



Review

Roman Frontier Archaeology – in Britain and Beyond: Papers in Honour of Paul Bidwell Presented on the Occasion of the 30th Annual Conference of the Arbeia Society. Edited by N. Hodgson and B. Griffiths. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2022. Pp. xii +371, illus. Price £60. ISBN 9781803273440 (pbk); 9781803273457 (open access eBook).

Hadrian's Wall has never benefited from a state-sponsored Reichslimes Kommission as in Germany, but this volume celebrates the very British achievement of the three decades of research and fieldwork on Hadrian's Wall which Paul Bidwell conducted for Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM) from his base at South Shields Roman fort. The papers are grouped in six parts: pre-Roman, material culture and scientific evidence, southern Britain, antiquarian matters, the Roman military north, and other frontiers.

The single pre-Roman paper by Heslop presents a valuable overview of the Late pre-Roman Iron Age (LPRIA) in the north-east, this area having benefited from two decades of developer-funded projects. The contributions in the next section vary from the big picture to insights dedicated to specific objects. Allason-Jones presents a study of sculpted pinecones as a taster for her now published CSIR volume on Roman sculpture in the hinterland of Hadrian's Wall, including a corrective to those who have posited any association with 'fantastic' Roman pineapples. Hunter discusses the significance of an enamelled strap junction from Doune fort near Stirling. The decoration is characteristic of southern LPRIA with vibrant red glass inlay. Brickstock has the honesty to revise some of his previous studies on third-century coin supply and circulation and to consider the end of the Augustan monetary system and the new *annona militaris*. This raises questions of how foodstuffs and other goods were transported to the Wall garrisons, which Dannell and Mees address as part of their comprehensive analysis of samian stamps found across Britain. They illustrate a cost path analysis which suggests a road-based supply system rather than sea-borne transport. A similar theme of supply emerges in Van der Veen's update of her earlier studies based on a deposit of burnt grain from South Shields, noting the future potential for stable isotope analysis and other techniques to help resolve the question of local supply *versus* import from afar. Croom studies 103 examples of pottery repairs known from South Shields, many from decorated samian bowls, a measure of their value to the owners. But in relative terms fourth-century coarsewares such as Crambeck show the most repairs, a clear reflection of reduced market supply and demand. The section concludes with a useful summary of trials of hand-thrown weapons by the Quinta re-enactment group by Griffiths, and a study by Greep of composite dice carved from bovine metacarpals mostly found in the towns of south Britain, largely replaced by the second century by smaller dice from single bones as commonly found on Hadrian's Wall.

The attention then turns to papers concerning south Britain, two focusing on baths, and two on the south-west where, as the contributors note, Bidwell's interest remained undiminished over 40 years. Fulford reconsiders the five major baths known from first-century Britain including the legionary baths at Exeter published by Bidwell in 1979. Holbrook examines previously unpublished antiquarian and more recent archaeological evidence for the location of the public baths of Cirencester which can now be placed in Insula II, south-west of the forum. Recent discoveries of Roman military sites from air photography and excavation in Devon and Cornwall allow Griffiths to update Rivet and Smith's 1979 place-name study. In an intriguing study of river access combining archaeology and geomorphology, Kaye and Salvatore demonstrate how the tidal regime and mid-first-century topography determined the location for barge quays and shipping on the river Exe.

Three antiquarian studies follow. Breeze illustrates a range of nineteenth-century views of part of Hadrian's Wall on Walltown Crags now lost to quarrying. Miket draws attention to a remarkable legacy of John Collingwood Bruce, an intricate bookcase and wooden bindings for the third edition of his *Roman*

Wall (1867). Once claimed to derive from the timbers of Newcastle's Roman bridge, radiocarbon dates revealed a range over nearly two millennia both B.C. and A.D. Miket skilfully navigates through the objects' varied biographies. By comparing the accounts of William Hutton and John Skinner, who independently walked the length of Hadrian's Wall in 1802, Wilmott presents a valuable survey of the Wall's condition in the early nineteenth century.

Collins' is the first paper in the section on the Roman military north. Until the later third-century, epigraphy provides a valuable resource for the commanders of the Wall garrisons, but as on other frontiers the decline of the epigraphic habit creates a vacuum of knowledge, which Collins approaches through the study of *praetoria*, especially South Shields and Vindolanda. Hingley's paper is concerned with the symbolic power of Oceanus from the time of Caesar onwards, suggesting that 'the role of the Wall as a boundary stood in place of the terminus of Ocean' – a possible solution for the two statues of Neptune from inland Housesteads? Hodgson presents a finely argued study of the systems of proportion which underlie the planning of the Hadrianic and Antonine stone forts of Wallsend and South Shields. Having established the metrology as the *pes Monetalis*, in practice 0.30 m, it is possible to define the grid based on multiples of 120 RF (1 *actus*) extending in both cases as far as the outer edge of the fort ditches. Hodgson posits 'the design of the fort is based on a regression of proportional shapes'. He compares other similar studies and reflects on the painstaking achievements of the *mensores*, creating apparently unique solutions for each site. The study can serve as a model for future analysis of Roman military structures.

Symonds and McCluskey both address differing aspects of warfare and conflict relating to Hadrian's Wall and its hinterland. Symonds critically reviews recent scholarship concerning the initial construction of Hadrian's Wall and turns to consider the potential threat posed by the indigenous north British tribes. McCluskey in turn considers urban conflict in the context of 'destruction deposits' from Corbridge and proximate wall forts. Unlike the small-scale threat described by Symonds in the Hadrianic period, the destruction in Commodus's reign implies a concerted tribal alliance, a foretaste of the later confederation of the Picti. Poulter examines the question of the Stanegate crossing of the North Tyne, a recognised gap in the known line of the road. Previous field evidence from excavation and observations are supplemented by recent LiDAR survey and a range of options are clearly illustrated and considered. Snape draws together the results from a number of excavations at South Shields to document and assess the evidence for the extramural settlement and broadens her study to consider the fate of *vici* along the frontier, while Wilson turns attention south of the Wall zone to Durham and North Yorkshire. Focusing like McCluskey on the events of the 180s, he considers how the continuing military presence at Piercebridge and elsewhere can be reconciled with developed rural settlements like Ingleby Barwick, suggesting continued insecurity in the Pennines to the west.

Three final papers consider frontiers outside Britain. Nemeth draws attention to the strategic concerns of Dacia, especially the threats posed by the *lazyges* in the plains to the west of the province. He draws attention to specific garrisons of Palmyrene archers and *numeri Maurorum* equipped to deal with steppe opponents. Welsby and Sjöström describe exceptional finds of rectangular kilns in the Kush empire on the middle Nile. Many of the closest parallels lie on Roman military sites: the finds raise questions of technological exchange between empire and neighbour. Finally, Wheeler draws attention to a comment in the sixth-century text of John Lydus which recalls Constantine I's 'last campaign' against Persia. Using his command of the eastern frontier evidence, he presents a thought-provoking discussion of imperial strategy up to the Byzantine era.

The editors are to be congratulated on assembling this rich and diverse collection of papers. Handsomely produced and illustrated by Archaeopress, it reflects ongoing debates in Roman archaeology across Britain and beyond and will interest a wide readership. Throughout, the authors show their admiration and respect for Paul Bidwell's scholarship and contribution to Roman studies, but also to his guidance and friendship. It is a sadness that what should have been a great celebration became a volume to his memory.

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