

Overall, S.'s attempts to make his data yield up nuggets of information relating to the socio-economic, military and political aspects of life in *Vindobona*, its hinterland and other sites in the wider region, reveal a thoughtful and thought-provoking approach. He demonstrates that a well-researched corpus of material need not be huge — there are only 369 brooches — for it to flesh out the interplay between the history and the archaeology of a site.

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*The Roman Inscriptions of Britain. Volume III. Inscriptions on Stone, found or notified between 1 January 1955 and 31 December 2006.* By R.S.O. Tomlin, R.P. Wright and M.W.C. Hassall. Oxbow Books, Oxford and Oakville, 2009. Pp. i + 505, illus. Price: £70.00. ISBN 978 1 84217 368 8.

Those who work on Romano-British epigraphy may count themselves fortunate. *RIB* I–III constitutes a published corpus of material that finds few comparisons in the other provinces of the Roman Empire, where the increasingly outdated volumes of *CIL* and *IG* still hold sway, supplemented to very varying degrees. *RIB* I published all material on stone up to 1955; *RIB* II performed the same task for *instrumentum domesticum* up to 1986; and now, in *RIB* III, the work is further updated with 550 inscriptions on stone ‘found or notified’ between 1 January 1955 and 31 December 2006. We await *RIB* IV, in which will appear curse tablets (on lead) and wooden writing-tablets. Although the editing of *RIB* III has been undertaken by Roger Tomlin, the work on these texts has been a continuous process of collection and publication since the 1950s, by Richard Wright, co-editor with Collingwood of *RIB* I, Mark Hassall and Roger Tomlin, who first joined and then succeeded Wright in his task; as Tomlin observes in his preface, ‘Their respective contributions cannot really be quantified’, and the triple credit on the cover seems wholly appropriate.

*RIB* III is an unshamed continuation of Volume I (although the numbering starts afresh from 3001 to signify Volume III; 2506–3000 remain unused). There are some innovations: diplomatic transcriptions now accompany the edited texts and translations; almost every entry includes a photograph as well as a drawing; and every stone includes a six-figure Ordnance Survey grid reference for its find-spot. This last is particularly welcome, although WGS (World Geodetic System) co-ordinates might have been more valuable to an international readership — and usable in e.g. Google Earth. Likewise, a concordance with *AE*, not just *JRS* and *Britannia*, might have been of immediate use to the wider epigraphic community. For those who do not have easy access to the complete set of OS maps for the UK, note the OS’s free online ‘getamap’ service at: <http://www.getamap.ordnancesurveyleisure.co.uk/>; as well as the co-ordinate converter and Google Earth OS grid overlay available at <http://www.nearby.org.uk/>.

The question of mapping, however, also illustrates the more reactionary side to *RIB* III. In his review of *RIB* I (*JRS* 1966), Eric Birley bemoaned the lack of either a *conspectus operis* or a distribution map. The only gesture towards such a map anywhere in *RIB* remains the reproduction in *RIB* I *add.*, 756 of Birley’s own attempt to plot the geographical order of the inscriptions in *RIB* I (cross-referenced here on p. 1; cf. B. Jones and D. Mattingly, *Atlas of Roman Britain* (1990), fig. 5.10 for a distribution map for *RIB* I). In *RIB* I, the original editors delighted in noting Emil Huebner’s misplacing (in *CIL* VII of 1873) of the Mendips in Derbyshire, and of Denbighshire in Scotland, but a chance to be more constructive has been missed.

The lack of any sort of *conspectus* remains a handicap: material from the line of Hadrian’s Wall begins on p. 270, with a brief introduction noting a change in the organisation compared to *RIB* I; but one will find this only by turning the pages. Moreover, this and the very sparse introduction (covering working methods) is also a missed opportunity: the uniting of all the material published piecemeal in *JRS* and *Britannia* over the last 50 years (plus six previously unpublished: *RIB* 3019, 3030, 3109, 3178, 3370 and 3550\*) offers a chance to take stock. The number of lapidary inscriptions from Britain appears to have increased by c. 25 per cent in 50 years (cf. J. Edmondson in A.E. Cooley (ed.), *Becoming Roman, Writing Latin?* (2002), 44–5 on both rates of discovery and the misleading impressions created by provincial-wide totals). I have not done so, but one would at least like to check the statement accompanying Mattingly and Jones’ distribution map for *RIB* I (above) that post-1954 discoveries ‘would not affect the overall pattern greatly’. The rate of discovery, or at least of reporting, to judge by the concordance with *JRS/Britannia*, looks remarkably steady other than

a marked slowdown 1993–1999 (a delayed consequence perhaps both of the recession at the start of the 1990s and the contemporary changes in policy concerning building development and archaeology?). It would be interesting to consider the pattern of new material against, for example, the concise observations of J.C. Mann based upon *RIB I* ('Epigraphic consciousness', *JRS* (1985), 204–6), since *RIB I* continues to provide the foundation for most subsequent discussion. Mann, for instance, noted the preponderance of military tombstones from the line of the Wall, suggesting a lack of take-up in the epigraphic habit in the region; total numbers are small, but the additional nine included here (*RIB* 3290, 3364, 3365, 3366, 3398, 3400, 3445, 3472, 3473) weaken that assessment slightly: only three are clearly for soldiers, one is for a family, two for women, one perhaps for a child, the other two fragmentary (Mann noted 20 military against 15 clearly civilian, and 28 uncertain).

One must not, of course, complain about *RIB* being something it is not, and we have in our hands a wonderful research tool, promptly produced in the face of an increasingly unsupportive research environment, for which Tomlin in particular deserves our immense gratitude. But this volume is not as helpful as it might be. The question is perhaps best considered in the deliberately blunt terms of whether *RIB III* is much more than a very well-edited compilation in a single volume of all the material published in the last 50 years. Given the absence of conspectus, maps and indices, anyone wishing to use this material for the purposes of synthesis will have to work very hard; and as we shall see shortly, related concerns apply at the level of individual texts. The independent work in progress to generate an XML-based digital version of *RIB* is therefore a welcome development.

Some misgivings might also be raised from a methodological point of view, such as occasional inconsistency in presentation, and the deliberately tacit approach adopted in relation to previous scholarship. As an example of the former, both the recording of letter-heights and consistent indication of drawing scale are firmly eschewed in the Introduction. It is a little difficult to see why, when the emphasis is so unashamedly epigraphic ('the prime concern of *RIB III* is the inscribed text', 2). The suggestion that *CSIR* provides letter-heights is beside the point, quite apart from the fact that not every volume of *CSIR* in fact does so; neither does every stone appear in *CSIR*, nor is a concordance to *CSIR* included. Letter-heights are provided in some cases, and the inconsistency looks odder when letter-heights are invoked as the principal argument for the disaggregation of various of the monumental fragments from Southwark (nos 3016ff., especially 3019).

What I have called the 'tacit approach' to previous scholarship can best be illustrated through a couple of examples. *RIB* 3398 from Carvoran on Hadrian's Wall was previously published in *JRS* 1965 and *CSIR* 1.6. In the description of the relief that accompanies the text, *RIB* observes that 'shortness of the tunic suggests a male figure although the person commemorated is female' (this is Wright in *JRS*), 'but the high neckband and outer garments are not typically masculine' (this is Coulston and Phillips in *CSIR*). The only references are the listing of previous publications at the head of the *lemma*. This example is harmless, for sure, but does it count as good practice? Where this becomes irritating, or worse, is in the effort it requires of the interested reader, and in the difficulty it creates of assessing the interpretations presented. *RIB* 3025 is a small fragment (two letters) of a fine marble inscription. Without discussion, the *RIB* entry concludes 'probably no later than c. 175 and funerary'. Working back through the original *Britannia* notice and the excavation report, it remains wholly unclear what the basis for the dating might be (not in any case a common feature in *RIB* it seems, where dates are often avoided, even when previous publications offered them — the previous example, 3398, is dated to the third century in *CSIR*, but no date is offered in *RIB*; notwithstanding the difficulty of dating epigraphic texts that seems to look a gift horse in the mouth). The proposal that the fragment is funerary appears to be a silent inference from the statement in *Britannia* that the fragment was found in secondary deposition in a pit not far from two burial monuments; but that report itself omitted the additional detail of the original excavation report that the fragment was found much closer to a building to which it could have been affixed, and the excavators reasonably wrote only of a monumental inscription. The problem with the tacit approach is that all statements are presented as being of the same status, yet some are derivative, some are inference, and some appear to be the editors' own judgement. Working out which is which is made unnecessarily difficult, and uncertainty will therefore remain as to what the basis is for any particular assertion.

None of this should be allowed seriously to detract from what is a hugely welcome addition to the materials available for the study of Roman Britain. The inclusion of translations already in *RIB I* was a significant step towards increased accessibility; the inclusion of photographs as well as drawings

throughout this volume is a welcome further step (contrast the continued austerity of *CIL*). The production values as a whole are high, the cost is relatively low. If every province were so well served, the study of the Roman world would look very different.

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*Sauromatisches und sarmatisches Fundgut nordöstlich und östlich des Kaspischen Meeres: Eine Bestandsaufnahme bisheriger Forschungen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Waffengräber.* By R. Wegener. British Archaeological Reports, International Series 2072. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2010. Pp. 157, figs 30, pls 97, maps 3. Price: £45.00. ISBN 978 1 4073 0633 9.

The subject matter of this publication is the question of an eastward expansion of the Sarmatians in the fourth to second centuries B.C. But that takes a while to extract from what is a largely unrevised MA thesis, submitted in 2003 to the University of Halle-Wittenberg. The stated aim is the compilation of a gazetteer of sites with finds of the Sarmatians and Sauromatians (the predecessors and/or eastern neighbours of the Sarmatians) east of the Caspian Sea on the basis of published research (3); and the resulting catalogue is described as ‘the core of this work’ (105).

Arguably both topic and approach are wrong for an MA thesis. The main problem is the Soviet and Russian practice of putting most details of fieldwork into unpublished field reports archived at Moscow, with only summaries being published. Any attempt to achieve the aim of the thesis would, therefore, have required lengthy archive study in Moscow. Instead, the author tries to compress the work into the scale of an MA thesis, leaving large gaps in the coverage.

Another problem is the complete absence of theoretical and methodological concepts. This is a serious fault in a study which deals with ethnically identified evidence. Labels such as Scythian, Saka, Sauromatian, Sarmatian and others are used as if they are self-evident. Wegener understands ‘problems of ethnic interpretation’ as relating mainly to the question of which ethnic label fits best. This is all the more frustrating as some specialists on Sarmatians no longer believe that they were an ethnic unit at all. In the ethnic identification of evidence, the author explicitly follows the publications; publications not offering ethno-cultural labels are ignored (3).

Many other procedures are similarly lacking. In the chapter on ‘The Sauromatian and Sarmatian Culture’ where attempts are made to provide an overview of the material culture, each of the sections is referenced predominantly to one or two papers or handbook chapters; and no fewer than 19 of the 23 figures in this chapter are taken from a single book. Written sources such as Herodotus and others are referenced exclusively to overview articles or even archaeology handbooks, which is not acceptable as an academic standard.

The core of the text is the seventh chapter (unnumbered, as are all chapters) which presents, by types of contexts and artefacts, the evidence of graves, grave-goods, sanctuaries and stelae. It is short (17 pages) and entirely descriptive. The evidence cited is referenced to catalogue entries, which does make sense, but the sheer number of catalogue references in the text makes this chapter almost unreadable. In one case, the noun and the verb of one sentence are separated by a full 23 lines (64).

The final section of this chapter presents, in less than one page, the conclusions of the thesis. It briefly lists the possible mechanisms by which Sarmatian artefacts and burial rites may have spread to regions east of the Caspian, coming down, in the admitted absence of sufficient evidence to support any answer, on the side of an eastward migration. And here, in the final sentence of the text, the author expresses the first hint of a doubt as to whether the ethnic identification of nomads is possible at all (75).

The German text is supplemented by English and Russian summaries which, in the view of the reviewer, are more readable than the German original. The Catalogue is a gazetteer which lists sites alphabetically, without geographical subdivisions. In contrast to the rest of the book, it is laid out clearly, providing in 37 pages concise information on each site.

It is recognised that this MA study may have been intended as the first stage of a doctoral thesis. Irrespective of this, the scope of the subject should never have been a stand-alone MA thesis, and the unsatisfactory outcome should never have been published as it stands. Specialists may be able to extract