

narrative approach assisted in the book's accessibility for amateur readers. The volume is very well illustrated throughout with photographs of artefacts, although in some cases reconstruction drawings for incomplete objects would aid the uninitiated reader to gain an appreciation of the original appearance of an artefact, particularly for horse harness and stirrup accessories presented on pages 59–60. As an archaeologist, I would also prefer to see a scale shown against the artefacts, although I can understand the decision not to include one for purposes of space and aesthetics, and the length (or diameter in the case of coins) is provided in a summary box for each of the 50 selected finds.

One area I feel that the volume would have benefited from substantially is a short section, perhaps in the 'Landscape' chapter, describing the historical development of the county, particularly regarding temporal geopolitical changes. Modern administrative boundaries would, of course, have been unrecognisable to prehistoric and Roman inhabitants of the region. This is hinted at occasionally (e.g. reference to the territory of the Durotriges based upon Iron Age coin distributions in Chapter 4), although an explicit statement about the changing nature of territory and administrative boundaries over time would assist the casual reader. Given multiple references to the Durotriges, a map plotting their postulated territory would also have been beneficial. Given the intended audience, brief references to external geopolitical territories such as the Danelaw would have benefited from further explanation, and I find it odd that while the Danelaw is mentioned, the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Wessex (of which modern Somerset was a part) is not, despite reference to King Alfred.

However, as a book aimed to introduce the amateur reader to the types of objects characteristic of each of the main periods of Somerset's history, the volume presents a well-contextualised, very attractive and affordable introductory guide.

*Cotswold Archaeology*

[tom.brindle@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk](mailto:tom.brindle@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk)

TOM BRINDLE

doi: 10.1017/S0068113X24000047

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies

*Drawings of Roman Mosaics in the Topham Collection, Eton College Library.* By P. Witts. BAR international series 3064. BAR Publishing, Oxford, 2021. Pp. xvi + 193, illus. Price £48. ISBN 9781407358987 (pbk); 9781407358994 (PDF eBook).

*Spectacle and Display: A Modern History of Britain's Roman Mosaic Pavements.* By M. Dawson. Archaeopress Roman archaeology 79. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2021. Pp. vi + 246, illus. Price £40. ISBN 9781789698312 (pbk); 9781789698329 (PDF eBook).

The history of the recording and display of mosaics is a fascinating subject and two very different books have considerably contributed to our understanding. Michael Dawson's book is quite far-ranging, looking at the changing attitudes towards mosaics and their display from the sixteenth century to the present day, while Patricia Witts focuses microscopically on one important collection of mosaic drawings.

Patricia Witts' research into Roman mosaics has involved her delving into various archives and illuminating in print the early recording of mosaics, and this work on the mosaic drawings and prints in the Topham Collection is particularly noteworthy. The life of Richard Topham (1671–1730) and how his vast collection of drawing and prints, etc., including those featuring mosaics, came to be in Eton College library are examined in Chapter 2. The mosaics featured in the collection, all illustrated in colour where appropriate, are mostly those displayed or found in and around Rome during Topham's lifetime. His principal artists were Francesco Bartoli (1670–1733), whose works are considered in Chapters 3–4, and Gaetano Piccini (1681–1736), in Chapter 5. While Bartoli's paintings are mostly versions of earlier ones, Piccini drew mosaics found near Rome, now lost, and are the only record of them. They were illustrated as if the artist were copying a painting rather than a mosaic, sometimes with a grid reflecting tessellation but not accurately representing it. The lives and techniques of these and the other artists represented are examined in Chapter 9. Each painting is described minutely, its subject matter examined and its importance assessed. The work ends with a detailed catalogue, including a bibliography for each entry, index and eight appendices tabulating various aspects of the paintings.

For students of Roman Britain, the drawings and prints of mosaics from Britain are of particular interest (Chapter 7). All but one, found in the bishop's garden, Chichester in 1727, are known from other recordings, although some in Topham's collection are superior. In particular, William Webb's pen-and-ink and watercolour drawing of the Bacchus mosaic at Stonesfield, Oxfordshire is a revelation. It was executed shortly after the mosaic's discovery and gives a better idea of its appearance than near-contemporary engravings and embroidery, although it has been rather overshadowed by later recordings, more accomplished but less accurate. Webb's painting shows that the mosaic has far more in common with the famous Woodchester Orpheus pavement than had been previously realised.

This book is a valuable contribution to art history and Roman mosaic studies. Witts is certainly thorough in her research and her writing is impeccable, and one feels that no stone was left unturned. The illustrations are good and well-sized – so often published illustrations of mosaics are too small to appreciate properly – although they would have looked so much better printed on higher-quality paper.

Michael Dawson's interest in the fate of Romano-British mosaics stems from the exposure and subsequent history of the Bellerophon mosaic at Croughton, Northamptonshire. He provides a valuable account of the treatment of mosaics after their discovery and their exhibition, from the eighteenth century, by aristocrats and antiquaries who, like Richard Topham, were inspired by the discoveries of ancient art and architecture in Italy. They exposed mosaics, either to be protected by cover-buildings or moved into their stately homes (Chapters 2–3). The nineteenth century saw a more commercial facet creep in to sites with mosaics, and the advent of public museums and guide-books reflecting a more general interest (Chapter 4), while twentieth-century display was increasingly in the care of local authorities and national organisations – the 'professionals' (Chapter 5). There are several detailed case studies of cover-buildings, including Fishbourne, Bignor, Brading and Chedworth, which are full of interest. Also considered is the evolution of museums from cluttered repositories of curiosities to stark display spaces with mosaics treated as works of art in a gallery, from antiquarianism to commercialisation. It makes fascinating reading.

Much is thought-provoking and a valuable contribution on how we should regard mosaics and their display, but it is also sometimes rather opinionated. Speaking of the cover-building at Brading, for instance, Dawson claims the modern cover-building has 'removed a sense of relationship between mosaics and ancient building' (p. 175). The same disparagement is aimed at the latest cover-building at Chedworth. As only a few courses of the Roman walls at Brading survive, the relationship between mosaics and ancient building has long been lost. A cover building must not only protect the mosaic from extremes of temperature, rising damp, algal growth, trampling feet, etc., but also allow it to be viewed by the public. Mosaics are always going to be seen out of context and any display has perforce to be a compromise. Although this reviewer does not agree with all that is written, one has to respect Dawson's daring to question policies towards the display of mosaics in cover buildings and museums, and one can empathise as the heart can sink sometimes at the 'dumbing down' that goes on to 'engage with the paying customer'. But nowadays, sadly, in many cases the mosaics will only be displayed if it is economically viable to do so.

Although the book has much to commend it, it is marred by the sheer number of careless errors. On the first two pages alone there is: 'Bellerophon the winged horse' (instead of Pegasus); 'Edward Woodward' credited as creating, with his brother, the replica of the Woodchester mosaic, mistaking John Woodward for the famous actor; and the transfer of Littlecote from Wiltshire to Berkshire. Claiming only 30 pavements were reburied (there are a dozen at Woodchester alone), a single mosaic on display at Colliton Park, Dorchester when there are five, does not fill one with confidence. Sadly, the other 244 pages are also peppered with errors. At least seven different site-names are misspelt. 'Cyparissus' on a mosaic from Leicester becomes 'Cypresses' (p. 210); 'Cypress' (p. 36) and is mistaken for 'Actaeon' (p. 32). The scholars Peter Johnson and David Johnston are hopelessly muddled. Tortuous phraseology abounds and there are passages which almost defy understanding. The book would have benefited greatly from copy-editing and proof-reading to remove errors and typos such as a glaring one on the back cover: 'Deptaprtment of Continuing Education'.

This is a shame, but should not detract from the important points that the book makes. It is well researched, with blow-by-blow accounts of the development of important sites threaded through its chapters. It forms a veritable catalogue of real or perceived shortcomings in the presentation of mosaics in museums and on sites throughout the ages, including the present. The 60 figures are largely devoted to showing mosaics in the context in which they are or were displayed. Although the presentation of these ancient floors to the

public is bound to be a compromise, it should always be the best one; awareness of the past treatment of mosaics is a very necessary prerequisite, and this book provides ample evidence for good and bad practice.

Ash Vale, Surrey  
[stephencosh675@btinternet.com](mailto:stephencosh675@btinternet.com)

STEPHEN R. COSH  
 doi: 10.1017/S0068113X24000126

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies

*Silchester Insula IX: The Claudio-Neronian Occupation of the Iron Age Oppidum (The Early Roman Occupation at Silchester Insula IX)*. By M. Fulford, A. Clarke, E. Durham and N. Pankhurst. Britannia Monograph series 33. Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, London, 2020. Pp. xii + 682, illus. Price £64. ISBN 9780 907764472.

*The Emperor Nero's Pottery and Tillery at Little London, Pamber, by Silchester, Hampshire: The Excavations of 2017*. By M. Fulford. Britannia Monograph series 36. Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, London, 2022. Pp. xi + 200, illus. Price £30. ISBN 9780907764502.

The extensive excavations at and around Silchester, directed by Mike Fulford, have produced nine monographs and a popular book, all since 1984. Several more monographs are on the way. This sustained programme of work has made Silchester one of the best known of the Iron Age *oppida* and Roman towns in Britain. These publications also testify to Fulford's persistence and stamina as an excavation director and project leader. Some of the results of this work are truly remarkable, including the unexpected discovery of the rectangular Late Iron Age timber aisled buildings in the area that was to become Insula IX of the Roman town and also the (apparently) nucleated form of the Late Iron Age *oppidum* (addressed in the 2018 volume reviewed in *Britannia* 51 (2020)). The two volumes reviewed here address the Claudio-Neronian occupation of Insula IX (published in 2020) and the excavation of the imperial tillery at Little London (published in 2022). This industrial site was located 3 km south-west of the *oppidum*/Roman town.

Some issues emerge in the 2020 volume that supplement and update/correct the information published in 2018. For example, it emerged from detailed work on the stratigraphy and finds that some of the deposits interpreted as Late Iron Age in the 2018 volume (Period 0) actually probably date to the very early conquest period (A.D. 43–50) (pp. 9–10). As a result, Periods 0 and 1 of the site stratigraphy are now interpreted as conquest-period. Fulford also reinterprets some of his earlier suggestions to argue that there was a short-term phase of Roman military occupation of the *oppidum*, in which soldiers lived in pre-existing Iron Age buildings (p. 569). He interprets this military occupation, which is mainly identified on the basis of the frequency of cattle bone and the discovery of 45 Roman military finds, as resulting from the stationing of Roman soldiers at the *oppidum*. Fulford's concluding summary does not discuss the nature of Roman conquest-period activity at the *oppidum* in any detail, although Nina Crummy's discussion of the Roman military finds considers the idea that the Roman military maintained a presence because of the strategic importance of the location at a significant road junction (p. 288).

Another significant issue explored in the 2020 monograph is the connection of the community living at the *oppidum* with Emperor Nero during the 50s and 60s A.D. The combined excavations at the Roman town and at the neighbouring tillery at Little London have recovered 21 tiles and tile fragments that are impressed with circular stamps that include the name and titles of Nero. This kiln site was partially excavated in 2017. The 2020 volume contains some interim comments (pp. 7–8), and the 2022 volume documents the full results of this work. These excavations produced 4.5 tons of ceramic material and indicated that, in addition to tile, pottery was fired at this industrial site. It only proved possible to excavate part of this extensive site, resulting in some significant discoveries. Fulford emphasises that this is the first time a major tile works associated with a Roman town has been excavated: the usual range of bricks and tiles was being produced, including *antefixes*.

Die stamps used on the flue tiles enable the distribution of tile from this production centre across much of southern Britain to be studied. Tile stamps with Nero's name from this production site have been found only at Silchester and Little London. They were evidently produced in small quantities, since only 21 stamps have been recorded: the kiln excavations produced over 17,000 pieces of ceramic building material. It is interesting to speculate about the character of the buildings at Silchester that included these stamped tiles. Unfortunately,