

period. Although not always addressing the full implications of ‘connectivity’, it provides an extremely valuable resource for the further study of material exchanges between Britain and the Continent.

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doi: 10.1017/S0068113X12000104

*Der Limes; Grenze des Imperium Romanorum.* By W. Moschek. Primus Verlag, Darmstadt, 2010. Pp. 144, figs 22. Price: €16.90. ISBN 978 3 89678 833 7.

*Empire Halts Here; Viewing the Heart of Hadrian’s Wall.* By S. Beckensall. Amberley Publishing, Stroud, 2010. Pp. 156, figs 153. Price: £16.99. ISBN 978 1 4456 0015 4.

*Hadrian’s Wall, History and Guide.* By G. de la Bédoyère. Amberley Publishing, Stroud, 2010. Pp. 160, figs 65. Price: £18.99. ISBN 978 1 84868 940 4.

The Roman frontiers have spawned a vast literature, and one only has to look at the review pages in *Britannia* to see that this has increased in quantity since the designation of Hadrian’s Wall as a World Heritage site in 1987, followed by the addition to the designation of the German Limes (2005) and the Antonine Wall (2008). This varied literature has ranged from academic works, to more popular works, guide books and children’s books. It represents a wide range of approaches, and has been of varied quality. The three books reviewed here represent different approaches to the popular presentation of the frontiers in Britain and Germany.

Wolfgang Moschek’s *Der Limes* is a straightforward, well-informed and wide-ranging introduction to the subject written in plain language. Beginning with the Roman attitude to borders, limits (city walls, temple precincts, etc.) and frontiers in Roman culture, he gives a lively overview of Roman frontier policy from the Republic to Trajan. A rapid survey of the frontiers under Hadrian, using Hadrian’s travels as a theme, and concentrating on the German *Limes* and Hadrian’s Wall follows. This includes brief sections on daily life, including quotes from the Vindolanda letters and reference to military amphitheatres. Subsequent chapters follow the history of the frontier from the later second to the end of the fourth century. Finally, M. presents a brief survey of the meanings that the Roman frontiers have acquired over the post-Roman centuries. Scholars became increasingly aware of the *Limes* through the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and it also achieved value as a symbol. An unfamiliar image was the 1938 Limes medal, commemorating work on the defensive *Westwall* (or Siegfried Line), a phase of the construction of which was called the *Limes* programme. The institution of the Limes Congress and the World Heritage nominations complete the story. The book is sparsely illustrated with monochrome illustrations, including photographs and reconstructions, and a single map, of the entire frontier. Highlight boxes give relevant quotations, and the subheadings are lively (*Dakiens dunkle Wälder – Der Limes porolissensis*).

In contrast to M.’s book, Stan Beckensall has produced a charming and personal picture book of Hadrian’s Wall. It is an annotated album of his own photographs, collected through decades of engagement with the landscape in which he lives with the addition of images of finds chosen by Robin Birley and Lindsay Allason-Jones. The images are grouped to illustrate aspects of landscape, the structures of the Wall, excavations, finds, and the presentation of the monument. The photographs are mostly good, some from unusual viewpoints, and reflect all seasons, though a few have faded and betray their age. A novel approach, it is perhaps difficult to see the audience at which the book is aimed. It certainly has value as a pictorial souvenir, and would work well as a memoir for those who have explored the Wall.

Finally, Guy de la Bédoyère’s guide to Hadrian’s Wall was first published in 1998, and has been a useful general introduction and visitor’s guide to the Wall. The author’s foreword to the 2010 edition, which mentions the Staffordshire Moorlands Pan, found in 2003, is the only revision of the original volume. Despite the huge amount of new information on the Wall that has emerged in the 12 years since 1998, David Breeze’s 14th edition of Bruce’s *Handbook* (2006) is the only work cited in the bibliography that postdates 1998. Nothing dates quicker than a guidebook, and no updating has been undertaken. De la B. does not mention the Hadrian’s Wall National Trail, opened in 2003. He still warns (97) against attempting to ford the Irthing at Willowford, despite the fact that a new footbridge was built there as part of the National Trail in 2001. Similarly at Wallsend what is visible is still apparently ‘dependent on current state of excavations and consolidation’ (36). The Segedunum Fort, Museum and replica bath-house

at Wallsend including the consolidated display of the whole fort plan opened in 2000. The failure to update this guide properly is a real lost opportunity.

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*Excavation of an Enigmatic Multi-period Site on the Isle of Portland, Dorset.* By S. Palmer and D. Reilly. British Archaeological Reports, British Series 499. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2009. Pp. xi + 140, illus, CD-ROM. Price: £34.00. ISBN 1 407306 1 62/ 978 1 4073 0616 2.

On noting the adjective ‘enigmatic’ in the title of an excavation report, the prospective reader can be gripped by two contrary sensations — either that a detailed study of the contents by a fresh pair of eyes will reveal more answers as to the site’s true character, or that the reader will remain, at the end, as baffled as the excavators were. In essence this is the eternal struggle that hope enjoys with experience. In this case, as in many others, it is experience, alas, that triumphs.

First of all, the plaudits. The excavation was carried out by the authors and members of the Association for Portland Archaeology (APA). It was a community-led project, and the amount of data we have from the site is a credit to this largely voluntary force. The project took place in the corner of a large sports field at Royal Manor Arts College in Weston Road, Portland. Excavation was undertaken because of a proposal to lay an all-weather sports field. Commercial archaeologists were initially on-site to do a ‘watching-brief’ during topsoil stripping, and one can sense a car-crash moment when the stripping immediately revealed remains of round and rectangular buildings, as well as quantities of Late Iron Age and Roman pottery. In the end, the quality of the archaeology instantly revealed was such that the proposed sports field was relocated, and the APA got to work on examining what had been surprisingly discovered. It was very soon after that point that the head-scratching started.

The real problem lay in the comparatively small size of the area excavated — c. 30 by 20 m. The archaeology was complex — limestone foundations of one complete roundhouse and half of a second, with most of the south-eastern quadrant of the site occupied by the stone foundations of a medieval rectangular building. In addition there were pits for graves, odd lengths of wall, a sizeable ditch, and a great quantity of finds. The excavation had revealed what was clearly a small part of a much larger site. In summary, several crouched inhumations were located, which appear to fit with the characteristic burial-rite of that part of southern Britain in the Late Iron Age. The roundhouses were dated by the excavators to the early Roman period, although conceivably they concealed earlier, Late Iron Age, foundations. Occupation in the Roman period lasted into the fifth century, and several ‘baby-burials’ were associated with the early ‘Roman’ period. Four out of the seven baby-burials were directly linked with structures, one possibly a domestic oven.

The format of the report leaves much to be desired. After a brief introduction, the text first deals with the structures and then has lengthy but divorced sections on the environmental and artefactual finds; with more detailed post-excavation material on an accompanying CD. The more interesting of the specialist reports concern the animal bones (a lot of fish and sheep) and the samian report (a lot of high-status decorated bowls and dishes, but few cups). Plans and photographs are bunched at the back, meaning that the reader constantly has to flip between text and images to gain a clearer understanding. The report is prefaced by a dreadfully over-enlarged map of Portland.

What larger whole are these roundhouses part of? Who used them and precisely for what? What kind of site is this? The answers are not forthcoming. The authors are inevitably much more comfortable measuring and describing the foundations and finds, rather than attempting any definitive synthetic interpretation. When suggestions are made, they are so heavily circumscribed by doubts and alternatives that the reader rapidly loses confidence in them. Too many caveats create a labyrinth of possibilities and the reader risks getting lost. Even the purpose of the rectangular medieval building remains elusive.

The value of this report surely lies in the future, when more of the archaeology of Portland Bill is known, and a much more coherent view can be established of the nature of its occupation in the Late Iron Age and Roman periods. Maybe at that point this piece in the jigsaw can be slotted in and we can all nod knowingly at the moment of revelation. For the time being this site remains an annoyingly frustrating part of a much larger puzzle.

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doi: 10.1017/S0068113X12000116