



## Reviews

*The Religious Reuse of Roman Structures in Early Medieval England.* By T. Bell. British Archaeological Reports British Series 390. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2005. Pp. x + 326, figs 143, tables 11. Price: £40.00. ISBN 978 1 84171 835 4.

This book is the published (and modified) version of a doctoral thesis accepted in 2001. The work set out to examine ‘why Roman structures ... were reinvented as religious centres in the Post-Roman period’ and pursued two principal lines of enquiry — the relationship of post-Roman burials with Roman buildings and the association of early churches with Roman structures. The aims of the research were threefold: (in short) to establish a unified corpus of sites, to consider the problem of continuity, and to demonstrate that the physical remains of Roman structures had a significant impact on the religious landscape of early medieval England. The study included more than ‘Anglo-Saxon England’, covering the ‘West and the Southwest’ and some examples from Scotland as well as comparative sites in Gaul and Rome. The publication of theses generally has to be welcomed, since the reference to an unpublished work can often be exceptionally difficult to follow up. Additionally, while the treatment of material and the conclusions reached can date rapidly, the bringing together of a corpus can have long-lasting value as a basis for future work. In this thesis, as indicated above, the establishment ‘of a unified corpus around which the study of these type-sites may be pursued’ was the first stated aim of the research. Unfortunately, it is in considering this that some concerns have to be expressed about the nature and accuracy of the corpus.

The corpus material is set out in the appendices, the most relevant of which are 5.1 ‘Burials associated with Roman Structures’ and 5.2 ‘Churches associated with Roman Buildings’. The corpus of burials (5.1) contains some 115 (p. 46) or 116 (table 1 and list 5.1.1) entries. Unfortunately, no consideration is given to what constitutes a physical or conceptual association between burial and structure. This means that the range of entries varies from the certain association, with recorded burials on definite Roman structures (Fishbourne), to the less certain (Barrow on Soar, Leicestershire, where ‘the precise relationship between structure and burial(s) is unknown’), to the doubtful association (Beddington, Surrey, an Anglo-Saxon cemetery 500 yards from a villa site). The author had a major problem producing this corpus from often vague references, and although useful, the study suffers from a lack of a ‘certainty rating’ that can be placed on the individual entries. This inevitably affects the analysis of the material carried out in ch. 2 when grave goods, cemetery size, burial rites and Roman building types are considered. The fact that no distinction is made between the value of sites in tables and maps reduces their usefulness.

On the other hand, in the corpus on churches associated with Roman buildings (5.2) the problem of ‘certainty’ of association has been recognised and addressed. Each entry has been defined as ‘certain’, ‘probable’, ‘possible’, ‘uncertain’, or ‘unknown’. However, the only assistance the reader is given as to the meaning of these terms is the statement that ‘the criteria for the identification of a church on a Roman building in this study are based primarily on the nature and persistence of the archaeological material’ (71). There are 256 entries, though unhelpfully the precise number is not indicated in the text, where the author only refers to 250+ (69). Of these about 161 are ‘certain’, 30 ‘probable’, 38 ‘possible’, 18 ‘uncertain’, and 9 ‘unknown’. It is clear that there are problems with consistency within the categories which makes them unreliable. It is also not helpful that the entries in Morris and Roxan’s pioneering work (‘Churches on Roman buildings’, in W. Rodwell (ed.), *Temples, Churches and Religion: Recent Research in Roman Britain*, BAR Brit. Ser. 77 (1980), 175–209), which are not accepted by the author, are given in table 5 instead of being associated more closely with the main corpus. It is also unfortunate that the ‘non-certain’ sites are lumped in with the ‘certain’ in order to draw general conclusions and appear on the distribution maps. Taking as one example the site of ‘Whitesands Bay’ in Pembrokeshire — where there is no doubt of the existence of a small medieval chapel and associated burials — the site is labelled as ‘uncertain’ and the author admits that there is no shred of evidence (except hearsay)

for a Roman building so the case for an ‘association’ is surely even weaker than ‘uncertain’. Despite this the site transmogrifies into a ‘Roman fort’ and appears as such in figs 35 and 36, which are general maps of Roman buildings by density and type, and in table 7 and fig. 54, where it is put on the same basis as Birdoswald, Caerleon, Gelligaer and Ribchester! Once again, there is a large amount of useful information in the corpus, but it has to be used with caution as does any analysis in ch. 3, which is based on it. Ch. 4, ‘Sites in the Landscape’, deals with the problem of continuity and considers various models.

Despite reservations, this work would be a useful one to have on a library shelf and will be a fruitful quarry for references as long as it is used with care. It is a shame that the treatment of the material has not been more rigorous given the large amount of effort that has clearly gone into it. It is good that it is in the public domain and the author deserves credit for placing it there.

*Surbiton*

DAVID MORGAN EVANS

*For the Glory of Rome. A History of Warriors and Warfare.* By R. Conway. Greenhill Books, London, 2007. Pp. 287, figs 47. Price: £19.99. ISBN 978 1 85367 733 5.

When first opening this book I asked myself what drew so many writers to compete in the highly lucrative market for books on the Roman army and ancient warfare, and then realised that in asking the question this way I had also answered it. Money! Greenhill Books list numerous titles in this field, while Ross Conway has three other studies on the Roman army to his name: *Roman Legionary 58 BC–AD 69* (2003), *Imperial Roman Legionary, AD 161–284* (2003), and *Roman Battle Tactics 109 BC–AD 313* (2007). His latest work, under review here, is ‘about the fighting men of Rome (and also their valiant enemies)’, a study in which readers are breathlessly told that they ‘will also meet Caesar’s proud centurions, mad emperors, charismatic kings and wily consuls’.

The book consists of an introduction, five chapters titled ‘The Pyrrhic War’, ‘Divine Intervention’, ‘Single Combat’, ‘Warlords and their Warriors’, and ‘Warriors and Poets’, as well as an epilogue. The main body of the text, including illustrations, is just over 250 pages long, with a further 20 pages or so of notes, 5 pages of references, and a comprehensive index that runs from ‘Acarmanians’ to ‘Zeus’.

C.’s knowledge of Roman historical sources is impressive and he is highly adept at paraphrasing and extending historical accounts of battles and tactics, particularly those of Livy, Caesar and Cassius Dio. His scene-setting through geographical description or pithy biographical vignette is also skilful. However, battle description after battle description after battle description after battle description does not make a book, particularly when there appears to be no coherent overall thesis to it. A reader could quite happily peruse separate chapters of the book without realising that they formed part of a single study. Within chapters some sub-headed sections do not comfortably follow what went immediately before or link to what comes immediately afterwards. Unfortunately, there is no concluding summary chapter that could have pulled together the arguments at the heart of the book. Instead, there is an anticlimactic three-page ‘Epilogue’.

Towards the end of the book C. states that ‘the success of the Roman army boiled down to its origins in the war bands of the earliest kings and armed retinues of the great clans. As the army developed into a more sophisticated organisation, the warrior ethos was retained’. There is no mention here of the currently-favoured idea of the army as a community and how such developing communality affected the individual soldier either in camp or on the field of battle.

The book is well illustrated, though the illustrations are not numbered and therefore not properly keyed in with the text to which they relate, but visual sources are scarcely used to support the book’s arguments in any case. When they are used, these visual sources, along with historical and documentary sources, are taken more-or-less at face value; a major criticism of the book. There are also two useful maps, though marking Hadrian’s Wall as a single dot in northern England on one is somewhat perverse. There are few typos noticeable in the text, though some of the prose has the deathly style of John Major — ‘his not inconsiderable charm’. C.’s description of Philonides having ‘pulled up his tunic and bared his backside at the enemy, then voided his bowels explosively’ will surely haunt me for some time. Unusual phrasing does crop up here and there, including the use of the slangy ‘tad’ — ‘one completely naked Saracen was seen to slash the throat of a Goth, then clamp his lips to the open wound and drink