



# *The Archaeological Journal*

## **Book Reviews**



**THE ROMAN CEMETERIES AND SUBURBS OF WINCHESTER. EXCAVATIONS 1971-86.** Edited by P. J. Ottaway, K. E. Qualmann, H. Rees, and G. D. Scobie. Pp. xxviii and 399, Illus 225. Winchester Museums and English Heritage, 2012. Price: £40.00. ISBN 978 086135 020 9.

This volume represents a major achievement in its level of detail, presentation and quality of discussion. It forms part of a series of volumes on the archaeology of the City of Winchester on excavations carried out largely in the 1970s and 1980s, but also later. This volume focuses on sites excavated outside the north, east and west sides of the Roman town and presents a rich resource of information on the Roman-period cemeteries and suburban settlement. Such excavations and publications form a crucial backbone to our knowledge of Roman Britain and provide a springboard for wider debate and analysis.

Chapter 1 provides background information to the rescue excavation programme at Winchester, and how the excavation techniques changed over this time, which is valuable for any student of urban archaeology. Chapter 2 then gives an introduction to the prehistoric and Roman archaeology of Winchester. The main chapters provide the data from the rescue excavations which are divided into what the authors call the northern (Chapter 3), western (Chapter 4) and eastern suburbs (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 presents a technical study of the human remains, and Chapter 7 gives a gazetteer containing each burial. The detail provided in these descriptive chapters provides an invaluable resource for researchers, and forms the basis for the comprehensive discursive analysis of the cemeteries in Chapter 8, and the subsequent examination of current knowledge of the Roman period suburban areas around Winchester through time (Chapter 9).

Combining the burials published in this volume with those from the equally important Lankhills cemetery at Winchester provides well over one thousand burials dating to between the mid- and late first century to the late fourth or early fifth centuries AD (p. 353). In the northern suburb lies one of the largest sites, Victoria Road, which produced over three hundred burials including cremations and inhumations. Whilst the authors are aware of the pitfalls always present in burial data, the strength of the report is the analysis of the material to tackle many social issues including the significance between cremation and inhumation and the meaning behind various treatments of the body, such as decapitation, the organization of cemeteries, the origins and composition of the urban population, differences between male and female burial numbers, the treatment of infants and newborns, the significance of grave furniture, and influences from the Iron Age. Crucially, this can all be translated to our study of the living in Roman Britain. Isotope analysis was used on four skeletons (p. 127), to ascertain place of origin, and this is an area that has much future potential as now seen elsewhere.

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The focus of burial in the ditch of the Iron Age *oppidum*, the Oram's Arbour, located to the west of the town, is usefully discussed; it perhaps indicates the continued significance of the Iron Age landscape and its integral relationship with the Roman period settlement, and there may even have been a shrine here that was destroyed in the construction of the railway (p. 342). The notion of ritualized landscapes and settlement topographies could have been taken even further here, as could what we mean by suburbs themselves, with the recognition, for example, of what seem to have been ritual shafts (pp. 108–09) and ritual deposits in boundary ditches (p. 25) in the northern suburbs. They remind us that it is important not to project modern normative assumptions of suburban life and urban living onto this data. What the extramural settlements also indicate, importantly, is continued occupation and activity into at least the early fifth century, which provides much potential for debate concerning towns in late Roman Britain, as does the evidence of dark earth (p. 27). One difficulty is the separation of the finds evidence for publication in future volumes, but for analysis of the key issues of identity and urban life in Roman Britain, this book is essential.

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