

# Introduction

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The TIR-FOR International Commission decided to hold this first TIR-FOR Symposium with the firm belief that it could be a useful platform to raise awareness of the latest advances made by a project whose roots date back over a century, at the same time as providing the opportunity for researchers working in related areas to share their experiences, methodologies and findings. On behalf of the organisations responsible for the Symposium, a collaboration between the Institute for Catalan Studies (IEC), the Catalan Institute of Classical Archaeology (ICAC) and the Catalan Society of Historical Studies (SCEH), we would like to thank all those who responded to its call for proposals and who continued to participate in spite of the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented us from carrying out the Symposium in person at the headquarters of the Institute for Catalan Studies, holding it online instead. In any case, although we regret it has not been possible for people to participate in person, it has nonetheless been very profitable, as can be seen by the interest shown in this publication.

The International Commission has been commissioned by the International Union of Academies to manage the unification, digitisation and updating of these two, initially parallel, projects on the cartographic topography of the Roman world: the *Tabula Imperii Romani* and the *Forma Orbis Romani*. Two projects which, in the 20th century, published numerous volumes on paper that cover a considerable proportion of the Roman Empire. At the time, the methodological coordination achieved led to significant results and, right from the start, the

approach taken was one of open international collaboration among the teams from each of the countries involved. An attitude which, today, the International Commission wishes to preserve and strengthen even further.

This resolve underlies the decision to digitise the geographical and archaeological information of the TIR-project in a large database, employing unified criteria and making the data available on a digital portal that anyone can access. The first step was therefore to implement a computer program for the project, sufficiently robust for the large amount of data that would be entered but at the same time agile enough for the teams from each country to manage their documentation independently, as well as being able to connect and share information with other databases on a range of subjects related to the antique and medieval world.

It was decided to develop a prototype for this program step by step, with progressive tests of the application every time the teams involved in the project in their respective territories entered their data. So far, the data from three of these territories have been entered and are openly available, highlighting the results and potential of this tool, whose features have gradually been enhanced by introducing successive improvements and functions. The application is currently in the phase of testing and fine-tuning.

All this has resulted in the creation and maintenance of a digital platform with a map of the Roman Empire that can be broken down into thematic, typological and chronological maps with the basic information of all the

antique toponyms and significant archaeological sites, as well as the thoroughfares, the natural resources exploited in Antiquity and any geographical information gleaned from ancient sources and archaeology. Without doubt, thanks to this new, comprehensive version of the project, the TIR-FOR now has huge potential as a means of raising cultural awareness, for education and even to promote tourism; but without forgetting the project's initial purpose as an instrument for scientific research.

In fact, the decision to organise a Symposium, which the International Commission hopes will be held regularly, results from this desire to raise awareness of the TIR-FOR project's scientific potential. The subject chosen for this first Symposium, *From Territory Studies to Digital Cartography*, is clearly along these lines, with the aim of encouraging reflection and debate regarding the inextricable interaction between research into archaeological sites, territory and archaeological topography and digital cartography.

The wealth of possibilities offered by digital cartography have made it an essential tool for investigating and disseminating knowledge of the Roman world. Joining efforts exponentially increases the potential of results from research and it is increasingly evident that important achievements require international networks of researchers with common goals and agreements regarding the methodology to be applied to their work.

Given this situation, it is of vital importance for the studies of settlement, communication networks and economic elements, toponymy and archaeological topography, as well as studies of the territory and landscape, that form the basis of many of these cartographic processes, should use commonly agreed methodologies to allow, collectively, interaction and the construction of maps of the Roman world, exploring the huge potential offered by Linked Open Data. A network needs to be set up between the different research groups so they can reach agreements regarding the mapping of the elements under study and, at this point, evaluate the research

being carried out and provide a forum for discussion.

The Symposium was held on the 26th and 27th of October 2020, in the format of a Zoom meeting. The virtual room had a capacity for 100 people, which was soon reached and unfortunately the last few applicants had to be turned down.

The President of the IEC, Mr. Joandomènec Ros, opened the proceedings at 8.30 in the morning on Monday, the 26th of October.

The Symposium was divided into three sessions, each starting with a talk to introduce the topic. The first session, on *The present and future of the international TIR-FOR project*, began with a presentation by the Catalan team, followed by five communications by the Italian, Romanian, Greek, Polish and Tunisian teams, all involved in the TIR-FOR project, thereby presenting the digital TIR-FOR project to the scientific community, one of the main reasons for holding the Symposium. The large number of people taking part was proof of the interest aroused, as well as the fact that, after the Symposium, several proposals were received for collaboration.

The second session focused on *Digital maps of the Roman world and specialised applications*, starting with a talk by Johan Åhlfeldt and followed by four communications. The third session, on *Studies of landscape, settlement and archaeological topography in the development of digital cartography*, was introduced by a talk given by Hector Orengo and Josep M. Palet, followed by fourteen communications.

In total, therefore, we heard three talks and 23 communications, and four posters were also commented on. Extremely interesting research was presented, starting with the DARE digital platform by Prof. Johan Åhlfeldt, who explained his splendid work in a relatively technical presentation. Of particular note was the readiness shown by Prof. Åhlfeldt to connect the DARE digital platform with the TIR-FOR platform. Also important was the talk by Héctor Orengo on the contribution made by the development of new methodologies to map ancient settlements, as well as to detect more sites.