



The Archaeological Journal

Book Reviews



ROMAN LONDON AND THE WALBROOK STREAM CROSSING. EXCAVATIONS AT 1 POULTRY AND VICINITY, CITY OF LONDON. PARTS 1 AND 2. By Julian Hill and Peter Rowsome. Pp. xlix and 597, Illus 410, CD-Rom. Museum of London Archaeology (Monograph, **37**), 2011. 2 Volumes. Price 57.00. ISBN 978 1 907586 04 0.

This report represents one of the most important single contributions to the archaeology of Roman London of recent years. It arose from the controversial development of 1 Poultry, a triangle of land between Poultry and Queen Victoria Street in the City of London, amounting to some 3318 m² of which 50 % was selected for controlled excavation. Altogether, between the evaluations of March 1994 and the conclusion of the work in June 1996, over 2800 m³ of archaeological deposits were recorded and excavated stratigraphically, for the most part beneath the ground-floor slab of the new building and while the superstructure of the new building was being erected above. In terms of the expected Roman archaeology the site lay at the heart of *Londinium* and close to the point where the main east-west road, which leads out from the town and west and north-west to, respectively, Silchester and St Albans, crossed the Walbrook. Excavations in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries indicated that good preservation of archaeological deposits was to be expected and this proved to be the case. The excavation produced a sequence which spanned the entire Roman period and beyond into the fifth century. Important, too, and rare for London, where so much of the evidence for the late Roman town has been truncated by medieval and modern development, was the survival of late Roman, high status masonry buildings of the third and fourth centuries. The opportunity was also taken to include in these volumes the reporting of several other smaller interventions of the 1980s and 1990s in the vicinity of the main excavation.

How then to capture succinctly the importance of this report, which includes: an account of the stratigraphic sequence (Part 1); a lengthy synthesis which integrates the evidence of the finds with the structures, a survey of the domestic buildings and other structures of timber, and specialist appendices on the associated finds and environmental reporting (Part 2); and a CD-ROM which provides valuable supplementary information on the chronology in the form of dating tables and on certain of the specialist reports such as those on the pollen and faunal remains? From the start of the sequence came important evidence for earliest London with a dendrochronological date of AD 47 / 8 for a wooden drain associated with the initial construction of the main east-west road. One implication of this is that the main road leading further on to Silchester and St Albans was in place by the late AD 40s. Evidence of pre-Boudican occupation in the form of terracing and timber buildings was abundant from the early AD 50s and the Boudican destruction preserved valuable evidence for the use of one of the buildings (p. 23) which fronted onto

The final version of this review will appear in *The Archaeological Journal* 169 for 2012.

the east-west road. Interpreted as a shop selling a variety of pottery, including amphorae and samian, as well as foodstuffs, including spices such as mustard and dill, with other important finds such as bone spoons and wooden beads, it could equally, perhaps, have served as a food outlet, a small *popina*, on the way to and from the heart of the town. To appreciate this building and its contents it is essential to have to hand both the account in Part 1 and that in Part 2, and this is true for the whole sequence; to fully understand the synthesis, it is essential to turn to Part 1, not least for crucial illustrations.

There is real meat throughout these two volumes, including the specialist appendices, many of which shed valuable new light on Roman London, such as Tomlin's report on the wooden writing tablets, one of which is a deed of sale of a slave girl, Fortunata, or the extraordinary, early Flavian assemblage of over one thousand Mayen lava querns, as well as the remains of larger millstones, including Pompeian-style donkey mills. However, to appreciate this material it is essential once again to combine the specialist report in 16.1 with the account in the synthesis of late first and early second century AD London in 11.6. As we have come to expect from MoLA publications, these books are beautifully produced, with sometimes too seductive illustrations. It is all too easily for the eye to be drawn to the reconstructed footprint of individual buildings and away from the actual evidence which underpins them!

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