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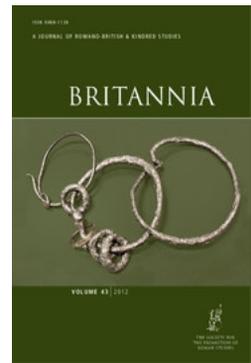
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***Britannia Prima: Britain's Last Roman Province.* By R. White. Tempus, Stroud, 2007. Pp. 256, illus. Price: £19.99. ISBN 978 0 7524 1967 1.**

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Britannia / Volume 40 / November 2009, pp 395 - 396

DOI: 10.3815/006811309789785864, Published online: 01 March 2010

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0068113X00000362

How to cite this article:

Andrew Gardner (2009). Britannia, 40, pp 395-396 doi:10.3815/006811309789785864

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possible fourth-century revival. The vexed question of the amount of silver in British lead is touched on, with T. concluding that it may have been greater than some earlier writers have thought. As he notes, an ingot from Green Ore had a very high silver content while the virtual absence of silver from some of the pigs is only explicable if the silver had already been extracted. A useful discussion of the question of the involvement of the army in the mining of precious metals in newly occupied areas both in Britain and other provinces leads to a consideration of the likely productivity of the gold mines at Dolaucothi. It is regrettable that much of this discussion is surprisingly poorly referenced.

We can only hope that this promising beginning provides the stimulus for more work on the archaeology of an area which is of some importance to our understanding of the economy of *Britannia*.

Penarth

WILLIAM MANNING

Britannia Prima: Britain's Last Roman Province. By R. White. Tempus, Stroud, 2007. Pp. 256, illus. Price: £19.99. ISBN 978 0 7524 1967 1.

A novel approach to the problems of the late and 'sub-' or 'post-'Roman periods in Britain is always welcome, and Roger White's new book takes a very refreshing perspective by concentrating on the westernmost province of the diocesan structure established in the late third century, charting its development into the sixth century and beyond. This is a book full of archaeological detail, but also lots of interesting ideas and insights, and if some of these might be debated or disputed this — in an area of our field with many conflicting views — is no real criticism. Rather, such boldness is crucial for the discussion about the transformation of Britain in Late Antiquity to move forward. It is the case that some key issues, including processes of cultural change and the integration of textual and archaeological evidence, could have been explored in more depth and more critically. These might be regarded as of lesser appeal to the broader audience at which this book is aimed, but it is important, for example, that the message that 'Romanisation' can no longer be taken for granted as a process is communicated widely; here the problems with this concept are not addressed. None of this detracts, though, from an impressive work which will hopefully inspire further syntheses of later Roman material at the level of later Roman institutions — rather than those generalised from the conquest period.

This is the issue which most concerns W. in the book's first chapter, on 'Perceptions of *Britannia*'. The point, well made here, is not of course that there are no studies dedicated to the later Roman period, but rather that a more regional focus which takes the later Roman institutional structure seriously is a rarity. This chapter also contains useful, but rather brief, discussions of identity and of materiality which pertain to the 'end' of Roman Britain. The next five chapters deal with different aspects of western Britain in the fourth century. Ch. 4 covers the initiation of the diocesan structure under Diocletian, the difficult issue of pinpointing the boundaries of the four provinces encompassed by the Diocese, and the nature of the landscape of *Britannia Prima* — comprising what is now western England, Wales and Cornwall. The administrative and military structure of this region, within its wider context, is considered in ch. 5. Some important suggestions are made in this chapter, including the notion that the *comes maritimi tractus* referred to by Ammianus in describing the 'Barbarian Conspiracy' was responsible for the western seaboard, not the 'Saxon Shore', and there is also a thorough discussion of the role of the fortress at Chester. Some anomalies also creep in here, though, including slightly uneven treatment of other key fort and fortress sites, with the similarly sparse fourth-century evidence at Caerleon and Caerhun, for example, being interpreted somewhat differently. Such are relatively minor points, however, and the overall attempt to reconstruct the structures of the Late Roman province is ambitious and well-crafted.

Chs 4, 5 and 6 address issues in the archaeology of religion, towns and the countryside respectively. These contain further interesting arguments, such as that for a late upgrade to *colonia* status for Chester, and cogent syntheses of evidence for phenomena such as the re-occupation of hillforts. The discussion of rural settlement is usefully divided into tribal areas, highlighting variation within the province, though this could have been enhanced with fuller consideration of the different economies across the region. With chs 7 and 8, the emphasis shifts to the fifth century. The divergence of the trajectories taken by the eastern and western parts of the province structures these chapters, and a plausible narrative is constructed to account for the emergence of a Brittonic culture with enhanced links to the Mediterranean via the Irish Sea and the Atlantic seaboard. This is contrasted with continuation of life in some towns in

the east of the province, based more on traditional Roman structures, but undergoing significant material transformations. The archaeological arguments are set out well here, but these are topics over which agreement will always be as elusive as the evidence. A clear necessity for open-area excavations as well as open minds is convincingly articulated. The closing chs 9 and 10 deal with the final end of the structures of *Britannia Prima* in the later fifth and sixth centuries, and with the legacy of this most long-lived of provinces into the medieval period, but are taken at rather a gallop. The reliance on historical sources increases in these chapters and the impact of Germanic culture in particular could be tackled more critically, but the broad hypotheses advanced are plausible and interesting. Overall, the wealth of material and ideas presented in this book make it a very significant contribution to the archaeology of a difficult but important period.

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The Roman Amphitheatre in Britain. By T. Wilmott. Tempus, Stroud, 2008. Pp. 222, illus. Price: £17.99. ISBN 978 0 7524 4123 8.

In 1993 David Bomgardner hailed what he saw as the dawn of a ‘New Era for Amphitheatre Studies’ in a review (with the same title) of J.-C. Golvin’s empire-wide survey of Roman amphitheatres, whilst lamenting the lack of a comprehensive survey of British amphitheatres. Much work has since taken place in Britain to justify his hopes for a new era: the excavation and publication of the London amphitheatre, new excavations and re-interpretation of the Chester amphitheatre, publication of the Cirencester amphitheatre, and new discoveries at Newstead and Inveresk. But it is only with the publication of Tony Wilmott’s well-written book that Bomgardner’s aspiration for a comprehensive British survey can be said to have been fulfilled.

The book succeeds in straddling the awkward gap between popular and academic: it provides an invaluable single reference point for students and researchers seeking the archaeological evidence from a very disparate group of publications and interim reports; but it can also be used as a guidebook by visitors to surviving remains (and it includes a handy section at the back on access). It does not pretend to be the last word on amphitheatres in Britain, though it justifiably lays claim to being the first to draw much of the evidence together. Occasional use of the personal pronoun in the text, however, emphasises that this is a very personal viewpoint. W. seeks to strike a balanced perspective, noting the ‘lack of enthusiasm’ displayed by some previous British writers for properly engaging with the subject (out of personal distaste?), whilst also acknowledging the opposing tendency of some to overplay the subject.

The book is constructed with a clear and simple chapter lay out. Ch. 2 sets out succinctly the origins of the *munera*, *venationes*, and dedicated buildings in which to stage them. Ch. 3 provides a brief survey of excavation and research in Britain, starting with Stukeley and progressing through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antiquarians. As W. points out, enthusiasm for amphitheatre discovery gradually turned from a trickle into a flood, with the result that not a few sites — with little more than deep holes to recommend them — must now be dismissed. The table on p. 34 is particularly useful for correcting some of these errors. Ch. 4 sets out W.’s core typology for the book. Sensibly he eschews a ‘traditional’ civil/military functional distinction. He uses instead a typology based on the ‘communities they served’, resulting in principal categories such as Urban, Rural, Legionary and Auxiliary (though with the plan-based category of Theatre-Amphitheatre also appearing, somewhat uncomfortably). This typology underpins much of the structure of the rest of the book, but in many ways is only necessary for ease of presentation. Ch. 5 deals with the geometries and construction of amphitheatres. Chs 6 (the South) and 7 (the North) provide the principal site summaries for each individual amphitheatre, précised and sometimes reinterpreted from their original publications. It also usefully recapitulates the weak arguments for and stronger arguments against a number of supposed amphitheatre sites which can now be dismissed. In ch. 8 the limitations of evidence for the existence of gladiators and *venationes* in Britain are exposed, alongside a useful survey of known representations on British wall paintings, mosaics and artefacts, as well as a brief summary of the central importance of the Diana/Nemesis cult. Ch. 9 surveys what is known of amphitheatres here after the Romans, drawing particular attention to the recent excavations at Chester and the publication of Cirencester. Ch. 10 presents W.’s conclusions, though in fact some of his most interesting suggestions are found scattered throughout the book.