Roman culture (see Bettini, *Comparison*, this volume). In this respect especially, we take to heart Alexis de Tocqueville's affirmation that "It is one of the peculiar deficits of our intellect to be incapable of judging the objects it has in sight except by juxtaposition with other objects."[2]

Textuality

A further, crucial characteristic of our particular methodology relates to acknowledging that Roman culture is overridingly textual – not only because every culture is, to borrow one of Clifford Geertz's metaphors, "an ensemble of texts … which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" – but also because a good portion (and perhaps the greatest portion) of our evidence for it actually consists in a couple of shelves full of books written in Latin. The other portion obviously is formed by the conspicuous material remains uncovered by archaeology, which can provide evidence fundamental to our understanding of Roman history and civilization. Still, no student of ancient Rome can escape the fact that many aspects of Roman culture are accessible to us principally through textual forms – and some exclusively through such forms.

In conjunction with archaeological and iconographic evidence, then, the Roman world presents itself to us as a series of textual "places" where we find representations by "natives" capable of communicating important characteristics of their culture. In this sense, classicists who apply their philological and literary-critical knowledge to Latin texts find themselves spontaneously involved in an undertaking of a generally anthropological character, aimed at understanding not only the Romans' literary history, but also their culture. Indeed, they find themselves in the same position as Geertz's anthropologist, for whom "doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript".[3] Let us not forget that reading ancient Rome's cultural "texts" in an anthropological perspective may also invite the Latinist to reflect on his or her own

[2] Unpublished letter to Pierre Freslon, dated 30 July 1854, "C'est une des infirmités singulières de notre esprit de ne pouvoir juger les objets, les vit-il en plein soleil, s'il ne place un autre objet à côté": see De Tocqueville 1991 [1854], 1230.

[3] Geertz 1973, 10. The theme of "extension of the notion of a text beyond written material" is further developed by Geertz 1973, 448–9.

procedures of "re-writing" the Roman world – something we know is crucial to the construction of ethnographic knowledge.[4]

Therefore, our anthropological "gaze" first and foremost traverses a linguistic and literary lens, exploring the entire spectrum of materials (but also forms) with and in which the Romans constructed their texts. A short and obviously partial list will include at the very least the following specific textual manifestations (all present and analysed in this book according to an anthropological perspective). First, whatever descriptions of cultural practices we find in classical texts, along with the vocabulary used to describe them (as when we analyse phenomena such as sacrifice or space). Next, the Romans' own reflections on these practices, along with the sometimes admiring but more often confounded discussions of these same practices by Greek authors or by more distant and usually more hostile Christian authors (as when we study the Roman family or Roman conceptions of the divine, for example). Then ancient forms of narrative and composition, together with their ways of "philosophizing" about human nature and the world – as when we reflect on discursive creations such as riddles or metaphors, or cultural phenomena such as the economy, man's relationships with animals, friendship and exchange relations. And so on and so forth, according to the range of possibilities the reader will find developed by the scholarship represented this volume, and which we hope will be further explored in future studies according to the perspective we articulate.

Importance of the Lexicon

The textuality of Roman culture has a very special feature, however: its closure. We mean simply that, unlike those of many other contemporary cultures studied by anthropologists, the cultural "texts" that the Romans have left us cannot be renewed, nor their number increased. Of course, this does not mean that Latin texts have not constantly been (and indeed remain) a locus for the negotiation of meaning and re-reading by those who have inherited them.[5] Only that, apart very minor additions over the course of the centuries, the corpus of Roman literary works has long been fixed, just as the language in which they are written has been frozen for some time now. Yet Latin filters almost every aspect of our knowledge about Roman culture. That is why it is essential to approach the lexicon of

[4] Geertz 1988; Remotti 1988; Dei 1998.
[5] Cf. Roberts et al. 1997.

this language with our eyes wide open: so that we may get hold of whatever it is that this lexicon may offer us in terms of the diverse, the strange, and the unusual. In this way, we observe (providing we are willing, of course) that the Romans frequently expressed notions that we possess and that are in common use among us, but following a semantic course that is profoundly different from ours or for that matter the Greeks'. This procedure suggests to the anthropologist of the ancient world countless *aphormaí* – points of departure and resources – for reflection and research.[6] Taking oddities of the lexicon (as Clyde Kluckhohn or Clifford Geertz perhaps would have put it) as a way to identify particular meanings, and to observe the categories at play in Latin speakers' understanding, appears to us a constructive way of doing anthropology "with" the Romans.[7]

Consider the Romans, for instance, when they present us with something "monstrous": that is, with a *monstrum* – something they would define instead as a "reminding of, warning about" (*monstrum* < *monere*, "to remind; warn"). Would we express this concept in similar terms? We conceive what is "monstrous" as something with terrible, horrible, and surprising features. A "monstrosity" for the Greeks, on the other hand, meant something that was surprising (*thaûma*) or something excessive in size (*pelóron* or *téras*). But, for the Romans, what does a *monstrum* "warn" of and on whose behalf is this warning made? Apparently, what is "monstrous" – a lamb born with a pig's head (Liv. *AUC* 31.12.7) or a rain of milk at Gabii (Jul. Obseq. 14) – gives a warning on behalf of a divinity. Above all, however, defined as "that which warns", the monstrous presents itself as something that exists expressly for this purpose, something that is inscribed in a natural palimpsest constructed for communicating the speech of the gods. What appears to us initially only as an oddity – as a *difference* – becomes, then, a precious resource for observing Roman culture not so much (or not only) through a modern scholar's eyes, but through the eyes of those who constructed and lived that culture. In this sense, lexical semantic studies can offer more valuable data than even literary evidence extracted from ancient authors, since in such cases we need to separate what belongs to the shared code from what is the product of the writer's individual imagination. The lexicon, by contrast, permits us to view the world through a sort of collective lens – that is, through the eyes of the social group that used and shared a given term within its own linguistic competence.

[6] For an expanded discussion of *aphormaí*, see Bettini, *Comparison*, this volume.
[7] As suggested by Detienne 2007, for the Greeks.

Another example. The process we define as "translating" – or "bringing" a text from one language into another – is captured in different languages and cultures through different metaphors. Whereas Italian, French, and Spanish employ the image of "leading across" (*trans* + *ducere*), English employs the image of "carrying across" (*trans* + *latum*). Sanskrit *chāyā* and *vivartana* capture the notion of translation through the image of a "shadow" or an "illusory appearance". In the Nigerian language Igbo, *tapia* and *kowa* combine elements that mean "narrate" and "break (apart)" to construe translation as a practice that first "decomposes" and then "recomposes" a narrative. The Romans, by contrast, used the metaphor of "turning (into)" – *vertere* – relying upon the cultural paradigm of radical transformation or metamorphosis in conceiving translation. When Plautus states that *Maccus vortit barbare* (*As.* 11) and *Plautus vertit barbare* (*Trin.* 19), referring to his translations of Greek plays, he intends his audience to understand that the original has undergone a real transformation. To translate in the sense of Latin *vertere* assumes that the text in question will undergo a change of identity, in the process becoming something entirely different – just like Jupiter who in Plautus' *Amphitruo* "changes into the appearance" (*vertit sese*) of Amphitryon, or Midas who "changes" (*vertit*) everything he touches into gold. At the same time, the Romans also used a metaphor drawn from the domain of trade and exchange to describe the act of translation. The Roman translator (*interpres*) was properly a commercial mediator, as Plautus' use of the term demonstrates, and as is shown by its etymology, which represents this figure as someone who stands "in the middle" (*inter*) and helps define the "price" (*pretium*) a buyer must pay.[8]

Or consider Plautus' *Trinummus*, in which the slave Stasimus admonishes himself for having forgotten a ring in a bar:[9] *tribusne te poteriis / memoria<m> esse oblitum?* "After three swigs of wine, have you forgotten your memory?" (1018–19). Strange expression, "forgetting your memory": some wine they must have served in that *thermopolium*! One could be forgiven for believing it an invention of Plautine comedy – an "Augenblicksbildung", as Leo Spitzer defined certain linguistic creations. However, other evidence reveals it was not merely a "formation for the moment". Cicero (*Deiot.* 13.37), for example, asks, "What length of time can ever conceal, what forgetfulness will ever erase such things?"

[8] On the problem of translation in the ancient world, see Bettini 2012.
[9] The MSS read *memoria*: *memoria<m>* is the emendation of Seyffert 1882, accepted by Leo, Lindsay, and Ernout.

(*en quae umquam vetustas obruet, aut quae tanta delebit oblivio?*).[10] *Oblivio* thus seems to be understood as a kind of force capable of "erasing" or "scraping off" (*delere*) what resides in memory, as if from a wax tablet. The etymological sense of the verb *obliviscor* ("forget") seems to confirm this, moreover: the word is composed of the preposition *ob-*, which signifies directionality "towards" or "against" something, and the root *lew-*, that is found also in the Latin adjective *levis* and in Greek *leîos*, both meaning "smooth" – so that "forgetting" is metaphorically "smoothing out" a surface.[11] An idiosyncratic image, but one that offers interesting *aphormaí* for the willing anthropologist. Beginning from this lexical oddity, we confront a cultural reality in which the letters of the alphabet appear to have totally monopolized the preservation of information. Even for conceptualizing internal states of memory and forgetfulness, Roman culture utilizes the external image of the stylus and scraper. Imagining their own faculties of memory, the Romans think in terms of writing.

It is perhaps opportune at this point to propose a general conclusion. All the possibilities of interpretation that the lexicon may present to us make sense above all when they can be fit within networks of specific cultural practices, which serve to confirm them. In other words, if the Romans define the act of translation (*vertere*) in terms of metamorphosis, what Plautus and Terence are really doing is radically transforming the Greek plots they often used as a basis for their own plays (whence our astonishment at their faithlessness to the original texts). In the same way, if the Romans defined forgetting in terms of "erasure", *damnatio memoriae* finds correspondence in the specific act of erasing – the technical term is *eradere* – someone's name (or image) from the monuments that contain it. Translation as "metamorphosis" and forgetting as "erasing" appear to be cultural representations whose particularity (not to say peculiarity) the lexicon first brings to our attention; wider practice then confirms the "reality" of these figurative understandings.

Metaphors

It is not accidental that we have been using the term "metaphor". For some time now, the idea that metaphor represents a necessary form of knowledge in general and of cultural knowledge in particular has been taking

[10] Cf. Cic. *Phil.* 1.1, *omnem memoriam discordiarum oblivione sempiterna delendam censui*; Fam. 2.1.2; *ND* 1.28. Cf. *TLL* IX.2, 107, 50ff., 83ff.
[11] For this interpretation of *ob-liv-io* and *ob-liv-iscor*, see *DELL*, s.v., with references to M. Bréal.

hold in the humanistic disciplines. Even before George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's formulation of their cognitive theory of metaphor, which has had such a pervasive influence on the human sciences, a certain tradition in philosophy, linguistics, and anthropology had considered an awareness of metaphor crucial to the definition of culture and to getting a handle on the differences between cultures.[12] Metaphor was central to Giambattista Vico's elaboration of his "new science" of culture, providing the means by which human beings experience and have a reality.[13] This notion was echoed by, among others, Friedrich Nietzsche, Northrop Frye, and Kenneth Burke.[14] For the linguist Roman Jakobson, metaphor, along with metonymy, stands at the root of all verbal expression and indeed of all human symbolic activities, including cultural representation.[15] The anthropologists Paul Radin and Franz Boas equally considered the metaphors a society uses to be suitable entry points into its belief systems.[16] Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* put metaphor analysis at the very centre of ethnographic description, and since then social, symbolic, and cognitive anthropologists have viewed "master", "root", or "key" metaphors as in fact constitutive of cultural meaning.[17]

Not that this awareness has been entirely absent from classical studies. Metaphor has often been considered a productive analytical category in studying the language and culture – especially the myths – of the "imaginative" ancient Greeks, and in recent years, a small cottage industry has grown up around this theme.[18] In Roman studies, though, the situation has been quite different. Happily, the view of the Romans as an uncreative, practical, and concrete people – with a language to match – has largely disappeared. Probably no one today would agree with (at least the second part of) George Granville Bradley's assertion that "Latin is an exceedingly clear and direct language … deficient on the imaginative and picturesque side".[19] Still, Latinists have tended to focus on metaphor almost exclusively as a literary concern, often reducing commonalities of metaphorical expression to acts of allusion and mimicry with little bearing outside a game of literary one-upmanship.

Yet the level of language that is probably the most relevant – or at least the most revealing – to anthropology is precisely the level of metaphorical

[12] See esp. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff 1987.
[13] Cf. Vico 1990.
[14] E.g., in Nietzsche 1976 [1873], Frye 1963, and Burke 1966.
[15] See esp. Jakobson 1956.
[16] Cf. Radin 1927 and Boas 1929.
[17] Cf. Lévi-Strauss 1966, Douglas 1966, Fernandez 1977, Ortner 1973, Turner 1974, Basso 1976.
[18] E.g. Ebbott 2003, Alexiou 2002, Ferrari 2002, Barringer 2001, Svenbro 1993.
[19] Bradley 1911, 34.

structure. Through its metaphors, in fact, a language often reveals the cognitive forms or mental models that organize the culture to which it belongs, especially when these metaphors seem to be organized into systems. It is sufficient to recall the classic example of the intricate metaphorical relation that English sets up between "time" and "money".[20] If Lakoff and Johnson had been more open to diachrony, they would have realized that a similar network of metaphors existed in the language and culture of the Romans. Other examples of linguistic and anthropological studies undertaken in the field of Roman cultural metaphors could be cited. For our own part, we can recall research conducted now some time ago into the way Roman culture represents the temporal dimensions of anteriority/posteriority and past/future or constructs the category of "proof" or that of "communication".[21]

Translation(s)

The kind of textual vigilance that we are proposing also has a practical dimension, connected to translation. Obviously, when translating from another language, it is desirable to try to preserve, as much as possible, the quality of differentness or of strangeness that a text may present. Downplaying this quality in favour of what is "modern" or "contemporary" is, in our view, problematic. We do not mean famous cases of blatant camouflage, like Pasolini's rendition of *Miles Gloriosus* in the Roman dialect, that reveal themselves to be not translations, but allusions to an original hidden in a radically new text. Rather, we mean that routine process of "flattening" texts, very often present in facing translations, which never hesitates to smooth, dilute, or even remove in order to produce acceptable phrasing in the target language. In this kind of translation, Stasimus' *memoriam … oblitum* becomes one who "has forgotten what he had in mind" and a *monstrum* will always be simply a "monster". The flattener, of course, does not consider this an issue: after all, isn't it the same word? On this score, we are completely in agreement with Antoine Berman's proposal that translation requires an "experience of strangeness": that is, an openness to the other and a willingness to accept the other in his own language.[22]

[20] Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 7–9, Johnson 1993.
[21] Bettini 1991a, 113–33 and 2011c, 238–54.
[22] Berman 1991, esp. 43–52. A radically different vision of translation can be seen in Longobardi's recent and admirable translation of Petronius' *Satyricon* (2008), in which a *civis Romanus* becomes "de' Roma", *pertractato vasculo*, "stroking his natural little vase", *suam cuique rem esse carissimam*, "There's no place like home", and so forth. See esp. Longobardi's introductory discussion, which argues these positions with the fiercest theory.

Understood in this way, translation does not pretend or deceive; instead, it reveals, becoming not only what Berman calls "l'auberge du lointain", but also the zero grade of an anthropology of the ancient world.

"The good God is in the details", Aby Warburg used to say.[23] Yes – and in metaphorical constructions, in words, and in some cases in suffixes, too. Indeed, the meticulous, exacting study of a suffix – asking what kinds of roots it normally combines with, exploring the constellation of meanings that bind these elements together and the semantic classes that emerge in this way – can provide valuable insight capable of increasing our understanding of the way in which the Romans constructed certain cultural representations. Admittedly, it is not always easy to find a suffix "odd" in Kluckhohn's or Geertz's sense of the word. Very often, however, a serious attempt to do so will be repaid in fascinating, surprising ways. Take the rare suffix *-bula*, which occurs in *su-bula* ("awl", an instrument used by cobblers, from *suere*, "to stitch"); *fi(g)-bula* ("fastener", from *figere*, "to fasten"); *mandi-bula* ("mandible", literally, "instrument for chewing", from *mandere*, "to chew"), and *tri-bula* ("harrow for beating grain", from *terere*, "to beat, wear down"). From this, we can deduce that the suffix designates the instrument that serves to complete the action indicated by the verb. That is not all, however. We also note that the suffix regularly occurs in words indicating instruments that have the ability to work deeply upon some material, gouging it with points (*subula, fibula*) or teeth (*mandibula, tribula*). The suffix thus functions as what linguists call a "submorphemic differential", that is, a cluster of phonemes, common to a set of words, that as such implies their semantic relatedness.[24] Does this imply that *fabula* – the Roman "fable" (< *fari*) – is also a kind of instrument that works deeply upon its material, something capable of profoundly modifying its object? These *aphormaí* suggest interesting considerations of how the Romans conceived of *fabula*, and thus of how they represented what we would define as "discourse" or "narrative".[25] Similarly, what does the fact that the suffix *-mō*, *-mōnis* defines a lexical field whose constituents include gods of the natural world along with other divinized objects suggest about how the Romans understood *sermo*, "speech, discourse; conversation"?

Our focus on linguistic structure as probably the most immediate index to culture should not be taken, however, to indicate our adherence to

[23] Warburg 1980, 623–5.
[24] The concept has been developed especially by Bolinger 1965.
[25] See esp. Ferro 2006. For an analysis of the ways in which the linguistic act of *fari* is realized – a way of speaking that possesses the traits of efficacy and even of divine force – see Bettini 2008a.

any strong form of the so-called "linguistic relativity hypothesis" – to any notion, that is, that the (morphological, lexical, syntactic) structure of the Latin language determines (in the sense of "limits") its speakers' possible pathways of thought, obligating them to a particular worldview. Benjamin Lee Whorf, to whom this hypothesis traditionally is ascribed, believed that language constituted the primary means of organizing experience. As he wrote, "We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds."[26] Our view is, instead, that language is a part of culture and that culture is a part of language, the two being so inextricably bound up that we can probably speak legitimately of a "languaculture".[27] As the most sophisticated medium for constructing and expressing complex symbolic representations, as well as arguably the mechanism most responsible for the transmission of these representations, language therefore stands out for us as the form of expressive activity that best reveals the culture it embodies. But we would not commit the category mistake of equating language with culture.

Nor, again, should our preference for using linguistic evidence in establishing the existence of cultural patterns be misconstrued as an undervaluation of archaeology's or art history's contribution to anthropological enquiry.[28] On the contrary, in our view, the entire matrix of Roman society's artefacts – including not only its written texts, but also its manufactured products of all kinds, such as tools, bridges, roads, houses, and works of art (all of the things, that is, commonly grouped under the rubric of "material culture") – reflect and embody the symbolic codes constituting culture and thus provide good evidence of it.[29] At least two of the essays included in this collection – Cristiano Viglietti's *Economy* and Giuseppe Pucci's *Images* – are strongly archaeologically and iconographically oriented, and several others incorporate material evidence. Nevertheless, it seems inescapable that archaeological and art historical evidence must often be interpreted

[26] Whorf 1940, 213–14.
[27] The term is meant to capture the inextricability of language and culture. Agar 1994, 96 explains: "The *langua* in languaculture is about discourse, not just about words and sentences. And the *culture* in languaculture is about meanings that include, but go well beyond, what the dictionary and the grammar offer."
[28] What Enfield 2000 calls the "linguocentrism" of many anthropological approaches.
[29] Cf. Goodenough 1964.