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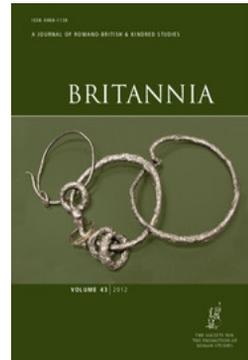
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***The Taberna Structures of Roman Britain.* By A. MacMahon. British Archaeological Reports British Series 356. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2003. Pp. vi + 169, illus. Price: £39.00. ISBN 1 84171 343 0.**

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The Taberna Structures of Roman Britain. By A. MacMahon. British Archaeological Reports British Series 356. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2003. Pp. vi + 169, illus. Price: £39.00. ISBN 1 84171 343 0.

In this promptly published doctoral thesis MacMahon sets out to describe the *taberna* structures of Roman Britain. These he defines as buildings or rooms ‘where goods were sold, made and/or prepared for sale and sold’. The introduction offers a brisk summary of Italian evidence, of social attitudes reflected in Latin sources, and of the history of relevant research in Britain. Subsequent chapters describe building plans, construction techniques, and the industrial and commercial activities undertaken. Evidence from Romano-British towns is thoroughly reviewed, although roadside and extramural settlements (e.g. Lincoln St Marks and Hibaldstow) figure less prominently than they deserve. The description of building form and fabric is furthermore constrained by the fact that some of the better evidence for Romano-British vernacular architecture comes from houses that were not shops, and fall outside the scope of this volume. The descriptions presented here are generally useful — especially so the survey of commercial activities, which includes sections on butchery, baking, fulling, glass manufacture, bone working, textile manufacture, fish processing, pottery shops, and bars and restaurants. M. then turns his attention to features which he considers to be particularly characteristic of retail properties. Individual chapters describe shop-counters, doorways, covered walkways, and signs and displays. For the want of evidence from Britain these chapters draw extensively on parallels in Pompeii and Herculaneum. The concluding chapters address some more general issues about both the economics and spatiality of retail activities, without reaching firm or wide-ranging conclusions.

Unfortunately this reviewer found the initial definition of the subject of study as ‘*taberna*-structures’ problematic. *Tabernae* are described in texts, whilst archaeologists study things like strip-buildings and the remains of commercial and industrial activities. It is not always possible to tell how these forms of evidence related to the retail activities referred to in the written sources. In recognition of this M. introduces the awkward concept of the ‘*taberna*-strip-house’, but cannot escape including examples of strip-buildings that were unlikely to have had any retail or industrial function (e.g. the Watling Court house illustrated on fig. 6). He also side-steps the fact that structures other than strip-buildings were used as shops. This was certainly the case in the rows of shops and stores built around Romano-British

fora, and probably so in the 'warehouses' built behind the timber quays of the port of Roman London. A proper study of such buildings would contradict M.'s argument that 'there is little evidence of any attempt at corporate planning beyond that of the individual retailer' (38) or evidence 'of *tabernae* which were constructed alongside quays' (67).

This lack of clarity over the architecture of retail buildings allows M. to suggest that 'the very earliest *tabernae* in Italy may have been similar to strip-buildings' and that 'Italian *tabernae* became the model for *tabernae* that were built throughout the Empire' (19 and 146). There is no evidence that this was the case. What we know of the early structures at sites in the *Viae Sacra* and *Regia* in Rome, or of the row-houses of 'Samnite' Pompeii, suggests a different architectural tradition applied here. This then calls into question M.'s reliance on the Italian parallels in his attempt to describe Romano-British retail property. Indeed this survey inadvertently reminds us of some striking differences of approach: Britain offers no good parallels for either the masonry shop-counters or the *fullonicae* of Pompeii. Given the wealth of Romano-British material summarised here the absence of evidence points to an evidence of absence. The architecture of Roman Italy is not the best place to look for the origins of Romano-British shop design. Alternative regional traditions are not considered in this report, and M.'s summary attention to the results of excavations in France and Germany is reflected in his references to the workshops of d'Alesia (instead of Alesia). He also fails to recognise some important points of comparison that can be drawn between the timber-framed architectural traditions of the Late pre-Roman Iron Age in southern Britain and post-Conquest developments within the region. It is also possible to disagree with some of the conclusions that M. draws as to the patterning and social significance of retail activity in Roman Britain, but not without extending this review beyond its allotted word length.

In sum, this report offers a useful review of both the evidence for commercial activities in Romano-British towns, and for shop design in Pompeii. But the two sets of data do not combine to allow a coherent description of the shops of Roman Britain.

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