

Reviews

ROMAN SILCHESTER. By GEORGE C. BOON. *London: Max Parrish, 1957. Pp. 245 25s.*

This is a most valuable and interesting book. Silchester is the most fully excavated town-site of Roman Britain and hitherto the only modern account of it has been the same author's *Guide*, on sale at Silchester itself or Reading. Now Mr Boon, who has lived and excavated at the site for several years, gives a coherent and lucid summary of all that is known or can be inferred about the town of Calleva and life in it throughout its history.

It is a fascinating history, although it probably includes only one episode that brought the town into the main stream of imperial politics, when it appears to have been sacked during the civil war between Allectus and Constantius in 296. The absorbing interest of the book is the study of the development of this alien Belgic settlement of pre-Roman date into a growing tribal capital which reached its golden age in the second century and then gradually declined during the third and fourth, to be eventually deserted and sink back into the soil which has so mercifully preserved its remains. The qualities that mark Mr Boon's presentation of this story are his fine scholarship and sympathetic imagination. He groups and disposes his evidence skilfully and is careful to build on it only such conclusions as he conscientiously thinks it will bear, e.g. in his discussion of pre-Roman settlement at Calleva; no detail, whether literary or archaeological, is too trivial to yield its information, but detail is always subordinated to the main picture it is being used to produce, and much of it is properly relegated to the admirable series of notes on each chapter, which are little treasuries of knowledge excellently compressed, and occasionally offering concise information on relevant subjects, e.g. the masterly survey of Roman coinage (pp. 221-2) or the description of hand-spinning (p. 236). The care and accuracy of Mr Boon's work has as its complement a keenly sensitive understanding of the ways in which human beings act and react, and it is this constant awareness of human values that makes his writing about the day-to-day life of the homes and streets of Calleva so interesting; he takes his reader into the kitchens, shops, temples and public baths and with ironical restraint confines his comment on gladiatorial and other shows in the Callevan amphitheatre to a comparison with all-in wrestling as practised today.

Besides the main story of the book, there is much else for which a reader wants to thank Mr Boon, notably his admirable survey in chapter one of the history of the exploration of the site, his discussion of the Roman roads converging on the town, the excellent illustrations, whether photographs or drawings, the maps, on one of which he modestly remarks in passing (p. 71) that the correct alignment of the streets is shown for the first time, and not least for the smooth lucidity of his style. With so much on the credit side it may seem ungenerous to mention anything else, and the following points are made only to complete the picture that the book leaves in one reader's mind. The introduction by Mrs M. Aylwin Cotton, who directed excavation on the site in 1938-9 and has worked there more recently, lacks the conciseness and clarity that characterize the rest of the book and are particularly desirable in presenting an initial survey, especially as Mrs Cotton's dating of one archaeological feature differs widely from that of Mr Boon; cross-references would be helpful here. In addition to

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the introduction a single page giving a date-chart, however approximate, of the chief stages of the town's history and relevant contemporary events would be useful. Sometimes Mr Boon's gift for concise exposition has led him into undue compression and consequent obscurity, e.g. in his accounts of *tubulatio* (pp. 110-1) and the working of a hand-mill (p. 167); and it might have been relevant to compare the 'redirection of life' away from the towns in the 4th century 'towards a more realistically based economy' (pp. 78-9), i.e. life in the *villas*, which is agreed to have been caused by extortionate taxation, with the contemporary practice of victims of the Inland Revenue department, who avoid taxation and feed their families by running farms at a loss. Finally, of only two misprints noted, one is trivial, the other 'Alcester' for 'Alchester' on the map-key on p. 53, is misleading; otherwise, printing and general format of the book are in every way worthy of the very high standard of its content

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EXCAVATIONS AT CLAUSENTUM, SOUTHAMPTON, 1951-1954. By AYLWIN COTTON and P. W. GATHERCOLE. 160 pp.; plates and figures. H.M.S.O., 1958.

This is No. 2 of the Archaeological Reports that are being published by the Ministry of Works on excavations undertaken by its Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments. As, however, No. 1 was devoted to a site in Shetland, Hampshire is honoured in providing the first English site to benefit from this new development in state-organised archaeology.

From Leland and Camden onwards, the Roman defences of the Bitterne peninsula have attracted attention and speculation. The position given for Clausentum in the Roman road-book known as the Antonine Itinerary enables us to apply the name to this site. Clausentum was in fact the Roman predecessor of the port of Southampton. Its remains, and the problems of interpretation that they raise when modern methods of investigation are applied to them, therefore well merit the thorough account here given of them by Mrs Cotton. Her report on the excavations directed by her in 1951 occupies most of the book, the remainder being a report by Mr Gathercole on the excavations of 1954.

It is reasonable to assume that what was going on at Clausentum was closely related to developments elsewhere in the Hampshire Basin, and possibly also in a remoter hinterland. It is of interest to note therefore that a pre-Flavian occupation of the site does not seem to be proved, and that the general trend of discovery suggests an organised settlement by the Romans of Hampshire and West Sussex in the Flavian period' (i.e. from about A.D. 70 onwards; p. 14). Incidentally, the pottery group published by Mr Waterman in Vol. XVII of our *Proceedings* is given further scrutiny, with the result that the Claudian date there assigned to it must be abandoned. Activity at Clausentum continues until about the early third century; thereafter, the excavation evidence—although not perhaps the evidence from chance finds—suggests a rather unexpected period of obscurity, lasting until at least the middle of the fourth century. Between about A.D. 370 and the end of the century there was building going on, and the place was now important enough to be provided with a stout town wall. Occupation apparently lasted into the fifth century. There is a possible Saxon cemetery on the site but any closer dating of this must await further work.

The excavations produced a large quantity of stratified pottery covering much of the Roman period, and the section (with separate index) dealing with this is a major contribution to the study of Roman pottery in southern Hampshire. (One criticism may be made of the pot-drawings; sometimes, but not always, decoration is shown as extending in one plane and not as foreshortened by the curve of the vessel; in some cases—e.g. the *vertical* lines on No.

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8 in Fig. 27—the resulting effect is odd and misleading.) Another valuable feature is a list of the inscribed stones from the site, given with a bibliography in Appendix II. And one may applaud the proper catholic attitude to antiquity implied by the inclusion, in a report devoted to a Roman site, of drawings of a dozen specimens of late medieval pottery.

This report takes its place by the St Catherine's Hill report, Heywood Sumner's reports on the New Forest Roman potteries and the work done by Mrs Cotton herself for Silchester, as a detailed record, written in accordance with contemporary scientific standards, of the investigation of a well-known Hampshire site. Like them, it has a more than local significance, being an indispensable work of reference for students of the period to which it relates.

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