IV. Spotlight on New Research

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Cleaves, R. 2023: *Imagining Luke-Acts in Roman Britain*. University of Gloucestershire; supervisor: Philip Esler. richard.cleaves1@gmail.com

This thesis aims to offer a new interpretation of the meanings *Luke-Acts* conveyed to its first audiences by imagining people from early Roman Britain encountering that text. As the events described in the New Testament were unfolding, the Romans invaded Britain (43 C.E.). By the time that invasion was complete (c. 83 C.E.), the earliest books of the New Testament were in circulation. An understanding of early Roman Britain opens a window on to the world of the New Testament and its first audiences. The investigation of three archives from an urban, a military and a rural community draws on the methodology of archival ethnography. In these writings, traders and merchants, civilians and soldiers, town and country dwellers, slave and free, men and women come alive. People such as these are encountered in the New Testament and are among its first readers.

The thesis uses first the Bloomberg tablets, to take the reader to passages to do with money and possessions, honour and shame, reciprocity and debt, patrons and clients, slaves and masters, the rich and the destitute, and Roman law and literacy. Second, it uses the Vindolanda tablets to examine passages concerning women of agency, the military and local people, Roman law, travel and identity, festivals and feasting, sickness and healing, honour and shame, patrons and clients, masters and slaves and the reversal of roles. Finally it uses the Uley curse tablets, examining passages to do with temples, ritual practice, cursing and praying. The resulting imagined reading of *Luke-Acts* is justified in the locations and with the writings chosen, informed by careful study of the data available, and warranted by close attention to the biblical text. It contributes to our understanding of the way the first readers of the New Testament negotiated life in the empire and understood *Luke-Acts*. doi: 10.46289/UU35C34Z

Clifton, S. 2025: *Discovering Ritual Landscapes in Southern Rural Roman Britain, with Particular Reference to Kent*. University of Kent; supervisor: Steve Willis. stephen.clifton@talk21.com

In rural Roman southern Britain, a great many masonry-built structures have been identified and often excavated to varying degrees of competence and completeness. Invariably the majority of these sites have been labelled as 'villas'. They have traditionally been understood to be grand houses in the 'Roman' style at the heart of a farming estate. This thesis examines that narrative through ten such examples and asks whether we have fully appreciated the important role that religious beliefs and practices played in everyday life.

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Pre-Roman Britain was a tribal society composed of many small clan groups rooted in an ancestral landscape that relied upon the agricultural produce of the land. Once southern Britain became part of a Roman province, those factors still remained embedded within a hybrid culture that was driven by local superstitions and sacred rituals. Many of those 'villas' can be interpreted as part of the *pagus* infrastructure which revolved around the grain cycle within fertile river valleys where the river deity was venerated as the bringer of life and fecundity. This reappraisal potentially has far-reaching consequences for our understanding of the way that rural life was lived in the south of Roman Britain and provides a more convincing narrative for many of those stone structures in the landscape that we call 'villas'.

Hamelink, A.M. 2024: *Monumentalising Identities: Presenting Dress, Gender and Identity in Funerary Portraits in the Roman North-west*. University of Amsterdam; supervisors: Emily Hemelrijk, Olivier Hekster and Ursula Rothe. a.m.hamelink@uva.nl

This dissertation explores how the integration of the far north-western provinces into the Roman Empire influenced the (self-)representation of people through clothing, hairstyles, jewellery and accessories. It examines the adoption, adaptation, rejection, or creation of new dress elements, using the concept of anchored innovations. This concept offers insight into the manner in which people assimilated new elements into their existing cultural traditions and beliefs. It centralises their agency and the connection rather than the break between new and old to understand the dynamics of cultural change.

The primary evidence comes from funerary portraiture, a medium of public representation created by and for local communities. These portraits provide insights into local perspectives on status, cultural, ethnic and gender identities.

The study highlights differing gender norms between Italy and the far north-west, showing the flexibility in the gendered meanings and uses of objects. Regional diversity in response to Roman influence is evident from the rarity of the toga in the far north-west, unlike in the Rhineland and other parts of the Roman Empire. Although the toga is rare in the far north-west, the adoption of the synthesis (the Roman dining costume) indicates familiarity and acceptance of Roman cultural practices by both men and women, especially in Roman Britain.

The most dominant form of dress for both men and women in the far north-west is the local dress style known as 'Gallic'. Despite its local origins and distribution, Gallic dress does not signify a rejection of Italian-Roman culture. Instead, it reflects a tension between local and empire-wide trends, showing how people creatively combined local and Roman elements in their appearance. The widespread adoption of Gallic dress coincided with the decline of fibulae, making these once-common objects obsolete. Yet this significant change in appearance does not necessarily imply the demise of ethnic identities.

In hairstyles, veiling and bonnets, varying levels of 'Roman-ness' are distinguishable aspects of dress. Bonnets, in particular, illustrate a differentiation between Roman and local dress in the provinces. This indicates that innovations occurred across a spectrum of Roman influence and were met with different levels of acceptance.

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Henry, R. 2024: *Fractured Britannia: The Twilight of Roman Britain*. University of Reading; supervisors: John Creighton and Hella Eckardt. rhenrymcifa@outlook.com

This thesis provides an in-depth examination of the distribution of coinage and elite items of Roman dress in later and sub-Roman Britain. Previous research has often sought to distinguish various groups serving the Roman state, yet identifying these groups in the archaeological record remains challenging. Both the military and the bureaucracy were ranked as soldiers and used similar objects to denote their status. Furthermore, the local elite, responsible for much of the day-to-day administration, began to adopt military fashions, leading to an evolution of dress accessories throughout the fourth century.

Five extensive datasets (404 crossbow brooches, 1,334 belt fittings, 86 spurs, 454 penannular brooches and 489,867 Roman coins) are collated and explored holistically, materials which previously have only been studied in isolation. These datasets lend themselves to systematic examination in combination as these objects, with their prolonged lifespans, provide insights into social and political changes. Evidence suggests that while some regions continued relatively unchanged into the fifth century, other parts of Britain abandoned Roman forms of material culture as early as A.D. 375.

This evaluation of a broad range of material culture offers new perspectives on a critical phase of the history of Britain, marked by the transition from a fully integrated Roman diocese to smaller post-Roman polities. The study delves into how material culture and specific forms of clothing were used to highlight status and identity within the later Roman world. By evaluating methodologies and revising typologies, the thesis details the geographic and site category distributions of various artefacts, pulling out key patterns in the data and making huge datasets publicly available. Ultimately, the thesis provides a chronological and geographic framework, analyses differential use of material across different site types and compares these patterns to those on the continent, thereby shedding light on the transformation of Roman Britain into the sub-Roman and Early Medieval world.

Payne, N. 2024: *An Archaeobotanical History of Arable Agriculture in Yorkshire (4000 B.C.E.–1100 C.E.)*. University of Cambridge; supervisor: Martin Millett. nhp25@cam.ac.uk

The extensive reports produced by commercial and research excavations provide valuable, though under-exploited, data for investigating macro-scale changes in the archaeobotanical record. In this thesis, I undertake a comprehensive synthesis of archaeobotanical evidence to critically analyse the long-term history of arable agriculture in Yorkshire (UK), spanning from the first evidence of cereal crops in *c.* 4000 B.C.E. until 1100 C.E.

Yorkshire's macrobotanical evidence has been collated and analysed using ubiquity and relative abundance analysis to establish long-term diachronic trends in cereal cultivation practices. The main outcomes of this analysis have been: 1) a refinement of the chronologies for the introduction of new cereals to the region; and 2) a clarification of their transitions into economically important crops. Arable weed data is also investigated, identifying the tempo of weed translocations into Yorkshire during different periods and providing insights into the agriculture practices which shaped the environment and unintentionally allowed these plants to flourish.

These analyses are contextualised through a detailed review of the pollen evidence that provides valuable context for the spread of agriculture and the broader environmental changes occurring in the regional landscape. Palaeoclimate records were collated to explore the long-term interaction between climate and crops. Results show a post-Roman transition away from a spelt wheat-dominated agriculture to a barley-dominated agriculture

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complemented by other emerging free-threshing cereals. https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.115004

Pitt, R. 2025: *The Long-Term Impact of the Roman Occupation on Infant and Maternal Health in Britain*. University of Reading; supervisors: Mary Lewis and Hella Eckardt. rebecca.a.pitt@outlook.com

Bioarchaeological research has highlighted the importance of studying mother–infant relationships, demonstrating that the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease (DOHaD) hypothesis can provide unique insight into pass stress events. Studies propose that experiences within approximately the first 1,000 days after conception can influence long-term health, longevity, and genetic markers as the developing body responds to the surrounding environment and makes predictive adaptations accordingly. Non-adult skeletons provide a record of early life experiences, while adults reflect survivorship. Yet studies traditionally analyse non-adult or adult health, with few examining the two in tandem to detect a multi-generational health impact. By viewing this relationship as interlinked, a unique insight into the long-term consequences of stress events can be ascertained.

To explore this, a total of 444 non-adults aged below 3.5 years (encapsulating experiences during the first 1,000 days after conception and early life) and 277 adult females of childbearing age (18–45 years old) from Iron Age and Romano-British sites were analysed (dating from the fourth century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E.). Iron Age communities from across England were compared to rural and urban Roman sites located in the south and central belt. This encapsulated a transition between regional Iron Age societies to a Roman-occupied province; a period marked by cultural and socio-economic upheaval, making it ideal to view long-term health impact.

Health was assessed through palaeopathological analysis and metrics (encapsulating growth faltering and obstetric hazards). Results showed significantly higher rates of physiological stress and other indicators of poor health in non-adults (n=112/222, 50.5%; χ^2=30.2 $p<0.01$, d.f.=2) and females (n=112/159, 70.4%; X^2=46.4, $p<0.01$, d.f.=2) living under Roman rule, compared to pre-contact individuals from Iron Age Britain (non-adults: n=40/150, 26.7%; females: n=44/115, 38.3%). This implies the health of communities was negatively impacted. Common changes observed included dental enamel hypoplasia, non-specific infection, metabolic conditions, growth faltering and pelvic morphology.

This research demonstrates that the Roman occupation of Britain had a long-lasting negative impact on the health of non-adults and adult females generations later.

Stewart, M.L. 2024: *Professor Eric Birley (1906–95): A Career in Roman Frontier Studies*. University of Durham; supervisors: Richard Hingley and Robert Witcher. m.j.stewart@durham.ac.uk

The period between the 1920s and 1930s — the inter-war decades — and the 1970s saw a transformation in the structural and institutional context of archaeological research in the UK. This took the form of a marked hegemonic 'shift' from local archaeological societies and private individuals to departments in state-sponsored universities and heritage organisations. Archaeology consequently began to evolve as a university discipline and became recognisably more 'professionalised'. This thesis explores a pivotal time in the history of British archaeology, taking as a case study the career of Eric Birley, an archaeologist of the northern Roman frontier who worked at Durham University from 1931 to 1971.

The thesis is based on the study of material in personal and institutional archives in Britain and Germany, supplementing the evidence of academic publications (both Birley's own and those of individuals influenced by him), and the memories and insights of those

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pupils and associates available to be interviewed. Previous assessments of Birley and his work, including autobiographical writings, are also considered carefully. Aiming for a more inclusive and truthful historiography, the premise of the thesis is that disciplinary developments and advances in knowledge should be understood as the product of the personal and professional networks in which practitioners participate, rather than primarily as the achievement of 'great men' in genealogical succession.

Birley developed a strong personal career 'story' based on his work on Hadrian's Wall and other Roman frontiers and his role in military intelligence during WWII. Yet the research reveals that he was a transitional figure in disciplinary terms, who came adrift professionally in the post-WWII context. From the early 1950s, his development as a scholar was hampered by persistent ill health, including periods of depression when he struggled to work at all. He responded to the career success of more forward-thinking and career-minded colleagues by reaffirming his commitment to disciplinary approaches of the past. Birley was ever an inspiring teacher, however, and the achievements of his pupils and mentees became central to his sense of self. Towards the end of his life, as this thesis contends, a fluid notion of a 'Durham school' or 'Birley school' of Roman archaeology emerged and gained traction in tribute to Birley and his academic legacy, which has affected the subsequent reception of his work. Crucially, it has obscured Birley's historiographical significance as an exile from an earlier period in the development of archaeology, when the skilled gentleman 'amateur' held sway.

van der Veen, V. 2025: *On the Legion's Doorstep: Studies into the Nijmegen* castra *and* canabae legionis. Radboud University; supervisors: Stephan Mols, Eric Moormann, Marinus Polak. V.van.der.Veen@zwolle.nl

From *c.* A.D. 71 to 104, the Roman Tenth Legion was stationed on the Hunerberg in Nijmegen. The legion was housed in a fortress, initially built in timber and later rebuilt in stone. After the legion left for Budapest, the fortress was occupied by detachments of other units. Directly outside the fortress settled the veterans, partners and children of the troops living in the fortress, traders, craftspeople and other civilians who accompanied the army.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate various aspects of the Nijmegen legionary fortress, its extramural settlement and the relationship between the two communities that lived there. This is done through an analysis of selected categories of material culture and their distribution across the two complexes. The selected categories are: terra sigillata potters' stamps, coins, tile stamps, military equipment, horse gear and (gendered) brooches. Some of the topics addressed are the chronology of both sites, construction and repair activities, the composition of the fortress's garrison, evidence for production and recycling of military equipment and the presence of civilians — and women in particular — living or working in the fortress. https://doi.org/10.54195/9789465150116

Visser, R.M. 2025: *Relating Roman Rings: An Interdisciplinary Study Using Archaeology, Data Science and Tree Rings to Understand Timber Provision in the German Provinces of the Roman Empire*. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam; supervisors: Sjoerd Kluiving, Philip Verhagen and Aoife Maeliosa Daly. r.m.visser@saxion.nl

This study examines wood and dendrochronological data from the Lower Rhine region during the Roman period. Wood was a critical resource in the Roman economy, yet its production and distribution remain poorly understood. Based on the development of dendroprovenance research, three understudied aspects were distinguished: 1) the focus on

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single objects rather than multiple objects from large regions; 2) the lack of methods, measures and visualisations for a big data approach; and 3) the lack of dendroprovenance studies for the Roman period.

This research is mainly based on legacy data. Evidence was found for four silvicultural systems: clear cutting, selection, coppice and agroforestry. Based on dendroarchaeological data, various patterns were discerned and a model is presented showing three spheres of wood procurement. Local wood procurement seems to have been most common. For large-scale military infrastructural works wood was procured within the province. For special purposes, wood was obtained beyond the boundaries of a province (imperial sphere).

A combination of archaeological, network and spatial arguments was used to estimate the provenance of wood, leading to new insights. The network approach was also applied on the dendrochronological measurements from several Roman barges, combining dendrochronology with network science and spatial analysis to determine the provenance of wood from river barges. This made it possible to estimate provenance and to understand building practices. A strong relation between shape and function was attested, probably related to attributes of wood with certain growth conditions. Wood was obtained locally for shipbuilding, but also in Gallia Belgica and Germania Superior. Complete trees were most likely loaded on barges and transported over the Rhine and Meuse. However, local wood procurement was the rule and long-distance transport the exception in the Roman period. https://doi.org/10.5463/thesis.1062

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