

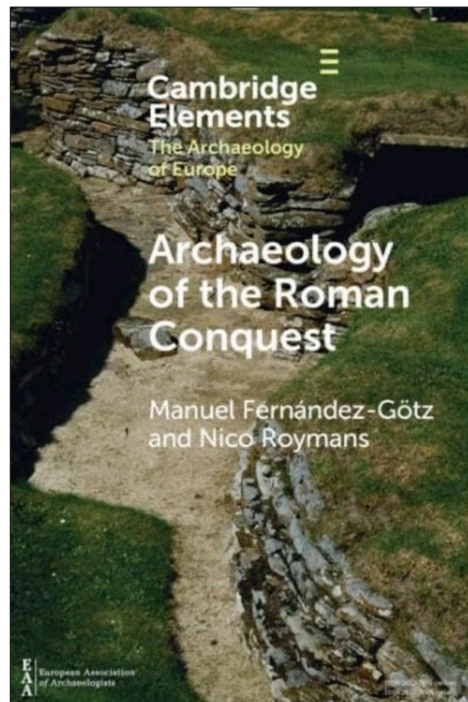
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Book Review

Fernández-Götz, Manuel and Nico Roymans. 2024. *Archaeology of the Roman Conquest: Tracing the Legions, Reclaiming the Conquered*. Cambridge Elements in the Archaeology of Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 978-1-00918-199-0 paperback £17.

Archaeology of the Roman Conquest is the latest edition from the Cambridge Elements series, in which Manuel Fernández-Götz and Nico Roymans summarize the latest scholarship on the Roman Empire's expansion and annexation of new territories. In particular, they wish to highlight the often brutal experiences of the indigenous populations during their military subjugation and its immediate aftermath, to counterbalance the traditional colonial narratives in Roman military and frontier archaeology.

The authors are well-established in the growing discipline of Roman conflict archaeology and deploy the latest methodologies to support their argument. Using Rome's conquest of Gaul, Iberia, Germania and Britain as their case studies, they use a multi-disciplinary approach to analyse how the archaeology of Roman military installations and infrastructure, battlefields and sieges, and the demographic consequences can begin to shift the academic discourse.



The section on Gaul places the conquest in its Late Republican context, describing the colonial and predatory motivations of Caesar to gain personal prestige, power and wealth. In addition to the latest battlefield archaeology from places like Alesia and Thuin, they also deal with the less familiar aspects of the war, such as the virtual disappearance of gold coins from local circulation from the mid-first century BC in northern Gaul, and the widespread abandonment of established settlements in the same region, indicating a significant demographic decrease as a consequence of the campaign. The extended nature of Rome's military activity in Iberia shifts the focus onto the human experience of conflict, from the bodies left on the streets at Cerro de la Cruz during the Punic Wars to the destruction of the *oppida* in the north-west during the final conquest under Augustus. Recent excavations in the *oppidum* at Monte Bernorio produced numerous projectiles, Roman military equipment and evidence of a huge fire as the settlement was destroyed, before being replaced by a Roman settlement nearby. Here, the indigenous culture was devastated by fire and sword.

The section on Germania changes direction, in that it begins to explore a campaign where Roman expansion failed. In this case study, the authors highlight the heterogeneity of the indigenous German peoples and the broad cultural differences between the north and the south of the region. In particular, they emphasize the socio-economic stresses in the north caused by life on poor land in fluctuating climate conditions. This produced decentralized and mobile societies as the indigenous groups fought among themselves for better land, displacing groups from east of the Rhine to the west as the pressure increased. Ultimately, they argue that this lack of economic development and dynamic power structure neutralized Rome's ability to conduct effective military and diplomatic strategies and complete the conquest.

The final case study in Britain contrasts the successful conquest in the south with the unsuccessful attempts to do so in the north. This section highlights the Roman and British political contexts, analysing how they interacted to either assist or resist the annexation process. It also discusses the Boudiccan rebellion highlighting the prominent political role of women in Iron Age society; the possible influence of pan-regional groups such as the druids; and the equally brutal counter-strategies the rebellion employed as the new Roman towns at Colchester, London and St Albans were destroyed. Rome did not have a monopoly of violent force in the first century AD. The failed conquest north of Hadrian's Wall gets a short mention, but the analysis is limited beyond similar socio-economic reasons to those in Germania combined with military resource pressure elsewhere in the Empire. Unfortunately, this section fails to engage effectively with the Antonine and Severan campaign in Scotland, and therefore does not consider the reasons for their failure. This oversight may be due to space constraints, but it is a significant shortcoming in the book.

So, does this book achieve its aim? Mostly yes. The newer survey methodologies of conflict archaeology are certainly bringing fresh data to light. Whether it is technologies

such as lidar, locating Roman military campaign camps, or the use of metal detection to find and map weapon/projectile scatters across ancient battlefields, we can now see events at the sharp end of Roman imperial expansion and annexation more clearly. Similarly, the authors highlight newer perspectives on the importance of social factors in conflict which can help us to understand the meaning of horizon changes in archaeological phenomena such as material culture, settlement patterns or even climate profiles. The layering of these datasets by the authors helps us to understand their interaction and supports better interpretation. This is what helps bring the indigenous peoples back into the narrative and in this respect the book is outstanding.

Nevertheless, while the incorporation of new approaches may rebalance perspectives to some extent, the book's fundamental conceptualization of Roman conquest in terms of military campaigns and some of the underpinning lexicon remains a problem. Although the authors attempt to focus on the military campaigns, they are inevitably drawn into non-military aspects of conquest strategy. This is an entirely correct thing to do, but it highlights a glaring shortcoming in conquest/conflict and *limes* archaeology; as scholars in these disciplines we need to improve our understanding of strategy if we want to get the most out of our research. Furthermore, while the authors foreground the 'dark side' of Roman conquest as a rebalancing method, this just seems to be repeating the original sin of the colonial perspectives from the opposite direction. It might have been better to say that the text was going to take a multidisciplinary approach and allow this to bring the indigenous groups into the narrative. This might have avoided instances where the bi-polar 'Roman vs. indigenous' vocabulary appears, such as references to pro-Roman or anti-Roman groups. In this regard, indigenous peoples are given a simplistic 'party affiliation' but still are not ceded full agency. Indigenous peoples were 'pro-themselves', picking and changing sides according to circumstance.

But this is a small criticism in the context of this book. It has excellent up-to-date references, is well-written, lavishly illustrated and is highly accessible for that. Using new archaeological methodologies it covers a large geographical area, over an extended historical period, to explain complex human behaviours. Whether you want an introductory 'primer' to pick up the major contours of these campaigns, or an introduction to new multidisciplinary methodologies to conflict archaeology, or if you are a student of the same needing an overview of recent research, this book is strongly recommended for you.

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