

Peter Salway, *Roman Britain: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 78, ISBN 978-0-19-285404-9

The following book is a short introduction, as the title suggests in the history of the Roman Britain, from the first attempts of conquering it to the end of the Roman rule. The author bases his book on previous studies, the written sources and the archaeological data. The book itself does not raise any new theories about the period of time that is discussed, but it remembers the old and new ones. The book is structured in four chapters (*The Beginnings of British History*, *The Roman Conquest*, *Britain under the Late Empire*, *The End of Roman Rule*), which are each, except for the last one, divided in several parts.

Chapter 1. *The Beginnings of British History*

In the beginning of this chapter the author starts by talking about the history of Britain before the Roman conquer and how this has evolved during the almost 2000 years of pre-Roman period. The author discusses about a really evolved society even before the Roman conquest, but which does not compare to the one that has formed during the Roman occupation.

In the parts *The Physical Landscape* and *Social Organization* he offers some information about the physical landscape and the social organization of pre-Roman Britain uses the arguments and theories that researchers, who are specialized in that fields of sciences, are confronting between them. Part entitled *The Expansion of Rome*, the author is explaining the Roman internal political system during the Republican period, and the way that one man, with a reputation can come to have an important political position.

The last part of this chapter, *Caesar's British Campaigns, 55 and 54 BC*, presents more the effects of the military campaigns, led by Caesar, then rather the actions itself. For the next period of time, in which Rome had internal problems, the lack of interest showed by the leaders of the Rome, in the problems that occur in Britain, even though they paid heavy taxes to the Roman state. In the period between Caesar expeditions and the reign of the emperor Claudius there were some attempts to conquer Britain.

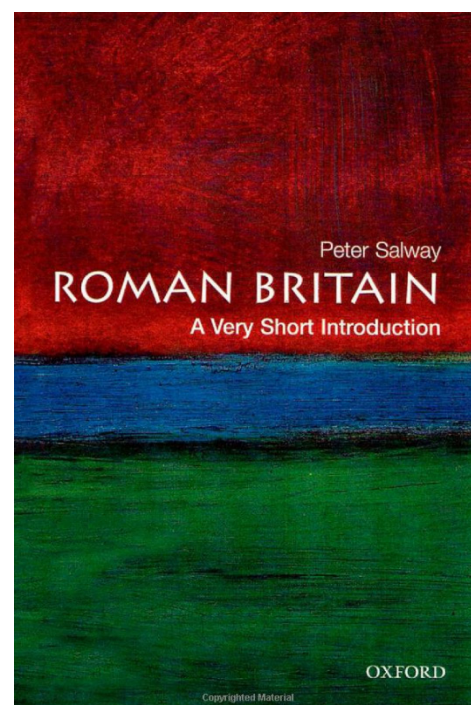
Britannia has change very much from 55-54 BC up Claudius conquest that started in AD 43; a lot of people came on the island for different reasons, the way that the agriculture was made became more productive, these may have been caused by the existence of the permanent roman armies on the Rhine line. The help that Rome give from time to time to some political leaders from Britannia was only for propaganda reasons. The author is using the writes of ancient historians and the example of some episodes to support the affirmations he has made.

Chapter 2. *The Roman Conquest.*

The author puts the Roman conquest of the Britain from the point a view of political propaganda that Claudius needed to do so as to ensure his position in the imperial family, which has been ignoring him before he became the Emperor, and in the Empire especially with the conflicts and a serious military revolts, but also because of the situation in Britain (the dead

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of Conubelinus, a leader who has been obedient to Rome).

The military campaign that was used to conquer Britain is briefly described because the author wants to be sure the common reader understands the implication of such a large military intervention he explains how the military system worked in Roman world and in Britain, which is a very good thing because the readers can have a better understanding of the magnitude and the differences between Roman and British force at that time.

In the part *The Romanization of Britain* the author discusses the way that Claudius thought the organization of the province, after the conquest: “employing” local client kings as much as possible and the rest of the province was “reorganized as local government units (*civitates*) with their nobles formed into councils and holding local magistracies – scaled-down versions of the Roman constitution, in fact, but often adapting existing institutions” (p.22) and in addition the province had a chief financial secretary (*procuratores provinciarum*). The construction of the Britannia, started right away by the standards of the Roman Empire. The local peace did not last in the new province because of the attacks of the rebels outside the province, from the parts that were not conquered. This is sustain by the archaeological data which provides precious information which is also sustain by written sources from that time.

Part named *The Boudiccan Revolt* discusses a spectacular episode of the rebellions, the Boudicca’s revolt against the Empire, which leads to a major destruction of what Romans have built in the previous period and almost have lost of the province. This revolt came from the inside and it was caused by the corruption of the Roman government system that was supposed to rule over Britain. The next period of time was marked of instability and some other rebellions, even so between AD 70 to 160 Britain became a real roman province and “its lasting features as part of the empire emerged” (p. 27).

The *Town and City* and *Religion* parts are discussing the way that has evolved in the period of Roman occupation, and the way that local elements blended with the roman ones (which had a more impregnated influence) in creating a new culture, a new way of live and the Roman Britain. In the *Defense and Security* part author is presenting the history of Roman Britain in parallel with the history of the Roman Empire and if the events that affected the Empire, had or not an influence in Britain in such a dramatic way that has done to the other provinces; the two main effects of this events were the strengthening of the defense system and the apparition of the Gallic Empire. To support his affirmations the author is using archaeological data that can be associated with that period of time.

Chapter 3. Britain under the Late Empire.

In this time period, the third century AD, Britain has not suffered as much as the other provinces have done it, because of its geographical position in the Empire, but even more in the third century we can notice an increasing number of *villa* were build, fact that may be explained in context of the Gallic Empire: “owners with land on both sides of the Channel decided to transfer their personal residences from their Gallic villas to their proprieties in what

must have seemed an exceptionally secure haven in an age of extreme danger” (p. 42). Another effect of the events that were happening on the continent is the large number of costal fortresses build in the southern Britain. To support his affirmations the author is using archaeological data. There was a period of almost nine years, from AD 287 to 293, in which Britain was under the rule of a self-proclaimed emperor (Carausius and his successor Allectus).

The *Reform under Diocletian* part starts with the author giving information about the context and the purpose in which the Diocletian reforms have been made. Britain was reconquered by Constantius I which hasn’t lost any time in rebuilding what the rebels destroyed and by AD 306 he launched a campaign in Scotland against Picts, but in the same year he died and just like Severus had a successor with him. The information that the author gives about the name of the Scottish people is based on the written sources.

In *Constantine the Great* part the author starts by explaining why Britain continued to have a great prosperity during the first half of the fourth century AD. The parts *Government and Administration* and *Military Command* are a brief explication on how the government, administration and the military life had evolved during the Late Empire. The author is supporting his affirmations by using archaeological data and written sources.

The part *The rise of Christianity* is dedicate on the way that Christianity had arrived in Britain and the way of its acceptance and embraced by the population. Through the fact that Mithras mysteries were very spread in the military and commercial circles, but also because it was exclusive the transition to Christianity was more simple, but not without any episodes of aggression. From the moment of the “Edict of Milan” it took only a year for the first bishop to appear, this sustains the idea that Christianity in Britain was very developed and “old”, fact also confirmed by the archaeological data that suggests some third century martyrs. Under Constantine church had benefited on his benevolence and a lot of people whom were Christian and who were the rich became very influent and the late fourth century bishops and clerical people had to put themselves under their protection.

In *After Constantine* part, we can see how Britain had to face some major changes and barbarian attacks that changed its face and position in the Empire. After Constantine’s death the Empire was divided between his three sons and Britain came under the rule of younger Constantine II. The attacks between brothers which had as a result the attempts of some men to take rule over the Empire and the barbarian incursions have led to “devastation of moral among both civilians and army can only left them in a weaker state to resist the barbarian troubles now pressing in on them.” (p. 59). In his statements the author is using written sources of a well-informed historian of that time, Ammianus, completed by archaeological data.

The part *Barbarians Incursions* discusses the intrusions that began in 367 which almost came to the loss of the province. The barbarians are not the ones from the past century, they aren’t the hostile aliens at the edge of the Empire, but are organized and familiar with the way that romans fought and their defending technics. Britain

was “saved” from the hands of the barbarians by a *comes rei militaris*, Theodosius (father of the later emperor Theodosius the Great).

In the part *Reconstruction and Renewal* the author referring to the reconstruction of Britain under Theodosius. Using archaeological data the author proves that villas and wall of Hadrian are continually lived, and the economy continued to go on, because we can see buildings that are constructed now. The author is warns the reader that we cannot speak of the “brilliance of the early fourth century” but neither of some sort of despair.

Chapter 4. *The End of Roman Rule*

In this chapter the author is discussing the loss of Britain by the Romans as a result of internal and external

events. The barbarian attacks continued, the army so not the same faith-full and well trained, as in the second or third century, the power of the Empire it has diminished considerably, more and more usurpers came out and the local wealthy people prefer to make agreements with barbarians then to ask for help from the falling Empire.

Roman Britain: A Very Short Introduction is a book that is directed more to the common reader, but it can still be used as an academic purpose. The language that is used in the book is easy to understand even for the casual reader. In conclusion I consider the book to be a “pocket-book” and I recommend to all those whom are going to visit England or want to find out, briefly, more about the history of Britain during Roman occupation.