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Martin Millett

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THE  
ROMANIZATION  
OF  
BRITAIN

*An essay in archaeological interpretation*

MARTIN MILLETT

*Lecturer in Archaeology  
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*Dedicated to the memory of my mother*

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## Preface

Some will pick up this volume with the feeling ‘oh, not *another* book about Roman Britain’. I have great sympathy with this view as there are too many books with little new to say. It is therefore essential to establish what I have attempted to do in writing this study. To be clear first, I have written an essay in interpretation which aims to present evidence and provide an explanation of it. I trust that it will be judged for the ideas it contains. Where topics are not considered, it is generally because I have not seen them as central to my argument, not because they are irrelevant or uninteresting. I hope to treat some of them and also other parts of the Empire in later works. Here I have attempted to gather a wide range of evidence and provide a series of connected explanations of it. I shall consider the work to be successful if others judge my arguments to be both internally consistent and consonant with all the evidence available to me.

The genesis of this book lies in the late 1970s when I first taught an evening class in Newbury. I soon discovered that the aspects of Roman Britain I wanted to discuss were ill-served by the available literature. Although prolific on the military and political history, the books were limited in their coverage of economy and society. This conclusion was reinforced when I was appointed to Durham University and came to teach the subject to undergraduates. Two elements were missing: first, a synthesis of the results of recent archaeology; not simply the results of the numerous and extensive excavations of the past two decades, but also the artefact studies which now abound. Secondly, we needed a modern commentary on the social and economic development of the province which took some account of information derived from other social sciences. One could find collections of studies on individual topics like towns or villas, but no book since Rivet’s *Town and Country in Roman Britain* (1958) has attempted to integrate the results. Even the ubiquitous textbooks which deal with the subject all too often treat the social and economic evidence as appendices to a narrative, text-based history. A review of this evidence seems especially important since members of the post-imperial generation (to which I belong) are seeking new explanations for cultural change in the Roman world: they are unwilling to accept the paternalistic view that ‘the Britons did what they were told by the Romans because it represented *progress*’. I have thus attempted to provide one alternative explanatory framework, whilst at the same time gathering and organizing sets of archaeological information which should be of use to students and scholars irrespective of whether they agree with my interpretations. These data illustrate the information explosion which has occurred since the 1960s, and which make Roman Britain a ripe area for research; rarely in archaeology does one find such a rich data-base on which to test ideas.

Whilst the resulting book is partly designed as an ‘alternative Roman Britain’ it does not aspire to be a ‘new orthodoxy’. I trust that those reading it will find it complemen-

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tary to the better traditional accounts (particularly those in Frere's *Britannia* and Salway's *Roman Britain*), in which they will find the necessary historical narrative which I have not attempted to provide.

Finally, during work on this book I have become intensely aware that some established opinions about the subject are based not on evidence, but on what have been called 'factoids'. These are pieces of information which have been so commonly repeated that they are almost indistinguishable from facts. I have earnestly tried to avoid including or creating these. Indeed, I hope that some of the data presented here may help lay some of their ghosts. If I have unwittingly created new 'factoids', I trust reviewers will unmercifully point them out.

*Acknowledgements*

Anything one writes reflects the influence of colleagues, and a work like this is particularly prone to contain ideas which have developed imperceptibly through contact with others. I freely acknowledge the ideas and stimulation provided by those who taught me in London and Oxford, my colleagues there and in Durham, and in particular the students I have taught since 1981. I hope any who recognize their ideas unacknowledged will forgive me. A number of people have kindly answered my questions and provided their own data prior to publication. These include Tom Blagg, Jeremy Evans, Paul Harvey, Colin Haselgrove, Ian Hodder, John Mann, Mark Pomel, Steve Roskams, Roger Tomlin and the parents of the late Mark Gregson.

The Department of Archaeology at Durham has provided a stimulating atmosphere in which to think, while the University has provided sabbatical leave which enabled me to put my thoughts on paper. Our departmental illustrator, Yvonne Beadnell, has translated sketches and assorted scraps into artwork with manifest skill and without complaint.

I am most grateful to the following who have read and commented upon various parts of the manuscript: John Casey, Jeremy Evans, Bill Hanson, Colin Haselgrove, Martin Jones, Simon Keay, Chris Scull and J. T. Smith. Their comments have saved me from errors and improved the work. At CUP, Peter Richards and Nancy-Jane Thompson have patiently helped me through the preparation of the text. Most importantly, Simon James has read the whole manuscript and offered very considerable humorous and enthusiastic critical support; any readability owes much to his careful consideration. The remaining errors and infelicities remain my fault. Finally, Victoria Brandon has done much to support me and maintain my sanity throughout.

*University of Durham*  
July 1988