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Review for *Britannia*

R.S.O. Tomlin (2018) *Britannia Romana. Roman Inscriptions and Roman Britain* (Oxbow: Oxford, Philadelphia)

Readers of *Britannia*, and indeed anyone interested in the history of Roman Britain, whether professional academic or avid visitor of archaeological sites, will find much of value in this volume by Roger Tomlin. Drawing upon Tomlin's decades of experience in editing new epigraphic finds from the province, it presents a history of Roman Britain via the lens of its inscribed remains. Much of the book is structured chronologically, with chapters covering the period from The Invasion of Britain (Chapter 1) down to The Fourth Century (Chapter 14). In addition, there are four thematic chapters focusing upon Soldier and Civilian (Chapter 9), Government and Administrators (Chapter 10), Economy and Society (Chapter 11), and Gods and Men (Chapter 12). The book is designed to be accessible to all, with transcriptions of Latin and Greek texts accompanied by translations into English, and explanations of Latin technical terms. The Introduction also contains essential information on the challenges of interpreting not only inscriptions themselves but their publication, with a brief guide to Lettering, Punctuation, Abbreviations and symbols, Dating, Damage to inscriptions, and Editorial conventions. The style of presentation is designed to appeal to a broad audience, with frequent modern analogies drawn, even though some of these seem to me to be somewhat misjudged. Nevertheless, I suspect that no other book on Latin epigraphy presents anecdotes on such a range of individuals as Winston Churchill, William Gladstone, Napoleon, John Le Carré, and Ian Richmond. Along the way we even encounter an alternative plot idea for Anthony Trollope's *Barsetshire* novels and a comparison of a distance slab along the Antonine Wall with the 'artless charm of a south-Persian tribal rug' (p.128)!

The main content of the book presents 487 inscriptions individually, with many more cross-referenced in the notes. These range from the inscriptions found in Roman Britain itself, chiefly texts engraved on stone but also including some inscriptions on other materials, to inscriptions from around the empire mentioning individuals or events in Britain. The piecing together of inscriptions from multiple locations leads to interesting insights into the lives of some individuals, and reminds us of the mobility of many army units. One of the great benefits of the volume is that it incorporates material recently published, notably the Bloomberg Tablets and the gold-leaf dedications to the goddess Senuna, into the broader history of the province. It also includes recent finds discovered too late for *RIB* III, namely two Mithraic altars from Inveresk, found in 2010 (p.369, 12.80-81), and an altar to Jupiter Dolichenus found at Vindolanda in 2009 (p.371, 12.84).

Another important contribution is that Tomlin occasionally offers interpretations that are at variance with those advanced by *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*. For example, he suggests that a dedication from Chester (*RIB* 445: p.71, 4.10) should be understood as *saluti eius* rather than *Saluti*, so that the dedication is made to 'Fortuna Redux and Aesculapius and his welfare', observing that 'The insertion of the possessive pronoun *eius* ('his') implies that the 'welfare' (*salus*) is that of their master, although *RIB* understands it to be the divinity *Salus*'. He proposes that the addition of *portam* and *fecit* framing the final line of a building-inscription from York (*RIB* 665: p.78, 4.16) is unnecessary, given that the original architectural context of the inscription would have made clear what was being built. In a dedication to Antoninus Pius from Newcastle (*RIB* 1322: p.143, 6.28), whose meaning is obscured by stone-cutting error and over-abbreviation, Tomlin argues that the reading in *RIB* of *ex Ger(maniis) duobus* should rather be interpreted as *ex(ercitibus) Ger(manicas) duobus*. Finally, in the case of *RIB* 2110 from Birrens (pp.147-8: 6.33), he cautiously suggests that the puzzling abbreviation C L could perhaps be expanded as *c(oronati) l(aurea)*, 'crowned with bay leaves'. There is also one previously unpublished inscription included, a Greek painted inscription on an Aegean amphora in the Museum

of London (p.300: 11.26), recording 'Helidorus' honey'. Particularly welcome are the 236 photographs of the inscriptions discussed, even though some would benefit from being printed on a bigger scale, whilst an indication of dimensions is too often lacking.

As one would expect, the military are at the forefront of much of the analysis, and the choice of structure also privileges inscriptions mentioning a whole range of emperors. The chosen chronological and thematic structure arguably risks under-representing non-urban, non-military culture and society in Roman Britain, as reflected by Celtic names scratched upon a set of panpipes excavated at Shakenoak Villa in Oxfordshire (*RIB* II.8.2505.4), or the glass bowl imported from Cologne and found on a villa site at Wint Hill in Somerset, with its hunting-scene and inscription pledging 'Long life to you and yours; drink, long life to you' (*RIB* II.2.2419.45). Perhaps an additional section specifically focusing upon Latin inscriptions in the countryside might have gone some way to balancing the inevitable prominence of the Roman army. It is inevitable though that some favourite individual inscriptions will always be missing from a sample, however comprehensive in scope. Otherwise, one can only raise minor quibbles: the claim on p.33 that Tibullus is known as a *cognomen* only in *Tab. Lond. Bloomberg* 44 and for the Augustan-era poet should be qualified with the North African inscription for Q. Racilius Tibullus (*AE* 2013, 1959).

What we have here, in short, is a volume presenting an effective up-to-date summary of what Latin inscriptions can reveal about the history of Roman Britain.

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