

## CHAPTER 8

# CONCLUSIONS

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In Volume 1, *The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain* (Smith *et al.* 2016) we set out a framework in which Roman England and Wales, essentially Roman Britain south of Hadrian's Wall, was divided into eight regions. Taking account of settlement characteristics and the quantity of available data, this was acknowledged as a minimalist approach to regional diversity. Already, as the case studies within individual regions indicated, it was possible to discern sub-regions with distinctive identities, based on the evidence of settlement morphology, material culture and environmental data, particularly in areas where fieldwork had been intensive as a result of development-led investigations. The clear implication is that, were one to extend a comparable intensity of fieldwork across less well-explored parts of the countryside of Roman Britain, a rich mosaic of sub-regional *pays* would emerge to offer an even more diverse picture of the countryside of Roman Britain.

The approaches taken in this second volume have done more to reinforce the emergent patterning presented in Volume 1. Thanks to the development of archaeobotanical and zoo-archaeological methodologies since the 1970s and their application in developer-funded fieldwork, there is now sufficient data to begin to generalise about agriculture and agrarian strategies in certain parts of Roman Britain. Inevitably, the focus of research has been in the Central Belt and South regions where the pace of modern development has generated the greatest number of archaeological excavations and new information. Here it has been possible to begin to define distinctive sub-regions, building on the case studies presented in Volume 1. In Chapter 4, Allen and Lodwick have integrated the evidence of arable and pastoral farming to outline four differing agrarian regimes, two in each of the South and the Central Belt regions. In the latter, the analysis of the West Anglian Plain builds on Smith's case study in Volume 1 focused on a very similarly defined area, the Cambridgeshire Fen edge (2016a, 192–206). In the case of the South region, the analysis of a larger area of chalkland, Wessex, develops Allen's earlier case study confined to the Hampshire Downs (2016a, 135–9). The integration of settlement characteristics, as set out in Volume 1, with the

biological evidence for agrarian regimes is encouraged by the synthesis of faunal and botanical data for two new sub-regions in Chapter 4, Kent and the Thames Estuary in the South, and the Upper Thames Valley in the Central Belt. This steady enrichment of knowledge of the countryside of Roman Britain alerts us to the need to take account of likely diversity when developing regional frameworks or policies. While being conscious of the need to avoid arguments built around environmental determinism, until proved otherwise, it might be helpful to use Natural England's landscape zones (for England at least), within the larger framework of eight regions, as the basis for testing regional diversity in Roman Britain.

This volume, *The Rural Economy of Roman Britain*, is divided between an analysis of the biological data, largely represented by faunal and botanical assemblages, and of material culture, the latter focusing partly on the role of coinage and evidence for rural industry and partly on what certain products of rural industry, notably ceramics, can tell us about distribution and consumption. In all of this research it is easy and certainly more productive to focus on the positives – what survives in the archaeological record and what can be quantified – but to overlook the negative evidence. We need to remind ourselves that a very significant proportion of what we know about the crops grown in Roman Britain derives from those that were more liable to be exposed to fire, particularly cereals in the course of parching or malting. Waterlogged and mineralised assemblages, which might be expected to preserve different types of plant and seed remains, are comparatively rare. So, other crops, like flax, or pulses, like peas, beans and lentils, may have been much more important than the current available evidence suggests. But proxy evidence can be helpful both in a positive way, such as the incidence of structures associated with the drying or malting of cereals supportive of the primacy of cereal cultivation, or negative, for example, the absence of infrastructure typically associated with the production and distribution of wine, correlating with the archaeological evidence to suggest that viticulture played only a minor role in the rural economy.

A similar awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence is just as applicable to the faunal data, where potentially important elements such as breeding and keeping poultry are very highly dependent on whether sieving regimes have been undertaken to ensure recovery of bird and small mammal bone. For example, the increased incidence of records since improved recovery strategies began to be widely adopted in the late twentieth century is beginning to give much greater insight into the role of chicken husbandry across Roman Britain and change over time (Ch. 3, p. 131). A perspective on a potentially important role in food supply for the military is evidenced as early as the turn of the first and second century at Vindolanda (Bowman and Thomas 2003, 23–34, no. 581). At the same time we should acknowledge how, just as with archaeobotany, zooarchaeology is transforming our understanding of the role of fauna in the lives of the inhabitants of Roman Britain. A case in point is the establishment of mortality profiles for the three main domesticates, which is helping us understand the extent to which meat was a primary or secondary product of the raising of cattle and sheep, and how this changes over time (Maltby 2010, 287–89; Ch. 3). Cattle were raised, it would seem, in the first instance, not for the urban or military meat market, nor for dairying, but for their capacity to provide the fundamental requirement of traction for plough and cart. Sheep, on the other hand, tended to be slaughtered young, suggesting that keeping them for their fleeces was of secondary importance. Though there is some evidence for a trend in the South region towards keeping adult sheep for their wool in the later Roman period, consistent perhaps with the reference to a *gynaecium* at Venta (Winchester?) in the late Roman *Notitia Dignitatum*, there is not yet enough to justify thinking that wool production was as important to the rural economy as had been inferred from other Roman written references to British woollen goods prior to the development and widespread application of zooarchaeology.

All of this argues for the continued and sustained application of the highest standards in archaeobotany and zooarchaeology because the results are transforming our knowledge of agriculture in Roman Britain. Nevertheless, after more than 25 years of developer-funded archaeology and an associated increase in publications, there are still some surprising apparent lacunae. Notable among these is the absence of evidence for specialised horse-breeding in Roman Britain (Ch. 3, p. 124). Given the *cursus publicus* and the size of the military establishment in Britain, the discovery of specialist horse-breeding establishments might reasonably have

been expected, but so far we have a low incidence of neonatal remains from less than a third of all farmsteads, suggesting that the raising of horses was only a minor element of the farming strategies of those settlements and that procurement on the part of the military would have been on a fairly *ad hoc* basis. It may be that we do not understand well enough the kind of evidence that might be left by horse-breeding in the archaeological record, but higher proportions of horse have been found in the Netherlands from settlements in Germania Inferior, which have been interpreted as evidence of horse-breeding for the army (Vossen and Groot 2008, 89–94). We should also recall the *pridianum* or ‘strength-return’ of a mixed unit of foot soldiers and horse serving in the army of Lower Moesia at the beginning of the second century A.D. It shows that members of the unit were absent outside the province to get supplies including horses (Lepper and Frere 1988, 244–59). It is possible, too, that cavalry units serving in Britain also preferred to look outside the province for their horses.

In drawing together the botanical and zooarchaeological evidence to assess variation in farming strategies, Chapter 4 raises important questions for the reasons underlying the regional diversity that has been identified, particularly the extent to which it derives from local, Iron Age traditions. We should remind ourselves that this patterning derives from sometimes quite small percentage differences in the representation of the species concerned and we have no experimental data to allow us greater insight into what these differences might mean in terms of herd management. With this qualification in mind we may consider the case of the Upper Thames Valley, for example, where there seems to be a correlation that associates a preference for barley with the raising of cattle. While the meadows of a river valley offer an appropriate environment for raising cattle, why should there be an apparent focus in one (major) river valley in the Central Belt rather than another? The urban markets of large towns like Cirencester and Gloucester or of small towns like Alchester and Dorchester-on-Thames might provide an explanation, but there is no evidence from them either for a greater consumption of beef than in other towns and regions in the Central Belt and South, or for the particular selection of younger cattle to meet the demands of a market for meat. The inference is that the strategy of estate owners and farmers in the Upper Thames Valley was to meet an extra-regional demand for cattle, echoing the conclusions of Roymans *et al.* (2015) in their major study of the villa of Hoogeloo in the Netherlands. A similar inference could be drawn from the apparent privileging of sheep husbandry in Wessex, which is

also not reflected in greater consumption of lamb or mutton in the towns; beef predominates here as elsewhere. Is this strategy also to meet extra-regional demands for meat and wool? Is there a possible connection with the inland salt-production centres at Droitwich, Middlewich and Nantwich (Ch. 5, p. 212)? Did the animals go northwards on the hoof to be butchered and salted (and the preserved meat then onwards to frontier garrisons), or did the salt travel to the villas and farmsteads?

While the faunal evidence does raise questions about the role of urban markets in shaping farming strategies across southern Britain, until we have much more information about the provenance of animals from bone isotope research it is not, perhaps, the best medium for examining town-country relations. In this context we might look to the evidence provided by ceramics, which can be provenanced and also lend themselves to quantitative analysis. In this volume we have developed three regional case studies that show the potential of ceramics as a proxy for the movement of perishables and other material goods that cannot be provenanced. Timby's contribution in Chapter 7 examines the evidence for the consumption of pottery in the west of the Central Belt region in an area that includes the *civitas* capital at Cirencester and the *colonia* at Gloucester. While the site's pottery assemblage in its entirety is at the core of her analysis, she focuses on a number of distinctive wares that are found across her study area. Two of these, Severn Valley Ware and Micaceous Grey Ware, were produced within, or, in the case of the latter, in or very close to the boundaries of her area. Two major industries with regional or provincial-wide distributions are Oxfordshire Ware, which was manufactured some 30 miles distant as the crow flies from the nearest major town, Cirencester, and BB1, the principal source of which lies around the shores of Poole Harbour, some 75 miles as the crow flies to the south. The area was also in receipt of a wide variety of other imported wares, including amphorae and samian (see Ch. 7, FIG. 7.28).

What is remarkable about the distributions and proportional representation of the wares in question is how little influence the major towns appear to have on them. The Micaceous Grey Ware (MGW) has a largely rural distribution in southern Gloucestershire and Avon and significant quantities are not attracted to any of the towns or larger nucleated settlements. This recalls several of the industries, such as Horningsea Ware, Nar Valley Ware, Wattisfield Ware, etc., described by Rippon in his contribution relating to the Roman pottery of eastern England (Ch. 7, p. 336), none of whose distributions appear to be influenced by the presence or proximity of major towns. Like

Micaceous Grey Ware the bulk of production is found within about 25 miles of the known or suspected location of the kilns and little reaches beyond about 50 miles. With these examples, there is evidence of distributional systems that do not involve towns, but villages or markets or fairs that we have yet to recognise archaeologically, including the possibility of direct potter-consumer relations. The potential role of the large and small towns is no less clear in the distributions of BB1 and Oxfordshire Wares, both of which have fairly even representation across the study areas, though there are fewer available assemblages from the north-east. In both cases the value of the product within the study area appears not to be influenced by increasing distance from its centre of production. This is perhaps understandable in the case of a fine and specialist production like Oxfordshire Ware, but less easy to grasp in the case of what we perceive to be a cooking and kitchen ware (BB1). There is no doubt that the towns were consuming, as Perring and Pitts (2013) demonstrated with their study of the origin of urbanisation in the south-east and this is well brought out by the distribution in Timby's study area of imported South Gaulish samian (FIG. 7.26), which largely dates to the first century A.D. Here the principal consumers are Cirencester, Gloucester (legionary fortress) and the port and possible *mansio* at Sea Mills, Bristol. There is a small, dispersed rural distribution, again with no indication that proximity to a town or military establishment had any influence on it. In the second and early third centuries Central Gaulish samian reached a greater number of consumers in the study area (FIG. 7.27), again with fairly even representation in assemblages and with no detectable decline in representation with distance from towns, roads or the River Severn. All these observations recall Gaffney and White's study of the hinterland of Wroxeter, which shows very little penetration of Roman pottery into the countryside (2007, particularly 237–42 and 269–78; see also the associated contributions by C.J. Evans (2007) and Willis (2007)). Timby's (2012a) analysis of pottery assemblages in the hinterland of Silchester also shows marked contrasts between the rich urban and the poor rural assemblages. Together these studies point to weak interaction between town and country.

This example of systematic analysis of pottery assemblages within a defined area that includes major and minor urban centres raises important issues. First, the role of coinage: the towns were clearly consuming foodstuffs and material goods in quantity and coin loss as, for example, in Cirencester, suggests that money played a prominent role in transactions. However, as Brindle's analysis of coin loss in the countryside

shows, very little coin reached rural settlements until the fourth century, with some categories of settlement, notably enclosed settlements, receiving none or almost no coins at all (Ch. 6). Such a pattern is consistent with the pottery evidence, which shows that settlements were obtaining goods without interaction with the towns and, by inference, requiring few market transactions involving coin. Even in the fourth century in his western study area, when coins were most in use, Brindle notes (p. 252), ‘large groups of coins are by and large restricted to nucleated roadside settlements and villas... coins were typically lost at farmsteads in only very small numbers’.

Second, how then did rural settlements acquire goods like the BB1, which is widely distributed across the study area? In considering this question, it also has to be borne in mind that, while its production cost was probably no more or no less than that of the local Micaceous Grey Ware with a similar repertoire of vessel types, the long distance travelled from the south coast, representing several days’ journey, would have added significantly to its cost. Was its quality as a cooking ware so much better than that of the MGW, or Severn Valley Ware that people were prepared to pay the additional premium? It has been suggested (see Ch. 5, p. 215) that BB1 carried salt, thus adding further value, and that this may partly explain the distribution of this ware, which extends up to the northern frontier where, despite the distance travelled, it remained a major source of the pottery consumed until the late fourth century (Bidwell Ch. 7, p. 290). Quite why the frontier garrisons would rely on salt from the south coast, when there were exploited sources in Cheshire and the West Midlands remains uncertain.

One possible explanation for the pattern of widespread consumption of BB1 in the countryside, and the lack of coin among farmsteads, is that it was a currency with which rural produce was bought by merchants, articulated by individual estates or through country fairs or Brindle’s putative villa markets not yet recognisable in the archaeological record (Ch. 6). For this to work, however, the increase in cost with distance travelled has to be overcome, perhaps by ‘free’ movement on the road network through the office of the procurator. Otherwise one would assume that farmers would have handed over more and more produce to compensate for the cost of transport. A similar explanation of payment-in-kind might also account in part for the distribution of Central Gaulish samian, another ware whose distribution is unaffected by the distance travelled from the kilns, across the study area in the second and early third century. Coinage, circulating through the South and Central Belt regions from the second

century onwards and coinciding with the increased penetration of imported goods into the countryside, is part of the mix, too, but perhaps not the most important form of currency. Arising from this interpretation is the thought that, if merchants were acquiring rural produce direct from country estates, by-passing the towns, it implies a considerable and complex organisation of the movement of goods along the road network, a subject to which we will return below.

First, however, we need to return to the larger towns, the *coloniae* and *civitas* capitals, and consider how they sourced and resourced payment for their food and material goods, if their role as markets was a marginal one. Town houses characterise the residence patterns of these types of town and there is an assumption that they are the urban properties of owners of estates in the countryside. If this was so – and it seems likely, but is, and will be, hard to prove – foodstuffs and fuel at least might have been brought into the towns from individual estates, rather than purchased at market, each town thereby consisting of a multiplicity of household or estate economies. However, money did, of course, circulate in towns and non-local material goods of all kinds were acquired. One source of income would have been from the sale of commodities direct to merchants, with the transaction either at the estate (*villa*), or at venues on the road network, at *mansiones* perhaps, but not necessarily at the larger towns (the prosperity of villas in the Central Belt and South regions was evidently not dependent on proximity to towns). Income would also have been generated by the traffic passing through the town and paying for goods and services at roadside *tabernae*. This aspect of a town’s economy can be seen very clearly in the plan of Silchester, where narrow-fronted *tabernae* line both sides of the main east–west street of the *civitas* capital (Fulford 2016, folding plan), or in the plan of the walled ‘small town’ of Water Newton (Burnham and Wachter 1990, 82, fig. 18).

The economic generation attributable to the road network was considerable, as is exemplified by the frequency of roadside settlements with their distinctive, linear, ribbon-development character. In this volume we have shown that they also have a distinctive economic character, as evidenced by the pattern and volume of coin loss (Ch. 6, p. 252), range of craftworking facilities (Ch. 5, p. 235) and the composition of botanical and faunal assemblages (Chs 2 and 3, pp. 83 and 111). These settlements draw attention to the importance of the movement of people and goods, including grain and livestock, in the economy of the province. Given grain’s strategic importance, it is puzzling that there is so little convincing evidence for

dedicated granaries in the countryside of Roman Britain (Smith 2016b, 58–60; Ch. 2, p. 68). Four-post structures decline in number with time, but are in any case rare. This may have been compensated for by the construction of storage buildings at villas where masonry structures, such as aisled buildings, are relatively common and may have served this purpose as well as supporting other functions, including residence. At villas they are considerably more common than those buildings interpreted as dedicated granaries. Our ignorance may simply be a reflection of the lack of modern research on this category of site where, with protection in many cases as Scheduled Ancient Monuments, developer-funded investigations in the countryside have had least impact since 1990. Until such research on villas is undertaken, our assumption, particularly given the absence or great rarity of granaries at other types of farmstead, supported by the absence from them of grain pests, is that villas did provide the storage facilities for grain from their estates.

The rarity of grain-storage facilities, including the equivocal evidence from villas, in the countryside is matched by a similar scarcity of convincing evidence from the towns of Roman Britain. One might have expected that the extensive excavations at Silchester would have uncovered the remains of raised-floor structures, but, in the absence of the latter, Boon could only speculate that some of the thirty or so small square structures dotted around the town were originally tower granaries (1974, 256–7). From more recent excavations, the buttressed, second-century structure from Culver Street, Colchester, has also been interpreted as a small (5.5 by 7 m), tower granary (Crummy 1992, 108–12). This absence or scarcity of unequivocal storage facilities for grain in a *civitas* capital like Silchester perhaps implies that grain was on the move to those destinations, such as the northern frontier and the garrisons in Wales, where it was needed in bulk and where granaries are in evidence, or to a major port like London, where riverside warehousing has been discovered, for trans-shipment to the Continent (Milne 1985, 68–78; and see below). With no evidence for capacity storage in towns capable of accommodating the surplus grain from multiple estates, it does seem likely that merchants interacted directly and individually with the villas and their owners. This picture contrasts with that from the near-continent where substantial urban granaries are known, for example the massive example on the western side of Tongeren, and others from Tienen and Amiens (Roymans and Derks 2011, 19).

To conclude, we have argued that the evidence does not support towns having a significant role as

markets, but that they certainly depended on and consumed resources from the countryside. Beyond meeting their own needs in town and country and their tax obligations, landowners sold their surplus direct to the merchants who supplied other consumers as well as the state, both in Britain and on the Continent, with requirements that could not be met by through taxation alone. The central role of the villa estate in the control of grain is also indicated by the increased evidence for milling (replacing the household quern) in the third and fourth centuries, implying control over the production of flour (Shaffrey 2015; above, Ch. 2). Given the lack of evidence for grain storage at farmsteads, did the villa estates also control the storage and distribution of seed corn? Arguably estate control extended over other activities such as textile production. For example, the decline in the archaeological visibility of spindlewhorls in the wider countryside in the Central Belt and South regions (though not in the South West and Upland Wales and the Marches) is matched by the finds of large numbers at some villas, while the technological changes in weaving associated with the decline of loomweights also hint at centralised control (Ch. 5, p. 227).

The road network of Roman Britain, with its plethora of settlements along the strategically important routes, attests to the constant movement of goods and commodities. We can glimpse some of that movement through proxies, such as archaeobotanical data (Orengo and Livarda 2016), and ceramics such as the well-established south-to-north distributions of BB1 and BB2, but there is also the midlands-to-south movement of ceramics, such as Nene Valley and Hadham wares, to London, which may go some way to explain the extraordinary agglomeration of industrial activity, including the production of iron, in the densely settled and agriculturally productive West Anglian Plain (Ch. 5). This was a region that looked to both the north and the south for opportunities – and from there to the continent beyond. As for London itself, its draw, as represented by ceramics, was not only from the north, but from the Central Belt and South regions more widely. By the fourth century, and probably unique in this respect among the late Roman towns of Britain, the majority of its pottery was coming from sources more than 30 miles distant, by implication bringing with it other goods and commodities for consumption in the city or shipment out of Britain (Green 1980, 76–9; Symonds and Tomber 1991, 83–4).

This volume is a tribute above all to the extraordinary achievements in the disciplines of archaeobotany and zooarchaeology which have underpinned so much of it, but we still have too

few reports of excellent quality, while coverage capable of meaningful synthesis is limited to a handful of study areas in just two of our eight regions, both in the south of Britain. Nevertheless, that we can begin to identify distinctive *pays* within our regions at large shows the potential that future research – and that likely to be almost entirely undertaken in a developer-funded context – has for extending this rich characterisation across the wider canvas of Roman Britain as a whole. As confidence grows in what has been achieved to date, so a more focused and problem-orientated approach will become appropriate.

Although some categories of data have allowed us to track change over time, such as the trend towards spelt and cattle-dominated agriculture on the West Anglian Plain and in Kent, the chronological resolution from rural settlements is not sufficient to shed insights across the piece. Hence Timby's regional study was compelled to amalgamate coarse-ware pottery (BB1, MGW, Severn Valley Ware) of second to fourth century date. The prospect of being able to offer regional characterisations by, say, half-century periods remains a distant prospect. This is particularly the

case with the third century, when dating evidence before *c.* 260 is in short supply.

The case studies presented in Chapter 7 show the potential of material culture, such as ceramics and stone, which survive in bulk in the archaeological record and are thereby susceptible to quantitative analysis as well as characterisation to establish provenance. If consensus on standards and methodologies can be achieved in material culture studies, more synthetic studies of the kind embraced by the Roman Rural Settlement Project will become possible. The need for robust sampling strategies and good-quality numerical data in both material culture and environmental research remains paramount, to be matched by the recovery of more dated deposits to allow us a better interrogation of change over time. The potential of recording the volume of soil excavated in order to calibrate the frequency of finds is clearly demonstrated by the report on the roadside settlement at Shiptonthorpe, East Yorkshire (Millett 2006). This approach should become standard practice. Without knowing the volume of soil excavated it is impossible to derive significance from the numbers of finds alone.