

## THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ROMAN TOWNS: STUDIES IN HONOR OF JOHN S. WACHER

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This volume is a festschrift dedicated to John Wacher, author of *The Towns of Roman Britain* (Berkeley 1974), which became one of the key texts for the study of Britannia, and its second edition (1995) is the starting point for many a research project and undergraduate essay alike. The 26 papers in the volume are, as to be expected, heavily biased toward Roman Britain (18 of the 26), and all but three of the authors are based in the United Kingdom. The book has no underlying thesis, being a collection of essays linked only by the general theme of the volume, and each would stand on its own. Many of the papers examine an aspect of a town (e.g., defenses at Colchester, Chichester, and Caerwent), summarize the results of a recent or ongoing project (e.g., Pompeii, Dolaucothi, Richborough), or provide a useful overview of one settlement (e.g., Ancyra, Nijmegen, Carlisle). A few papers look at broader issues (e.g., Ferris on urban art, Hassall on the tabularium, Esmonde Cleary on civil defenses in the west).

The production is generally good, with the black-and-white photographs reproduced well. In common with most self-typeset volumes, it is in A4 format, although it is nicely bound in hard covers. There are a few typographic errors, the worst of which occurs in the title of the paper by Neal (*Veralamium* instead of *Verulamium*). The tables are ghastly, however, showing no understanding of typographic design issues.

Rather than attempt to summarize or review all 26 papers, I will pick out some of the points and issues that seemed of especial interest to me; reviewers with different preoccupations would no doubt alight on others.

One trend in the study of Roman towns that is reflected in a couple of papers here

is the use of large-scale geophysical survey, which in recent years has developed into a research technique in its own right. The Wroxeter Hinterland Project (ch. 22) combined field survey, excavation, and the collation of existing data sources (within a GIS) along with geophysical survey of almost the entire town. A wide variety of techniques were used, which have been published in *Archaeological Prospection* (7[2] [2000]). The results dramatically increased the number of buildings known within the town. More important, however, is the use of different geophysical signatures to characterize the nature of the settlement in various areas (e.g., industrial vs. high-status buildings), although the discussion is marred by errors in numbering the insulae such as “XLX [meaningless]–LXI [nonexistent]” (229). The authors’ call for other greenfield Romano-British towns to be surveyed in a similar manner (226) makes much sense, especially when it can be combined with excellent aerial photographic evidence such as that discussed by Wilson for Caistor-by-Norwich (ch. 25). The Richborough project discussed by Millett and Wilmott is a second interesting example of this approach, looking at the settlement around the well-known fort (although 189–90 reads like a grant application). Such broad-scale projects are contributing significantly to our understanding of the urban form but are obviously limited by the few sites available for such treatment.

The origins and early development of towns in Roman Britain have been much debated. The inclusion of two examples from the Rhine frontier (Cologne by Carroll [ch. 3] and Nijmegen by van Enckevort and Thijssen [ch. 7]) provides stimulating comparisons. Both these towns were thought to be inhabited

by a mixed population with high numbers of immigrants, although the evidence for this is not discussed. Both argue for a deliberate, state-led policy of urbanization. This contrasts with the elite-competition model for urbanization in Britain, which has perhaps become the dominant explanation in recent years. Fulford (ch. 10) provides us with a wider summary of the evidence for the earliest phases of towns in southern Britain than the title of his paper suggests. He argues that the extensive early settlement at Silchester was a result of its being the principal town within the client kingdom of Cogidumnus, and that this kingdom included most of the land south of the Thames, as well as the territory of the Catuvellauni centered on Verulamium. The evidence for the extent of the kingdom is virtually nonexistent, and although the possibility that the quick development of Silchester could be attributed to the kingdom's favored status, the pattern of development at the other public towns in the region seems unlikely to be a result of this.

Esmonde Cleary's collation of the evidence for town walls in Gaul and Germany provides an important context for the unusual pattern of development in Britain (ch. 8). Although the suggestion that many of these early wall circuits were status symbols rather than defensive works is not new, having the data to back this up is helpful. Against this background, Esmonde Cleary argues that many of the early British wall circuits may also have been more symbolic than functional. This is surely right but still leaves us wondering why so many more sites were defended.

The "transformation" of the western Roman empire during the period now usually referred to as Late Antiquity is a topic of much current debate, but nowhere is this transformation murkier than in Britain. Protagonists in the arguments surrounding the end of Roman Britain can be crudely divided into supporters of a long chronology or of a short one. Verulamium, so often a type-site for the development of urbanism in Britain, has contributed to this

debate in many ways but especially with the identification by Frere of a long sequence of occupation in *Insula XXVII*. Neal (ch. 19) was unhappy with the dating of this sequence, not for its wider implications but because it caused problems with the stylistic dating of the mosaics. His detailed examination of the report shows that the dating relies on only two coins, and that there are contradictions between this evidence and the pottery. If one accepts his revision of the data, the whole sequence can be contained within the third and fourth centuries, and one of the major pieces of evidence for the supporters of the long chronology vanishes. A detailed re-examination of the excavation archive and the ceramic evidence is needed. Two minor points should be noted. First, the off-setting of the north entrance of the forum with the north-south road depicted in figure 19.2 has been shown by Niblett to be the result of a Victorian surveying error (cf. 301). Second, if by "substantial" (197) Neal means "deep," this cannot be cited as evidence for a second story, however likely. Deep foundations are needed when the subsoil is poor, and in this case the structure was built over the levelled remains of buildings destroyed by the fire of ca. A.D. 155.

In summary, this volume contains much that is worthy, useful, and interesting but is, on the whole, unambitious. It is not a volume to which one would point a student in the first instance, or one to which colleagues in other disciplines would turn to discover what Roman archaeology has to contribute to the study of urbanism. Like Wachter's original volume, however, it contains much in the way of helpful synthesis.

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