10. Research proposal

| Title of proposal | Bridges and the city of Rome; the life and landscape of a river crossing (300BC to 150AD) |

“The bridge swings over the stream ‘with ease and power’. It does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream......The bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream.” (Heidegger, 1971)

“It is an unfortunate fact that bridge studies have, ...been the Cinderella of archaeological and historical research.” (Watson, Brigham, Dyson, 2001)

10 bridges connected and transformed the landscape of ancient Rome. Creating new routes of communication and networks of social interaction, they represent a unique, urban space. Yet dedicated research is scarce and largely focused on the technical and chronological. In the light of recent developments in the study of Roman urbanism, Rome’s own Cinderella's require re-examination. My thesis will be the first systematic appraisal of this subject to connect the bridges, the Tiber and the people of Rome. Thus, my research will place the action of crossing the Tiber, the building of bridges, and river traffic at the centre of how we understand life in the city of Rome in antiquity.

Research Background and Questions

During the past decade the study of space, movement and flow in the Roman city has provided new insights into the cultural, economic and political behaviours of antiquity (Laurence and Newsome, 2011). It has identified roads which demonstrate high usage and integration (van Nes, 2011), and has drawn attention to the importance of crossroads as areas of social interaction (Laurence, 2011). This research has been silent on bridges and their effect on traffic flow and social interaction. My thesis aims to correct this omission; to establish bridges within the context of the current research, with two inter-related topics.

The type and volume of traffic are critical elements of traffic flow (Tuck, 2012; Quilici, 2008). My thesis will develop these ideas, and utilising technical information (O'Connor, 1993; Quilici, 2008) test the hypothesis that not all bridges were open to all forms of traffic; and that one way traffic was advantageous at certain times of the day.

The city of Rome is synonymous with the Tiber, yet publications related to the river are few, and their analytical elements limited (Aldrete, 2007); yet the addition of bridges can have negative connotations for the river and its traffic. Bridges have also remained isolated from scholarship on monumental development and the power of monuments in Rome (Patterson, 1992, Favro 1996); despite being the perfect visual medium for the display of images.

Movement and flow challenges the statement that ‘bridges were not central to the city's life’ (Robinson, 1992) by asking the following questions:

a. Can the type of traffic and direction of flow on the bridges in Rome be determined? If so, can this inform our understanding of directional movement around Rome?

b. What forms of social interaction, as well as movement, were facilitated by the construction of new bridges?

c. Did the addition of bridges to the Tiber have a negative effect on both the flow of the Tiber and the traffic navigating its course?
d. What is the relationship between bridge building and monumental development in the city?

The phenomenology of Roman bridges: Building on the work of Betts (2011) and Heidegger (1993), this section aims to put people back on the bridges. My thesis will approach the bridge as a particular type of urban space, the experience of which was quite different from those found elsewhere in the city. These elements will link with the section above and be explored with the following questions:

a. How did the experience of crossing the bridges in Rome, alter a traveller’s perspective of the city?

b. What is the evidence for life around the bridges, and how was the experience different from other areas of the city?

The project will benefit from the supervision of Ray Laurence (University of Kent) and Eleanor Betts (Open University) who, respectively, lead the field in research on space, movement and traffic flow in Roman cities, and the study of phenomenology and sensory space in antiquity.

Research Methods

My undergraduate degree at Birkbeck combined both archaeology and classics, and benefited from the Roman expertise of Prof. Catharine Edwards. Skills gained during my career as a project manager enable me to manage my workload effectively while working full time. An MA scholarship (Kent) has allowed me to develop my research skills, which will continue whilst at the Kent centre in Rome.

Access to the libraries in Kent, London and Rome ensures I have a full range of literary sources for my thesis. A database of textual and material sources will be created using Excel; to access ancient views of the bridges, and to provide a comprehensive list of their life spans.

A detailed investigation of archaeological reports in *Notizie degli Scavi* relating to the excavations of the Tiber embankments will be undertaken. This will seek to identify votive offerings, temples, animal bones and indicators of traffic. The data will populate a material based database. To facilitate this I have attended an Italian and Latin module at Kent and Rome, which I intend to continue throughout my PhD. Kent University actively encourages cross discipline communication and boasts a thriving community of Postgraduate students. This ensures the opportunity to discuss my thesis ideas with architects, environmental experts and historians.

The analysis of space will be derived from current bodies of theory and IT based applications (Space Syntax; Rome Reborn) which predict traffic flows, in relation to bridges, and other factors such as population increase over time. I will also use the many available maps of Rome (Hypercities, Forma Urbis Romae) literary sources and research as detailed above. A Museum of London monograph offers a comparative study of London Bridge (Watson, Brigham, Dyson, 2001), which I will use to inform my research.

Schedule of work

Research will be routinely written up with each block of research resulting in a written report, literature review or draft chapter as appropriate. During term 1 and 2 of the first year, I will complete a literature review on bridges and begin identification of a suitable platform for spatial analysis and theoretical methods. In term 3, I will write a review of the epigraphic, literary and legal sources relating to bridges and the river in the landscape of Rome. The collection of archaeological material will begin. I will evaluate and revise the areas of the project in light of my findings. To make this project accessible to the public, I will develop a website by term 2 of the first year.

Year 2 will see the completion of the first section of the thesis in draft. Term 1 will include the creation and population of a database of archaeological material. Questions regarding spatial analysis will be settled in term
2. Term 3 will focus on writing, and include the evaluation and revision of the project. I also will give presentations at 2 major conferences, and complete 2 journal articles to disseminate the project.

Year 3 will see completion of the analysis and writing. During term 1, I will re-evaluate how my analysis and interpretation of the sources maps onto the thesis areas. In term 2 and 3, I will finalise my research and adjust my write-up of the sections, along with a revision of the overall structure of the thesis. On completion of the thesis, I expect to publish an up-to-date monograph on Rome’s Bridges and will make the databases publicly available to other scholars on an Open Access basis. There are no ethical issues pertaining to this project.

If awarded the scholarship, CHASE can expect me to show the commitment, ability, and skill required to undertake my research to the highest quality within the timeframe. I share CHASE’s ethos that engages with cross disciplinary research, ensuring my thesis reflects research from a wide range of sources. CHASE will give me the opportunity to participate in exciting programmes from consortium universities. I also believe I am a great ambassador for mature students, embodying how further education can change your life, regardless of age or background.

**Bibliography**


