



## Review

*London's Roman Tools: Craft, Agriculture and Experience in an Ancient City.* By Owen Humphreys. BAR British series 663/Archaeology of Roman Britain Volume 3, BAR Publishing, Oxford, 2021 Pp. 492, illus. Price: £102.00. ISBN 9781407357386.

While the title of this volume is *London's Roman Tools*, it is important to clarify that this monograph is an edited version of the author's doctoral thesis, which focused exclusively on metal (mostly iron) tools, and tools of other materials (wood, antler, bone, etc.) are therefore not included, although tools of other materials are occasionally discussed in the body of the text. That aside, this is an impressive volume, and Humphreys draws together and discusses 837 tools from a range of museums, archives and archaeological contractors found within the city.

An initial chapter succinctly presents the historical and archaeological background to Roman London, along with a useful review of the archaeological study of metal tools that helpfully includes a range of references to continental studies, which will also be of use to specialists outside Britain. This section includes a well-informed discussion of a range of theoretical frameworks used in the study of artefacts and how they contribute towards interpretations of identity and technology. The remainder of the first half of the volume presents a discursive synthesis of Roman tool-use in the city, with a series of nine chapters arranged by tool function, including woodworking, agriculture, horticulture and gardening, metalwork, leatherwork, masonry and stonework, pottery-making, animal husbandry, bone, antler, ivory and horn working, and glass-making. Some of these chapters are lengthier and more detailed than others, with greater numbers of finds associated with woodwork, agriculture, leatherwork and metalwork facilitating wider and more detailed discussion than for other craft types. Given the evidence for glass and pottery production in London, these sections appear notably short, a result of there being few recovered metal finds definitively associated with these industries, which, in the case of pottery, may be a result of the preference for the use of organic materials for tools.

These thematic chapters contextualise the artefacts nicely, presenting both historical and theoretical archaeological evidence for the varying social status of craftspeople such as smiths, woodworkers and leatherworkers in the Roman world. In each of these chapters, the manufacturing process for a range of commodities is described and illustrated, and the scale and methods of distribution of these products is considered. Together, these chapters demonstrate how London was an important centre for craft production, unparalleled in Britain, with manufacturing techniques that indicate a complex, diverse immigrant population of craftspeople. Indeed, the study presents little evidence for local Iron Age influence in the manufacture of tools, with a trend towards the specialist manufacture of 'Roman' tool types, possibly indicating immigrant smiths, and certainly in some instances the importation of tools from the continent.

The author frequently presents useful observations that go beyond the tools he discusses. For instance, he notes that the largest number of stamped tools are those associated with woodworking, possibly highlighting the importance of fine carpentry in London, with carpenters investing in fine tools from specialist producers (some imported from the continent), reminding us that the city would, of course, have been filled with many artefacts and furnishings of wood that rarely survive.

The second half of the volume is typological, with 57 distinct categories of tools identified. The final chapter provides catalogue entries for the 837 metal tools, arranged alphabetically by type, accompanied by illustrative plates, mostly photographs, with some drawings, the latter where they have been reproduced from other sources.

While very occasional typos were noted, the volume is in general excellently written in a lively, humorous and engaging style, which draws the reader into the lived experiences of the people who may have manufactured and used the tools described; the volume is certainly more than a dry typological tome.

The book is very well illustrated, and as well as the photographs and drawings accompanying the catalogue in the second half of the volume, it includes many useful drawings reproduced from other sources showing the process of tool use derived from various types of evidence, including Roman sculptures and frescoes and tool marks left on artefacts. Maps are used to good effect, showing elements such as the chronological development of the Roman city and the distribution of finds (although the author notes how the geographical distribution of the tools relates to depositional practice and not to their use, meaning their distribution cannot be used to consider the organisation of crafts within the city, nor how this changed over time). The reproduction of several colour illustrations showing reconstructions of the city's buildings and tool-manufacturing processes, as well as photographs of artefacts and features under excavation, do much to enliven the volume.

In summary, I found this an excellent and important study of tool use in Roman London, which will be of great value to Roman finds specialists and to those with a wider interest in the historic development of London.

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