

## Tomasz Bochnak

(review) H. J. M. Green, *Durovigutum. Roman Godmanchester* (= *Archaeopress Roman Archaeology* 33). Compiled, collated and edited by Tim Malin. Oxford (2017): Archaeopress Publishing Ltd.; xxi + 460 pages and 67 illustrations.

*Durovigutum. Roman Godmanchester* is a monograph concluding the vast research project lead by Michael Green in Godmanchester in the county of Cambridgeshire for over 30 years. The book is a volume of xxi + 460 pages and includes 67 illustrations, some grey-scale and some in full colour.

The publication is composed of three main parts: 'Excavations at *Durovigutum* Roman Godmanchester', 'Specialist Studies' and Appendices. Part one comprises seven chapters, presenting the materials recorded at 25 sites located in Godmanchester. The author does not stop at discussing the chronology and function of individual finds, placing them within their respective occupation phases. but also outlines the broader economic context of the town and its rural hinterland. Part two of the book contains an analysis of the finds themselves, including samian ware, coarse pottery, a kiln, mortaria, lamps, faunal remains, coins, slag and two special assemblages – a hoard of jewellery and a cremation casket. The quality of the analyses is characteristic of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was when H. M. J. Green conducted his research in Godmanchester. And so, the anthropological study of the bone assemblages is principally concerned with determining the sex of the deceased and the identification of diseases discernible from bone material analysis. By contrast, no results of more advanced physiochemical analyses are presented (e.g. strontium data). It appears that no metallurgical examinations were conducted either, be it of the ornaments, crucibles or slag. Similarly, no results of glass analyses are discussed. The final part of the publication comprises three appendices: 'Site reports arranged chronologically by excavation date', 'Collected Publications on Roman Godmanchester' and 'Small Finds Catalogue and Drawings', those last contemporary with the excavations. The 'Collected Publications' are not uniform in character. Next to reports from surveys of the town defences, readers will find a paper on the Villa Estate at Godmanchester, in which the author broadly comments on the local pantheon as viewed in the context of mythology, iconography

and folklore. Despite its semantic heterogeneity, and no doubt thanks to the excellent editing work by Tim Malin, the publication remains clear and precise. Nevertheless, the particular structure of the book has resulted in a rather fragmented bibliography. Those chapters of the book which were once independent publications have kept their original reference lists located at the end of each text. What is more, readers will find that some of the illustrations appear more than once throughout the monograph, no doubt because they had originally been used in more than one text (e.g. Fig. 1.20b, p. 34 and Fig. p. 337, Fig. 4:8 p. 110 and Fig. 12 p. 414, Fig. 4.9 p. 112 O and Fig. 9 p. 411).

H. M. J. Green first became interested in the history of Godmanchester in 1949, when he undertook the first of some 37 separate excavation projects (running between 1949 and 1986). He studied a total of 25 sites. Some of them covered several acres, while others were watching briefs, with one or two keyhole excavations. However, due to the constraints of the modern city plan of Godmanchester, many of the excavation sites were, by necessity, limited to narrow exploratory trenches. Nevertheless, these still produced valuable stratigraphic records of cultural change which had taken place in the town throughout the ages.

Godmanchester lies on the river Great Ouse, about 16 km West of its confluence with the river Fens. The Roman name of the site is attested in the 7<sup>th</sup> century Ravenna Cosmology, in which the town figures as *Duro viguto*. The importance of the site in Roman times derived from the control it allowed over the river crossing on Ermine Street (from London to Lincoln), the great trunk road to the north and the junctions of roads from Colchester and Verulamium. The earliest finds from Godmanchester (i.e. the circular structures, including one of 6 m in diameter with a storage pit containing carbonized barley) have been dated to the Iron Age. However, it is believed that the history of the town had not truly begun until the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Overall, six Roman Period occupation phases have been established. The earliest structures are the two forts. The first is associated with the Claudian invasion of Britain, when the Roman army occupied the area of the Great Ouse. The second was built to control Boudicca and her uprising (c. 43 AD – 70 AD). The subsequent phase is a Flavian settlement, consumed by fire (c. 70 AD – 130 AD). Phase three (c. 130 AD – 210 AD) is associated with a posting station and village, mansio complex and market place. Phase four lasted until about 300 AD and comprises a market town, market hall (c. 210 AD) and the town masonry defences dated to about 270 AD. Phase five is defined as the resettlement and demolition of public buildings following a fire, c. 300 AD. Finally, the last, sixth phase is interpreted as a police post, the Theodosian masonry defences (c. 370 AD) and a granary function for *annona* (corn tax). It is believed that the settlement ceased to function as a posting station and market centre around 410 AD. However, evidence of later Anglo-Saxon settlements has also been documented.

The excavations unearthed remnants of both public function buildings (mansio, bath-house, brewery, basilica and temples), as well as private ones – houses, tavern, potter's workshop, smithy. The dairy equipment and a structure interpreted as a glassware shop constitute some of the most interesting finds. Another noteworthy discovery was the jewellery

hoard recovered from one of the mansio pits. Regrettably however, Chapter 12 (part two of the book), in which the hoard is presented, fails to mention some of the more important details such as the dimensions of individual ornaments. On the other hand, Michael Green proves on many occasions that he is not satisfied with simply presenting the findings of his research to readers. On the contrary, his discoveries often serve as the starting point of a very well informed discussion of the economic background of the settlement. The author often draws on many Antique sources (i.e. Varro, Columella, Palladius, Tacitus) to tackle subjects such as the white meat industry, cheese-making, egg production or brewing and drinking. Undoubtedly, both the comprehensive source bibliography and the author's expert knowledge of the texts are one of the greatest merits of the publication. The citations range from Apicus to the Medieval monk Theophilus Presbyter. The book also delves into analyses of land organisation or infield and outfield agriculture. Similarly, the discussion of the economic basis of Durovigutum certainly adds great value to the monograph.

Unfortunately, the volume is not without certain minor flaws. The incoherent indexing of illustrations is, regrettably, one of them. Generally, the figure indexing system is composed of the chapter number (1, 2, 3) and an incremental figure (starting at 1 in each chapter) for each illustration (sometimes with a letter sub-index, e.g. Fig. 1.19a, Fig. 1.19b). However, some of the illustrations are not indexed at all (see pp. 199-200), which might make referencing them rather cumbersome. Curiously, Appendix 2 uses another, rather more complex system. What is more, some of the figures (e.g. figures on pages xvii and xix, Fig. 4.8, figure on page 358, figures from Appendix 2) are low quality, grainy prints (with visible pixels). Perhaps adjusting the contrast of the black and white figures (e.g. Figs. 1.14; 6.6, &.2) would have made them clearer. With all certainty, they could have been enhanced by removing perspective distortions (foreshortening, radial distortion) etc. The chart presenting the quantitative analysis of the animal bone assemblage has no key, making it difficult to read. It is also unclear what exactly it is meant to illustrate. Some of the photographs are also of low quality. For instance, the one on p. 168 (not indexed). The picture was taken with a too large aperture setting resulting in shallow depth of field. For this reason, parts of the samian bowl in the photograph appear out of focus. Pictures from pages 205 and 206 (not indexed) are also far from perfect. The shots were framed improperly (or perhaps cropped incorrectly). Moreover, the use of a wide-angle camera lens distorted the proportions of the photographed vessels. Similarly, the Nero coin (shown on page 270) would have been much clearer, had the piece been placed against a brighter background. Additionally, adding a visual scale indicator would have allowed the readers to discern the actual size of the coin. Lastly, some of the press article reproductions included in the monograph (e.g. Fig. 1.20b) would have been more legible had they been scans rather than foreshortened photographs.

Nevertheless, in no way do such minor shortcomings diminish the value of *Durovigutum. Roman Godmanchester* for the research of both local history of the area and, more generally, of the Roman Period in Britain. The author makes some truly valuable remarks

concerning the Roman glass shop or a window glass from the Roman bath. He also presents an analysis of the mansio-complex glassware, comparing recorded artefacts with iconographic sources known from the continent. The evidence for repair of samian pottery is also of great worth. As readers will no doubt discover, the value of Michael Green's monograph lies not only in the outcomes of his scientific enquiry. The volume is an important chronicle of the research methods employed in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After all, such projects were often conducted with the help of volunteers. Prints of original sketches from the sites, as well as the meticulous plan drawings, show great skill, perhaps unsurprisingly since H. J. M. Green is also an experienced architect. Last but not least, the final shape of the *Durovigutum* monograph owes much to Tim Malin, who did not fail to include archive materials in his editing work, so often omitted in similar publications. Some of the most interesting pictures included in the volume are the sample pages from site notebooks (from H. J. M. Green's archive), field drawings documenting the location and plan of features, photographs of press articles and even a letter report on study progress by John Coles. It is in this context that we should consider the following passage by H. J. M. Green:

On the site I was always conscious of the people of the town who wanted to communicate their lives – their different ways of life – whether a farmer, a shop-keeper, an artisan, a soldier – so that each site would reveal his activity, whether as a cheese and butter maker, a glass-blower, a potter, an inn-keeper, or a slave-girl who had stolen her owner's jewellery and thrown it into a pit in the hope of recovering it later. Imported fine glass was used in the mansion, the rest-house for soldiers, administrators, government officials, who moved up and down the Great North Road. A small wooden temple was attached to the mansion. A Christian family built their villa on the side of the River Ouse, and later a Saxon church was built over their family burial ground.

It is the revelation of the lives of these people through their buildings and artefacts which date from Roman times into the so-called Dark Ages and beyond which makes the site of Godmanchester so unique (p. xxi).

Such a deeply human and touching perspective makes the monograph a true gem amongst the scientific archaeological publications of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Institute of Archaeology  
Rzeszów University  
Moniuszki st. 10  
35-010 Rzeszów  
Poland  
tbochnak@univ.rzeszow.pl