

Institution: University of St Andrews
Unit of Assessment: 31 (Classics)
Title of case study: Shaping public perceptions of the Roman army
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Dr Coulston's pioneering research on the Roman army and on ancient representations of Roman soldiers (especially but not exclusively in visual media) has:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. enabled several UK museums to improve the classification and display of their Roman material. (<i>Heritage management</i>) ii. helped a wide range of media companies in the UK and North America to produce historically accurate representations of the Roman army. (<i>Contributing to creative sector</i>) iii. enriched the experience of various non-academic user groups in the UK, Europe and North America with a passionate interest in the Roman army, including (a) Roman army re-enactors, modellers, illustrators and amateur historians, as well as (b) other members of the general public. (<i>Public understanding and enriching cultural life</i>)
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Study of the Roman army – from both archaeological and cultural-historical perspectives – has been a vigorous growth area in recent scholarship. Coulston has been a leading figure in that development. Since appointment at St Andrews in 1995, his research has deepened our understanding of the equipment and appearance of Roman soldiers, their self-representation in visual media, and their treatment by other communities in the Roman world. His work is based on comparative study of (i) equipment artefacts archaeologically recovered from Roman military contexts, and (ii) representations of and by soldiers from across the territory of the former Roman empire. Key outputs include:</p> <p>(a) The second edition of Bishop and Coulston, <i>Roman Military Equipment</i> (output 2). Internationally recognised as the authority in the field, it is indispensable for anyone interested in the Roman army. The book surveys the appearance and function of the full range of military equipment items and draws new conclusions about the evolution of Roman military equipment and the social status of the Roman soldier. The second edition (2006, 1200 items in the bibliography) involved large-scale expansion and revision from the first (1993, 700 items), in order to take account of new developments in many areas of the field.</p> <p>(b) Studies of representations of Roman soldiers in metropolitan Rome: esp. Coulston 2000 (output 1) which engages with the 2,662 human figures and 542 items of spoliated equipment on Trajan's Column in Rome (facilitated by access to scaffolding covering the monuments) and offers new arguments about the significance of those images for our understanding of the Roman army.</p> <p>(c) Studies of the self-representation of military communities. Coulston 2007 (output 3) analyses 750 surviving figural gravestones from across the Roman world which depict Roman soldiers as they wished to be remembered. Coulston 2013 (output 5) explores perceptions of courage and cowardice by serving soldiers and veterans, and sheds new light on the ancient evidence by comparing it with post-classical military cultures.</p> <p>(d) A study of the self-representation of gladiators: Coulston 2009 (output 4) offers new arguments for the differences between gladiators and soldiers, but also especially for similarities in their techniques of self-representation: gladiators are often depicted in similar form to soldiers and in many of the same media, especially figural gravestones, despite the fact that they had much lower status.</p>

3. References to the research

1. Coulston, J.C.N., "'Armed and belted men": the soldiery in imperial Rome', in Coulston, J. and Dodge, H. (eds.), *Ancient Rome. The Archaeology of the Eternal City*, Oxford, **2000**, 76-118 [peer-reviewed edited volume]
2. Bishop, M.C. and Coulston, J.C.N., *Roman Military Equipment from the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome*, Oxford, **2006** [internationally recognised as the authority in the field]
3. Coulston, J.C.N., 'Art, culture and service: the depiction of soldiers on funerary monuments of the 3rd century AD', in Blois, L. de (ed.), *Impact of Empire VI*, Amsterdam, **2007**, 529-61 [peer-reviewed chapter presenting new approaches to the funerary iconography of soldiers based on the whole corpus of empire-wide finds]
4. Coulston, J.C.N., 'Victory and defeat in the Roman arena: the evidence of gladiatorial iconography', in Wilmott, T. (ed.), *Roman Amphitheatres and Spectacula: a 21st Century Perspective*, Oxford, **2009**, 195-210 [an innovative study of gladiatorial fighting-styles, body-language and status in Roman society]
5. Coulston, J.C.N., 'Courage and cowardice in the Roman imperial army', *War in History* 20.1, **2013**, 7-31 [peer-reviewed article in the UK's leading journal of warfare studies] [DOI: [10.1177/0968344512454518](https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344512454518)]

4. Details of the impact

Bishop and Coulston 2006 (**output 2**) lies at the heart of the impact claimed here. It is regularly consulted by museum staff, media companies, artists, and historical re-enactors striving for accurate identification and depiction of Roman military equipment. The research underlying that work has enabled Coulston to offer advice on these issues to a large number of organisations. More broadly, the research underlying all five of the listed publications has allowed him to enhance public understanding of the Roman army both nationally and internationally, for example through his media consultations (including work for North American magazine and television companies) and public lectures. These influences have been concentrated in three areas.

i. Heritage management: improvement of museum displays

A number of UK museums have drawn on Coulston's research, by direct consultation and by use of Bishop and Coulston 2006 (**output 2**), in order to improve the classification and public display of their holdings. Most importantly, in 2012, Coulston acted as advisor to a restructuring project for Housesteads Museum on Hadrian's Wall, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A senior curator for English Heritage writes (**source 1**): *'[After initial consultation in person] I commissioned a report [from him] on the sculptural and epigraphic material from the site. The project also relied heavily on Coulston's earlier work on Roman military fittings with Dr Mike Bishop. Coulston's analysis was key to our selection of artefacts for display, and in how we chose to interpret them. Beyond the rigour of academic description, his willingness to consider the circumstances, mechanisms and personal aspects which may have inspired the creation of the pieces provided a more personal and intimate narrative though which our audiences now access meaning in the collection... Dr Coulston's ability to make comparison with other assemblages from along the Wall and elsewhere in Britain, and to then distill the particular significances and narratives within the site collection was essential in giving our interpretation depth, confidence and clarity'*. Bishop and Coulston 2006 (**output 2**) has also been used regularly by staff in the National Museum of Scotland during 2008-13 for informing new displays on Roman material, researching newly excavated finds and answering public queries. In addition, since 2009 Coulston has annually presented his study of Roman military equipment finds on ancient battlefields at the Conflict Archaeology Short Course held jointly by Cranfield University and The Joint Defence Academy of the United Kingdom at Shrivenham, a public event attended by numerous heritage industry professionals.

ii. Contributing to the creative sector: consulting work for media companies

Coulston regularly advises media companies seeking to meet the huge public demand for material on Roman military and gladiatorial culture. During 2008-13 he has helped a range of television and print media companies to produce historically accurate representations and interpretations. That advice has been underpinned by decades of research on the Roman army, and in particular by the five outputs listed above. Examples include:

- (a) Consultations and filmed interviews for television documentaries on Roman military and

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gladiatorial subjects during 2008-2013. i) *The Varian Disaster*, series *Perfect Storms*, EOne Entertainment, Toronto, for History TC Canada, UK Yesterday and National Geographic Channel (filmed interviews, London, May 2012), where his contribution focused both on military equipment and on the experience of warfare in the forests of Germany, drawing esp. on **output 2** and **output 5**. ii) *Truth Behind the Film: Gladiator*, Blinkfilm for National Geographic Channel (filmed interviews, London, June 2010), where his contribution focused on gladiatorial experience and self-presentation, and on the connections between soldiers and gladiators, drawing esp. on **outputs 1** and **4**. iii) *Septimius Severus*, Lion TV Scotland (filmed interviews, Scotland, Oct. 2009), putting Roman warfare in northern Britain into the context of the Roman army and military equipment in the wider Roman world, drawing esp. on **outputs 1** and **2**.

(b) Contributions to print media during 2008-2013. i) Ongoing consultancy work for the archaeology correspondent of the *Independent*, which has involved lengthy telephone conversations on average three or four times per year during 2008-13. Recent consultations have involved discussion of new finds of Roman helmets at Hallaton Hill, Leics and Crosby Garrett, Cumbria (the latter having been reconstructed and auctioned controversially without proper archaeological consultation), drawing on Dr Coulston's military equipment specialisation (esp. **output 2**); and the Roman cemetery at York (where the evidence of skeletal pathology suggests burial of gladiators), drawing on Dr Coulston's expertise in gladiatorial culture (esp. **output 4**). The *Independent's* archaeology correspondent writes (**source 2**): '*My ability to communicate new discoveries, new ideas and new thinking to the general public is...utterly dependent on the quality of the information I receive from the academic world. In the field of Roman military archaeology (essential to creating a public understanding of Roman Britain and its long-term impact on modern Britain), Jonathan Coulston's knowledge, published articles, commitment and advice have been essential in enabling me to inform my readers*'. ii) Consultant on Roman military and gladiatorial equipment for two pictorial reconstructions in *National Geographic Magazine*, drawing especially on **outputs 2** and **4** ('Roman Frontiers', Sept. 2012, 106-27; 'New Old Libya', Feb. 2013, 28-59). A representative of the magazine writes (**source 3**): '*Dr Jon Coulston has been instrumental in helping us to create and refine artwork developed in conjunction with two...stories... His in-depth knowledge of the time period, numerous publications (Roman Military Equipment in particular), and keen eye for detail have been invaluable to our research staff, editors, and artists. His expertise helped us to achieve the standard of excellence and journalistic integrity our readers have come to expect from the magazine.*' iii) Popular magazine interview on aspects of Roman army training, equipment and battle by Ben Beaumont-Thomas, 'Could you have survived as a Roman soldier?', *FHM*, April 2011, 94-102, drawing esp. on **outputs 2, 3** and **5**. iv) Authored article, 'Late Roman Military Equipment: Culture, Arms and the Man during the Dominate', *Ancient Warfare*, Dec. 16, 2012, 14-19, including collaboration with a commissioned artist to produce a historically accurate depiction of Roman military equipment and dress, drawing esp. on **output 2**.

(c) Production of online material. He has contributed to the BBC website *The Roman Army* with a series of own-copyright images and supporting texts which focus on Roman military equipment and iconography (http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/romanarmy_gallery.shtml), drawing especially on **outputs 1, 2** and **3**, and providing images for public engagement which would otherwise be difficult to access (last updated in 2011).

iii. Cultural life: enriching the experience of our cultural heritage

In addition to influencing heritage managers and media companies, the research underlying the listed publications has made a major difference to wider public understanding of the Roman army.

Particularly striking is Coulston's influence on Roman army re-enactors, modellers, illustrators and amateur historians. Bishop and Coulston 2006 (**output 2**) is heavily used by these groups to inform their reconstructions of costumes and equipment. The Chair of the late Roman reconstruction group *Comitatus* and of the organisation 'Historical Interpretations', which provides activity days for school children, writes (**source 4**): '*Via "Historical Interpretations" Roman days, Jon's ideas on the Roman military are taught to roughly 2,000 children each year. Comitatus relies heavily on Jon's work... With 50 active members Comitatus performs to around 24,000 members of the public each year. While the military displays are visually stimulating, the scripted commentary carefully describes the equipment on display and the nature of the late Roman army. Much of this can be traced to Jon's publications... His views on Roman archery and especially the use of strung bow cases caused a new approach to be taken within Comitatus, and he is the*

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*touchstone against which new items of equipment are introduced... It is fair to say every re-enactment group uses Jon's work to improve their presentation, and this in turn has an impact on the heritage industry. Archaeological sites hire Roman re-enactment groups to help boost visitor numbers, while cities with a strong Roman connection such as Chester and York use costumed guides dressed to help tourism. The standard of such off-the-shelf Roman equipment has noticeably improved over the past twenty years in part due to Roman Military Equipment. Computer and figure war gamers use Jon's work to develop figurines and models, while military illustrators base their own reconstructions on Jon's work'. One member of the Ermine St Guard (Britain's first Roman re-enactment society) writes (source 5): 'it is fairly safe to say that Bishop and Coulston rank alongside Carol van Driel-Murray, Simon James and Mark Hassal as the chief influences on the society'. Coulston's work has also had sustained influence on authors for the popular history-of-warfare Osprey series (it is cited in 11 volumes from that series). Graham Sumner, a leading reconstruction artist, describes Coulston's influence on his work as an illustrator and author for the Osprey series and other popular-history publications (with reference among others to Sumner (2008) *Roman Military Dress*, D'Amato (2009) *Arms and Armour*, and various titles in the 'Roman Conquest' series for Pen and Sword Books: 4 volumes in 2009-13) (source 5): 'Whenever I am working on a painting dealing with a re-construction of a Roman soldier I always as a matter of course refer to one if not all of these publications [i.e. Bishop and Coulston 2006, and earlier editions] first'. See also source 6 for online description of engagement with Bishop and Coulston 2006 in reconstructing Roman *caligae* (boots). Coulston is also a regular contributor to the internet forum *Roman Army Talk (RAT)*, an international online community of 6,500 Roman army enthusiasts, and regularly draws on his research to answer enquiries from non-academic members. He delivered a paper ('Arming the Late Roman soldier') at the annual *RAT* conference 2011, in York (audience of 30).*

In addition, Coulston's work has helped to improve understanding of the Roman army for members of the wider public with no specialist interest. His museum consultations continue to influence the experience of thousands of visitors. Housesteads has more than 100,000 visitors per year; Segedunum Roman Fort Baths and Museum (where displays on which Coulston advised before 2008, helping especially with interpretation of monumental sculpture fragments from the site, are still in place, and so have continued to have an impact on the experience of visitors during 2008-13) has approximately 50,000 visitors per year. The contributions to television and print media listed above under 4(ii) have reached a wide non-specialist audience. In addition to the consultations listed, Coulston made contributions to a number of other television projects before 2008 which continue to be syndicated worldwide and to reach a wide audience: e.g. *Gladiator Graveyard* (filmed interviews, London; script editor for final cut; originally aired on BBC, Oct. 2007) and *The Roman Way of War* (filmed interviews, London; script editor for final cut; originally aired on BBC 1998). *National Geographic* has a global circulation of 8 million, and an estimated monthly readership of 60 million; *FHM* had circulation of more than 150,000 in 2011; *Ancient Warfare* has circulation of approximately 10,000. He has also given a large number of public talks in museums and schools exploring the place of the army in Roman society (underpinned by all five of the outputs in 3 above), e.g.: i) 'A Century of Archaeology in Rome', Kirkcaldy Museum and Art Gallery (15 Sept, 2008) (audience of 60); ii) 'Trajan's Column: Window on the Roman Army?' (44th Annual Roman Army Conference, Durham, 5 April, 2009) (40); iii) 'Augustus, Mussolini and the City of Rome', Fettes College, Edinburgh (6 Oct, 2009) (30); iv) 'Reconstructing the Roman Army in North Britain', Perth Museum and Art Gallery (14 Oct., 2009) (40); v) 'Art and Service: the presentation of Roman soldiers on Figural Gravestones', Museum of Archaeology, Warsaw (13 May, 2011) (60); vi) 'Gladiators in Fact and Fiction', St Leonards School, St Andrews (10 May, 2012) (25).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Senior Curator, English Heritage
2. Archaeology Correspondent, *The Independent*
3. Editor, Art Research and Senior Graphics Editor, *National Geographic* (joint letter)
4. Chair of *Comitatus*, late Roman re-enactment group
5. Graham Sumner, independent illustrator
6. Description of engagement with Bishop and Coulston 2006 in reconstruction work (24/8/10): <http://www.legiotricesima.org/campusMartis/MakingCaligae/MakingAuthenticCaligae.html> (corroborating the claims above about engagement with output 2 by reconstructionists)