

The last Part, ‘Comparing *Villae* and Peasants Habitats in Settlement Systems’, does not focus so much on analysing the landscape, but rather on an examination from an architectural perspective, following a more traditional approach based on the identification of settlement patterns, but not without opening new avenues for investigation in Roman peasantry. In this regard, V. Revilla discusses the architectural and functional characteristics of various types of rural settlements in north-eastern Spain. The aim is twofold: on the one hand, to define better the nature of the *villa* system and its impact on the landscape and on the organisation of settlements; on the other hand, to highlight the problems of identification of peasant lifeways using complex archaeological documentation. The chapter by M. Sánchez-Simón, in turn, focuses on *villae* and farms in central Roman Spain during the early Roman period, whereas the chapter by A. Vigil-Escalera Guirado seeks to explore how rural populations developed in central Spain during the late Roman and early medieval periods. The latter focuses on the identification of the peasantry in the context of the aftermath of the Roman Empire and the decline of large rural estates. Finally, in a purely theoretical chapter, in the good and necessary sense of the word, J.A. Quirós Castillo explores the Roman and early medieval agrarian societies of north-western Spain, using a relational perspective, drawing on concepts such as relational agency, social memory, moral economy and closure theory.

This book provides the framework to strengthen the interdisciplinary connections between aspects of existing research on rural societies in the Roman period. According to Bermejo Tirado and Grau Mira in the concluding chapter, further engagement with such questions in other geographical areas across the Mediterranean is essential in order to add analytical value to these new ideas, help reformulate questions and bring a more comprehensive analysis of how rural places were remade under the Roman Empire. Despite the overwhelming volume of material remains and literary sources in this period, Roman archaeology is seldom studied in connection with wider issues in contemporary social sciences. Thus, only in the direction set by this volume will we be able to move forward in making a future contribution from the perspective of archaeology to a better understanding of rural societies at a global level.

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THE ROMANS IN BRITAIN

HINGLEY (R.) *Conquering the Ocean. The Roman Invasion of Britain*. Pp. xiv + 312, ills, maps. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Cased, £22.99, US\$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-093741-6.
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In this book H. recognises the tendency in recent years for those studying Roman Britain to ignore the ancient texts. He therefore aims ‘to navigate the division between [the] accounts of classical literature and studies of archaeological materials’ (p. viii). His suggestion that the use of the term ‘sources’ for the texts ‘implies that they contain factual information about events that can be taken on trust’, preferring ‘literary texts’ (p. 6), may, however, raise eyebrows. It not only misunderstands the work of generations of scholars, but H. also bases his narrative on texts that can only be described as key sources, and he takes literary flourishes seriously. For example, Tacitus’ epigram about ‘enslavement’

(the result of being introduced to fine living and baths: *Agricola* 21) is treated as though it means literal slavery (pp. 256, 258; cf. A. Birley's translation [1999], pp. xxxv–vi). The key to the book's overall approach can be found in the rather awkward final sentence: 'This tale of conquering Ocean narrated in this book are [sic] aimed to communicates [sic] the futility of such imperialistic acts and the death and enslavement they occasion' (p. 260). These sentiments demonstrably affect the selection and interpretation of the evidence.

Archaeological evidence and texts are used to contrast peaceful Britons and aggressive, exploitative Romans. While archaeology may show little conflict in the Iron Age (p. 61; cf. pp. 7, 33–4), we would similarly lack evidence if we relied on archaeology alone for the Roman invasions. Even the claimed Caesarean invasion base near Ebbsfleet (p. 30) is open to other interpretations. The evidence (e.g. p. 26) can easily be read as indicating an Iron Age martial culture. Chariot warfare needs controlled resources and practice. British exports including grain and slaves (p. 59) must have been carefully controlled, and the slaves must have been obtained from warfare. One should not argue anything from standard depictions of victims on Roman tombstones (p. 237; cf. pp. 84, 191); this is merely the visual equivalent of naming one's 'people' 'men good in battle' (the *Catuvellauni*, p. 268). References to the Britons' use of forests and marshes in warfare may well be genuine (*contra* p. 33). Even in the south-east Caesar and Aulus Plautius would have seen for themselves the forest of the Weald, heavily wooded London Clay and marshes in Kent and Essex. The frequent emphasis on deliberate Roman massacres to set examples proceeds by assumption, with little support from the evidence: for example, 'a small sample of the *many* victims' (p. 84); 'we can *presume*' slaughter (p. 160); the 'strategy *may* have included the killing of their enemies in large numbers' (p. 157). This is all rather in contradiction to H.'s emphasis on the constant Roman search for slaves (e.g. pp. 37, 157).

Taxation is another regular theme (e.g. pp. 122–3), but the probability that something of the kind existed in Iron Age societies is ignored (cf. *Agricola* 13). H. says *Agricola* was 'working ... to improve the efficiency of the taxation' (p. 140), when Tacitus' story was about him dealing with abuses in the system (*Agricola* 19). Tacitus himself helped to prosecute a corrupt proconsul (Birley's translation, p. xxxiii). Any positive aspects go unnoticed. The archaeological evidence suggests that the south-east, and later much more of Britain, took readily enough to being in the Empire; countryside settlement shows little change in the years either side of the invasion.

The narratives of the invasion and the Boudican revolt are disappointing, both muddled and offering little advance on the traditional stories. The text (e.g. p. 69) rather conflicts with the map (fig 3.1; surely 48–9 is an error for 43–9?). Accepting that Togodumnus and Togidubnus are the same (pp. 70–1) follows current fashion, which makes no sense from the Roman point of view, and after all there were other Boudicas (R. Tomlin, *Britannia Romana* [2018], p. 211; cf. R. Coates, *Antiquaries Journal* 85 [2005]). The supposedly planned Caligulan invasion (pp. 63–4) lacks almost any evidence, and the case for Plautius landing in the Solent, offering a better fit for Dio's account (e.g. D. Bird, *Britannia* 33 [2002]) should have received attention.

The Solent area is something of a blind spot for H.; illustrations consistently lack the London–Chichester road (fig. 7.10 omits the London–Silchester road). The Seine–Solent was a long-established crossing (B. Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean* [2001], p. 43; not mentioned in this book). H. refers to pre-Roman Fishbourne and the major settlement at Silchester (e.g. pp. 54–5, 126), but fails to recognise their significance during the invasion. He lands forces at Fishbourne, but gives them nothing to do (pp. 67–9). In the Boudican revolt, far from going north after the dash to London, Suetonius Paulinus would surely have aimed to protect Silchester, providing himself with support, supplies and a link to the Continent (*contra* p. 122).

The attention paid to a magnified special significance of Ocean is supported by little more than assertion: for example headings such as ‘subduing Ocean’ (p. 94), ‘Emperor of the Ocean’ (p. 198), ‘Ocean harnessed’ (p. 228), and language implying more than is in the texts. Claudius’ speech to the Senate (p. 94) does not say ‘*challenging the gods and crossing Ocean*’; Tacitus (*Agricola* 23) has no mention of ‘*divine waters*’ (p. 153). A quoted ‘Roman poet’ (Martial) only refers to *visiting* ‘Father Ocean’ (p. 162). H. suggests that ‘failures in Britain contributed to the poor reputation of the emperors Caligula, Nero and Domitian, who were damned at death by order of the Roman Senate’ (pp. 4–6; cf. 65), but it is surely a step too far to suggest that this figured much in minds at Rome where these rulers were concerned.

Most ancient references emphasise the difficulties, not the ritual aspect of the Ocean. Surely if conquering Britain was seen as a ‘religious’ objective and campaigning a ‘magical act’ (p. 4), we should expect Caesar and Tacitus to emphasise this aspect? Yet *Agricola* 10 is standard in offering a sober and practical account of the ‘the largest of the islands known to the Romans’ and its surrounding seas. Calling Hadrian’s Wall the ‘magic and military wall’ (pp. 222, 230) cannot hide the lack of evidence for the supposed special link to Ocean. There may be water-related shrines along the Wall, but there were for other landscape features also (p. 225), and these practices are common throughout the Empire. We might recall Frontinus, with his views on Roman practicality, as exemplified by aqueducts, compared to ‘the useless, though famous, works of the Greeks’ (*De Aquaeductu* 16).

There are some surprising errors in the concluding sections (e.g. concerning *Classis Britannica* forts [p. 214], Carausius [p. 248] and Magnus Maximus [p. 264]), but they are irrelevant to the main thrust of the book. The afterword, ‘What Have the Romans Ever Done for Us?’, mostly challenges any positive views of things Roman; but surely one cannot take Monty Python seriously as representing views in ‘elite (“public”) schools’ (p. 258)? Overall, the book offers little new on the narrative of invasion and conquest, with the main differences being the focus on nasty imperialist Romans and an interesting but ultimately unconvincing exploration of the supposed religious and magical dimension caused by Britain’s setting in the Ocean. The target audience is presumably undergraduates with little knowledge of Roman Britain. The book may offer them a marker of the current anti-colonial approach with an up-to-date bibliography, but it is to be hoped that challenging it will encourage readers to seek a more balanced engagement with the original texts.

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THE SOUTH-WEST OF ENGLAND IN ROMAN TIMES

THOMAS (S. A.) *On the Edge of Empire. Society in the South-West of England during the First Century BC to fifth Century AD.* (BAR British Series 667.) Pp. xvi + 207, figs, colour ills, b/w & colour maps. Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2021. Paper, £52. ISBN: 978-1-4073-5846-8.
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Exeter, Isca Dumnoniorum, is the last (or first) Roman town in the south-west of the Roman province of Britannia. It was responsible for the judicial and fiscal administration of the peoples of the south-west, the *civitas* of the Dumnonii, which, it is believed, but