

*Roman Southwark settlement and economy: Excavations in Southwark 1973-91* by C. Cowan, F. Seeley, A. Wardle, A. Westman and L. Wheeler, 2009. London, Museum of London Archaeology Monograph 42. ISBN 978-1-901992-78-6 £27.95.

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This well-produced book is an important and much-needed synthesis of the evidence of Roman period activity excavated at Southwark in London. Southwark lies across the Thames opposite the modern City of London and there has been much debate regarding the status of this area in relation to the rest of the Roman town. This analysis argues that Southwark was an integral part of London (p.170) and demonstrates that it deserves more consideration than it has traditionally received in studies of the Roman settlement. The book readdresses the balance well but in doing so care is also needed so as not to reinforce the separation between the two areas rather than considering the settlement evidence of the town as a whole.

The volume presents an analysis of 100 selected sites from the northern part of Southwark, some of which have already been published in more detail in earlier Museum of London reports, but concentrates on 41 previously unpublished sites excavated between 1973 and 1991. It is not a complete history of Southwark excavations but refers to earlier work and publications. For the report each of the 100 sites is given a number independent of its archive name or site code. This is understandable but it can sometimes be difficult to follow individual sites through the book; it is also unclear by selecting sites what information is not included in the volume. Chapter 5 presents more specialist material for the researcher dealing with pottery, accessioned finds, building materials, plant remains and structural sequences; and further tables can be found on an accompanying CD including detailed dating evidence and plant remains for selected sites.

Chapter 1 outlines the organisation of the report and chapter 2 the chronology of the area from the late Iron Age to the late Roman period. Chapter 3 forms the largest part of the book and presents the main synthesis of the material examining a number of useful themes including settlement origins and early development, roads and layout, structures and functions of buildings, the economy, evidence of

religious activity and late Roman activity. Through these important themes the book clearly demonstrates the scale and importance of activity at Southwark. The reconstructed topography of pre-Roman and Roman Southwark, with its islands separated by braided channels of the Thames, (pp.10-11) is an important aspect of understanding the nature of the settlement here. Chapter 3 presents the buildings and objects relating to religious activity in Southwark but only in a brief comment in the conclusions (Chapter 4) is the possibility of the religious significance of the islands themselves raised (p.171). This, along with the pre-Roman evidence, could have been given more attention because it adds an additional perspective and moves beyond a purely practical assessment of London's location and its bridging point across to Southwark. The book also addresses the military presence in Roman Southwark which has always been a point of discussion and uncertainty; it demonstrates that although there is military material here there is still no definite evidence of military installations. It argues that the distinction between military and civilian was likely to have been more blurred in the early Roman period with military personnel assisting in construction activities where needed (p.42).

Chapter 4 concludes the synthesis including a useful, if brief, discussion of the Southwark material in relation to the town as a whole and also outlines some points for further research. The importance of syntheses for addressing broader theoretical developments within archaeology and urban studies could also have been pursued here. The success of the volume also makes it a shame that it did not incorporate more recent excavations in any detail from the year 2000 onwards. Overall, this is an important work for scholars interested not only in Roman London and Roman urbanism but in many themes relating to Roman archaeology. It is successful in presenting considerable, and otherwise unpublished, material in an accessible and affordable way and provides a resource to pursue research interests.