

BOOK REVIEW

Londinium: A Biography. Roman London from its Origins to the Fifth Century. By RICHARD HINGLEY. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Pp. xv + 383; 75 illustrations. Paperback, \$35.95. ISBN 978-1-3500-4729-7.

In *Londinium: A Biography*, Richard Hingley has undertaken the ambitious task of summarizing in a single work all archaeological investigation of London since the last survey by Perry in 1991. A second personal goal was to place London in a broader context by including evidence of human activity as early as the Bronze Age. Although the city is one of the most intensively excavated and studied sites in the world, few definitive answers have resulted to date. The archaeologist can say only that it may have become a colony in the second century and then functioned as a provincial capital until the Roman withdrawal. Hingley compares his task to assembling a giant jigsaw puzzle with 95% of the pieces missing. The most important recent discoveries include the amphitheater in 1988 and the temple site at Tabard in 2002-2004. Numerous writing tablets were found at the Bloomberg site in 2012-2014. Besides copious notes and a bibliography, Hingley's work is supported by greyscale illustrations and an appendix listing the 268 archaeological interventions mentioned in the text.

Whereas previous surveys began with the Roman occupation, Hingley starts with the late Bronze and early Iron Ages. At that time the landscape was marshy and intersected by waterways. The fact that over one hundred disarticulated crania and deposits of elaborate metal work have been discovered suggests the area may have functioned as a ritualistic meeting place, especially for the disposal of the dead at a time before bodies were buried.

The remaining eight chapters follow previous approaches which begin with the Roman arrival in AD 43. Rather than being founded by the military, the author believes the city was established by merchants for trade. The Thames River at the point where the city was built was quite wide. First a main north-south road was constructed at the narrowest crossing. This formed a T-junction with a second east-west road. The colony developed at the junction of these roads. The

first timber wharf and bridge were built in AD 52. The city's population was multicultural in character and included natives from the countryside.

The next two chapters document evidence for the destruction of the settlement by Boudica in AD 60 and its reconstruction in the next decade. A thick burnt layer seals many of the earliest sites attesting to the thoroughness of the rebel attack. Although some scholars have argued that over a decade elapsed before the city was rebuilt, Hingley believes the city was quickly reconstructed using the same plan as before the attack, except that a fort was constructed near the city core. Numerous wooden writing tablets recently discovered at Bloomberg attest to the swiftness of the reconstruction.

Chapters 5 to 7 document the period AD 70- 200 when the city was at its height. In Chapter 5, covering AD 70 to 120, the city experienced a period of intense public and private building as the populace became socially differentiated. The first forum, basilica, bathhouses and temples were built at this time. The most significant public building was a forum-basilica constructed at Cornhill. Private buildings included shops, houses and industrial premises. Although pre-Roman burial practices, such as skull displacement, continued, areas were now set aside for the interment of the dead. Though there is no evidence that a Roman governor resided in the city, London acted as a major point of entry for government officials and the military. In the early AD 120s the so-called Hadrianic fires broke out; Hingley argues against interpreting these as indicating a decline. Evidence suggests that the fires spared all the important buildings. Although there had been no invasion, a new fort was constructed at Cripplegate replacing the old one.

Chapter 7 documents the period from AD 125 to 200 when the city reached its high point. The most significant new structure was a three kilometer wall into which parts of the fort were incorporated, making Londinium by far the largest walled urban center in Britain. Rather than being defensive, Hingley argues that the wall's purpose was to project the city's importance. A forum five times larger than the earlier one and a basilica were also built; these were connected to a new amphitheater. This complex of buildings may have been part of a processional way. Large private buildings constructed at this time also attest to the city's importance. A private building along the waterfront has been identified as the governor's praetorium. Inhumation and cremation continued as the main forms of burial; the city's cemeteries now included large monuments such as mausolea.

In the final two chapters the archaeologist argues that Londinium continued to prosper and retain its importance as an urban center in the 4th and early 5th

centuries. The greatest change was its increased importance as a manufacturing center. After the Roman withdrawal, Hingley finds little evidence to suggest that people lived within the old walled city, although urban clusters continued at the margins and beyond. Medieval London was founded in the 7th century, when St. Paul's cathedral was built; the old walled area was reoccupied by the 9th century.

Hingley's work represents an enormous undertaking. Besides detailed factual information, he presents updates on such unresolved questions as reasons for the city's foundation, the impact of the Hadrianic fires, possible depopulation before the withdrawal and late disuse of the port. His analysis touches upon virtually every aspect of city life from personal adornment to architectural detail and mortuary practices. Although fragmented, a picture of city life emerges as a unique blend of Roman and British society at the periphery of the Roman Empire. My only major criticism is his reluctance to include charts and composite maps which locate the newly excavated sites in the ancient city.

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