



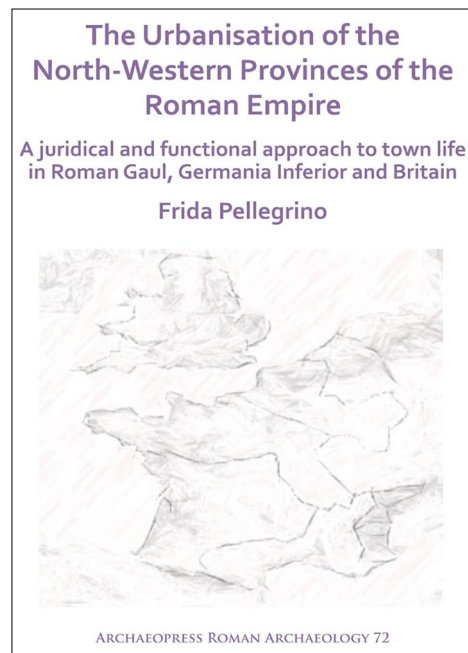
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## Book Reviews

**Frida Pellegrino. 2020. *The Urbanisation of the North-Western Provinces of the Roman Empire: A Juridical and Functional Approach to Town Life in Roman Gaul, Germania Inferior and Britain* (Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 72). Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-7896-9774-2 paperback £48.**

Frida Pellegrino's volume is part of a successful monograph series on urbanism in the Roman Empire, resulting from the ERC 'An Empire of 2000 cities' project, coordinated by the University of Leiden (see de Ligt and Bintliff 2020). Pellegrino's contribution should be understood in this context, insofar as it shares methodological premises and techniques of analysis with publications covering other areas of the Empire (e.g. Donev 2019 for the Balkans; Willet 2020 for Asia Minor; Houten 2021 for Hispania). The broad scale chosen, although it does not allow us to capture the enormous variability of Roman territorial organisation during its many centuries of existence, is the most appropriate for tracing certain common patterns and identifying regional trends with their own personality.

To do so, Pellegrino turned to a wide variety of sources, especially literary texts, epigraphic documentation, and archaeological data, understood in a very broad sense—from monographic studies of individual buildings to the layouts of cities.



Coherency is a challenge when faced with the regional complexity of the Empire; the author tackles this by focusing on the north-western provinces, i.e. the Galliae (Narbonensis, Western Alps, and Tres Galliae), Germania Inferior, and Britannia. In any case, regardless of the coherence of the geographical framework chosen, it is highly unlikely that the processes of urban and territorial implantation were homogeneous. As in so many other areas of the Empire, here too, Rome carried out a selective decision-making process, adapting itself to the settlement patterns and previous organisational structures that suited and were compatible with its interests of conquest.

In order to carry out a study aimed at characterising the urban phenomenon in a territory it is first of all necessary to have a series of clear starting parameters for the definition and identification of what constitutes a city and of urbanisation itself. This is the subject of Chapter 1, which establishes criteria such as the legal status and management autonomy, dimensions, morphology, or the function of the inhabited nuclei as providers of services to a wider territory. Despite the homogeneity that Rome tried to bring to the city, as a model of Romanitas and an instrument for the expansion of a way of life and administrative management, there were many real variations that can be observed in the very different territories of the Empire. The territorial structure and hierarchy of settlements in the pre-Roman period, respected or modified according to different dynamics and interests, undoubtedly played a decisive role in this.

The chronological approach is fundamental and accordingly in Chapters 2 and 3 the urbanisation of the chosen territories is dealt with according to the progression of the phenomenon of conquest, occupation of the territory, and establishment of the provincial system. Pellegrino focuses on the first to third centuries AD in Gallia, Germania, and Britannia. However, a large part of the study, especially the sections devoted to the characterisation of the urban phenomenon based on its different indicators (e.g. existence of walls, public buildings, spectacle buildings, legal status, etc. in Chapter 4) are based on the situation in the second century AD, which is considered to be the time of greatest urban development in these provinces. Regarding the aforementioned indicators, a more incisive analysis of some of them, such as the theatres, is lacking. The morphological variability existing in a large part of the Gallic territory—the ‘Gallo-Roman’ type—cannot be explained simply by a formal ‘flexibility’ (p. 97). Although theatres in other provincial areas can eventually serve as indicators of urbanisation by Roman standards, I do not believe that Gallo-Roman theatres in peripheral, rural areas, often associated with sanctuaries of pre-Roman tradition, should be considered in the same way. Certain public buildings, particularly

those dedicated to worship, should also be treated with caution here as evidence of 'Romanity'. Moreover, the dynamics of pre-Roman structures played a fundamental role as the unifying element of a territory with a dispersed population and should not, therefore, necessarily be understood as reflecting an urban entity.

One of the most singular aspects of the urban phenomenon in the north-western provinces were undoubtedly the 'secondary agglomerations', which have been particularly well characterised and studied by researchers in the Gallic case. Chapter 5 is devoted to this problem (Chapter 6, shorter, deals with the phenomenon in Germania and Britannia). The author reviews a selected eight case studies of *civitates* which are better known both from the archaeological and epigraphic point of view than the many other secondary agglomerations into which the Gallic territory was structured. These had clear links with the previous populations and traditions, later integrated into the Roman Empire and for whose further development the latter undoubtedly served as a catalyst. It was also in this structure, with so many links to the pre-Roman period, that the Roman system either established or promoted a network of privileged cities (self-governing ones), although considerably fewer in number than in other Mediterranean provinces of the Empire. These new cities, *coloniae* and *municipia*, characterised by dispersed habitats or smaller nuclei as in other Roman regions, would serve as political-administrative centres in the new Roman order. As Pellegrino recognises, in the case of a large part of the north-western provinces of the Empire, it is not possible to understand the urban reality and the structuring of the territory without taking into account the complementary network of secondary agglomerations in addition to the privileged cities (e.g. p. 124, fig. 94). These, however, did not fulfil all the requirements of a canonical city, including that of being the seat of magistracies in the Roman manner. In this case, as presented by the author, it is necessary to trace the maintenance of the old management structures of the pre-Roman period, in a clear exercise by Rome of 'political economy'. All this could, however, be completed with reflections based on classical debates on the autonomy of economies and markets in the Roman world. Perhaps the complex hierarchy of the north-western territories, a region lacking privileged cities compared to the rest of the Empire, can be better understood by distancing oneself from these somewhat outdated globalising readings, giving greater prominence to regional economic and administrative structures.

A series of annexes, mainly tables with data by nuclei (also magistratures), complete the work. Once again, it is the necessary systematic processing and classification of the data that has allowed its integration into GIS-type spatial tools and which, as we have already indicated, is common to the different territorial studies of the

ERC project. All of this is graphically reflected throughout the volume in the form of valuable maps illustrating the weight of certain variables and phenomena. In this sense, Frida Pellegrino's work is one more piece in the puzzle of the Roman Empire, and her monograph, alongside the others produced from the project, certainly helps us understand the complex reality of the Empire. As an independent monograph, it is a very valuable contribution to our knowledge of the north-western provinces of the Empire, of unprecedented scale and territorial focus.

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