



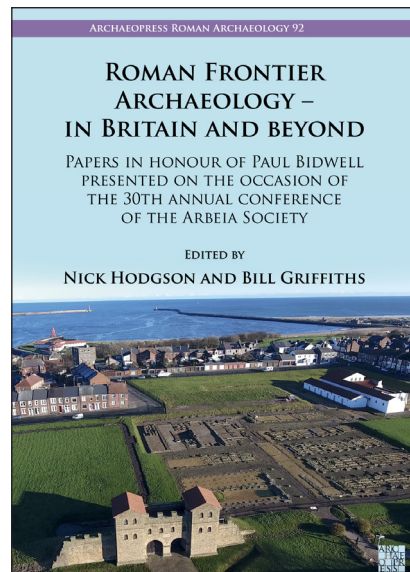
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## Book Review

Hodgson, Nick and Bill Griffiths (eds). 2022. *Roman Frontier Archaeology – in Britain and Beyond. Papers in Honour of Paul Bidwell Presented on the Occasion of the 30th Annual Conference of the Arbeia Society* (Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 92). Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-8032-7344-0 paperback £60.

Archaeopress continue their successful Roman Archaeology series with this well-illustrated Open Access volume, in honour of Paul Bidwell. Twenty-eight contributions to Roman frontier archaeology are split across six thematic sections, only a brief consideration of which is possible here.

The inclusion of a section on the too-often-overlooked pre-Roman Iron Age, albeit in the form of a single contribution, is particularly welcome—D.H. Heslop’s paper on Bronze and Iron Age settlement in lowland north-east England providing a succinct and useful summary of the impact of the latest findings in understanding site development. The following section, ‘Studies in material and scientific evidence’, is larger and considerably more eclectic. Most papers focus on specific artefact types and assemblages: Lindsay Allason-Jones on the distribution of pine cone motifs and, aside from the traditionally ascribed funerary associations, their links to both the military and specific deities, including the cult of Attis; Stephen Greep’s detailed study of composite dice; Alex Croom on incidence and trends in pot repair at South Shields; Fraser Hunter on an Iron Age harness fitting and the potential insight into the origins and movements of its owner; and Bill Griffiths on experiments with



replica hand-launched weaponry, effectively challenging the perceived truism of the limited defensive value of Roman fortifications. Other papers in this section tackle the somewhat broader topic of subsistence and supply: Richard Brickstock's numismatic analysis offers a refined understanding of the date of the introduction of the *annona militaris*; Geoffrey B. Dannell and Allard W. Mees consider the supply chain of Hadrian's Wall and hinterland forts through interpreting Samian stamps from South Shields; and Marijke van der Veen analyses the data for crop prevalence and surplus production, demonstrating significant changes in crop choice during the late Roman and into the Anglo-Saxon period.

The 'Southern Britain' section includes two thought-provoking contributions on bathhouses from Michael Fulford and Neil Holbrook. The former, emphasising structural failures as possible drivers for alterations and abandonment, is reflective of a renewed broader interest in the recognition and role of failure in the past (Price and Jaffe 2023). A timely update on Roman placenames from south-west England from F.M. Griffith is followed by Stephen J. Kaye and John Pamment Salvatore's paper on the effects of relative sea change and its implications for the location of the Roman maritime facilities at Exeter. Making up the section on 'Antiquarian matters' are David Breeze's analysis of nineteenth-century artistic receptions of Hadrian's Wall, Tony Wilmott's paper on the variously complementary and diverging impressions of the Wall from two antiquarians who encountered it, and Roger Miket's detailed study of John Collingwood Bruce's famous 'cabinet' and book bindings.

'The Roman military north' section opens with Rob Collins' discussion of the culture of command in northern Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries, providing the sort of contextual study essential in challenging anachronistic assumptions about the Roman military. Richard Hingley then explores the ritual significance of Ocean in the Roman conquest of Britain before Nick Hodgson examines the design process of Roman forts, both belying the modern dichotomy between art and symbolism on the one hand and practical function on the other. Alistair McCluskey's paper uses the interpretation of the Corbridge destruction deposit to offer potential insight into Rome's antagonists whilst John Poulter, utilising the latest LiDAR imagery, addresses the problem of the North Tyne crossing of the Stanegate. Margaret Snape's paper then looks at two case studies, South Shields and Newcastle, to discuss the changing fortunes of fort *vici*. In a sign that debate about the function of Hadrian's Wall is alive and well, a contribution from Matthew Symonds next considers the evidence for the Wall being a response to a military threat. Crucially, such a focus serves to highlight how attention is increasingly being paid to the Wall as both more than an over-engineered customs fence and of a design acutely sensitive to the political and geographic landscape it inhabited.

The section ends with Pete Wilson's paper on Cade's road and the role of military infrastructure in the Wall's hinterland.

The final section, 'Other frontiers', consists of: Eduard Nemeth's paper on military activities in Dacia; Derek A. Welsby and Isobella Welsby Sjöström's study of kilns and pottery as indicative of potential technological exchange between the Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Kush; and Everett L. Wheeler's discussion of Constantine's last plans, purportedly related in John Lydus' *De Magistratibus*, for an attack on the Persians through Colchis. The geographic focus of the volume is very much northern Britain and, in this sense, the three papers in this final section appear initially to do the heavy lifting in service of the 'beyond' in the collection's title. However, not only do the papers more than justify inclusion, adding an essential wider perspective, but a broader theme of viewing the frontiers holistically is also apparent throughout the volume.

Indeed, the book's predominantly chronological/geographic structure arguably belies a more theoretical thread, with a consideration throughout on those who practise archaeology and an attention to how archaeological knowledge comes into being. This is perhaps most conspicuous in the antiquarian section but clear, for example, in Holbrook's paper on the shifting interpretations of the public baths at Cirencester and Heslop's observation that data trends can reflect archaeological interest as much as human activity in the past (p. 24).

The editors and contributors have produced a well-written and stimulating volume that is essential reading for anyone with an interest in Roman frontiers and Roman Britain more broadly. The collection is dedicated to Paul Bidwell, whose influence and achievements are evident not only in the impressive bibliography of his work and Jonathon McKelvey's overview of Tyne and Wear Museums Archaeology under his leadership, but in the diverse collection of papers presented in his honour. The book is both a testament to the enduring draw of Roman frontier archaeology, its challenge and continuing significance, and a fitting tribute.

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**Reference**

Price, Max and Yitzchak Jaffe. 2023. Ending the war on error: towards an archaeology of failure. *Antiquity* 97(396): 1598–1606. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2023.120>

