

clear need for such a popular summary of this work. The book is written in a clear, concise style, which renders technical detail accessible, and this is matched and aided by clear diagrammatical illustrations.

The first two chapters provide background on the landscape setting of Hadrian's Wall, its plan and main components, and a brief section on surveying the line. Chs 3–7 — quarrying and working stone, lime, sand and mortar, scaffolding, hoisting and transport — are the heart of the book. These chapters form a practical introduction to Roman methods of construction, and have far more than a local Hadrian's Wall application. The author's practical experience as a professional stonemason shines through these chapters, which are therefore far clearer than many discussions of these matters written by academics and archaeologists who lack this basic, 'hands-on' practical understanding. A good example is the issue of scaffolding. H.'s analysis of the quantity of scaffolding poles required for the work, and his insistence that scaffolding must have been used for the building of the entire curtain wall demonstrates an aspect of logistics in Wall-building hitherto not considered. Other descriptions, such as that of lifting by means of a lewis, are the clearest that this reviewer has encountered. The description of the capacities of forms of transport from wheeled carts and wagons to pack animals is impressive, using evidence drawn from sculpture, faunal remains, Classical sources, and twentieth-century military manuals.

One of the merits of the book is the correction of terms often used uncritically and erroneously by archaeologists. One example is the use of the term 'ashlar' to describe the stonework of the facing of Hadrian's Wall. In fact this basic Roman military work is technically termed 'squared rubble', ashlar being a term for much higher quality work. The use of the term 'puddled' clay rather than 'clay bonding' is a similar misuse where clay is used instead of mortar.

Chs 8 and 9 apply the lessons of the previous chapters to Hadrian's Wall itself; one deals with building operations, the other with organisational aspects. This latter chapter usefully assesses the effect of adverse climate on the work, concluding that the key was not to undertake work with lime mortars when frost was a risk between October and March, though such was the diversity of tasks involved in establishing the frontier, other jobs could readily be undertaken in winter.

The practical analysis of aspects of the work reveals places where it is 'difficult to imagine a more inefficient way of building', and these are the places where patently the work stopped for a while to be resumed later. Ch. 10, the most important from the point of view of the student of the history of Hadrian's Wall, assesses the physical evidence for dislocations in the work, where changes of plan and halts led to changes in the type and quality of the work.

Essential for any serious student of Hadrian's Wall, H.'s book is also invaluable to anyone with an interest in Roman construction methods.

*English Heritage*

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*Searching for the Silures: An Iron Age Tribe in South-East Wales.* By R. Howell. Tempus, Stroud, 2006. Pp. 159, illus. Price: £17.99. ISBN 978 0 7524 4014 9.

Tacitus' account of the warlike qualities of the Silures and their successes against the invading Roman army gives them a particular distinction amongst the 'peoples' of Roman Britain. Yet outside of this account we hear little more of them. Their name is preserved in *Venta Silurum*, the Roman town of Caerwent; the construction of the forum-basilica, most probably some time in the reign of Hadrian, can perhaps be taken to be the point when at least parts of the former territory passed into civil rather than military control. Traditional views of Romanisation would see the subsequent establishment of the *civitas* capital as a reflection of the progressive civilising influence of the Roman *Imperium*.

This study seeks to find these people and identify continuity from the late Bronze Age into the early medieval period. This is a difficult task. Most of the larger excavations have been of Roman sites and there have been few in the recent past. Therefore, the overall evidence-base for this kind of examination is weak, and Howell is quick to emphasise that without far more investigation, particularly excavation and survey, we are a long way from being able to write a detailed and definitive account. For a start we have little in the way of evidence for the people themselves, as apart from the late sub-Roman cemeteries at Caerwent, Atlantic Trading Estate, near Barry, and Llandough, on the outskirts of Cardiff, no extensive burial groups have been excavated. Nor do we know the extent of the boundaries of Silurian territory before the conquest, although the core of their territory ought to have been in the former counties of

South Glamorgan and Gwent. It is quite possible that they were a loose confederation of smaller groups with territories centred round clusters of hillforts. Following the conquest — the Silures must have been regarded as *dediticii*, a conquered people with no rights — some of the territory would have remained in military (imperial) control, and not just that forming the *territorium* and *prata* of *legio II Augusta* based at Caerleon. Thus the land eventually passing to civil control cannot be equated to that formerly owned by the conquered peoples.

The approach is therefore to seek other markers, but this works to a very limited extent. Ahead of the invasion cultural distinction is sought from ritual deposits, artefact types, and settlement forms and whilst H. can glean some connectivity with other parts of Britain, indicators of a distinctive Silurian culture are few and uncertain, though an affinity to red and black decoration seems possible. Consideration of military dispositions and *vici* is fleeting. Some will find this frustrating, but the approach is consistent with the theme of the work. As there have been no significant excavations in any of the *vici* in south-east Wales, we have no evidence of any interaction. There is some evidence from Caerwent: an altar to the (Romano-Celtic) deity Mars Ocelus, and another inscription dedicated to ‘Mars Lenus otherwise known as Ocelus Vellanus’. It is suggested that Ocelus may have been a deity worshipped by the Silures. Mars Ocelus is also known from Carlisle and whilst these inscriptions, plus a statuette of a seated mother goddess, and a stone head can reasonably be taken to indicate the continuance of earlier beliefs, they do not in themselves confirm the survival of a particular Silurian culture.

Of more potential interest, but rather underplayed, is the discrepant pattern in the countryside. Our attention is drawn to Thornwell Farm in the shadow of Caerwent where Romanisation is only seen in terms of material culture and a similar site at Biglis in the Vale of Glamorgan. The survival of indigenous building forms might be taken to represent cultural continuity, but detailed comparison with other sites where Roman building styles were adopted (e.g. Whitton and Llandough) or those where villas or farmsteads were constructed *de novo* is not made. Whilst on the present evidence-base we may not be able to develop meaningful models of rural life under Roman rule in south-east Wales, the different patterns are intriguing and closer comparative analysis of the material evidence from these sites could be rewarding.

The transition from Roman government to the early medieval kingdoms of Gwent and Glywysing is well-explored with the themes of land-holding continuance, ecclesiastical influence and the return to hill-top settlement, some with clear high status. Is the latter a reflection of increasing uncertainty, or as H., following the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, suggests, an indication that these sites had ‘some legal importance in connection with land tenure’? Here, we might note that it was the Roman *venta* that survived in the name of the early medieval kingdom (Gwent), not the name of the earlier peoples. H. considers that Dinas Powys, excavated by Leslie Alcock, may have been a proto-*llys* (royal court) in Glywysing. The relationship of early medieval ‘Royal’ sites to the later Royal Courts (*llys*) is best seen in north Wales; here the pre-Edwardian conquest *llysau* are generally unfortified, and this also seems to be the case where they can be seen in south Wales, as for example at Llysworney in the Vale of Glamorgan. Dinas Powys is clearly a royal site in Glywysing, but not the only one, for the defended site at Hen Gastell on the Neath estuary can from the material evidence be considered to have high status and was perhaps the seat of a *subregulus*. If each of the seven *cantrefi* of Glywysing had similar local rulers, we might expect to find more of these sites in both early kingdoms. As the Llandaff Charters amongst other sources indicate, some Roman terms (e.g. *villa*) pass into land-holding descriptions, and other continuities were preserved by the church, but these were Roman traditions not those of the Silures. Furthermore, whilst some echoes of earlier Roman land management can be seen, the early medieval Welsh system is separate and removed. It may be intriguing to speculate that it might reflect the late pre-Roman Iron Age system, but this supposition at present lacks the evidence-base. The peoples gradually abandoning the Roman way of life and forming new cultural entities can only have had the barest of links with those who four centuries earlier had briefly made a mark on the pages of history.

The case for continuity is therefore at best tenuous, but what this work does serve to underline is the weaknesses in our current evidence-base. It is to be hoped that the agenda that the author has set can be met, as he pleads, through further targeted research.

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