



# The Archaeological Journal

## Book Reviews



**EXCAVATIONS AT CHESTER. THE WESTERN AND SOUTHERN ROMAN EXTRAMURAL SETTLEMENTS: A ROMAN COMMUNITY ON THE EDGE OF THE WORLD.** By Simon W. Ward, David J. P. Mason and John McPeake. Pp. xvi and 446, Illus 178. *Archaeopress* (British Archaeological Report British Series, **553**), 2012. Price £55.00. ISBN 978 1 407309 31 6.

It may be politically incorrect to say so in these days of internet publication and a dogma that espouses ‘synthetic publication’, but the appearance of a substantial volume on a key historic city is in itself a welcome development. The fact that it is produced to a high standard and incorporates both extensive finds reports and significant environmental sections only serves to increase this writer’s pleasure at having been asked to review it. However, the greatest strength of the volume is the inclusion of over 150 pages of discussion that contributes significantly to our understanding of *canabae* and the regional context of the legionary fortress of *Deva*.

The ten sites considered in the volume are all situated to the west or south-west of the legionary fortress — they were excavated between 1964 and 1989 and as ‘backlog’ publications represent a further welcome plus at a time when resources for such work are at a premium. Substantial reports are provided on the site sequences, the finds and the environmental material. The authors note with caution that many of those reports were written in the 1980s and some, such as the pottery records, ‘were compiled in a very summary fashion’ (p. 1), but this does little to detract from the achievement represented by the volume. The reports on excavations at St Nicolas Mews and Sedan House, along with the site discussions and the overall synthesis, represent the products of recent and well-considered scholarship.

The site reports underpin the discussions which cover the development of the river channel, the ‘western extramural settlement’, a review of burials from the Infirmary Fields cemetery (included as a comparator for the artefact assemblages from the western extramural settlement), an overview of the extramural settlements and a consideration of the fortress, *canabae*, and their hinterland. Given the wide-ranging nature and value of the various elements of the discussion it is perhaps invidious to pick out ‘highlights’. However, within Peter Carrington’s ‘Fortress, *Canabae* and Hinterland’ his consideration of agriculture (pp. 389–96) under the wider topic of ‘Military Demand and Supply’ provides much food for thought with respect to the likely impact of the Roman occupation on agricultural demands in the hinterland of the fortress, although he modestly claims the figures he offers are merely there to ‘think with’. Similarly, explorations of the wider landscape of Roman Cheshire and the roles and relationships of

the ‘small towns’, industrial and other sites in their region, particularly in relation to Chester, are also valuable.

In summary this volume represents an important addition, not only to the literature of Roman Chester, but also to the wider topics of military supply, the nature of extra-mural settlement in the major military sites of the north-western Empire and military / civilian interaction. The authors are to be congratulated on a job exceptionally well done.

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