

## THE ROMANIZATION OF BRITAIN

*The Romanization of Britain* was greeted, on first publication, as an innovative study of cultural change and interaction, offering a bold new perspective on Roman Britain based on archaeological evidence. It set out to explore the social dynamics of cultural change from a local perspective by looking at the patterns of interaction between provincial peoples and imperial power. Drawing together a wide range of excavated data as well as textual evidence, it provided a new synthesis of the province whilst offering an alternative way of understanding cultural change in the Roman Empire more widely. Its publication served to catalyse debate, stimulating very considerable discussion and generating a wide variety of responses in a range of publications. This revised edition adds a new introductory essay exploring the genesis of this classic work and reviewing the subsequent debate, while also recalibrating the author's perspective on cultural change within the wider Roman provinces.

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# THE ROMANIZATION OF BRITAIN

*An Essay in Archaeological Interpretation*

SECOND EDITION

MARTIN MILLETT

*University of Cambridge*

with a Foreword by

CHARLOTTE HIGGINS

*Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London*



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*Dedicated to the memory of my mother*

## Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page viii
<i>List of tables</i>	xiii
<i>Foreword</i>	xv
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xviii
<i>Introduction: The Romanization of Britain in perspective</i>	xix
1 The Nature of Roman Imperialism	1
2 The Pattern of Later Iron Age Societies	9
3 The Invasion Strategy and Its Consequences	40
4 The Emergence of the ‘Civitates’	65
5 The Maturity of the ‘Civitates’	104
6 Development at The Periphery	127
7 The Developed Economy	157
8 Later Roman Rural Development	181
9 Epilogue: Decline and Fall?	212
<i>References</i>	231
<i>Index</i>	247

*Illustrations*

	<i>page</i>
1 The growth and provincial organization of the Western Roman Empire up to AD 14	4
2 The ceramic style-zones found in Britain around 100 BC	13
3 Coinage zones in LPRIA Britain, showing the regional nomenclature used	14
4 General settlement types in Britain around 150 BC	16
5 The LPRIA mirror from Desborough, Northants	19
6 The distribution of sites known as <i>oppida</i> in LPRIA Britain	25
7a Comparative plans of the <i>oppida</i> at Bagendon, Verulamium and Camulodunum	26
7b Comparative plan of the <i>oppidum</i> at Stanwick, North Yorks	27
8 Air photograph showing part of the LPRIA <i>oppidum</i> at Stanwick, North Yorks from the east	27
9 The distribution and context of Dressel 1 wine amphorae in LPRIA Britain	32
10 A panel of decorated bronze, probably a casket mount from Elmswell, East Yorks	34
11 The Battersea Shield, decorated in the characteristic style of the LPRIA	37
12 The Roman military sites of the period to AD 75 in Britain	47
13 Outline plan of the <i>oppidum</i> at Camulodunum showing the location of Roman military sites of the invasion period	48
14 Alternative responses of the Roman army to centralized and decentralized native societies	49
15 Roman invasion-period military sites located within hillforts	52
16 The <i>civitates</i> of Roman Britain	67
17 The Public Towns of Roman Britain	70
18 Comparative plans of a barrack block from Valkenburg Z.H. and the pre-Boudiccan structures at Verulamium	71

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

19	Comparative plans of the <i>fora</i> at Ampurias (Spain), Augst (Switzerland) and Silchester (Hampshire)	73
20	Alternative models for the relationship of forts to town origins in early Roman Britain	75
21	Simplified plan showing the relationship between the legionary fortress at Exeter and the later <i>civitas</i> capital	76
22	Simplified plan showing the relationship between the legionary fortress at Wroxeter and the later <i>civitas</i> capital	77
23	Plan of the <i>forum</i> at Verulamium showing the ditches beneath	78
24	Plans showing the development of the <i>forum</i> at Silchester	79
25	Plans showing the monumental baths of the legionary fortress at Exeter demolished to make way for the <i>forum</i>	80
26	Distribution of monumental dedicatory inscriptions from Roman Britain	81
27	Air photograph showing the early Roman temple at Hayling Island, Hants	84
28	Plan of the <i>colonia</i> at Colchester	85
29	Comparative plans of the Lion Walk excavations in Colchester	86
30	The Temple of Claudius at Colchester and the adjacent theatre	88
31	The development of Roman London	90
32	Rank-size graphs for villas in Roman Britain divided according to half-century periods	93
33	Villa numbers and their average size through time	94
34	Air photograph of the LPRIA enclosure at The Ditches, Glos	95
35	Comparative plans of three first-century AD villas in Britain: Fishbourne, Sussex, Mileoak, Northants and Gorhambury, Herts	96
36	Evidence for agricultural innovation in the first millennia BC and AD	97
37	An inscription ( <i>RIB</i> 707) which records the presentation of a new stage building for the theatre at Brough-on-Humber in AD 140–4	105



## THE ROMANIZATION OF BRITAIN

38	Plan of Verulamium based on excavated and air photographic evidence	108
39	Plan of Wroxeter (Viroconium Cornoviorum) based on excavated and air photographic evidence	109
40	Two early Roman urban buildings at Watling Court in London	111
41	Head of a statue of Mercury from the Temple at Uley, Glos	112
42	Tombstone ( <i>RIB</i> 200) of M. Favonius Facilis, a centurion of the XX Legion, found at Colchester, Essex	113
43	Tombstone found at Chester ( <i>RIB</i> 491)	114
44	Relief carving from Cirencester showing three mother goddesses	115
45	Relief carving from Bath showing three mother goddesses	115
46	Relief of Venus and two nymphs from High Rochester, Northumberland	116
47	The mosaic from Room 7 of the villa at Sparsholt, Hants	116
48	Map of Roman Britain showing the distribution of villas in relation to the <i>civitates</i>	118
49	Chronological changes in the mean distance of villas from towns in Roman Britain	119
50	Comparative plans of LPRIA and Romano-British field systems	121
51	The changing size of settlements in the Fenland through the Roman period	122
52	The changing pattern of the location of pottery kilns in Roman Britain	124
53	The origins of pottery supplied to London and Chelmsford in the later first century AD	125
54	The distribution of samian ware in central southern England	126
55	The suggested boundary between the Severan provinces of Britannia Superior and Britannia Inferior	133
56	The suggested boundaries between the Diocletianic provinces of Maxima Caesariensis, Flavia Caesariensis, Britannia Prima and Britannia Secunda	134

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

57	A substantial later Roman town house (Verulamium Insula 27, building 2)	135
58	The three major houses within the walls of Cirencester (Insula 12)	136
59	The distribution and sizes of urban defences in Roman Britain	138
60	Gold medallion found at Arras, northern France	142
61	The distribution of Major, and Minor or Small Towns in Roman Britain	143
62	Rank-size graph of the defended areas of urban sites in Roman Britain	144
63	The morphology of the Small Towns of Irchester, Kenchester and Water Newton	146
64	Piercebridge, County Durham	147
65	Various pottery imports into later Roman Britain	160
66	The supply of pottery to London and Chelmsford in the fourth century	164
67	The substantial timber quay found beneath Cannon Street station in London	165
68	The distribution of later Roman pottery kilns in Britain divided by century and production type	166
69	The distribution of Alice Holt/Farnham Roman pottery in the fourth century	170
70	The pottery production centre in the Alice Holt Forest, Hampshire	171
71	The distribution of Oxfordshire Roman pottery	173
72	The distribution of mosaics from the different schools or workshops in later Roman Britain	175
73	The location and layout of the tilery at Minety, Wilts	177
74	Diagram reconstructing the administrative mechanisms involved in the circulation of coinage in the later Roman world	178
75	The various mints supplying coinage to Richborough in the fourth century	179
76	The distribution of mosaics in Roman Britain	187

## THE ROMANIZATION OF BRITAIN

77	The development and decline of the Iron Age farmstead and Roman villa at Barton Court Farm, Oxon	188
78	The monumental and axial layout of the late Roman villa at Woodchester, Glos	189
79	The development of the courtyard villa at Rockbourne, Hants	190
80	The central panel of the mid-fourth-century Venus mosaic from the villa at Rudston, East Yorks	191
81	The Charioteer mosaic from the villa at Rudston, East Yorks	193
82	The relationship between town size and villa distribution	194
83	The numbers of Romano-Celtic temples in use in Roman Britain through the Roman period	196
84	Beadlam, Yorks, a Roman villa of the unit-type	198
85	The distribution of unit-type villas in Britain	199
86	King's Weston, Avon, a Roman villa of the hall-type	200
87	The distribution of hall-type villas in Britain	200
88	Comparative plans of an Iron Age round house at Little Woodbury, Wilts and a Romano-British aisled building at Castlefield, Hants	201
89	The distribution of aisled buildings in Britain	202
90	Map of the Chalton, Hants survey showing the mixture of fields, individual farmsteads and villages in the Roman period	206
91	The earthworks, showing house platforms, trackways and excavated buildings at one of the Romano-British villages at Chalton, Hants	207
92	The Romano-British village at Catsgore, Glos	208
93	The Romano-British villa and village at Kingscote, Glos	209
94	The late Roman or sub-Roman timber buildings constructed amongst the ruins of the Baths Basilica at Wroxeter	220
95	The distribution of the dominant fabrics in late-fourth-century pottery assemblages in S.E. England	225

## Tables

2.1	Settlement patterns at the end of the LPRIA	15
2.2	LPRIA tribal élites: the evidence of Caesar ( <i>DBG</i> ) in 54 BC	20
2.3	LPRIA tribal élites: the coin evidence	22
2.4	<i>Oppida</i> and related sites	24
2.5	Tentative division of <i>oppida</i> according to variables of élite residence and tribal centralization	28
2.6	The occurrence of the categories of LPRIA metalwork	36
3.1	Basic literary sources for the Roman invasion of Britain (AD 43–83)	43
3.2	Burden of the Roman army of conquest	57
3.3	The cost of the Roman army of conquest	58
3.4	Invasion period forts to <i>c.</i> AD 75	61
3.5	Movements and bases of the legions to the end of the first century	64
4.1	Numbers of inscriptions recording architectural benefactions from Britain and adjacent provinces	82
4.2	Numbers of known benefactors recorded on inscriptions for Britain and adjacent provinces	83
4.3	Simplified model of Roman impact on native societies	100
4.4	Public towns as centres of administration	102
5.1	Known public buildings in major towns	106
5.2	Categories/places of origin of people recorded on Bath inscriptions	110
5.3	Figural art in Roman Britain	117
6.1	The loss of public buildings in later Roman towns	130
6.2	Flows of wealth in the Roman Empire	132
6.3	Taxation and settlement centralization	148
6.4	Urban defences	152
6.5	Small Towns of Roman Britain shown on fig. 61	154

THE ROMANIZATION OF BRITAIN

7.1	Principal late Roman pottery industries in Britain	167
8.1	Previous population estimates for Roman Britain	182
8.2	Estimated size of the urban population of Roman Britain	183
8.3	Rural site densities from surveys	184
8.4	Estimated rural population of Roman Britain	185
8.5	Estimated population of Roman Britain	185
8.6	Results of analysis of villa distributions around Romano-British towns	192
9.1	The transmission of major Roman town names to the present	222
9.2	The end of Roman Britain	229

## Foreword

The book you hold in your hands nods, through its choice of title, to an earlier classic: *The Romanization of Roman Britain* by the great scholar Francis Haverfield, published in 1912. Martin Millett's similarly named *The Romanization of Britain* came out at the other end of the twentieth century, in 1990. The intervening years were eventful to say the least: the violence and slaughter of two world wars and, particularly pertinently, the collapse of the British Empire. Both writers were deeply engaged in the idea of empire: specifically in considering Britain's role as an imperial subject, rather than as an imperial master. To do this work – to examine Britain in its role as a possession, rather than a possessor, of an empire – remains important, if seemingly counterintuitive, perhaps especially in the early twenty-first century, when Britain is still so painfully, haltingly and often unsuccessfully considering how to frame its post-imperial identity and narrative.

These books both have at their heart the question of how, and to what extent, Britain 'became Roman' during its 400-year history as the furthest north-west outpost of an empire based in central Italy. Their underlying assumptions, though, are very different. Haverfield, writing at the height of British imperial confidence, was able to say, of that earlier imperial project: 'The Roman Empire was the civilized world; the safety of Rome was the safety of all civilization. Outside was the wild chaos of barbarism.' Writing in 1990, Millett was utterly shorn of such illusions. His book was a work for the postcolonial generation, rather than for colonial gentlemen.

But there were, as the echoing titles suggest, many similarities, too. Like Haverfield, Millett was uninterested in offering a narrative history of the province from its conquest by the emperor Claudius in 43 CE to the cessation of Roman rule in 408 CE (the dates are glibly neat; the reality was fuzzier). As he pointed out in the book, such works abounded, and the study of Roman Britain had for centuries been populated, perhaps overpopulated, with studies of military history. Nor was he engaged in swelling the ranks of those many specialist books on Roman Britain that looked at specific aspects of its archaeology. The subtitle declared the nature of the book: 'an essay in historical interpretation'. Millett's aim, like Haverfield's before him, was to offer a theory, not a story. Millett had absorbed a world of archaeological scholarship on Roman Britain and also, crucially, was able to bring to bear on his subject recent thinking in the fields of economic and social history. After this vast ingestion of material, Millett then stood back and, in spare, sinewy prose, offered his synthesis. He asked the reader to consider what kind of a place this Britain

was – this island that represented, to Roman writers, nothing much more than a ‘remote and mysterious backwater’. How did change act upon it? What did being part of the Roman empire actually mean? How was it organized socially, and what were its patterns of power? Why, when and how abruptly did its ‘Romanness’ end?

The study of Roman Britain has a peculiar and fascinating quality. It is part of British history – and it is often easy to forget that it is also a long period: as many as the years that separate us, in the early twentieth century, from the reign of Elizabeth I. At the same time, it often seems to stand outside the sweep of the nation’s past, and is frequently presented as a sort of self-contained prelude to the ‘real’ history of England and of Britain, which is often, in the British imaginarium, seen as properly beginning with the Anglo-Saxons. This feeling of Roman Britain as being paradoxically both familiar and distant, of its belonging but not-quite-belonging to the island’s story and of its fragmentary evidence (not so much lacking as unevenly distributed) has long made it a particularly productive space for historical thinkers to wrestle out their positions about ideas of nationhood, and empire, and historical change. With the distance of time, it is often possible to discern what contemporary anxieties, what troubled thoughts about Britain’s present, worked upon the author, often unconsciously. Rigorous as it is, Millett’s *The Romanization of Britain* is no exception – a fact that serves only to make it more rather than less interesting after the passage of the decades since its publication. Most important of all, and most satisfyingly, Millett’s book is not an attempt at a set of definitive answers. If it were, it would be long outdated. Rather, it offers a way of thinking. It has the spirit of a thrown gauntlet. It is a challenge. *The Romanization of Britain* says, with great economy and zest: ‘Read on – and argue with me!’

Charlotte Higgins

## 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-



#### THE ROMANIZATION OF BRITAIN

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*

## *Introduction: The Romanization of Britain in perspective*

As I sit down to write this introduction it is difficult to appreciate that writing the original text of *The Romanization of Britain* (henceforth *RoB*) was written (in my attic in Durham) a professional lifetime ago – the manuscript being completed in July 1988.<sup>1</sup> In this introduction, I want to reflect on the context within which the book was written, then discuss some of the responses to it, before offering a few thoughts on the current state of studies of Roman Britain (and the provinces more broadly). I will not, however, enter into a prolonged discussion of current thinking about cultural change under Roman hegemony. Before embarking on this, I would like to digress with two observations. First, over the ensuing thirty-five years, I have occasionally been asked why I have not written a new edition of *RoB* in order to bring the text up to date. My answer has always been that the original book was very much a product of its time and was conceived of, as its subtitle proclaims, as ‘an essay’. As such, although aspects of the evidence presented should indeed be updated, the essence of the book was conceived of as a connected narrative, so any updating or revision would carry the danger of blunting its argument. Further, it was a product of my thinking at a particular point in time, so it should remain as such and be read in that context.

Although I have not wished to revise *RoB*, I have from time to time joined debates about it in a variety of conferences and seminars. Aside from these verbal contributions, I have also published two papers that reflect on the issues raised in those debates. The first of these was delivered at an international symposium held at the University of Tokyo in April 2004. The published paper from that meeting (Millett 2003–4) provides my near-contemporaneous analysis of the debates about ‘Romanization’ that took place in the decade or so after the publication of *RoB*. My second published contribution was presented at a seminar held at the Villa Vigoni (Centro italo-tedesco per il dialogo europeo) on Lake Como in November 2019 (Millett 2021). The discussion there focused on issues around the theme of ‘Romanization between Colonization and Globalization’. It is no coincidence that both these papers were presented at international meetings and published outside the UK since, until now, I have not felt inclined to put into print my thoughts on *RoB* in the UK, partly I guess because in the 2000s in particular, I had become fed up with

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Simon James and Thomas Matthews Boehmer for reading and making helpful comments on an earlier draft of this introduction.

xx *Introduction: The Romanization of Britain in perspective*

the debate and also wanted to focus on other research. It was not that I found the ideas being promoted by critics as uninteresting, simply that too often the discussion became heated and there was a consequent lack of sympathetic engagement with the ideas of the opposing factions. Now, having been given the opportunity to see *RoB* reprinted, I am pleased to be able to offer some retrospective reflections.

### Context within which *RoB* was written

My engagement with the study of Roman Britain came about largely by chance. As a schoolboy I had become fascinated by archaeology from an early age and, thanks to supportive parents and a dynamic local archaeological society (at Farnham in Surrey), I was able to join in at local excavations from about the age of twelve. The initial impetus had come from finding and collecting flints in the locality, but my first excavations were on medieval sites. However, in the context of British archaeology in the late 1960s, where there was no systematic provision for the excavation of sites threatened by building work or infrastructure projects, our local archaeological group often undertook ‘rescue’ work where development had unexpectedly resulted in archaeological finds. Through weekends engaged in this type of work, I gained experience of all kinds of sites of different periods. The archaeological group also spent time examining building sites in order to record whatever had been revealed, whether or not archaeological finds had been reported. It was in this context that during the Christmas holidays in 1969 a group of us (illicitly) walked the area where topsoil had been cleared in preparation for the construction of the A31 Alton bypass at Neatham, near Holybourne in Hampshire. At the end of the day, when cleaning mud from our boots in a stream, we found masses of complete Roman pottery vessels which, on subsequent excavation, turned out to be grave goods from one of a series of early Roman cremation burials. Subsequent excavation along the line of new road produced a mass of structures and other material, evidence for a hitherto unknown Roman town (Millett and Graham 1986). The local archaeological society were left with the task of studying all these finds and publishing them. The rich assemblage of material was studied with various individuals taking responsibility for different categories of finds, and somehow I ended up with the pottery. Learning how to study and process this material as well as an abiding fascination with trying to understand the whole complex of evidence from the excavations at Neatham set me on a path that determined my career. Having joined other excavations including the summer seasons with the Cirencester Excavation Committee (1971–3), and a memorable summer with the then newly established Department of Urban Archaeology in the City of London (June–September 1974), I arrived at the University of London’s Institute of Archaeology to study for my degree in October 1974. There, taught in particular by Richard Reece, I gained a much fuller understanding of Roman archaeology, and was strongly influenced by Richard’s insistence on the systematic treatment of material culture. Besides making some lifelong friends with whom I have continued to work, I was also strongly influenced by a range of other

people (teaching staff, students and academic visitors). This not only broadened my understanding of the Roman world, but caused me to think about issues like numerical and spatial analysis, anthropological theory and new ways of thinking about ancient history.

Following doctoral research in Oxford (working on computer analysis of Roman pottery assemblages), running various fieldwork projects at the same time, I spent a short period as a museum curator in Hampshire (1980–1). From there, I took up a post as a lecturer in Roman Archaeology at the University of Durham in October 1981 (replacing Professor John Mann, who had retired early). There, almost immediately, I was pitched in to teach a course on Roman Britain. Since John Casey, the other Romanist in the department, was on leave and there was little in the way of course documentation available, I had to start from scratch. I well remember sitting in a room in temporary accommodation in a Durham college in October 1981 reading the newly published volume in the Oxford History of England series, *Roman Britain* by Peter Salway, and wondering how on earth I was going to deliver a compelling series of lectures to students on a subject that seemed to have been made so dull.

In this context it is worth reflecting on the state of the study of Roman Britain around this time, since it was against this background that change was gradually underway. In essence, the subject had evolved in the mid twentieth century around what was fundamentally an historical frame of reference that had been created from the reading of textual sources. The dominant narrative was thus of a chronological account which told the story of Roman annexation and control, and into which other aspects of the evidence were fitted. Where there were gaps in the textual sources, archaeological evidence was often pressed into service to create a comparable historical story, most notably through the use of evidence from excavated military sites which was used to map the stages of conquest and pacification. The most eloquent and authoritative such an account was Sheppard Frere's *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain*, originally published in 1967, which remained the dominant text for a generation. This was very much centred on a colonialist view which by default explained change as a result of the initiative of the imperial power, very often exercised through the medium of the Roman army. Furthermore, the potential and achievements of indigenous people before and during the period of Roman hegemony were minimized in these narratives. In retrospect, although I was not yet aware then of postcolonial thinking as such, like others, I shared a profound dissatisfaction with the assumptions on which the work of scholars like Frere was based.

However, other aspects of the archaeology of Roman Britain were increasingly being explored during the period from the 1950s onwards, with work focusing on such things as towns, villas, temples and roads, but these were largely interpreted within the framework of the dominant narrative history. This is implicit in the structure of the key syntheses (like those of Frere and Salway) where the texts dealing with such evidence and cultural aspects of the province were consigned to separate chapters, either sandwiched between the chronology of conquest and an account of the end of Roman Britain, or at the back of the book. Both literally and in terms of understanding, they were marginalized.

Nevertheless, the growth of archaeological activity during this period had also been characterized by important efforts to draw together information about Roman Britain and this had resulted in the province being increasingly well-served cartographically (with the Ordnance Survey's maps of Roman Britain and Hadrian's Wall), and with syntheses of aspects of the evidence including roads, art, inscriptions and temples providing a foundation for future research.

During the 1960s, '70s and '80s there was also a burgeoning of new fieldwork, much of which was beginning to deploy new approaches – promoted by the growing academic discipline of archaeology – such as detailed analysis of pottery and the application of methods from environmental archaeology. Through the latter part of this period, this coincided with the growth of professional archaeological excavation teams who were engaged to deal with sites threatened by destruction through development, and these too were developing new approaches, especially in urban settings.

By the late 1970s, these developments provided the context for a fairly lively period in thinking about Roman Britain, certainly amongst those of my generation who had studied at the Institute of Archaeology in London. One of the principal arenas within which ideas were debated was periodic weekend conferences – ostensibly organized as teaching events for adult education (many held at the Department of Continuing Education in Oxford) but in fact acting as research seminars – a sequence of which were held during this period, with resultant volumes published in the then new British Archaeological Reports series. Topics for these included temples (Rodwell 1980), the environment (Jones and Dimbleby 1981), rural settlement (Miles 1982), military and civilian (Blagg and King 1984) and the third century (King and Henig 1981). A couple of more theoretically focused conferences drawing on ideas from anthropology were organized in Cambridge around the same time, also stimulating significant discussion (Burnham and Kingsbury 1979; Burnham and Johnson 1979). In aggregate, these meetings and discussions were effectively creating a counterculture that questioned the dominant narrative and promoted new ways of thinking about Roman Britain that drew on other branches of archaeology and sought to place excavated material at the core of debates. Certainly for me, ideas derived from the work of the 'New Archaeology' were influential. To some of us at the time, it appeared that our new ways of approaching the subject were hitting the brick wall of the established historical narrative. In retrospect, that historical consensus was crumbling, as witnessed in the counter-attack on new approaches seen in Sheppard Frere's valedictory lecture in Oxford delivered in 1987 (Frere 1987).

This formed the background for my attempts to construct a lecture course at Durham in 1981. There was no single volume providing an alternative narrative to that of the dominant accounts, although there was a broadening range of conference volumes and research monographs to draw upon. I therefore set about constructing a new form of narrative which, although remaining structured around a chronological account, attempted to do two things: first, to draw primarily on the material evidence so as to provide a socio-economic story rather than one based on armies; second, to integrate different strands of the evidence to provide an account in which they were

intertwined. It was this structure that was to become the text of *RoB*, after several years of being refined with the student audiences.

I am not certain when I made the decision to turn the lectures into a book, but it was in the mid 1980s, after my job in Durham had been made permanent, and when I had completed writing a series of excavation reports. I do recall that the decision spurred me to purchase my first Apple Macintosh computer! One of the key drivers for me in the construction of the book was to ensure that it was thoroughly based in the evidence that I could document, as critiques of work by those in my peer group at various conferences often ran along the lines that we did not take full account of all the evidence. I therefore spent a lot of time and effort to ensure that the ideas were demonstrably supported by the latest information available. In the period following the unexpected and untimely death of my mother in 1987, I buried myself in intensive research and spent long periods absorbed in collating details of the archaeological evidence from across Britain. A strong emphasis in that work was the compilation of maps since I was strongly influenced by research on spatial analysis that I had read as a student.

It is equally true that the political atmosphere of the time had a profound influence on me. Living in the north-east of England during the 1980s, when the government of Margaret Thatcher was in power, exposed me to different ways of thinking from those I had been brought up with in the south of England. Within this context and in discussion with politically active friends, I was also beginning to become more aware of what we now call postcolonial thinking although at that stage I do not think I labelled it as such. It is fair to say that I did not immerse myself in the literature on that topic, but I was undoubtedly placing my thinking in that sphere. The attentive reader of *RoB* may also note that there are oblique references to the state of Thatcher's Britain in the text.

Beyond my wish to write a book that was designed to be authoritative and drew on and publicized the work of my generation of Roman archaeologists, it is difficult to explain the rationale of my thinking at the time. (However, in contrast to the situation in universities today, there was little expectation that writing a book would help with promotion. I was one of the few who had been fortunate enough to secure a permanent university job, but promotion was then very rare, and seemed a long way off.) From this distance one must surely make allowance for *post facto* rationalization, but I would say that the following were the key messages that I wanted to make. First, I was insistent that the book should give sufficient weight to archaeological evidence across the full range rather than treating written material as having greater inherent value. Second, it was important to recentre the story on the bulk of the civil population, moving away from the conventional emphasis on the Roman army. It is pretty clear to me now that I went too far with this. My failure to engage with the rich evidence of the northern frontier (including, but not only, Hadrian's Wall) now seems out of balance. Third, I was determined to ensure that the role of indigenous people was recognized, not only by attempting to understand the cultural achievements of the population before the arrival of Rome, but also by giving weight to their role in creating the culture of the province.

In doing this, I was – fourth – keen to offer an explanatory framework within which we could understand the motivations of these populations to engage with Roman power (although in retrospect I was certainly too focused on social elites). In this I was also seeking social explanations on the grounds that I had previously seen change as a primarily economic phenomenon, but had become disillusioned with that explanatory framework. This in turn explained my attraction to substantivist economics, which seemed to help explain the evidence. Finally, I was also strongly aware of the geographical diversity of the evidence from Roman Britain and sought to explain this in terms of historical contingencies including the social make-up of the different peoples that lived within Britain at the time of Roman annexation. As such, my analysis sought the roots of the regional character of Roman Britain in the nature of Iron Age society. In thinking about this I had in mind the idea that the arrival of new material culture during the early Roman period effectively acted like a barium meal, rendering visible a system that was already in existence yet unseen. It is now clear that this failed to take into account the extent of social change both during the Iron Age and around the time of Roman annexation, whilst also falsely reifying the idea of the ‘tribe’ (Moore 2011).

The resulting book followed an approach that now certainly looks dated and was in many ways processualist. This way of approaching the evidence was undoubtedly influenced by my reading of archaeological theory as a student, but aspects of it also reflected my engagement with the work of Keith Hopkins, who had been an academic visitor at the Institute of Archaeology/Institute of Classical Studies when I was an undergraduate and he was writing *Conquerors and Slaves* (1978).

It will be evident from some of the critiques discussed below that certain aspects of this manifesto were less evident to readers than others. In this context it is I think important to note that the book’s published title was decided upon at a comparatively late stage. My friend and colleague Simon James was the one person (apart from CUP’s readers) to see the whole manuscript before it was published – indeed, he made a substantial contribution in helping me sharpen the text whilst also saving me from a number of errors. My working title had been something like *Politics, Policies and Power*, which Simon told me firmly was far too pretentious! However, it is interesting now to note how this working title did place emphasis on an analysis of the operation of power – a theme that was largely neglected in subsequent debates. The published title self-evidently references the work of Francis Haverfield although in the text of *RoB* he hardly features beyond the first page, where I suggested that I was building on his foundations.

Before moving on to discuss the reception of *RoB* it is worth noting that, in dealing with Roman Britain, I was intensely aware of the need to place events and processes there in a broader European context (not least because I was by that time regularly doing fieldwork in Roman Spain). This wider geographical context was discussed at a conference that I organized together with Tom Blagg at the University of Kent in March 1987 and which was published as *The Early Roman Empire in the West* (1990). In my own contribution to that volume (Millett 1990) I sought to explore how the mechanisms that appeared important in Britain might work

elsewhere. I long intended that discussion to be a prologue to a more extensive discussion of Roman impact on western Europe, but as I have become more and more familiar with the complexities of the material and the issues involved, that objective has never been fulfilled. Faced with the impossible challenge of such a synthesis, I have however sketched some ideas which move beyond the framework first laid out in *RoB* (Millett 2010; 2021).

### **The reception of *RoB***

When publishing *RoB*, I had fully expected to receive highly critical reviews from those invested in what I saw as the established consensus, much as the conference papers noted above had often been received when delivered. As it was, only Roger Wilson in the *Journal of Roman Studies* (1992) gave me such a reception. Instead, and rather to my surprise, there gradually built a broad spectrum of critical responses from those who felt that my account fell short of the radical reappraisal that they sought. I first became aware of this when I was invited by Bill Hanson to give a seminar in Glasgow soon after its publication. There a number of the participants, most notably Phil Freeman, vigorously questioned my assumptions (Freeman 1993). These ‘progressive critiques’ came together in what might be called ‘the Romanization debates’ which occupied a substantial part of the discussion at the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference through the 1990s. The conference was established at the initiative of Eleanor Scott, with the first meeting (comprising about twenty to thirty people) held in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1991. That initiative formed a lively focus for some radical thinkers, who debated a diverse range of ideas (post-processualism, feminist, postcolonial, etc.), bringing fresh theoretical debates from prehistoric archaeology to the study of Roman period. The early conference programmes represented a radical reinvention of the study of Roman Britain and, in this context, there was some very robust discussion which did a lot to hone ideas that were subsequently explored in other contexts and in a range of publications.

Various strands of debate about what was by then the contested term ‘Romanization’ emerged following the publication of *RoB*. Looking back on this and re-reading my Tokyo paper that discussed the debates (Millett 2003–4), I think we can identify a series of different strands of thinking in these critiques. The first centred on an historical analysis of the origins and use of the term ‘Romanization’ (e.g. Freeman 1993; Hingley 2000). This line of argument demonstrated how the term itself had developed within the context of British and European imperialisms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and so encapsulated the acceptance of the assumption that Roman culture was superior to that of the conquered people, thereby condoning imperialism and its ‘civilizing’ mission. Arguing from this position, a number of scholars argued strongly that any continued use of the term was highly problematic because its origins and use meant that it still carried these overtones. This analysis was certainly valuable in highlighting the historical context of the original development of the idea of ‘Romanization’ and exposing its undoubted imperialist undertones. However, this critique did not acknowledge how



the meanings of words evolve through time and with use, nor that my use of it in *RoB* actually sought to reinterpret the process and certainly did not support a pro-imperialist agenda. Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge that my use of the term created space for ambiguity and thus the passive acceptance of old colonialist ideas, thus arguably hindering their critical re-evaluation.

I now avoid the term ‘Romanization’, partly because it has become too loaded with contested meanings to convey an idea that encapsulates the complex processes of cultural change in which I remain interested. Outside the UK, this critique has not had much traction (Belvedere 2021), whilst in the English-speaking world some other scholars have continued to commend its use in a ‘weak’ sense (e.g. Keay and Terranato 2000). Other writers like Sloftstra (2002) have continued to advocate its use because of the emphasis they place on to a two-way process of cultural interaction, although this itself is also arguably problematic (see below).

A related strand in the debate acknowledged the value of a term to describe processes of cultural change under Roman domination, but sought an alternative terminology. One solution proposed by Jane Webster (2001) was the adoption of the word ‘creolization’. This proposal arose from her rejection of any pro-imperialist stance and followed the postcolonialist critique which sought to focus on broader spectrum within society, especially those who resisted Roman control, rather than the social elites that had dominated my discussion in *RoB* (Webster and Cooper 1997; Mattingly 1997). These attitudes were ultimately founded in a moral repugnance at imperialist values and encouraged approaches that gave voice to the silent majority of the population of the Roman world (cf. James 2001).

The difficulty with these approaches seems twofold. First, it should be acknowledged that the nature of the archaeological evidence from the Roman Empire offers most information about those who were in power, who thus had most access to material wealth (Woolf 2002), so it remains incredibly challenging to obtain a full understanding of the lives of the poor. Whilst we should certainly try to document their lives, an absence of evidence sometimes encourages one to allow rather thin evidence to be used in support of wishful thinking about resistance to Rome. In reality, social relations in a region were complex and patterns of response to the hegemonic power of Rome require subtle treatment. Second, it is a paradox that certain of the approaches that seek to empower indigenous peoples also seem to rely very heavily on the view of Rome as all-powerful and interventionist with a ‘policy-driven’ mission that I sought to question in *RoB*.

Jane Webster’s rhetoric in favour of a concept of creolization was very appealing and deployed a radical alternative language which placed indigenous peoples at the centre of the historical processes, although, as I have noted elsewhere (Millett 2003–4, 171), her conceptual framework is not substantially dissimilar to that expressed on page 1 of the first chapter of *RoB*. This suggested to me at the time of the ‘Romanization’ debates that, despite criticism of the terminology, there remained some consensus over the type of processes under discussion but with a difference in emphasis on the relative roles of elites, with Webster giving a far greater agency to ordinary people than I had done.