



Review

Roman Rural Settlement in Wales and the Marches: Approaches to Settlement and Material Culture Through Big Data. By L. Reynolds. BAR British series B670: Archaeology of Roman Britain Vol. 6. BAR Publishing, Oxford, 2022. Pp. xix + 177, illus. Price £46 (pbk). ISBN 9781407358963.

This volume represents an excellent and up-to-date academic assessment of the Roman period in Wales and neighbouring areas of England. It is useful for those already familiar with the region's Roman archaeology, but also suitable for scholars new to this area or period. Drawing upon the author's PhD, it represents an important step forward for the archaeology of a largely under-studied region. It also represents a significant contribution to wider settlement studies from this period, through innovative use and further analysis of existing 'Big Data' collected by the *Rural Settlement of Roman Britain Project* (<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl/>), showcasing the value of academic research utilising such data-sets.

The monograph aims to move beyond traditional regional narratives which prioritise Roman military dynamics and relegate rural settlements to mere backdrop, stating in its abstract: 'this study seeks to refocus and move beyond a simplistic Roman/native opposition to present a more nuanced understanding of the nature and development of rural settlement during this period'. In this it is successful, forming a valuable update and different approach to previous syntheses (e.g. *Roman Frontiers in Wales and the Marches*, Burnham & Davies 2011). By including the Marches of western England, it also avoids artificial divides formed by the modern national boundary upon data-sets and approaches.

The book's structure is clear and accessible to any reader, but particularly an academic audience, with an introduction stating its position within the wider field and a literature review discussing the archaeologies of the Iron Age (Chapter 2) and Roman period (Chapter 3). These form a concise and current narrative discussing wider British developments in later prehistoric and Roman archaeology, before identifying how these have influenced previous approaches to the study region, highlighting gaps in the knowledge base and the need for new approaches going beyond mere contextualisation for Roman military and urban sites. The following chapters (4 and 5) introduce the study's data-sets, derived primarily from *Rural Settlement of Roman Britain (RSRB)* but drawing upon other regional and national sources (including the Portable Antiquities Scheme). Settlement types, building forms and artefactual evidence are introduced critically, showing an understanding of the material needed for the study's further analysis. Also introduced here is the author's own methodology for quantification of ceramic evidence, building upon the data analysis from *RSRB* in order to better assess distribution and uses of, and engagement with, ceramic materials across the region.

The results are discussed via three clearly defined, well-structured themes: landscape, economy, and identities/socio-cultural practices, decreasing in scale from regional to site-level to individual. Chapter 6 represents a fluent critical discussion of the region's settlement landscapes, highlighting issues but nonetheless drawing out important regional variations spatially and over time. The following chapter's focus on economic developments also successfully draws out patterns in the rural economy and varying relationships with Roman supply networks and production, highlighting a variety of indigenous responses to the Roman presence. Chapter 8 confidently utilises artefactual data to discuss identity and socio-cultural practices through focus upon personal objects and dietary consumption. In thus mirroring the three broad themes chosen by *RSRB* for publication, the book is able to compare results with the original 'Big Data' evidence.

The final discussion (Chapter 9) effectively and succinctly draws the analysis together, placing it into the wider context and critically assessing both the project's results and the application of 'Big Data' for secondary projects. Its main conclusions concern regionality in settlement and material culture, and a variety of

responses to Roman occupation and resulting developmental trajectories. The book's aim to move away from binary Romanisation arguments is consequently successful, linking back to the earlier theoretical discussion. It also acknowledges the gaps within its own scope (for instance, its focus on rural settlement naturally leading to an avoidance of military or urban sites, and prioritising of artefactual over ecofactual material) and that of the wider *RSRB*, putting forward useful suggestions for future work on both. A good number of illustrative and easy-to-understand maps, graphs and tables are found throughout the data analysis sections, essential support for the text. There is, however, a lack of other imagery (e.g. photographs of sites, landscapes or artefacts) that would further illustrate the narrative. Nevertheless, the text is well written and accessible. An Appendix comprises a full list of sites mentioned in the text, with helpful references back to the original data-set, while a comprehensive bibliography supports further reading into the subject.

This book is therefore a recommended read for anyone studying the late Iron Age and Roman periods in Britain, not just for its own study region but also other areas with rural settlement similarly neglected by previous archaeological research. For the specialist studying the archaeology of Wales, it represents an essential update and re-evaluation of the Roman period.

University of Edinburgh
Ian.Hardwick@ed.ac.uk

IAN HARDWICK
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