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The Material Fall of Roman Britain, 300–525 CE. By Robin Fleming. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. 296 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. Hardcover, \$45.00. ISBN: 978-0-81229-736-2.

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Reviewed by Adam Rogers

This is an entertaining and accessible book on an interesting period in the history of Britain, 300 to 525 CE, as it moved from being part of the Roman Empire to entering the early medieval world. Its focus on materials is narrow but provides a stimulating perspective on the nature of life in Britain at this time. The title has echoes of Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which might suggest a book describing the end of Roman civilization in Britain, but there is more nuance to the issues it examines.

The book's approach to materials takes a clear overall economic theme—"marking change in Britain as the Roman state and economy receded" (p. 8)—and it starts by setting out a vision of the economy of Britain in the later Roman period including a focus on the *annona* system. The book is then organized over a series of chapters, each taking a different category of material or find type, that describe how the evidence changed from the late Roman to early post-Roman periods. The choice of themes allows for an interesting discussion of the material world of the period addressing the issues of industry, production, skills, trade, and commerce but also, as the author states, "not just that people make things, but that things make people" (p. 175). Drawing on a range of theories connected with materiality, including the work of anthropologist Danny Miller (p. 44), author Robin Fleming shows that there are social as well as economic implications to understanding the material and that there is a need to consider both together.

The first material category is plants and animals (chapter 2), and Fleming conjures an evocative image of not only the food that became available in Roman-period Britain but also the invasive species resulting from connectivity across the Empire. There could have been more on how lives in many rural sites differed from those in urban and military

settlements. In chapter 3 the book charts the changes to pottery production and availability well, although there could be more consideration of alternative traditions to pottery use. This also has implications for understanding the material examined in chapter 4, which looks at the afterlife of Roman ceramic and glass vessels. Fleming discusses evidence for how pieces of Roman-period pottery appear to have been collected and repurposed in the post-Roman period, but this then also raises questions as to what kinds of vessels these people were using in their daily lives.

In a useful reminder of the nature of Britain in the Roman period, the chapter examining brick and quarried stone emphasizes how most households would not have had the means or inclination for stone-built architecture. More on different building styles here would have been useful, to balance the discussion on stone. Especially interesting is the way in which building stone appears to have been used or treated in ways that suggest it possessed meaning, such as being included in potential structured deposits in wells. This, and the incorporation of stone into new structures, is similar to the *spolia* phenomenon seen across the Roman world in the late Roman and early post-Roman periods, where stone was reused—often in ways that appear meaningful, perhaps even having apotropaic significance. The chapter links well with the next, on metal production (chapter 6), which evokes the scale at which metal was to form part of people's lives by the later Roman period from the smallest iron nail upwards. Fleming argues that the reemergence and control of metalworking played a role in the development of localized hierarchical societies in the post-Roman period.

Human remains also formed part of this material world and represented responses to economic and social contexts. In a departure from what might be regarded as more conventional categories in material studies, Fleming examines the ways in which infant burials were used in structured ways in settlements, showing the complexity of engagement with the material world (chapter 7); these practices appear to have largely gone by the early post-Roman period. Chapter 8 examines the identity of those buried within early Anglo-Saxon-era cemeteries and shows how the cemeteries were being used by local people and incomers to Britain at this time. The debate on what is Anglo-Saxon identity has similarities with the discussions within Roman archaeology as to what we mean by "Roman" and "Roman Britain." You could argue that this book takes a Romanocentric stance, prioritizing the "Roman" perspective through its choice of materials and objects—and looking for their fall—without really managing to capture the range and complexity of different lives and experiences throughout the Roman period.

It would have been useful to include more discussion of how we understand the nature of the Roman period economy and the need to think about localized responses, experiences, and different practices. We tend to produce an image of the economy in the Roman period as familiar to the modern world and normative, but there may well have been many different economies in Britain in the Roman period, some engaging with the Roman world and others more local and culturally meaningful. Fleming emphasizes that the material developments documented in the book built a brand-new material reality, a different material Britain, and as such we could argue for a change rather than a fall.

The book is written in an engaging and conversational way that will appeal to a wide audience. The highly selective approach to the case studies can be a bit frustrating at times, but an extensive notes section at the end of the book is helpful.

Adam Rogers specializes in the archaeology of the Roman World at the University of Leicester and has published books including Late Roman Towns in Britain: Rethinking Change and Decline (2011), Water and Roman Urbanism: Towns, Waterscapes, Land Transformation and Experience in Roman Britain (2013) and The Archaeology of Roman Britain: Biography and Identity (2015).

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Pioneers of Capitalism: The Netherlands, 1000-1800. *By Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. 280 pp. Illustrations, tables, map, notes, bibliography, index. Hardcover, \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-69122-987-4.

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Reviewed by Gijs Dreijer

In this book, the (recently retired) Utrecht professors Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden tackle an important subject in the history of capitalism: the development of capitalism in the early modern Dutch Republic (today, the Netherlands). Arguing that the roots of capitalism in the Netherlands can be traced back to the medieval period, the authors forcefully push back against narratives that define the Dutch Revolt of 1566 to 1609 as an important breaking point in the development of capitalism in the Netherlands. Drawing from literature on the importance of institutions, as well as the “varieties of capitalism” literature, Prak and van Zanden argue that both the peculiar institutional structure of the state and the early commercialization of the countryside (thereby overcoming ecological bottlenecks) significantly contributed to the Dutch economic miracle of the early modern period.