

CHALLENGES FOR ROMAN WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY: INTERVIEW WITH CARLOS FABIÃO¹

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Interview conducted by the Google Meet platform, on January 28, 2022.

Link: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKOBICeFBWw>]

Filipe Noé Silva: We will then begin the interview with Professor Carlos Fabião, from the Universidade de Lisboa, whom we would like to thank for having promptly accepted our invitation. The interview will be conducted by me, Filipe Noé Silva, collaborating professor at the Department of History at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas, and by professor Pedro Paulo Abreu Funari, titular professor at the same university. This interview will be published in the journal *Heródoto*, from the Universidade Federal de São Paulo, whom we would also like to thank

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Heródoto, Unifesp, Guarulhos, v.7, n.2 - 2022.2. p. 08-17.

DOI: 10.34024/herodoto.2022.v7.15466

for all the support. I will then hand over to Professor Funari so that we can begin.

Pedro Paulo Abreu Funari: I'm Pedro Paulo Funari, from Unicamp, from the Department of History. First of all, I would like to welcome Professor Carlos Fabião's participation in this interview, and say that this opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from Professor Fabião on various topics related to the ancient world is a great pleasure. Professor Fabião, I would like to start with a question about your trajectory. We are contemporaries, we were born in the same year, 1959, which brings us even closer. But the issue that seems interesting and relevant to me in your trajectory is the fact that the professor works, shall we say, in several areas: History, Archaeology, Literature. So, I would like to hear the professor talk a little about his trajectory, the characteristics. How today, in maturity, you look back and evaluate this trajectory.

Carlos Fabião: Well, good afternoon! First of all, I would like to thank you for the honorable invitation you extended to me and say that it is a great pleasure to be talking with my dear friend, Professor Pedro Paulo Funari, and with Filipe Silva as well. My career began with a degree in History. When I did my degree, here in Portugal, there was only a degree in History. Afterwards, the degree in History of Art would appear, parallel, and the degree in Archeology, also parallel, although there is always a common core between these three degrees in Portuguese universities. I did my degree in History, even then with a lot of interest in Archeology, although Archeology at that time (the seventies of the last century) was something somewhat marginal, secondary. It was an activity that today we would consider amateur. That is, normally, people were looking for a job, had a job, and in their free time they dedicated themselves to research. In my case, I started precisely as a secondary school teacher, pre-university, and at the same time I did my studies, I continued my studies with my professors at the university, in the summer. I had the good fortune to do a degree at one time (the 1970s, democracy was restored, many professors who had been exiled and entered the university system returned) and at a university, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, which was just starting out. I belong to the first degree in History at Universidade Nova de Lisboa, to the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences. At the time, it was a very dynamic institution [attention, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that it isn't now...], above all, it promoted a strong relationship with the universe

of Social Sciences. Afterwards, I had an opportunity and started teaching in university, at Universidade Nova de Lisboa, where I taught in the Department of History, but also taught in the Department of Anthropology. This mixed experience was extremely important and interesting precisely because these teaching tasks challenged me, forced me, deep down, to continue my own training in these two domains: Social Sciences and History, but with a permanent attraction for Archaeology. Archeology, which, I would like to emphasize, I never understood as anything other than a way of doing history. I do not consider these to be distinct or separate fields. They are exactly the same thing. The only difference lies, fundamentally, in the corpus of sources that the archaeologist uses and in the corpus of sources that the historian often uses. However, when we think of the classical world, of the Roman provincial world, the one in which I work, naturally, the textual legacy, the epigraphic dimension, the inscriptions on hard supports and all that, are naturally, constantly summoned, we cannot just stick with the data from the archaeological record. Meanwhile, a degree in Archeology opened at the Universidade de Lisboa, which is the other public university in Lisbon, and I applied for a professorship, as there was no Archeology course at the Universidade Nova at the time. Therefore, I introduced myself as a professor at the Universidade de Lisboa and moved there. From then on, from 1990 onwards, all my teaching and research activity has been carried out at the Faculty of Letters of the Universidade de Lisboa. I think that, in general terms, this gives an idea of the path, especially the professional path. Then, in parallel, there is the research path, which has taken me to different regions of Portugal and to different research contexts.

FNS: It was clear, therefore, that your trajectory has been interdisciplinary. In your work as an archaeologist, as a scholar of antiquity, what were the advantages of undergoing an interdisciplinary training? What are the possible benefits and, eventually, limitations that this interdisciplinary training has provided you throughout your trajectory?

CF: I would say the advantages are obvious. Multiplying the ways we look at the realities of antiquity is extremely important. I must say that in addition to my training, first school and a degree that was already interdisciplinary, later, I myself felt the need to move towards other areas of interdisciplinarity. I will give just a few examples: studying the universe of Roman economy, I felt the need to broaden the type of study we did on

amphorae, for example. I felt the need to get to know their products better. From then on, I established contact, communication and dialogue with teams that work in research in the field of Chemistry and Geology as well. It was an important learning process, as I had to study what were the working methods that these scientists use, what are the limitations and advantages of these methods. From then on, realizing what Geology and Chemistry could give me, it was important to convey what I wanted to know, so that we could refine methods and procedures. I also wanted them to understand what I wanted to know. This was a first level. But then, naturally, working with the universe of metals, I also came to the conclusion that it was important to deepen the study on issues of origin and composition of metallic alloys. We currently have a study on Roman lead in the finalization phase with other colleagues who work with metallography. I also realized another important thing: archaeological sites from the Roman era keep a set of realities that the archaeologist Lewis Binford called ecofacts, to distinguish them from artifacts, which are, basically, all the remains that result from interactions between human societies and their environment, the exploitation of resources and everything in between. I realized that this huge source of information was not properly harnessed, exploited. There were and are many studies of archaeozoology, at the level of prehistory, but when we arrive in Roman times there are not many studies in this area, although there is an enormous source of information available. Thus, we also approach and develop research work with groups of biologists, fundamentally, and we also develop approaches to other types of data in sites with a long tradition of research. For example, in the Roman villae, there is a lot of important research on the large manor houses, with their architecture, their mosaics, painted stucco, this type of reality. However, the rubbish bins that exist in these villae are very interesting. And we have, for example, in mosaics and painting, these characters who would be precisely the members of the elite hunting, on horseback, deer. Now, we would say that this is a stereotypical scene. However, studying the dumps and characterizing the fauna found in these dumps, we will find, exactly, the deer. we can see that there was a hunting practice with large animals, as the iconography or the Latin texts show us. But, more interesting is to find them in the dumps. We also find oysters in the garbage cans of the villae, sometimes far away, more than 300 kilometers from the sea. And we know, therefore, of course, that there is the possibility of preserving these oysters and transporting them over great distances. Then, reading Apicius's Roman cookbook (*De Re Coquinaria*), we know that there is a recipe for preserving oysters. The Romans had recipes for preserving oysters. But it is by looking at dumps that we find the practical result of this conservation. Another issue, for

example, is the exploitation of marine resources. There are a number of scattered references, in Latin and Greek literature, to the exploitation of marine resources and the production of fish seasonings. Garum, halec and other preparations and condiments, and we also know some descriptions of the nature of these preparations. However, when we found the production units, the factories, so to speak, where these articles were produced, the tanks where this production was carried out, we found remains of ichthyofauna (fish vertebrae and scales) inside. From an archaeozoological perspective, this ichthyofauna, these fish remains, give us a clear idea of the nature of the product that was being produced. Therefore, we free ourselves, in some way, from the stereotyped image of the texts, to descend to the real world and add information. All this makes my path of interdisciplinarity grow and I hope it continues to grow because it has immense potential. It's all that we can draw from the past that is interesting and that goes far beyond our own knowledge, insofar as I only have a background in History and Social Sciences. I can't identify deer bones, fish vertebrae or oysters. I know, nowadays, what an oyster shell is. But, obviously, the path is always to work as a team. And the more diversified they are, the richer the perspective becomes, the more diverse the perspectives, the richer the information.

PPAF: It is very interesting everything that was mentioned. Firstly, because many of these reflections also resonated in my trajectory, such as this issue of working with people from diverse backgrounds and with such varied vestiges. This naturally requires intense cooperation with different areas. Then, although the professor has already answered a part of the question I had outlined, which is about Archeology for the study of Antiquity. You have already abundantly exemplified the importance of material traces. However, to delve a little deeper into this theme, the question I would ask is: to what extent are the traditional areas, Ancient History, Roman Archaeology, History of Ancient Art, among others, such as Letters and Literature, Latin, Greek, areas that have a degree, how do all these disciplines stand up to the challenge of archaeological evidence? In the case of Letters, for example, there are people who study Catullus, but who go in search of the materiality mentioned in the texts. How do the other areas face the challenge of Archaeology, material culture information that complements, contradicts or supplements what is in other records.

CF: There is a question and some misconceptions around this, I usually say that I work in Provincial Roman Archeology and not in Classical Archeology in general terms, insofar as this Classical Archeology is often more dedicated to aesthetic objects, architectures and the philological domain . I think that all of this, obviously, this whole tradition that goes back to Winckelmann and to ancient art studies, makes sense and only benefits from being articulated with other fields of investigation. Take the case of Roman agronomy, well known for several treatises of the time, but when we look at the great rural domains of the Roman world, it does not make much sense to be talking about the production of olive oil or wine without knowing how the wine or the olive oil are made. All of this has, of course, to go through a knowledge of Latin agronomists to know, effectively, how they dealt with these realities and, simultaneously, with the observation of the traditional processes of production of these foods in order to be able to cross these realities with the materialities of the archaeological record. As for the more purely literary domain, there is every interest in deepening the relationship and crossing information. I am talking about an experience that we carried out not long ago, and which culminated in a small exhibition, within the scope of a congress of philologists on the Latin poet Statius and the discussion of his work. Now, in Statius' poems, we find a series of references that we manage to associate with the materialities that we obtain in the archaeological record. And what we did was, precisely, an exhibition in which the selected archaeological artifacts were used as an illustration of the notes made by the poet Statius. Therefore, this crossing continues, naturally, to exist and has been extremely interesting and fruitful, also with engineers and architects, that is, with people who know how a building of the complexity of Roman buildings is assembled and works, with all its stormwater drainage system: about how it is built, how it is structured, and it has been truly interesting. There is, effectively, no limit and I do not believe that the archaeological record, given the great development that Archeology over the Roman period, as it has had in recent times, calls into question or conflicts with traditional approaches. I think all this adds and enriches.

FNS: We would like Professor Fabião to comment a little on the History of Archaeology. A few years ago, you published an interesting and detailed book on the History of Portuguese Archeology. Comment a little on the importance of this type of study in today's world, on the importance of reflecting on how each era looks at, interprets and makes use of the past.

CF: The theme of the History of Archeology entered relatively early in my life as a researcher and teacher. It was born in the 1980s, mainly after reading two books by the English professor and archaeologist Glyn Daniel, respectively *A hundred and fifty years of Archeology* and an anthology of texts that accompanied this volume. I really enjoyed reading both books and, naturally, the question that arose was: and here, in Portugal, how was that process? And as I like to work in libraries and archives, I also started to develop this line of research, the History of Archeology, which I usually say is my retreat. When I'm tired of ceramics, economics and food, I take a few days off to dedicate myself to the History of Archaeology. And, obviously, the big question is this: the curiosity that I feel today, and that made me move towards the study of Antiquity through archaeological remains from a multidisciplinary perspective, what moved people? What moved the scholars of the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries? From then on, we will, naturally, as we do today, perceive how they saw and interpreted the traces of the past, I, for example, think of the world I live in through my political stance. These researchers of the past also naturally reflected their own time. All of us, deep down, are like that Arabic proverb that says: all men are more like their time than their own fathers. And I think this is very correct, because we are always the product of our time. It is also a fascinating dive, so to speak, into different eras and different cultural contexts. The uses and abuses of the past, uses that we try, shall we say, deliberately not to do, but which we always end up doing. For example, when I talk today about archaeological remains and the past, I always emphasize the open and cosmopolitan character of the Iberian Peninsula. In the context of Portugal, whenever I talk about this, it is to say and underline that all identities are, so to speak, mestizo and that they incorporate realities from different cultural spheres, from different spheres of sensibility and that the construction of identities, nowadays, is not a factor of exclusion, but a factor of approximation, understanding and tolerance towards the other, which is also a part of us. And here, well, I could also be accused of using the past.

PPAF: Your last mention is very encouraging for us. This idea of coexistence, interaction, is a critical look at the past, but with a positive, hopeful message about the present. I would like the professor to comment a little about his relationship with the foreigner. His cooperation with scholars outside of Portugal is evident in his trajectory: what does this mean for young people? How important is cooperation across borders? I think this is somewhat consistent with the issue mentioned about mixed-race identities.

Heródoto, Unifesp, Guarulhos, v.7, n.2 - 2022.2. p. 08-17.
DOI: 10.34024/herodoto.2022.v7.15466

CF: The question is this: I find it truly extraordinary the possibilities that are open today to young researchers to do some training abroad, for example, that there is the Programa Erasmus, according to which, a university student from all over Europe can circulate through different universities from any country in Europe. I also think that, in our time, professor Funari, not wanting to sound like an elderly person's speech, this was an adventure. Any trip abroad was an adventure. And a complicated adventure! That's why my first adventures, my first trips out of Portugal were to Spain because it was the country that was closest and most accessible, even from a financial point of view it was what I could afford. Since those trips, I began to realize the enormous advantage, the enormous enrichment resulting from these contacts, of getting to know other worlds, other realities, from all points of view. I had a teacher in the 70's who said an extraordinary thing. It was a time when Portugal was still very closed: the dictatorship had already ended, but there were many limitations, especially of a financial nature. He said that there should be the possibility of giving a small scholarship to any student to go to Paris, it was enough just to be able to look at the windows of bookshops, to know what direction the investigation was taking, what was being done outside this limited space and closed that ours was (it was also a time when Portuguese scientific culture in the area of Humanities and Social Sciences was mainly French-speaking). There were no low cost flights, there was no set of support that exists today. Leaving our space is extremely important, for example, to observe new realities. Try different environments. Those who study the Roman Empire cannot forget that it stretched from Syria to Great Britain, and from North Africa to the Danube. There is a common heritage that must be valued. A few years ago, I was invited to participate in meetings between Portuguese and Moroccan universities. What I said at that meeting was that we, from the Iberian Peninsula, and North Africa had the same cultural heritage. Today it is fractured, in political and religious terms. We, members of the European Union and the people of Morocco, members of the OAU (Organisation of African Unity) are two separate institutions, but we all belong to the UN. Therefore, a political and religious boundary. The world of the Iberian Peninsula with its Judeo-Christian tradition and Morocco with its Islamic matrix. However, historically, these two realities, the political and religious boundaries are recent and torn over a common heritage. Therefore, we have these points of contact, these points in common and a richer and more interesting approach is what brought us together in the past than what separates us today.

FNS: You have already been to Brazil a few times. In addition to the dialogue with Unicamp and Professor Funari, you also maintained, and still maintain, contact with other institutions, research groups and students of Ancient History here in Brazil. About the Ancient History that has been done here in Brazil, what aspects caught your attention? There is a certain peculiarity that brings the History of Antiquity made here in Brazil closer to the one you have followed in Europe throughout your trajectory.

CF: I run the risk of being unfair, as my knowledge is quite limited. Brazil is a world, it is almost a continent, certainly, with very different nuances. It would probably be interesting for Brazil to create its own schools in Rome and Athens. I know of researchers who have worked in the context of integrated projects in the great international schools based in Rome and Athens, which has naturally contributed to the enrichment of their training and has a multiplier effect among the students of these researchers. But creating its own bodies could make Brazilian research less dependent on individual initiatives and raise its quality through immersion in more cosmopolitan environments. With regard to what are the lines of research in Brazil, what I notice, has a lot to do with an Anglo-Saxon matrix, with a very special attention to the so-called post-colonial epistemological perspectives. It seems that things make sense in this direction. Personally, I am not a big believer in postcolonial approaches to the Roman Empire, for example, insofar as I believe that the Roman Empire was fundamentally an inclusive empire in the way it incorporated new entities, how it absorbed and giving space to the development of these new realities. In less than two centuries there were already provincial emperors, and when we look at the list of Roman emperors we see people from the Iberian Peninsula, North African emperors and a Syrian emperor. There is, indeed, a great diversity that makes us see and think that the Roman Empire was inclusive. By the way, I think that the longevity of the Roman Empire has to do with that, with the fact that it was an inclusive empire. It is interesting that the universe of contemporary imperialisms belatedly realized that the inclusive strategy was the greatest guarantor of continuity. The interest in classical studies, for example, in Great Britain, was closely related to the appreciation that was made of its Empire. Here in Portugal something similar happened, very late, already in the 1960s, already in the post-Second World War, when the great decolonization movement took place. At that time, belatedly, a higher school of colonial studies was also created here in Portugal, where people from the colonies who came to Lisbon to

study could be found. Supposedly, later, that they would be the administrative elite of the empire. Naturally, too late, in the specific case of Portugal, everything turned out the other way around and the concentration of African students here in Lisbon became the main focus of the birth and development of liberation movements in the former Portuguese colonies. By concentrating these people, they considered and gained awareness that they were going to turn against the colonial power. I think that the Roman Empire was, fundamentally, an inclusive Empire and this inclusiveness is, for me, the main justification for its longevity and the absorption of all this cultural diversity. It would be impossible to sustain an Empire for five centuries (in the West) and fifteen (in the East) on the basis of violence and coercion.

PPAF: An inspiring answer. Again, the message is one of incorporation. I share, with Professor Fabião, a good part of these considerations regarding this inclusiveness, as an important characteristic, and in contrast with modern and contemporary imperialism. It is also very useful in terms of historiographical analysis so that we can criticize the uses of antiquity, of the Roman Empire, for modern imperialist purposes. I always mention an example, which is the Ottoman Empire, which lasted for a long time, and which had an inclusive character. People of the highest elite were Jews, people from the Iberian Peninsula and elsewhere. And this is very interesting. I would like to thank Professor Fabião for being with us today. His interview was very important because, having collaborated with the professor for years, we did not have a clear notion of his trajectory and of some of his points of view on some aspects of the study of Antiquity. Thus, this interview will be very helpful. We thank you very much and we count on your precious revision, before the translation. I would also like to thank Professor Filipe, who is with me at Unicamp. We also thank professors Glaydson José da Silva and Gilberto da Silva Francisco, who coordinate the journal *Heródoto*, and who extended this kind invitation to us. Thank you very much, Professor Fabião.

CF: I am grateful for the invitation. It was, as always, a pleasure to be with you. I hope that next time we are physically present and not this new reality we live in, in which we are reduced to rectangles on a computer screen. Thank you very much.