1 Introduction

1.1 Scope and Aims

The Roman conquest, i.e. the annexation of new territories by the expanding Roman state, was one of the most important processes of the ancient world. Starting as a relatively small city-state in central Italy, over the course of several centuries Rome gradually expanded its dominion to the point that by the second century AD it extended from the Atlantic coast of Iberia to the Near East, and from northern Britain to the Sahara (Morley 2010; Woolf 2022) (Figure 1). A vast body of literature by both ancient historians and archaeologists documents the multiple military campaigns and strategies that were employed in order to incorporate new territories (e.g. Badian 1968; James 2011; Maschek 2021). The Roman military has been an attractive field of study since at least the nineteenth century, and it continues to captivate the interest of scholars and the public alike. This is reflected not only in academic publications, but also in popular books, museums, and re-enactment groups.

Why, then, do we need a new publication on this topic, and what makes this volume different? While we do not claim to present data that are completely novel, our aim has been to produce an up-to-date overview of Rome's military conquest campaigns in the West, summarising a large amount of information in combination with a theoretically informed approach and some original interpretations. This is a timely moment for this task. The last few decades have witnessed an enormous increase in the quantity and quality of archaeological evidence related to various Roman wars of conquest (e.g. Fitzpatrick and Haselgrove 2019; Roymans and Fernández-Götz 2019). More widely, the rapid development of conflict archaeology as a field of study that increasingly engages with the prehistoric and early historic periods (Dolfini et al. 2018; Fernández-Götz and Roymans 2018), as well as the growing importance of theoretical perspectives influenced by postcolonial and decolonial approaches (cf. Belvedere and Bergemann 2021; Cahana-Blum and MacKendrick 2019; Gardner 2013), have opened up new methodological and theoretical avenues for studying the growing corpus of evidence. In this sense, the aims of this Element volume are manifold:

1) Move beyond the traditional focus on Roman frontier studies in order to concentrate on the actual moment of military conquest and its immediate aftermath.
2) Summarise a large body of recent archaeological data related to the Roman wars of conquest in the Late Republican and Early Imperial periods.
3) Contribute to the wider field of conflict archaeology through a number of theoretical and methodological reflections.

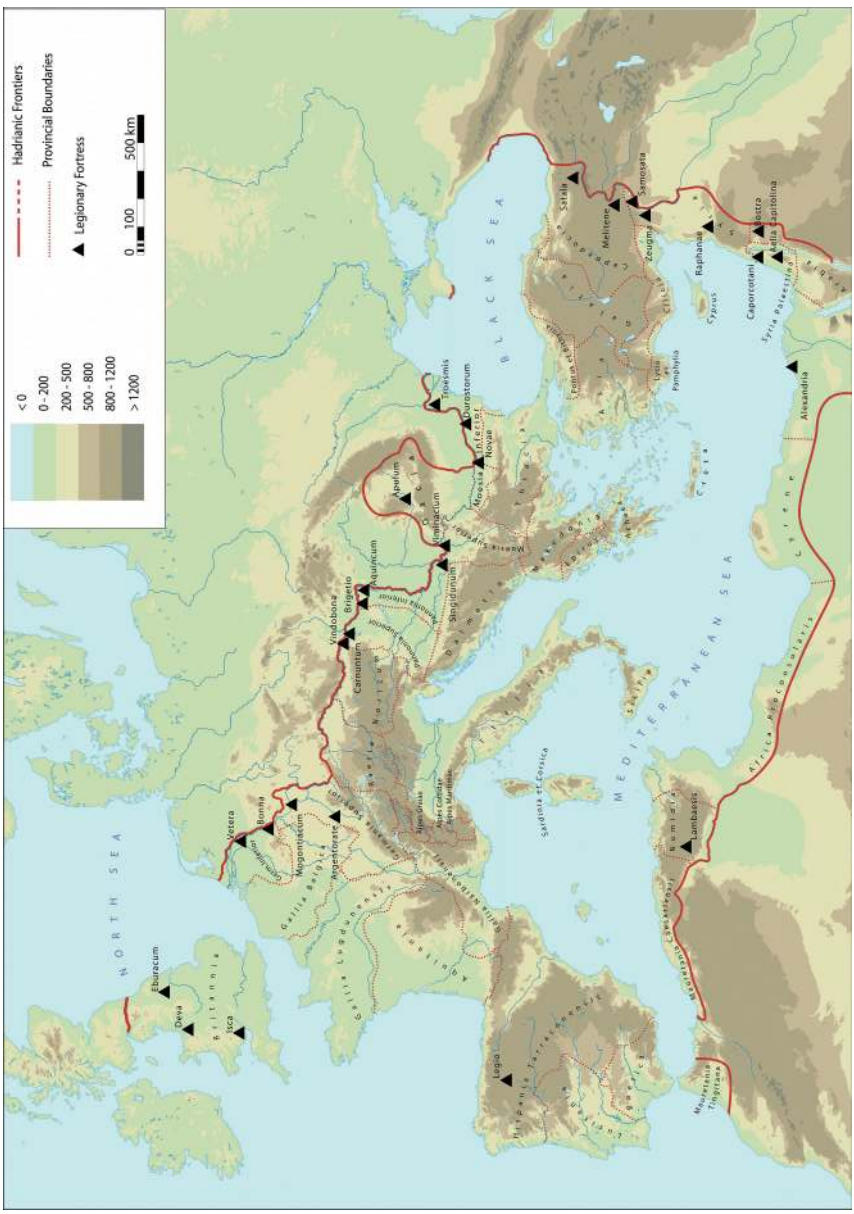

Figure 1 Map of the Roman Empire at the height of its expansion (image: D. Breeze)

4) Put the focus on the impact of the conquest on indigenous populations, thus reclaiming the memory of the communities that were forcibly incorporated into the Roman state.

In this Element, we use the term 'indigenous' primarily to refer to the Late Iron Age populations of Western and Central Europe that in many cases ended up being conquered by Rome, keeping in mind that indigenous groupings were dynamic and that there was considerable diversity between and within them. In this sense, our use of the term is very similar to the recent proposal by Shaw (in press). With this in mind, our goal is to present existing data in an accessible way and at the same time open new avenues for future research within and beyond the Roman world. To conform to the format of the Cambridge University Press Elements Series and their aim of producing concise overview works with a limit of around 30,000 words, we have decided to focus on a number of selected case studies. Geographically, our focus is on the Roman conquest of Western and Central Europe, with examples from ancient Gaul, Iberia, *Germania*, and Britain. Chronologically, we concentrate on the Late Republican and Early Imperial periods, more specifically on a number of military campaigns that range from the middle of the first century BC to the late first century AD. For reasons of space, we also focus primarily on the military campaigns and their repercussions, although we fully recognise the importance that other strategies of diplomacy and control (e.g. bribery of and collaboration with certain local elites) had in the process of integration into the Roman world. In any case, beyond this specific geographical and chronological scope, we hope that some of the approaches outlined in the volume can also be of interest to scholars working on other regions and periods.

After this introduction, the Element follows a roughly chronological order with most sections dedicated to a specific case study: Caesar's Gallic Wars (Section 2); the Cantabrian and Asturian Wars (Section 3); the Germanic Wars of Augustus (Section 4); and Rome's conquest of Britain (Section 5). Finally, Section 6 addresses some wider implications of the research for our understanding of Roman expansionism and its impact on local communities.

1.2 Beyond *Limes* Archaeology

Traditionally, much of the research on the Roman military has focused on so-called *limes* archaeology, i.e. the study of the frontier installations and infrastructure established in the provinces after the actual conquest had already taken place (Breeze 2018; Breeze et al. 2015; Schallmayer 2011). *Limes* archaeology represents a fascinating field of study that has made enormous contributions since the nineteenth century, not only from an academic perspective but also in

terms of heritage management and visitor attractions through initiatives such as the Frontiers of the Roman Empire UNESCO World Heritage network. Monuments such as Hadrian's Wall and its associated forts in northern Britain, or the *Limes Germanicus* on the continent, are impressive examples of Rome's desire to consolidate its borders and regulate flow through them (Figure 2). However, due to its very nature, *limes* archaeology is mainly focused on the material remains that were aimed at protecting the conquered territories from potential outside attacks. Therefore, from this perspective the predominant approach has been to conceptualise the Roman army as the 'defender' of peace and civilian life in the provinces against external 'barbarian' enemies.

Our proposal in this Element volume is not necessarily in contradiction to *limes* archaeology, but it adopts a different, in our view complementary, approach, both temporally and conceptually. Our main focus is on the period of the Roman conquest itself, i.e. during the military campaigns as well as their immediate aftermath. This implies a different set of research questions and methodologies than *limes* archaeology. From the perspective of the archaeology of conquest, the Roman army acted as the aggressor, as a military force that imposed Roman rule on previously independent populations. Thus, the Roman military is frequently associated with episodes of violence and mass enslavement, and in some instances even potential cases of genocide. As previously indicated, this focus on the archaeology of

Figure 2 Image of Hadrian's Wall, which marked the northernmost frontier of the Roman Empire for nearly three centuries (photo: D. Breeze)

conquest is not in contradiction to *limes* archaeology, but it investigates a different side of the same coin. It does in any case highlight the 'darker sides' of Roman imperialism (Fernández-Götz et al. 2020; Raaflaub 2021; Taylor 2023), which means uncovering the more brutal sides and consequences of the conquest process.

1.3 Footprinting the Legions: Challenges and Possibilities

While most of the wars of conquest are mentioned – sometimes in considerable detail – in ancient written sources and the Roman army has been the focus of considerable scholarly work, for a long time the military campaigns themselves received relatively little attention from archaeologists. There are, of course, some exceptions of well-studied battlefields such as *Alesia* (Reddé and von Schnurbein 2001), but in general the amount of energy invested in the study of the archaeological remains of the conquest campaigns has been considerably less than in fields such as *limes* archaeology or the analysis of Roman domestic architecture, to name just two examples. At the risk of oversimplifying, and taking into account the existence of numerous nuances, we can identify three main factors that have played a role in this situation:

1) The problem of the chronological resolution of much of the archaeological material, which hinders analyses on the timescale of the *histoire événementielle* (at the level of specific decades or even years) and makes it difficult to establish direct connections to historically documented military campaigns. For example, based on material culture alone it is usually extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine if a specific Gallic *oppidum* was abandoned shortly before, during, or slightly after Caesar's Gallic Wars.
2) The challenges in obtaining a tangible grasp on the remains of mobile armies and battlefields, a problem not exclusive to the archaeology of the Roman conquest but shared by much of conflict archaeology research. Marching camps, for example, were only occupied for a few days or weeks, usually leaving scarce material finds. Battlefields, for their part, are exceptional sites because of their large size (often covering hundreds of hectares), the absence of stratigraphy, the ephemeral nature of most material remains, and the scarcity of structural features. Battles can be very significant, but at the same time they very often last for only a few days or even hours. The immense damage and demographic losses inflicted by armies that ravaged the countryside using scorched-earth strategies are also normally difficult to identify archaeologically. Burning farmsteads, destroying harvests, stealing cattle, and enslaving, raping, or killing people are all acts that have an enormous impact on the civilian population (Figure 3), but can leave little or no trace in the archaeological record.

Figure 3 Destruction of a Germanic village by Roman troops during the Marcomannic Wars (AD 166–180); scene from the Column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome (image: © Alamy)

3) Finally, much of the research has traditionally tended to emphasise the supposedly 'positive' consequences of the Roman conquest, particularly in temperate Europe where integration into the Roman Empire has often been portrayed as the introduction of 'civilisation' to previously 'barbarian' populations. In this vein, the more brutal aspects of the conquest period have – consciously or unconsciously – frequently been ignored or underplayed, with many narratives focusing on the supposed 'bright' sides, such as the spread of literacy, the development of villa landscapes, and the erection of monumental architecture. Partly for this reason, as well as the previous point about the scarcity and ephemeral nature of much of the conflict-related material evidence, scholarship has tended to focus more on remains that are easier to identify and more spectacular to preserve and present to the public: uncovering a mosaic or a Roman bath building has traditionally received more attention than trying to search for the tenuous traces of marching legions and destroyed hamlets. This, in a way, is not dissimilar to the tendency to prioritise the excavation of aristocratic villas or commander's headquarters instead of the homes of the humble peasants or the barracks of the ordinary soldiers.

The scarcity of direct material evidence for many of the military campaigns has led some scholars to conclude that the Roman wars of conquest had limited societal impact. For example, just a few decades ago Caesar's actions in northern Gaul or Augustus' conquest of northern Spain were almost untraceable in the archaeological record, which resulted in many ancient historians and

archaeologists underestimating the dramatic consequences that the wars had on the indigenous communities of those regions – and this despite the ancient written sources explicitly mentioning the brutality of the campaigns.

However, as outlined at the beginning of this section, the situation has been changing in the last couple of decades. This is again due to several, sometimes interrelated, factors:

1) The increased quantity and quality of the archaeological data available for many regions, which have sparked a breakthrough in our knowledge of the military campaigns and their repercussions; the case studies presented in the following sections are a case in point.
2) The development of conflict archaeology, which has triggered interest in the topic of mass violence and led to an enhancement of the methodologies available for its study (Pollard and Banks 2005; Scott et al. 2009). The latter include specific research strategies for battle sites, the widespread use of remote sensing methods for identifying conflict-related military installations such as marching camps, and the use of isotope and ancient DNA analyses for the study of human remains (cf. Roymans and Fernández-Götz 2018).
3) The influence of postcolonial and decolonial thinking, which has generated greater interest in the negative consequences of imperialism and conquest, including in the case of the Roman world (e.g. Lavan 2020; Mattingly 2011; Padilla Peralta 2020). In addition, and partly complementary to this, there is growing interest within archaeology for perspectives 'from below' centred on the lives of ordinary people (Thurston and Fernández-Götz 2021), and Roman studies are also increasingly engaging with this trend (Bowes 2021).

1.4 Themes and Methodologies of an Archaeology of the Roman Conquest

The maturity of conflict archaeology has led to the recognition that this sub-discipline is about much more than just the study of battlefields (Fernández-Götz and Roymans 2018; Saunders 2012). While the latter continues to be very important and attracts the greatest attention, there are many other ways in which archaeology can, directly or indirectly, contribute to the study of the Roman wars of conquest and their social impact on affected communities (Roymans and Fernández-Götz 2019). This includes, for instance, the investigation of military encampments from the war and post-war periods; the study of the weaponry and fortification techniques employed by the different combating parties; the analysis of indigenous settlement patterns to identify potential cases of discontinuity; the use of palaeoenvironmental data to assess the impact of

Roman expansion on the landscape; and the research of post-conflict ritual depositions and/or commemorative structures. While there are multiple avenues for research, here we want to highlight the potential of archaeology for our understanding of the Roman conquest in regard to three main themes, which will be illustrated in more detail in the following sections:

1) *Roman military installations and infrastructure*. The starting point for archaeological research is usually the identification and exploration of Roman military structures (both permanent forts and temporary camps) and marching routes. This type of research is not new in itself and has been pursued since antiquarian times. The main difference is that we now have at our disposal a set of advanced methods that is revolutionising our knowledge. This includes, for example, the systematic use of aerial photography and LiDAR data, which has led to the identification of large numbers of previously unknown marching camps, particularly in mountainous and/or forested areas such as northern Spain (Section 3). Once identified, the study of Roman military installations is benefiting from enhanced excavation and documentation methods, as well as metal-detecting and geophysical surveys. An example of this type of state-of-the-art investigation is the work carried out at the Caesarian site of Hermeskeil in the Trier region of Germany (Hornung 2018).
2) *Battlefields and sieges*. Directly linked to the previous point is the identification and study of battlefields and sieges related to the Roman conquest. Some of them are mentioned in written sources and have been identified archaeologically without any reservation, as in the case of *Alesia* in central Gaul (Reddé 2018a; Reddé and von Schnurbein 2001). Other identifications are still debated, such as the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest at the site of Kalkriese in Lower Saxony (Burmeister 2022; Moosbauer 2009; Wells 2003), or just tentative as in the case of *Bergida* – Monte Bernorio in northern Spain (Brown et al. 2017). Finally, there are also battles not mentioned in ancient written sources (or at least not in sources that have survived) but which have been identified archaeologically, such as Harzhorn in Lower Saxony (Meyer 2018; Moosbauer 2018). Building upon the seminal work undertaken by Scott and his team on the nineteenth-century Battle of Little Bighorn in the USA (Scott et al. 1989), in the past few decades archaeology has made substantial progress in developing fieldwork strategies adapted to the special characteristics of battle sites (Meller 2009; Scott and McFeaters 2011). Most effective appears to be a combination of survey techniques (metal detection, aerial photography, LiDAR-based elevation models, etc.) and small-scale targeted excavations aimed at testing hypotheses. This methodology has been

successfully applied, for example, at the Second Punic War Battle of *Baecula* in southeast Spain (Bellón et al. 2015). In addition to open battles, such as Kalkriese and Harzhorn, attacks on fortified indigenous settlements by the Roman army are also attested. Evidence for the latter can sometimes be uncovered on a spectacular scale, as demonstrated by the thousands of arrowheads identified at the *oppidum* of La Loma in northern Spain (Peralta et al. 2022; cf. Section 3) or the hundreds of lead sling bullets found at Burnswark hillfort in Scotland (Reid and Nicholson 2019; cf. Section 5). These types of finds, together with other characteristic items such as the hobnails from the sandal-boots (*caligae*) of the Roman soldiers, help us to 'footprint' the legions during the conquest campaigns.

3) *Demographic consequences of the conquest*. Written accounts from the classical world as well as analogies with later historical periods clearly show that military campaigns can have a dramatic, negative effect on the demography of conquered regions. This refers not only to the casualties produced by direct military combat, but also to massacres of non-combatant populations, the effects of systematic scorched-earth campaigns by invading armies (leading to hunger, starvation, and illness), the deportation and mass enslavement of groups, and the fleeing of refugees (Figure 4). Mass violence appears to have been a systematic aspect of Rome's military expansion and

Figure 4 Refugees from the battle of *Baecula* (Proyecto Baecula/PastWomen; illustration: I. Diéguez)

Roman society was very familiar with the use of collective violence, sometimes in extreme forms. This is amply illustrated in Roman iconography, for example on Trajan's Column and the Column of Marcus Aurelius. In some cases, classical authors report estimated numbers of casualties: for example, Appian (*Roman History* 4. *The Celtic Book* 1) and Plutarch (*Caesar* 15) claim that Caesar killed one million and enslaved another million of his Gallic opponents. Even if these numbers were exaggerated, there is little doubt that the conquest of Gaul must have had a substantial demographic impact. However, historical sources also suggest that there were major regional differences in the direct demographic effect of the Roman wars of conquest. Whereas in some regions the population seems to have remained fairly stable, in others the annexation process was extremely violent and would have led to a significant demographic decline, with episodes of at least partial depopulation in the years or even decades following the conquest (cf. Section 2.5). Archaeology can make a significant contribution to this debate by studying settlement pattern trajectories in case study regions: do we observe a marked continuity between the pre- and post-conquest periods, or rather a sharp discontinuity that could reflect a demographic decrease caused by the conquest? A precondition for this assessment is the availability of a substantial body of high-quality settlement data in combination with a well-developed chronological framework. In addition, palaeoenvironmental data in the form of pollen diagrams can shed light on human landscape use that might contribute to the discussion: was there an increase in cultivated areas, or rather a reduction of human activity and a surge in arboreal pollen?

1.5 Towards Interdisciplinary and Multidimensional Approaches

The study of the Roman conquest and its consequences requires interdisciplinary and multidimensional approaches. Interdisciplinary, because it should combine all available sources of information by incorporating both literary accounts and archaeological data within a contextual framework. Thus, classical authors often provide crucial information when describing aspects such as military routes, siege works, and battles, as well as elements of the wider background including information on political strategies, alliances, and negotiations. At the same time, each individual source needs to be subjected to a critical and contextual analysis in order to assess its degree of reliability, disentangling aspects such as literary *topoi*, personal agendas, and imperial propaganda. When referring to outside enemies and conquered populations, we always need to keep in mind that classical sources are providing etic descriptions that are often incomplete and influenced by biases, stereotypes, and political agendas (Woolf 2011).