

Romans Revealed –Julia Terrtia, the Ivory Bangle Lady: notes for teachers

Summary: Julia is used as an example for a migrant in the Roman Empire. Skeletal evidence suggests that one of her parents may have originated from North Africa, demonstrating that people travelled and settled across the Roman Empire. Students will learn about archaeological approaches to studying the past and how evidence (grave goods, the skeleton, chemical analysis of teeth and bone) can change our current perceptions on life and society in Roman Britain. The grave goods and North African heritage can be used to talk about how diverse the population of Roman Britain, and indeed of the Roman Empire, was. Her apparent high status also challenges popular perceptions that African Romans were all slaves.

Target audience: KS2 History students

Curriculum links: the Roman Empire and its impact on Britain

Examples (non-statutory): “Romanisation of Britain”, i.e. the impact of technology, culture and beliefs, including early Christianity

Supporting material:

- PPT presentation
- Artefact cards
- 3D-printed artefacts and skull (if using University of Reading box rather than just web materials)
- List of discarded items: curry jar, pizza box, tin of dog/cat food, ‘gold’ jewellery, postcard (to be collected by teacher if lesson not delivered by University of Reading staff)

Lesson plan and PowerPoint script:

SLIDE 1:

Introduce class to the topic:

- Today, we are going to explore everyday life in Roman Britain, and we are going to discover who the real Romans were.
- Ask the children what they know about Roman Britain: How long ago was it that the Romans were here? Who were the Romans, and what did they look like? How did the Romans come to Britain? Was it a peaceful invasion? Do you know what an archaeologist does?

Suggested activities at the start of the lesson:

- Ask the children where they were born/their parents were born/their grandparents were born. Get children to discuss why their family members have moved. Give examples of yourself and your family.
- Bring a bag full of discarded items: pizza cardboard box, curry jar, 'gold' jewellery, tin of dog or cat food, a postcard. Say these have been found in your neighbour's garden and get the children to discuss what they tell us about the person next door. Why do they have these items? Are they rich or poor? Are they from somewhere else? Where did they buy these items? How do you know that some items are more expensive than others? How do we know how much an item means to someone?

SLIDE 2:

- The Romans came to Britain more than 2000 years ago. We want to find out who the real Romans were and what they looked like. Have a look at the pictures of people on the screen. Who do you think was a Roman living here in Britain?

SLIDE 3:

- We are going to investigate the grave of a real Roman woman called Julia Tertia.
- Her skeleton was found in York, and she was buried with a lot of expensive grave goods.
- In Roman times, people would often put jewellery on their dead during the funeral, or give them presents to be buried with.
- Archaeologists have studied the grave and all the items in it, and we are going to have a look at what they are, and what they tell us about this lady.

SLIDE 4:

Pass the prints of the ivory bangles around

- Julia was found with some bracelets, some of which were made from ivory, that's why she is also called the Ivory Bangle Lady.
- Do you know where ivory comes from? It's a hard white material from the tusks of elephants.
- These bracelets were very precious in Roman times, and you can see that one of them even has a pattern on it.
- The ivory for these bracelets came all the way from north Africa. Jewellery makers in north Italy would have then worked the ivory tusks into bracelets.
- The bracelets were then shipped to Britain where they could be bought and sold.
- What do you think it tells us about this lady that she had ivory bracelets in her grave?

SLIDE 5:

Pass the print of the jet bracelet around

- Julia was found with even more bracelets, like this one here made from jet. Jet was popular for jewellery in Roman times.
- Jet is a black material that is found in Whitby in Yorkshire, not far from where Julia was buried in York. It is formed from the fossilised wood of the Monkey Puzzle Tree over many millions of years.
- Julia may have bought this bracelet at the market in York herself.
- Does this bracelet tell us anything more about Julia?

SLIDE 6:

Pass the print of the glass bracelet around

- A third type of bracelet was also found with Julia. This one here is made from blue glass beads.
- There were many glass makers in Roman Britain, and jewellery made from glass was popular.

SLIDE 7:

Pass the print of the glass jug around

- It was not just jewellery that was made of glass by the Romans. Archaeologists also found this blue glass jug in the grave of Julia.
- This is a very precious item, as not many people would have been able to afford a small jug made of glass.
- We can't tell what was in the jug when Julia was alive, but we think it could have been used for wine or perfume. Do you have any other ideas what it might have been used for?
- What do you think this jug tells us about Julia and her life in York?

SLIDE 8:

Pass the print of the mirror around

- Another item in Julia's grave was made from glass: this is a mirror.
- The Romans made mirrors by polishing glass until you could see your reflection in it.
- The mirror found in Julia's grave would have had a wooden or leather case, but this hasn't survived in the soil for 2000 years.
- Maybe Julia was quite concerned with her appearance, that's why this mirror was put in her grave when she was buried.
- What else can this mirror tell us about Julia, how she felt and what she looked like?

SLIDE 9:

Pass the print of the bone plaque around

- The last item that archaeologists found in the grave was this bone plaque or inscription.

- This writing was probably set into a wooden box.
- This is a very strange and unusual object to find in the grave of a Roman woman in Britain.
- Some of the writing on the tablet has survived and can be read by archaeologists. It says: 'Hail Sister, may you live in God'.
- This is a Christian blessing and tells us that Julia may have been a Christian.
- This is very interesting, as not everyone was Christian in Roman times, and people had many different religions.

SLIDE 10:

- Archaeologists and anthropologists can study the bones of the skeleton, that's why we know that Julia was a woman.
- The bones of the hip and in the skull are slightly different between men and women, meaning that women have wider hips and men have bigger jaws for example.
- Her bones showed that she was healthy and young when she died.
- We can even listen to the scientist who studied her.

Click on the link, then the skeleton and play video 'Listen to the scientist'.

SLIDE 11:

- The skeleton of Julia held even more clues for the archaeologists.
- By studying her bones very closely, especially those from her skull, scientists can tell that she had a parent from north Africa.
- This means that either her mum or her dad came from somewhere in the north of Africa.
- As you can see in the picture, the scientists have worked together with an artist to reconstruct what Julia may have looked like when she was alive.
- Do you think Julia grew up in Roman York, or that she travelled to Britain and York when she was an adult?

SLIDE 12:

- Now we know that Julia's mother or father came from North Africa, we also want to know where Julia is from and where she grew up.
- Another interesting thing that scientists can study are the teeth from a skeleton.
- Julia had very clean teeth that were in good condition, and these are excellent for more analysis.
- Your teeth only grow when you are a child. For example, the tooth crown of your two big incisors at the front of your upper jaw forms when you're between 4 and 5 years old, and stays the same for the rest of your life.
- When our teeth are formed, some tiny elements from the food we eat and water we drink as children stay in our teeth.

- The water we drink is different in Britain compared to, for example, Italy or North Africa. In Roman times, the foods eaten in Britain or Italy would have been different, too.
- Archaeologists studied the teeth of Julia and looked at the chemical elements they contained from food and water.
- Those elements show that she did not spend her childhood in North Africa, but may have grown up somewhere warmer like the south of Britain, for example.
- This shows us that people moved long and short distances during the Roman period. One of the Ivory bangle's parents likely came from North Africa, and she herself was probably not born in the place she died.

SLIDE 13:

- After all this, studying the teeth and the bones, and all of Julia's grave goods, what can we tell about this lady?
- Julia was leading a very interesting life.
- She was a very wealthy young woman of high status living in Roman Britain.
- She grew up somewhere warmer and only travelled to York when she was an adult, where she eventually died.
- She must have had many wealthy and important friends in the city of York to have had such a rich grave and funeral.
- One of her parents came from north Africa and she may have been a Christian.
- How do you imagine Julia's life?
- We can listen to Julia's story here, based on how the scientists who have studied here think she might have lived.

Click on the link and play audios.

SLIDE 14:

- Now that you've heard about the story of Julia, who do you think the Romans in Britain were?
- Do you think it was only soldiers who moved to Roman Britain?
- Julia was leading a very interesting life, and shows that wealthy people from all over the Empire travelled and came to Roman Britain.
- Julia also shows that women were moving to Britain, not just soldiers.
- Most importantly, Julia shows that African Romans were living in Britain, and not just as servants but very wealthy and important citizens.