

with continued differences reflecting the nature and functions of the different sites. One issue with the study and categorisation of sites in this way, however, might be that it applies modern perspectives of status, wealth and value onto the way in which we interpret these sites and landscapes.

The book is very descriptive in terms of sites and data and perhaps some of this material could have been placed in an appendix allowing for more analysis and interpretation in the main text. It is one of the powerful strengths of this project that observations can be made through the use of large datasets. Objects can bring settlements to life and there is considerable opportunity to develop the theoretical perspectives of interpretation. Even what might be regarded as simple observations, such as pottery lids present at certain sites compared with others (p 161), could be used to evoke different experiences, domestic lives and life styles. It is here that there could perhaps be more engagement with tackling the complexities of the relationships between humans, things, buildings and landscapes, and also the difficulties with identity itself and interpreting tribal identities. This might be key to addressing social organisations and relationships in the immediate pre-Roman to early Roman periods. Likewise, the biography of things, including coins, may be more complex than simply their assumed functional usage, which might have had an impact on their distributions and findspots. The book in many ways relies on a very conventional way of reconstructing Roman Britain.

*Alien Cities* offers numerous gems of information that will be invaluable for future studies on, and syntheses of, Roman Britain. It also offers valuable lessons and, in a way, serves as a potential guide for future projects wishing to utilise the vast wealth of data now available in archives and other databases. It demonstrates as well the difficulties and frustrations with such work and the caveats involved, but indicates the rewards of perseverance and collaboration.

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*The Towns of Roman Britain: the contribution of commercial archaeology since 1990.* Edited by MICHAEL FULFORD and NEIL HOLBROOK. 297mm. Pp xvi + 216, b&w and col ills, maps, plans. Britannia Monogr Ser 27. Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, London, 2015. ISBN 9780907764410. £28 (pbk).

The purpose of this volume is straightforward: it is to provide a synthesis and assessment of the contribution that developer-funded archaeology has made to the principal towns of Roman Britain since 1990. By 'principal' is meant towns presumed to be *coloniae*, *municipia* and *civitas* capitals. It contains eleven chapters in all, including an opening introduction by Holbrook and a concluding discussion by Fulford. London and York each get their own chapters, while the towns of the rest of England are grouped in the South-East, the South-West and the Midlands/North. There is a chapter on planning and commercial archaeology, and three thematic chapters on burial archaeology, archaeobotany and zooarchaeology.

The well-written papers summarise some of the particularly eye-catching discoveries, but also do not shy away from articulating the main structural weaknesses of commercial urban archaeology. Bryant and Thomas, in dealing with PPG 16-led archaeology, suggest that one of the greatest advances in the last quarter of a century has come not from commercial work *per se*, but from the impetus PPG 16 provided to establish better urban archaeological databases such as the Urban Archaeological Database and the Extensive Urban Survey programmes. They also note the areas where advances have been much more negligible – improving the standards of some commercial work, publication and archive deposition.

The chapter on Roman London (Perring) deals with the development of the town from much-debated military origins to late in the Roman period. It is worthy and illustrated with useful plans, but ultimately uninspiring. The questions posed are old ones, and there is little evidence that more nuanced research questions have been provoked by the data. This may well be the result of funding arrangements determined by commercial archaeology, as Perring himself suggests. The stand-out statement, however, at least for this reviewer, is that two-thirds of the important excavations undertaken of Roman London in the last twenty-five years have yet to be published in full.

For York, Ottaway remarks that the last twenty years have seen most work take place outside the historic core. There have been significant discoveries, such as the Driffeld Terrace cemetery for executed males, but environmental studies have stagnated, grey literature reports accumulate while full publication remains problematic. What is required now, Ottaway suggests, is not necessarily more fieldwork, but a project designed to harness the research

dividend that lies within already completed work. These three themes – occasional spectacular discoveries, lack of full publication and failure to obtain new research insights from the data already acquired – provide the mood music, both high and low notes, for the rest of the volume.

Fulford divides his paper on the towns of south-east England into Late Iron Age origins or predecessors, Roman intramural and then extramural results. Pre-Roman discoveries, such as the burials at Stanway (Colchester) and Folly Lane (St Albans), and the Late Iron Age activity at Fishbourne (Chichester), are obvious highlights. However, despite major area excavations within the walled circuits of all the major towns of the south east since 1990, only two have seen full publication. In the south west, important advances have been forthcoming with regard to unexpected installations and structures outside the legionary fortress at Exeter, but Holbrook rightly stresses that the major weakness of developer-funded urban archaeology has been the lack of significant progress with regard to publication. The towns of the Midlands and the north have seen more work take place outside their historic cores, with important advances in knowledge about the nature of extramural areas, but Bidwell, recognising the problem of publication, argues that, for the results of commercial archaeology to be realised in full, there needs to be some sort of stage beyond the output processes of developer-funded archaeology.

Incongruously, the chapter on the dead brings some relief, arguably because it is a thematic, as opposed to a geographically constrained, offering. We learn that inhumation was widespread in the early Roman period, that some funerary ceremonies were marked by extensive destruction of objects and commodities and that between 40 and 60 per cent of people in Roman Britain seemed to have moved considerable distances in their lives. But even here Pearce suggests that the lack of print publication greatly compromises the research potential of the new data. Robinson (archaeobotany) and Maltby (zooarchaeology) both flag discoveries (eg large-scale grain storage or systematic cattle-carcass butchery in towns) while both lament the dominance of grey literature and the lack of full publication.

Fulford's concluding chapter strikes a suitably downbeat note and deserves to be read more than once. He itemises some key steps to address the significant problems of commercial archaeology, and soberly suggests that if

publication of a key urban site has not occurred within ten years the chances of it ever appearing are negligible. While agreeing that the issue of non-publication has an ancestry that precedes 1990, he recognises that this failing is still pervasive and persistent. This reviewer found these observations justified, but ultimately depressing. Reviewed from a distant future it is hard to escape the anticipated judgements of successor archaeologists that our profession, in the first quarter of a century of urban commercial archaeology, just did not get it right.

JOHN MANLEY

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*Understanding Roman Frontiers: a celebration for Professor Bill Hanson.* Edited by DAVID J BREEZE, REBECCA H JONES and IOANA A OLTEAN. 253mm. Pp xxxiii + 398, many ills, maps, plans, tables. John Donald, Edinburgh, 2015. ISBN 9781906566852. £30 (hbk).

This wide-ranging volume has immediately become important reading for anyone interested in the ever-broadening subject of Roman frontier studies. As a collection of twenty-six papers examining different aspects of recent research on the subject, it should perhaps be seen as an extra volume to sit beside those that result from successive Congresses of Roman Frontier Studies (*Limeskongress*). This is appropriate as, for decades, Bill Hanson has been a key figure in the development of frontier studies through these Congresses (as is apparent in the appreciation of Bill's career in this volume). The editors and contributors to the book are mostly regular Congress participants.

The contributions are divided into three groups, 'Frontiers and their Operation' (six papers), 'Life in and Beyond the Frontier Zone' (eleven papers) and 'Roman Frontiers: Prospection and Perspectives in the 21st Century' (eight papers).

The first section ranges chronologically from Augustan *stationes* in areas that were to become frontier zones (Ehrdrich) to the nature of late imperial frontiers (Collins), and geographically from the Pennines and the Antonine Wall (Symonds, Grafstaal *et al*) to the Black Sea (Rankov) via considerations of river frontiers