Hospitium: Understanding ‘Ours’ and ‘Theirs’ on the Roman Frontier¹

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The assumption behind the practice of *hospitium* is that there are two parties to a relationship, and that the two parties do not belong to the same community [see below]. Crucial to the establishment of the relationship is that the parties exchange gifts and agree thereby also to respect and to protect the person and property of the ‘other’. Implicitly, *hospitium*, by recognizing what is ‘ours’ and what is ‘theirs’ and by making a commitment to performing mutually beneficial services, could and indeed did promote peaceful exchange between ‘strangers’. How this ritual worked in practice and how it evolved from the Late Republic into the Early Principate is the subject of this paper. Of course, this is not the complete story of *hospitium*, but rather an exploration of one dimension of the phenomenon.²

Hospitium, as a respected form of ritual, offers a compelling structure governing exchange between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Moreover, during the Principate it became a vehicle for ‘them’ to become more like ‘us’ [Romans, i.e., ‘to Romanize’].³ *Hospitium* could play this role because all Indo-European peoples (as best we can tell) shared the fundamentals of Guestfriendship / *Gastfreundschaft*;⁴

1 This article honors Lukas de Blois. I am grateful for his many displays of *hospitium* over many years.

2 A full discussion of *hospitium* is planned for a monograph on the subject. The latter is nearing completion.

3 In a number of sessions and volumes of *Impact of Empire* I have explored the theme of *hospitium* and exchange in Roman history and did so at recent sessions in Münster, Nijmegen and Durham, and now in New York.

4 ‘Guestfriendship’ is somewhat awkward in English: Mommsen felt comfortable with *Gastrecht* / -freundschaft in his seminal study, “Das römische Gastrecht und die römische Clientele”, in *Römische Forschungen* 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1864), 319–90. I prefer to use the Latin word, *hospitium*. Also: Bolchazy, L.J., *Hospitality in Early Rome: Livy’s concept of its humanizing force*. Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1977. Balbín Chamorro, Paloma, *Hospitalidad y patronato en la Península Ibérica durante la Antigüedad*. 2006. Nicols, J., “The Practice of *hospitium* on the Roman Frontier”, *Impact of Empire*, 2010, and “Hospitality among the Romans”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. M. Peachin, Oxford, 2011,

indeed, *hospitium* [both *publicum* and *privatum*] and its associated rituals and expectations have played a significant, if somewhat underappreciated, role in defining the relations between Romans and peregrines; in particular, *hospitium* provided a venue for peaceful and profitable interaction between the two parties in a world that did not enjoy the advantages of international law. The relationship / agreement may be characterized as one,

- that was extra-legal, indeed unenforceable,
- that assumes reciprocity, and a conscious awareness that the benefits and services exchanged, whether in material or services, were or ought to be of equal 'value',
- that the relationship was continuous, and over generations, and indeed,
- that it assumes protection of person and of property of the alien when in the community of his *hospes* / guestfriend, and
- that it served to enhance the reputation of each party and was celebrated / commemorated in a variety of ways by both parties.⁵

By the time of Augustus, peregrine communities in Iberia began to employ the Latin language, and Roman technical terms, to conclude pacts of hospitality even when no Roman was involved. Nonetheless, as will be argued here, we must also recognize that beneath the common vocabulary, each of the peregrine partners brought to the relationship expectations that were not consistent with what we know about Roman / Italian models. In brief, *hospitium* assumed not only that two parties were involved, but also that the institution was sufficiently flexible to allow for some considerable variation in its practice.

The argument is developed here in three steps. First, and precisely because *hospitium* involves exchanges between members of *different* communities, we need to consider the basics of 'ours and theirs', namely, how did Romans and peregrines understand where 'ours' begins and 'theirs' ends. The discussion then turns to the practice of *hospitium*, both in its public and private forms. The third step is not directly related to *hospitium*, but does offer context for understanding, by analogy, how Roman and peregrine variations of *hospitium* might be blended successfully.

422–435. Also: O. Hiltbrunner / D. Gorce: Art. "Gastfreundschaft" in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, VIII (Stuttgart 1972), Sp. 1061–1123l. O. Hiltbrunner: *Gastfreundschaft in der Antike und im frühen Christentum*, WBG (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft); Auflage: 1., Aufl. (1. April 2005).

5 These points have been made and documented in my other publications (see the Select Bibliography at the end), and need not be repeated here.

1 Understanding 'Ours' and 'Theirs'

To a member of the Roman elite of the Principate, there will have been no doubt about the meaning and implications of 'ours'. The departure point was clearly *Mare Nostrum*. Sallust, Caesar, Livy, Pliny Maior and Tacitus all stress *nostrum* in referencing the internal sea.⁶ So too were the *finēs imperiū Romani* well established in physical and in psychological space.⁷ Augustus [and conflating several passages from the *Res Gestae*, cc. 10, 12, 14, 26] had expanded [*auxi*] the borders of the empire, and had pacified [*pacavi*] what lay between them and the *Mare Nostrum*.

Moreover, as Claude Nicolet has demonstrated, Augustus and Agrippa prepared and posted maps that laid out, for all to see exactly, what might be 'ours' and what lay beyond.⁸ But the contours were not to be found solely on a map posted at Rome. The Atlantic to the West, the North Sea, and the axis of several northern rivers—Rhine, Neckar and Danube—became the effective borders of the Empire. Moreover, as the Roman system of defense became more static, the *limes* also served the same purpose, and both directly and indirectly helped to define where 'ours' ended and 'theirs' began.

There are problems with this perception. It is not only that the process took time, and evolved between the late Republic and Principate, but also there is good reason to believe, as I want to argue here, that the degree of homogeneity was anything but consistent. I often have wondered for example how a *praefectus fabrum*, or ancient quartermaster, faced with meeting the daily needs of a legion or cohort on the march, and in areas that were less Romanized, and perhaps less congenial, met his responsibilities. That is: how did the various citizen and peregrine communities along the roads view the soldiers marching through 'their' territory? Would the peregrine feel that the supplies of food and fodder made available to the marching cohorts had been provided willingly and at a fair price? Or did the supplies and quartering need to be extracted by force or intimidation, and taken from those who were perhaps not so willing? The issue is a particularly pointed one, for the meaning of *hospitium* in the later Roman Empire does change to include compulsory quartering of troops.⁹

6 Sall. *BJ*, 17f., Caes. *BG* 5.1; Liv 26.42; PlinMaior, *nh.* 6 142; Tac. *Ag* 24.

7 That is, the 'frontier' here includes not only the actual borders of the Roman Empire, as at the Rhine or Danube, but also within a province and at the intersection of peregrine and Roman culture; for example, in interior and less urbanized parts of Tarraconensis or Lugdunensis.

8 Claude Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire*, Ann Arbor (UMich Press 1994), 4–11.

9 *Cod. Theod.*, 7.9; also Leonhard, *Art.*, *hospitium* in *RE* 8.2, 2498.

How to proceed? There are two complementary questions we can consider in respect to the practice of *hospitium* on the Roman frontier: How did Romans understand 'ours and theirs' as these concepts played out in their hospitable arrangements? And how did peregrines understand 'ours and theirs'? The first question is certainly easier to address than the second, and for that reason will be tackled first.

2 The Roman Perspective

In the Republic, *Mare Nostrum* is mentioned by Livy, in reference to the Punic Wars and to the results of those conflicts. But *fines* are not so clear. Beginning early in Roman history, the Republic [so Cicero and Caesar below] justified going to war by the need to defend and protect our [*nostri*] *amici*, *socii* and *hospites* from enemies yet more dangerous [admittedly it is not always clear who these communities were]. Nonetheless, these three terms do describe classes of peoples who enjoyed a variety of relations, public and private, with the Roman state and with individual Romans. Admittedly there is much overlap in these three terms. *Amici* might be citizens; *socii* and *hospites* were not. Moreover, peregrines might first have been identified as *hospites*, and then later, as relations evolved, became also *socii* and *amici*. Originally, *hospites* were outside or on the margin of the self-defined Roman sphere of influence; but certainly before the end of the Republic *hospites* / peregrines were to be found throughout Italy and the various Roman provinces.¹⁰

As Sallust indicates (*BC* 6) Rome progressed by rendering aid to her *socii* and *amici* [*sociis atque amiciis auxilia portabant*]. Caesar writes in many places about the need to protect and to defend the *socii* and *amici* and *hospites nostri* in Gaul [see next paragraph]. Noteworthy here is, first, that *nostri* should be understood inclusively, to include communities [*hospitium publicum*] and individuals [*hospitium privatum*] and does not refer to space. Second, the categories mentioned are not mutually exclusive; there is no reason why an individual or a community could not be any one or all of the three at the same time. Hence, we may reasonably conclude that this emphasis reflects two perspectives, the first, as is well established, that Romans used such considerations [defending friends, allies and guest-friends] to justify going to war. For our purposes, however, the focus in the Republic was rather on the manner in

10 Note the case of Cornelius Balbus receiving *hospitium* in his hometown of Gades after become a Roman citizen and senator.

which the decision was justified, namely, to defend *communities* and *individuals* ['our' allies and *hospites*] and not *territory*.

To return to our imaginary quartermaster: how would he work with peregrines? Here Caesar suggests a solution. Caesar selected Marcus Mettius to negotiate an arrangement with Ariovistus, because of the *hospitium* he enjoyed with the Gallic king [*qui hospitio Ariovisti utebatur* [BG 1, 47]. This solution is not an isolated example, for Caesar adopts and / or mentions how he used *hospitium* on other occasions in all his works [BC 2, 25; BA 68, BH 16]. Consider the words of Diviciacus, 'those who enjoyed the *hospitium* and friendship of the Roman People were the most powerful men in Gaul' = *populi Romani hospitio atque amicitia... in Gallia potuissent*, 1, 31; also at 5, 27, etc. I want to emphasize the implications these statements, for they are central to the argument of this paper, and especially when we turn to what peregrine *hopites* considered 'theirs'. Clearly, and to anticipate: peregrines [here Gauls] and Romans understood how *hospitium* [*publicum* and *privatum*] worked and were willing for the most part to take advantage of the benefits, so as to facilitate exchange of goods and services.

It is quite clear from the many references that *hospitium* provided the dynamic element in the social structure that allowed Romans and peregrines to interact in a constructive way. Tacitus concurs in many places throughout his works [e.g., *Ger* 20, e.g.], and notes *inter alia* especially how Valens and his soldiers, while on the march to Italy, abused the *iura hospitii* [*hist* 3, 2 and 45]. That is, Valens made use of *hospitium* to provide for his soldiers, and did so in a manner that offended his hosts, namely, he and his legionaries seized goods that might have been offered by *hospites* voluntarily and demanded services for which there would be no reciprocation. They offended gods and men, just as Verres [*hospitium... quod sanctissimum est*, *Verr.*, 2.2.110] had done in violating the *hospitium* of the Sicilians, when he acted in a manner that was appropriate for a wild beast [*fera atque immanis belua*, *Verr.*, 2.5.109].¹¹ It is clear that in practical, everyday matters involving Romans and peregrines, both parties employed an institution, here *hospitium*, and one that resonated within the unique culture of each. The particular significance of these passages is the following: *hospitium* provided a ritual and a portal that facilitated interpersonal exchanges when there were no other rules or laws to provide guidance. Moreover, and through these interpersonal connections, *hospites* were able to manage an orderly, or perhaps *more* orderly, and less-exploitative exchange of material goods, from 'us to them' and from 'them to us'. Even so, as the cases

11 On the significance see below; also J. Nicols, *Civic Patronage in the Roman Empire*, Leiden [Brill, 2015], Chapter 5 and especially 185–193.

of Verres and Valens reveal, there was no guarantee that *hospitium* would be respected consistently, and no recourse to the courts if it was not.

By the end of the first century AD this narrative of 'ours and theirs' changed, and this change is easily documented in Tacitus. In the *Agricola* 8, Tacitus mentions that Britannia was a *ferox provincia*. Agricola first had to pacify the warring tribes; tribes that were outside the Roman jurisdiction and *hospitium*. Admittedly, Tacitus does not make a direct contrast between *ferox* and *hospitium*, but such a connection is implicit. In the *Histories* [4, 73–74], Cerialis warns the Treveri that, should the Romans withdraw, warrior bands would once again destroy civilization [= urban culture and peace].¹² Indeed, the historian makes it very clear on two occasions in the *Agricola* [21 and 30] that 'ours' refers to areas within the Empire that enjoy peace, urbanization, culture, civilization; indeed specifically *humanitas*.¹³ Implicitly, these were places indeed where *hospites* and *hospitium* [*quod sanctissimum est*, so Cicero, see above] and other conventions were respected, and peaceful exchange could take place. Those who did not respect *hospitium* lived and acted like wild beasts and stood outside the self-defined *humanitas* of the Roman system. In this manner the concept of membership shifted: in the Republic, one did not need to be associated with the Roman Empire to enjoy the benefits of Roman *hospitium*. In the Principate, however, participation in the system was based on and defined by a sense of territory. Those within the Roman frontiers, individuals and communities, were eligible to enjoy the benefits of *hospitium* and to participate in this form of *humanitas*; those outside the frontiers were excluded from both.

Conclusions regarding the Roman concept:

1. In the Republican period, 'ours' relates to human beings, to communities and to individuals [*amici, socii, hospites*]; under the Principate, 'ours' becomes space / territory. Communities are less relevant. *Hospitium* plays an important role, albeit a changing one, but in both periods it serves to mediate the relationship between the two distinctive communities or individuals.
2. As Roman notions of what is 'ours' and what is 'theirs' evolve, so too does the practice of *hospitium*. Increasingly the latter does not describe the relationship between communities and individuals of different states,

¹² On the use of *nos* in these chapters, see Holly Haynes, *The History of Make-Believe: Tacitus on Imperial Rome*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, (UCal Press; 2003) 163 ff.

¹³ Admittedly, there some cynicism in these passages, but the point is rather to understand how the Romans perceived their actions, see the next paragraph.

- but can now be employed to describe 'hospitable' relations between individual and groups who may be citizens or peregrines.
3. For the Romans of the Principate, 'ours' includes enjoying the advantages that are the goals of *hospitium*, namely the promotion of *humanitas*, *urbanitas*, and peace. 'Ours' includes the two groups:
 - a. *hospites*, both individuals and communities, who were to varying degrees integrated into the Roman system; who might also be *amici*, *clientes*, or *socii*.
 - b. *hospites* who were peregrines living on the 'frontier' whose only connection to Roman and to Romans was through *hospitium*.
 4. The idea of 'theirs' includes those who were clearly outside this system; those who lived in places that the Romans considered to be *ferox* or individuals / communities who lived as wild beasts and did not respect or acknowledge *hospitium* at all; places that did not enjoy the benefits of Roman *humanitas*.

3 The Perspective of the *Peregrinus*

Here I acknowledge the work of my recently deceased colleague and friend Professor Jürgen Untermann [Cologne] who knows / knew the Keltic texts far better than I do, and I will therefore postpone discussing the purely Keltic texts in this context [though this will come in my fuller study of *hospitium*, mentioned above at note 2].¹⁴ Instead, the paper now focuses on Kelts in transition from peregrine to Roman status and Latin culture; doing so allows us to get a sense of how *hospitium* might have evolved as Roman and peregrine cultures blended on the 'frontier'.¹⁵ In doing so we can gain some insights into the peregrine perspective by looking at texts that document how peregrines became more Roman, and yet retained significant features of their native cultures. In brief, we can try to identify enduring components [some may call them 'anomalies'] of 'theirs' as they become more like 'us'. There are two such components that I want to mention here. The first relates to the subject of this paper, namely, to the practice of *hospitium*, and the second to religious syncretism. In both cases, significant components of traditional culture persist despite the adoption of the Latin language and other Roman cultural forms. Note: I include the brief discussion of religious syncretism not because it has much to do with *hospitium*, but rather to provide an example of how Roman

14 *Monumenta Linguarum Hispanicarum* vols 1–4; Wiesbaden [Reichert; 1975–1998].

15 On the physical and psychological frontier, see above at note 5.

and peregrine cultures could blend at one level, and yet preserve distinctive characteristics at another level. For this is indeed what happens in the case of *hospitium*.

Regarding *hospitium*: There are dozens of *tabulae* and *tesserae hospitalis* from Spain, and most are dated [as here with the Tillegus text from Torre de Cabreira near Lugo in NW Spain, SE of Coruña]. This text and other images of the *tabulae* and *tesserae* are available at: <<https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmliui/handle/1794/13015>>.

We can also follow the evolution in nomenclature and identify characteristic features that are similar to, but also occasionally radical departures from, conventional Roman usage. With Tillegus, the date of the agreement is clear, i.e., it is within one generation of the Augustan conquest. During that time, both parties to this agreement [to judge from their names] are peregrine Kelts [Tillegus himself and the Lougeii], but they opted to conclude the arrangement in Latin. Both parties are then on the road from 'them to us'. Moreover, the formulas employed are conventional for Roman *tesserae hospitalis*: ... *hospitium fecit* and *in fidem clientelamque* are the exact words used at this time to record a similar agreement between a Roman *quaestor pro praetore* [AE 1962, 287 = AE 1972, 263] and the community of Munigua [between Sevilla and Cordoba]. So too is the placement of the names of the magistrates; and equally, the overall form of both tablets is nearly identical. Nonetheless, the text takes an unusual and surprising turn: it is the Lougeii, i.e., the peregrine community, who receive Tillegus and his dependents into their *fides* and *clientela* [... *eumque uxorem liberosque ... in fidem clientelamque ... Castellanei ... receperunt*]. This oddity is not an accident. Another slightly earlier *tabula* indicates that the Lougeii did indeed know the proper language, for in AD 1 they also made a pact of *hospitium*, and coopted Asinius Gallus as patron and did so in the standard manner. The reversal of roles, the group as the patron and the individual as the client, is significant and suggests, I believe, that we are dealing with a Keltic convention persisting in Roman dress.¹⁶

A third *tabula* [CIL 2.2633] provides another variant. Two indigenous communities [near Astorga] used the Latin language to renew *hospitium vetustum antiquom* [venerable and ancient] and to receive *each other* into their respective

16 There is another anomaly, though it is one that may been recognized elsewhere; namely *hospitium* assumes originally equality in the status of the two parties in each of their respective communities; *clientela* / *patrocinium* does not. This ambiguity however is well documented throughout the Roman West, so while it may not have any particular meaning here, it does illustrate that the peregrines understood and employed the common formulae.

fidem clientelamque—a highly unusual arrangement [...*eique omnes ali(u)s alium...repperunt*], and unparalleled elsewhere in the Roman West. The significant hint here is that this text records the renewal of the ancient agreement that apparently had developed in a manner different from Roman norms. Here, then, we can say with some confidence that we are observing continuity of traditional forms in a society that is transitioning to a new language and culture. The original agreement belongs to the time when the respective clans were more ‘theirs’ than ‘ours’, but they have gone far in that the Latin language is used and Roman forms are now binding.

This conclusion may appear speculative, but there are examples of similar transitions in religious practices. When a clearly Keltic individual, Medamus, makes an offering to the Keltic god Bormanicus [*CIL* 11 2402] and employs the Latin language and Roman style [altar] to do so, he is expressing his conviction that the efficacy of his offering is not diminished by the use of ‘foreign’ forms. Moreover, even men with names like C. Julius Hispanus, presumably a Romanized Kelt, continue to honor Lugubus Arquienolobus or Lahus Paraliomegus [Javier Gomez Vila, *Epigrafia romana de la provincia de Lugo*, No. 44; and *IRdeL* 5, 67–68].

This pattern is confirmed by the aggregate data drawn from the traditional Callaecian areas:

TABLE 9.1 *Frequency of references to divinities by Conventus*¹⁷

	<i>C. Bracarum</i>	<i>C. Lucensis</i>	<i>Total</i>
Keltic deity	65	46	111
<i>Roman deity; Keltic surname</i>	22	3	26
Roman deity	105	52	157
<i>Total cultic</i>	193	101	294
<i>Total Inscriptions</i>	Ca. 500	Ca. 300	Ca. 800

In understanding the transition from ‘theirs to ours’ we need to recognize the significance of the data in rows two and three. We can [in row 2] see how indigenous peoples adopted the Latin language for an altar and for dedications,

17 For more on this subject see my article, “Indigenous Culture and the Process of Romanization in Iberian Galicia”, *AJPh* 108 (1987) 129–151.

thereby reflecting their belief that their native gods heard their prayers in the language of their Roman lords. And in row 3, how they syncretized their own deities with those of the Romans formally linking to two names.

Consider these two cases:

Marti Cap/riocieco/L. Hispani/us Fronto/ex voto sacrum [CIL 2, 5612]

and

Albinus/Balesin/i. Lari[b]us/Fin/deneti/icis libe/ns. posui [CIL 2, 2471]¹⁸

In these cases the dedicators have combined deities of traditional Roman religion [Mars and the Lares] with those of the Keltic. Hence, as Tranoy and I believe, Capriociegus must be the Keltic Mars.¹⁹ But the distribution is also telling: over half of the dedications consist of references to the Lares with some kind of indigenous ethnic signifier. Moreover, dedications to conventional Roman deities in this area reveal a distinctive distribution. That Jupiter replaces Bandua seems clear enough, but the prominence of the *Nymphae* [nymphs of mountains and of springs] appears to be a regional preference that surely reflects Keltic religious preferences even as the Latin language and Roman conventions are adopted and adapted.

In brief, the epigraphical evidence is very suggestive, and indicates that the Kelts ['them'] selectively adopted features of Roman culture including the language, rituals and forms of *hospitium* and religious dedications. Nonetheless, they preserved features that were characteristic of their own culture. In other words, peregrines may have made increasing use of the Latin language, but they also applied and adapted that language to their own preferences in respect to social conventions like *hospitium* and religious worship. Formally, at least in terms of language, they increasingly appeared to be like 'us', but nonetheless retained elements of 'their' indigenous culture and did not perceive that such retention conflicted with their decision to adopt some of the characteristics of

18 There is much uncertainty in the transcription of this text. Some editors see a *p*; others reconstruct the *b* in *Laribus*. The *Fin/denei/ici* has also been read as: *Findeneticis* or as *Pindeneticis* or even as *Pindeneaicis*. Some also see 'periods' others do not. The meaning is, I believe, clear, namely it is dedication in Latin to the local Keltic / ethnic *Lares*. See Blanca Maria Prosper, *Lenguas y religiones prerromanas del occidente de la Península Ibérica*, Salamanca, 2002, 318.

19 A. Tranoy, *La Galice romaine*, Paris (de Boccard, 1981), 304f. J. Nicols, op. cit.

Roman culture. *Hospitium* works in such cases because the underlying dynamics were widely understood and judged to be useful.

4 Conclusions

One of the important findings of modern chaos theory is that seeds of chaos are apparently embedded in order, while the seeds of order seem to be embedded in chaos. Systems that are stable in relation to their environment can become unstable. Systems that are unstable can return to stability. Another important finding is that the behavior of a system in stability and its behavior after becoming unstable are not related in a causal sense.

That apparently ordered systems [like the Roman Empire] embody deep structures of 'chaos' is one such wide-ranging implication of Chaos Theory. And I believe this lesson applies here when we consider the understanding of how *hospitium* worked, namely, not only to facilitate peaceful exchange on the frontier, but also to promote a process by which the differences between 'ours' and 'theirs' were minimized—all very orderly. However pervasive *Romanitas* became at one level that should not obscure the persistence of indigenous practices at the local and regional level. *Hospitium* was attractive because its advantages to both parties were considerable, and because it was sufficiently malleable to be universally recognized and also to encompass a number of local varieties. In *hospitium*, 'ours' and 'theirs' blended, but did not become identical.