

A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR WALES: ROMANO-BRITISH THEMES

The Welsh research agenda will differ from that discussed by various authors in James, S. & Millett, M. (ed) *Britons and Romans: advancing an archaeological agenda (CBA Research Report 125, 2001)* because of a fundamental dearth of quality data in many fields. Other research frameworks may refer to the need for sampling methodologies but in Wales the relative scarcity of relevant material reduces our ability to challenge traditional narratives and explore new concepts. We thus feel that it deserves a high priority in the context of Welsh research agendas in general, not only because its results can be placed in a reasonably well understood framework, but also because these are comprehensible to the general public and, thus, have an inherently educational value. The very predictability of this period often cited as dull and unexciting can be turned to the advantage of archaeology in general by providing a straightforward pathway into the benefits of lifelong learning.

We feel that the following represent key areas for research:

1. A re-assessment of the material record is urgently required, because this is the key to understanding issues such as exchange mechanisms, economic development, social status and the key theme of 'romanisation'. This approach should not be solely constrained to artefact studies but should be extended to include what we can glean from environmental studies and regional trends in respect of land-use etc. This involves extensive literature research, examination and publication of museum collections and the analysis of what may be termed 'grey literature'. It needs to span the later pre-Roman Iron Age as well as the earlier post-Roman period, in order to address issues of continuity, discontinuity and change. All four regional assessments highlight the evidence of continuity and argue for further examination of existing records with a view to identifying chronological and landscape interfaces at local and regional scales. We consider that this re-assessment is a fundamental requirement which can not only explore a wide range of issues, some of which are noted below, but which has the potential to direct research into particular themes and geographical areas.
2. There are large tracts of Wales where the basic character of the Romano-British settlement pattern is simply unknown.

Hitherto there has been a heavy geographical bias in the exploration of settlement forms in some zones to the virtual exclusion of others. This needs to be urgently rectified. We need to determine the extent to which the pre-existing settlement pattern determined that of the Roman period, both in terms of form and density. We also need to determine whether Romano-British communication systems affected the existing settlement pattern.

3. There has been little attempt to adequately investigate high-status settlements (the *civitas* towns excepted) in Wales. These will undoubtedly vary in type from region to region, and can include hill-forts in some areas, though the class would normally be judged to encompass settlements of 'small town' character and *villae* in a non-military and *vici* in a military context. It is astonishing how little we know of the origins and histories of *villae* in Wales, especially when we consider the strong hints and real likelihood of occupation into the post – Roman period at some of the known sites. *Vici* have been identified as key to our understanding of the interface between the indigenous population and their Roman conquerors and also the level of interaction between the military and their camp followers. At a wider level it is a means of exploring over-arching issues of land-use and inter-site relationships.
4. There are key gaps in our knowledge of the conquest phase, particularly the military dispositions of the pre-Flavian era. There are question marks against the nature, and in particular the chronology, of a number of military sites which appear to belong to the period c.AD 48-74. There has been a tendency to over-simplify what is undoubtedly a much more subtle and complex picture in respect of military deployment. We may note the complexity emerging at sites such as Llanfor and Dinefwr Park, and the potential to expand our understanding of prolonged conflict by revisiting and extending the work carried out on the prominent and familiar sites of South East Wales.
5. Technology and 'industry', with some few exceptions, has been grossly under-researched. Traditional narratives need to be re-examined as this has the potential to resolve issues such as regional differences and discrepancies. Desk-based assessments; for example, the analysis of ceramic distributions or access to particular types of tools, should be broadened to involve intensive fieldwork and recording on 'industrial' complexes of all types, ranging from

large and small-scale exploitation of metals (from Flintshire to Glamorgan and Gwent in the case of lead-silver exploitation), to artefact production of all kinds. Again evidence of continuity from the Late Iron Age may offer valuable insights into the origins of Roman industry.

6. The study of ritual and funerary practices have languished in Wales. Wide-ranging desk-top survey in respect of sacred landscapes -springs and wells which figure in folklore, together with funerary monuments and cult sites of earlier ages which have produced evidence of Romano-British activity- has the potential to unlock an important repository of data and to identify further priorities. A number of enclosure types have been tentatively categorised as being of ritual character, but none have been investigated. Geophysics in the vicinity of known military bases and urban sites can reveal burials together with shrines/temples, some of which are alluded to in inscriptions.

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