

Cambridge Archaeological Journal

<http://journals.cambridge.org/CAJ>

Additional services for **Cambridge Archaeological Journal**:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



**Britannia: the Creation of a Roman Province, by John Creighton, 2006.
London: Routledge; ISBN 0-415-33313-X hardback £55 & US\$97; xii+180 pp.,
29 figs.**

Andrew Gardner

Cambridge Archaeological Journal / Volume 17 / Issue 01 / February 2007, pp 116 - 117
DOI: 10.1017/S095977430700011X, Published online: 30 January 2007

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S095977430700011X

How to cite this article:

Andrew Gardner (2007). Cambridge Archaeological Journal, 17, pp 116-117 doi:10.1017/S095977430700011X

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

Britannia: the Creation of a Roman Province, by John Creighton, 2006. London: Routledge; ISBN 0-415-33313-X hardback £55 & US\$97; xii+180 pp., 29 figs.

Andrew Gardner

The narrative of the Roman conquest of Britain is, in the popular consciousness, relatively unproblematic. Caesar came and saw, while Claudius conquered. In the volume which was the standard work on Roman Britain for a generation, Sheppard Frere's *Britannia* (1987), the gaps in the story of this period were merely matters of detail. John Creighton's new book, named in explicit homage to Frere's, challenges this established story in a number of fundamental ways. It succeeds quite brilliantly in providing a thought-provoking and refreshing picture of social continuity and change across the late Iron Age and early Roman periods, elegantly combining detailed case studies with theoretical discussion. To be sure, recent debates over the landing-site of the Claudian invasion have begun to unpick the traditional account. Nonetheless, Creighton's book goes well beyond these to question our whole framework for understanding the relationships between the societies of Britain — especially their rulers — and Rome, and the impact these had on urban development in the province. It succeeds in its central aim of putting the major military landings of AD 43 into a much broader context of imperialism involving both Roman and indigenous actors.

The book comprises seven chapters, framed by an Introduction and Conclusion. In charting the shifting power relations either side of the Claudian invasion date of AD 43, two major themes are pursued. These are the role of 'friendly kings' in the transition to Roman rule, and the diverse origins of the early Roman towns in Britain. The Introduction primarily focuses on previous scholarship concerning this period, and succinctly deals with a number of quite long-term trends, extending back into the Middle Ages. Chapters One to Three then address different aspects of client kingship, using comparative material from other parts of the Roman world to illuminate evidence from Britain, where this phenomenon seems to have been established between the times of Caesar and Claudius, particularly in the south and east. The ways in which client dynasties interacted with Rome, and the manifestations of this interaction in material symbols and military support are discussed, and some exciting interpretations put forward. The idea that kings who were supported or even implanted by

Rome were beginning to look like governors in their personal appearance is notable, as is the suggestion that Roman — or Roman-style — troops were present in Britain before AD 43. The latter notion in particular will doubtless prove controversial, but is undeniably worth consideration.

The second half of the book begins with almost a second introduction (Ch. 4), discussing a range of ways of thinking about Roman towns. This encompasses trends in Romano-British scholarship and a more diverse variety of ideas from the wider Roman world and from social theory. It sets the scene for an alternative typology of the towns of Roman Britain to that traditionally deployed, based firmly in the situated experience of living in them rather than what we know (or assume) about their legal status. Thus London (Ch. 5), towns built on former fortress-sites (Ch. 6) and towns based on the extensive late Iron Age settlements known as *oppida* (Ch. 7) are considered in terms of the social influences governing the dispositions of structures, and the extent to which these could be transformed by the inhabitants. London's cosmopolitan population was unusual in Britain, and can be compared more directly than any other Romano-British town with places like Pompeii, in which a competitive elite resided and participated in quite classical rituals of display. The military colonies, and other towns which developed from fortresses, are interpreted as embodying the rather more regulated hierarchies prevalent within the military community. By contrast, the townscapes of a number of the urban centres which developed from *oppida* seem to have been constructed around monuments preserving the memory of the indigenous kings who had been allied to Rome. Again, there are specific suggestions here concerning early town phases which are likely to provoke debate, but the arguments are well presented and introduce some much needed dynamism and diversity to the interpretation of Roman urbanism in Britain. Both in Chapter Seven and the Conclusion, this strand is folded back into the earlier discussion of client kingship.

Overall, the book is a vibrant synthesis of theory and data, linked at numerous points to previous trends in the discipline of Romano-British studies. Detailed analyses of specific structural sequences are effectively integrated with approaches derived primarily from Giddens (and to a lesser extent Bourdieu), and the limitations of some of the arguments put forward are openly acknowledged. Points of criticism are few but some topics do seem to fall between the cracks defining the identities which are the author's primary focus. Thus Roman, tribal, elite, urban, military and

civilian categories all receive thorough treatment, while rural and gender identities do not. There is also the inevitable problem that, in trying to correct one set of imbalances in earlier accounts, others are introduced. Thus cultural resistance is rather lacking from the picture of early Roman Britain at which we arrive by the end of the volume. The conflicted decisions of powerful individuals are emphasized, but Roman-sponsored regime change generally comes across as a positive force, which it may not have been perceived as by all members of society. Nonetheless, this is a book to be much admired for presenting a wide range of fresh and ambitious interpretations and developing a sophisticated structurationist account of early Roman Britain in a clear and fluent fashion. Many of its suggestions, both in detail and in general, are likely to provoke controversy within Romano-British archaeology but, at the fundamental level that this book addresses, that can only be a good thing.

Andrew Gardner
Institute of Archaeology
University College
31–34 Gordon Square
London
WC1H 0PY
UK

Email: andrew.gardner@ucl.ac.uk

Reference

Frere, S., 1987. *Britannia: a History of Roman Britain*. 3rd edition. London: Pimlico.