

Urban Romanization Theory: Case Studies from Lugdunum and Sarmizegetusa

The process of Romanization within the provinces of the Roman Empire has long been a contentious topic between scholars of provincial studies. Defined under Theodor Mommsen and refined under Francis Haverfield, the original model of Romanization focused on a bilateral process of cultural transference between Romans and “natives” that supported imperialistic ideals of the early 20th century (Chappell 2005). In recent scholarship, a new model has been proposed that supports a more organic process that takes into account the diverse and complicated cultural amalgamations of how “the inhabitants come to be, and to think of themselves as, Roman” (Woolf via Harris 1998). This model accounts for the significant developmental differences between provinces and lacks the overt hierarchy of cultures the original model espoused. I plan to evaluate how this Romanization theory may be applied to different provinces and how it may be better defined to reflect diverse archaeological evidence through a study of material culture, literary evidence, and urban development at Lugdunum in Gaul and Sarmizegetusa in Dacia.

The site of Lugdunum was founded in 43 BC under Lucius Munatius Plancus and was named the new capital of Gallia Lugdunensis, while Sarmizegetusa was founded as the new capital of Dacia in 106 AD under Trajan at the conclusion of the second Dacian War. Both urban centers developed quickly upon geographically disadvantageous positions and were transformed into lucrative and highly “Romanized” centers. The discrepancy in dates offers two polarized microcosms of Roman urban development that follow similar foundational patterns with vastly different results. Both sites were established well within the borders of the new Province and were chosen less for their economic advantages and more for their lack of significant previous native occupation (Drinkwater 1975).

Lugdunum shows particularly clear signs of Romanization through its ethnically diverse population, taking on many facets of Roman culture in its early formation (Woolf 1998). Sarmizegetusa, on the other hand, lacks evidence of ethnic Dacians sufficiently participating in urban life, suggesting either a conscious rejection of it or the lack of opportunity to assimilate (Otlean 2007). Although the division of the Roman Empire between West and East can account for differing levels of Romanization at provincial sites, I believe there is more nuanced archaeological evidence for Romanization that can explain the variations of Romanization seen in the Provinces. Lugdunum and Sarmizegetusa provide an interesting juxtaposition of a native provincial people and their adoption and assimilation of a foreign culture.

This new shift in Romanization theory, in relation to how urban centers are understood as cultural provincial microcosms of social blending, leads us to new ways in which scholars can address the Romanization of a Province. Lugdunum and Sarmizegetusa are especially indicative of this. I plan to show how the new model of Romanization can be used as a lens to reimagine the complex socio-political, economic, and cultural transferences within these heterogeneous sites. Urban developments in these two diverse sites both vary and coalesce regarding the success and reception of Romanization in each respective Province.

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