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Review of:
Dark, K. and Dark, P. 1997. *The Landscape of Roman Britain.* Stroud: Sutton Publishing. 186 pages. ISBN 0-7509-0964-1 (Hb.)

This volume provides the reader with an introduction to the archaeology of the landscape of Roman Britain. It gathers together a large quantity of information on individual sites and their environmental setting, and constitutes an excellent introduction to the various sources of data for environmental reconstruction. The main thesis of the work with regards to the 'social' landscape of Roman Britain is the division of the Province into two areas roughly analogous to the traditional 'Military' and 'Civilian' zones. The authors prefer to re-name these the 'Native' and 'Villa' zones respectively. Within this structure they consider 'regional groups' of site types, though in a book of this length the treatment of these sub-regions necessarily lacks detail. The second half of the book concentrates on thematic issues within the landscape including agriculture, urbanism and industry, before concluding with a chapter on the 'end of the Romano-British landscape'. The book is full of copious case studies, and is well illustrated. It provides a valuable overview of the available evidence, and the thorough bibliography will be of great use to anyone studying in this field.

However, its value as a synthesis aside, this book has its difficulties. These begin with an inadequate understanding of the issues embodied in modern archaeology by the word 'landscape'. This no longer means simply considering archaeology against the backdrop of the natural environment. Recent work, which the authors fail to address, focuses much attention upon the social structures recoverable from patterns of ancient settlement, for instance the mechanisms of imperial dominance, signs of native (violent and non-violent) resistance, and social and ethnic variability. The new agenda seeks to de-construct the 'top heavy' conception of an archaeology directed at the conqueror to the exclusion of the conquered. This failure to consider current research in landscape archaeology extends to this book's consideration of 'Romanization'. The published literature on what constitutes 'Romanization' is large and growing. It is no longer a simple word to use, and certainly not in the form in which it is used in this book, where it is defined uncomplicatedly as "the adoption of Roman ways of life" (p. 17). This crude acculturative model of cultural interaction and change has long been under attack. Recent work on this topic (see Hingley 1996 for a summary), should alert us to the dangers of such a simplistic approach.

A basic theme of this book, the division of the province into Native and Villa zones, does nothing to ease this difficulty. Conceptualising a whole section of the province with reference to a single 'elite' manifestation, the villa, is not a helpful move. This approach neglects the conditions under which the populace at large lived, and the ways in which, through the medium of an informal and protracted cultural negotiation, they tried to reach an accommodation with the conqueror. Landscapes in the Roman Empire were the products of colonial negotiation between the conquered and the conquerors (Mattingly 1997), and Roman Britain was no different. The

authors fail to address key questions associated with these issues. How did different native groups respond to their changed circumstance after the conquest? How did the imperial authorities set about controlling disparate groups of people in the landscape? To discuss the province in terms of 'Villa' and 'Native' landscapes is to create regional caricatures which serve to deny the true complexity of Romano-British identity, and obscure the reality of power relations in a landscape of Imperial domination.

The final, though deep seated problem with this book is that its vision of landscape is essentially ahistorical. Any attempt to grasp the complexity of landscape must include its transformation over time. The analysis of the Roman landscape in this book is prefaced with an all too brief consideration of the Iron Age landscape that preceded it. This most certainly should have been a more substantial component of the study, since in many areas the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age landscape is the foundation for not only much of the post-conquest landscape in general, but also the social structures within that landscape (for a case study along these lines see Fincham 1999). There is little consideration of how the Iron Age landscape passed through the transition of the conquest, or how the 'Roman' landscape developed over the course of the Roman occupation. The authors present the Romano-British landscape as something which 'starts' with the conquest, and 'ends' with the Roman withdrawal from Britain: it occupies a single place in time, and simply 'is'. What is not addressed is that beneath the structures of society lie power relations between various social groups, which are reproduced through continuous social action. Such relations are not static, but change through a process of negotiation. Thus, the presentation of a single 'Romano-British' landscape is not only a failure to understand the true meaning and complexity of social interaction, but denies the native population (and the Imperial authorities) their history.

Although there is much that is of interest in this work, it leaves us with no better idea how the landscape of the province *functioned*. We do not know how Roman domination was enforced or resisted, or what *really* occurred beneath the mask of 'Romanized' material culture. A great opportunity has been lost, and the urgent task of applying modern critical and archaeological thought to the landscape of Roman Britain remains to be conducted.

References

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