Britannia (2026), 1–5
doi:10.1017/S0068113X26101019

IV Spotlight on New Research

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Ball, M. 2026: *The Distribution and Circulation of the denarius in the Second Century AD*. Lincoln College, Oxford; supervisor: Christopher Howgego. MBall@britishmuseum.org

This thesis examines the interregional distribution of newly struck denarii during the second century A.D. (Trajan–Commodus) in order to reconstruct patterns of Roman silver coin supply across the western empire and to contribute toward our understanding of the nature and pace of subsequent circulation. Drawing on a dataset of more than 100,000 denarii from over 300 hoards extracted from the Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire (CHRE) project database, this study represents the first attempt at a broad, interregional analysis of the second-century silver both at the level of the issue and the level of the design. Chi-squared testing is employed to compare observed and expected frequencies of denarii across seven broad regions of the empire, with a particularly strong focus on the frontier regions of Britain, the Rhineland, and the Danube. This approach allows statistically significant deviations from 'normal' distribution to be identified while accounting for major disparities in sample size between regions and hoards. Particular attention is paid to whether discrete batches of coins were preferentially distributed in specific regions and, in turn, whether these shipments reflect regular fiscal-administrative activity, responses to events such as wars, or deliberate acts of audience targeting by the Roman state.

Duffy, E. 2026: *The People of Durovernum Cantiacorum: Exploring Canterbury's Late Roman Past Through a Multi-Scalar, Osteobiographical Approach*. Canterbury Christ Church University; supervisors: Eleanor Williams, Jay Ingate. lisa.duffy@canterbury.ac.uk

As a UNESCO World Heritage site recognised for its Medieval history, Canterbury has received comparatively little attention for its Roman origins. Recent excavations have uncovered several inhumation cemeteries dating to the later Roman period, contributing substantial new bioarchaeological evidence. These discoveries coincide with developments within Roman studies, where commercial excavations, advances in analytical techniques and new theoretical approaches have expanded the study of Roman identities and societies.

This thesis builds on this momentum by integrating newly available evidence to explore the lives of the Late Roman people of Durovernum Cantiacorum. The dataset comprises three contemporaneously used Late Roman (A.D. 270–410+) inhumation cemeteries, excavated between 2009 and 2015, integrating osteology, burial context, ancient DNA, stable isotopes and parasitology. Over 300 burials were identified, with a multi-scalar osteobiographical approach applied to 182 individuals, progressing from population-level

analysis to individual osteobiographies and utilising developments in bioarchaeological prosopography to construct collective biographies.

The results identify shared and divergent embodied experiences and sociocultural factors shaping life and death in Late Roman Canterbury. Childhood was a vulnerable stage, with widespread physiological stress potentially reflecting local child-rearing and caregiving practices, while varied funerary treatment (e.g., double burial and decapitation) suggests culturally specific responses to child death. Among adults, males experienced significantly more trauma and a wider distribution of osteoarthritis, suggesting physically strenuous lives, although biomechanical stress was evident in both sexes and may reflect differing types or intensities of occupational activity across the gendered life course. Stable isotope analysis identified predominantly local origins (71%) in the sampled burial population, alongside non-local individuals (29%) from elsewhere in Britain and a smaller number with values matching areas including southern and central Europe and North Africa. Funerary patterns varied between the three sites, including differences in grave furnishing and burial treatment, and when mapped onto collective biographies, suggest burial locations were socially constructed spaces in which the living engaged with memory, space and the social identities of the dead.

This study places people at the centre of interpretation, offering a nuanced and overlooked perspective on the lives and social dynamics of late Romano-British towns.

Gregory, K. 2025: *Regional Patterns and Elite Networks: Digital and Theoretical Approaches to the Roman Mosaics of Britain*. University of Exeter; supervisors: Martin Pitts, Ruth Westgate (Cardiff). karengreece@hotmail.co.uk

This thesis critically re-examines the regional significance of fourth-century Romano-British mosaic designs using two approaches, digital and theoretical. Data have been drawn from the complete British corpus of over 2,000 mosaics. Until now, this exceptional resource has not been exploited for a significant research study. A relational database has been created to store information related to each mosaic, including its location, date, dimensions and design. By allocating unique codes to all significant design elements, the application of digital techniques has been made possible and the effectiveness of agglomerative hierarchical clustering (AHC) for this type of data has been tested and evaluated. In the fourth century, groups of mosaics of similar designs cluster in particular regional areas. This led to the assumption that workshops or 'schools' of mosaicists, each with a distinctive repertoire, had operated from permanent bases in towns central to each region. Studies of mosaic 'schools' focus almost entirely on the organisation of the 'industry' and its craftsmen and rarely gave any consideration to them in relation to the social networks of the property-owning elite. These issues were explored with reference to two different theory-driven perspectives. A reassessment of the regional use of mosaic designs before the fourth century was carried out with a quantitative analysis. One design was restricted to a small number of sites which were examined in an archaeologically focused case study. This was supplemented by an investigation of regional differences in the initial introduction of mosaics to Britain using the concept of objectscapes. For the fourth century, a second theoretical approach employed social network theory in conjunction with contemporary written sources, mostly personal letters. With this analysis it was possible to argue that elite social

networks were largely responsible for the movement of craftsmen and consequently the circulation and regional clustering of mosaic designs.

La Duc, E. 2025: *The Use of Coal for Ferrous Metallurgy in Roman Britain*. University of Cambridge; supervisors: Marcos Martinón-Torres, Martin Millett. elizabeth.laduc@gmail.com

The occurrence of coal on Romano-British archaeological sites has been recognised for many years, but the evidence for how coal was actually employed was mostly circumstantial. In this thesis, the use of coal for blacksmithing in Roman Britain is definitively proven based on the analysis of iron production debris from a second-century C.E. blacksmithing workshop in Aldborough (Isurium Brigantum), Yorkshire, with confirmation from other Romano-British sites in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Northumberland, including from Hadrian's Wall. This study, primarily using SEM-EDS and optical microscopy, shows that fuel choice — whether coal or wood-derived charcoal — can be identified through the presence of fuel inclusions and through several microstructural and chemical features which reflect the contribution of fuel ash.

This thesis challenges existing views of Romano-British coal use as a response to deforestation or, at least, a wood shortage. Instead, it is proposed that coal was adopted for a combination of environmental, economic and technical reasons. While fuel requirements for blacksmithing and for Roman society as a whole were indeed significant, deforestation in Roman Britain has most likely been overstated, given literary and archaeological evidence for woodland management and the challenges of using pollen data as a tool for landscape reconstruction across an entire region, especially because of the possible palynological invisibility of managed woodlands. Economic motives promoting the adoption of coal include its lower labour cost compared to charcoal, and its greater energy density (energy for a given volume), which could have facilitated transport and storage. Technical reasons include its superior working properties over charcoal for blacksmithing, as evidenced by its precocious adoption by smiths in the late medieval period and corroborated by contemporary craftspeople. The results of this thesis highlight the importance of fuel in the *chaîne opératoire* of metallurgy and the need for further research combining materials analysis with the study of human–environment interactions, especially in regions with intensive metallurgical and industrial production and/or in marginal environments.

The other main objective of this thesis is to characterise metal production at Aldborough. Analysis of the production debris confirms that the workshop at Aldborough was dedicated to secondary blacksmithing, with no evidence for iron smelting, primary blacksmithing (bloom refining), or non-ferrous metallurgy. Comparisons are made between the chemical composition and microstructure of different classes of production debris, which demonstrate the formation of smithing slag from the reaction of the worked iron, the hearth lining, and (coal) ash. Study of the smithing slag from Aldborough also highlights some challenges in the study and interpretation of ferrous metallurgical slag, including differences between national research traditions. Recommendations for future research include more experimental work, analysis of all categories of metallurgical production debris, not

just smithing hearth bottoms (SHBs), and open data, including more photographs and/or illustrations of artefacts.

Magee, M. 2025: *Romano-British Curse Tablets and their Contexts*. King's College London; supervisor: John Pearce. matthew.magee@kcl.ac.uk

The thesis examines curses from Roman Britain and their contexts with a focus on Prayers for Justice. As foundations for the subsequent arguments, Versnel's account of Prayers for Justice is defended from its critics, the notion that cursers typically inscribed their own curses is qualified and the role of model texts in their composition emphasised. Such model texts help explain the transmission and conservatism of the tradition.

The thesis then turns to specific contexts of deposition/display. Prayers for Justice were at core a temple practice, embedded at the heart of communal religion. They were shaped by and designed for the temple context. Aspects of cursing at selected temples are considered with a focus on parallels with other votive activity. The four curses addressed to Neptune and their contexts are also explored. The thesis then places curses in wider social contexts. The language of curses is considered with an emphasis on the complexity of the language of gift and vow. Magic was an important fact of life in antiquity. It shaped actions and perceptions. As a temple practice, Prayers for Justice were deliberately unmagical, a normative ritual practice which could be distinguished from other forms of curse. One unmagical aspect of such curses was the invocation of the law both in terms of its legitimacy and its prosaicness. Accounts of the relationship between curses and law and secular justice are nuanced and their respective violence explored.

Finally, while British Prayers for Justice differed little from those elsewhere, British cursing culture was distinctive given its relative uniformity and conservatism. The chronology of the introduction of Prayers for Justice as part of the wider cultural package of temple religion is arguably one factor behind this distinctiveness.

Sylvester, D. 2026: *Representations of Jupiter and the Sky-Deity in the Iconography of Roman Britain*. University of Winchester; supervisor: Tony King. D.Sylvester.17@unimail.winchester.ac.uk

A study of the god Jupiter in his various incarnations in iconography in Roman Britain is long overdue. As the Roman state deity, understanding his depictions can establish the level, nature and extent of Roman religious culture in the most northerly province of the Empire. This thesis establishes that current theoretical approaches, including Romanisation, Creolisation and Globalisation, are each ill-suited to Romano-British Jupiter iconography. A full exploration of the syncretic process of Jupiter types in Roman Britain needs to be carried out to uncover new aspects. This thesis uses Fragmentation Theory in Art as a framework to observe, analyse and interpret depictions in a variety of materials for varying purposes. The application of the theory is supported by a gazetteer of 140 artefacts assembled without discriminating any subgroups. Existing scholarship establishes the etymological connections between Zeus, Jupiter and the Germanic sky-deity Tiwaz. This thesis supports those connections through iconographic evidence, proposing their shared prehistoric origin as a celestial Sky-God and god of thunder, alongside an examination of Jupiter's attributes including the lightning bolt and trident. A quantitative analysis of the full corpus addresses object material, object form, origin category, tribal distribution, social distribution and religious and watery contexts. It has found new types of Jupiters including

syncretism with a one-eyed god, a horned or antlered god, and alignment with the emperors. There are new features found in depictions of Jupiter Dolichenus and conflations with smith deities. Furthermore, the study has identified traits of re-modelling in metalwork figurines of Jupiter. The research has also offered new interpretations of the social and political roles within depictions of the Eagle and Ganymede, opening further avenues for research into mythological scenes in Romano-British iconography. The thesis opens up the study of Jupiter in Britain to new and exciting possibilities for depictions in this cult.

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