

# OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AGENDAS 2011

## 4) ROMAN

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## 4. Roman Research Agenda

*This document sets out an archaeological research agenda for Oxford covering the Roman period. The document should be read in conjunction with the period resource assessment for the City (Oxford City Council forthcoming) and the Thames Solent Regional Research Agenda (2010).*

### 4.1 Overview

The Roman archaeology of Oxford is of particular importance because of the concentration of pottery manufacturing sites related to the nationally important Roman pottery industry orientated on the Dorchester-Alchester Road, known to extend as far south as Dorchester and as far north as Otmoor. The Oxford Local Authority Area (LAA) has produced evidence for several of the most important sites in the wider dispersed manufacturing landscape. It represents a distinct concentration of activity that ranges from the 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century and presents exceptional opportunities to investigate the development of the industry and its relationship to the wider landscape, environment and rural economy.

The LAA is also important for the potential to study how the Roman communication and transportation network utilised and navigated across the Thames and Cherwell rivers and floodplains. Furthermore whilst Roman Oxford was rural in character a concentration of rural settlement can be detected in the vicinity of South Parks Road and the further investigation of whether this constituted a more substantial 'village' settlement is of notable interest.

### 4.2 Zones of potential

The LAA has been divided into five broad landscape zones based on surface geology and relief (please note the geological areas have been simplified and are not intended to be used as a guide to local geology):

- A** The North Oxford Terrace (Summertown-Radley and Wolvercote Gravel Terrace)
- B** The Thames floodplain (including islands of 1<sup>st</sup> gravel terrace)
- C** The Cherwell floodplain (with pockets of gravel)
- D** The alluviated stream valleys of the Corallian Ridge
- E** The Corallian Ridge

Some research questions provide an assessment of potential for the zones listed above; these are referred to in terms of high potential (e.g. the zone has already demonstrated its ability to contribute to this agenda) or general potential (based on comparison with similar landscapes).

### 4.3 Chronology

1. Can closer dating of middle 1<sup>st</sup> century assemblages be obtained by using scientific dating techniques? Sites with well-preserved deposits of both Late Iron Age and Roman date should be given careful attention in order to investigate continuity of local tradition at these sites. Sampling strategies should ensure that as wide a range of contexts are sampled as possible (see Fulford 2010)
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
2. More detailed study of the production and distribution of Oxford wares across the country may contribute to our understanding of the importance of this industry at a national level and to a greater understanding of the chronology of the Roman period.
  - *Zone potential: N/A*
3. Further evidence for 5<sup>th</sup> century AD activity would be of great value. Dating of late antiquity inhumation burials is a noted priority (see Fulford 2010).
  - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D General; E High*

#### 4.4 Landscape and agriculture

1. Environmental analysis can further contribute towards a reconstruction of the agricultural landscape in the Roman period including the extent and impact of farming.
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
2. Evidence for a Roman cultivation signature in the alluvial sequences of the Thames Valley should be sought (see Fulford 2010).
  - *Zone potential: B General; C General*
3. Can the size and shape of identified Roman fields be related to agricultural regimes?
  - *Zone potential: A High E High*
4. Can further subtleties in agricultural production patterns be identified (e.g. evidence for emmer wheat and peas from Mansfield College, and barley from Manor Road, Headington)?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
5. Only isolated Roman find-spots have been located close to the Thames channels which are characterised as low energy and alluviating during this period. Is there evidence for either 1) ritual activity, 2) fish management, 3) channel management, 4) river transportation of goods, 5) crossing points or structures?
  - *Zone potential: B General C General*
6. It has been suggested that pottery production sites utilised soils unfavourable to agriculture where woodland cover could be expected and certainly is present in the Late Saxon period (Shotover Forest). However sites like Eastfield House, Brasenose Driftway suggest that stock enclosures and domestic settlement not obviously associated with manufacturing were also present in this zone close to the Dorchester-Alchester road. Also there is some evidence that pottery production expanded into pre-existing bounded agricultural fields (e.g. Blackbird Leys). What was the relationship between the manufacturing and agricultural landscape in East Oxford?
  - *Zone potential: D General; E High*
7. Can a significant and well preserved bone assemblage be identified to help establish husbandry practices in the manufacturing and agricultural/husbandry zones? Can patterns of fish management and consumption be identified from targeted sampling ?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*

#### 4.5 Settlement

1. Can the South Parks Road settlement zone be further characterised? Was this a village settlement?
  - *Zone potential: A High*
2. The further examination of 'Corn dryer' type structures would be of interest, both in terms of their archaeo-botany and possible multi-functionalism, and in terms of their associated archaeology. E.g. T shaped dryers identified at the Churchill Hospital Site ( see Fulford 2010).
  - *Zone potential: A General; E High*
3. What was the character of domestic settlement in the vicinity of the kilns?
  - *Zone potential: E High*
4. Is there any evidence that the wealth generated from the industry manifested itself in the local community in such a way as to distinguish this area from other

comparable rural landscapes? Can the presence of more fine wares on late Roman rural sites on the 2<sup>nd</sup> terrace be explained through accumulating wealth or simply abundance of local supply?

- *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
5. In what way was the character of settlement near the floodplain and terrace distinct from the manufacturing zone?
    - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
  6. Can patterns of landscape re-organisation, migration of boundaries and patterns of disuse be further characterised?
    - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
  7. To what extent is the general regional pattern of 2<sup>nd</sup> century relocation and re-organisation of settlement patterns reflected within the LAA? There is some suggestion that Oxford was not as significantly affected as other areas. Why might this be?
    - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
  8. What was the density of settlement on the gravel terrace/Corallian Ridge? Are we still missing settlements?
    - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
  9. Is there a distinction between the material culture of settlements on the Dorchester-Alchester Road and rural settlement on the gravels?
    - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
  10. Is there any evidence for settlement specialisation?
    - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
  11. Can the character of Roman activity at Port Meadow and elsewhere on the floodplain and its gravel islands be further understood? How did alleviation and changes in water level over time impact on activity in the floodplain?
    - *Zone potential: B General*

#### **4.6 Manufacturing and trade**

##### The Oxford Pottery Industry

1. What is the full character and extent of manufacturing infrastructure within the LAA? Can well preserved kiln sites be identified and conserved?
  - *Zone potential: D High; E High*
2. Of particular importance is the question of how the pottery industry organised in relation to the Roman economy; did potters form part of a larger cooperative or were they independent operatives? How, when and why was a greater uniformity of production achieved towards the height of the industry?
  - *Zone potential: E High D General*
3. What is the relationship between kilns, workshops, settlements, quarries, water sources and woodland?
  - *Zone potential: D High; E High*
4. Can further evidence be obtained regarding the presence or absence of managed woodland (e.g. evidence for coppicing in ecofact assemblage or regulated supply patterns in terms of species). The further targeted examination of charcoal deposits at manufacturing and settlement sites would be warranted.
  - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D High; E High*
5. Can Roman quarry workings be identified?

- *Zone potential: E High*
- 6. Geophysical survey has a great deal to add to our understanding of pottery manufacturing sites (e.g. as at Lower Farm, Nuneham Courtenay).
  - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D General; E High*
- 7. 1<sup>st</sup> century activity, perhaps involving coarse ware production, is suggested at the Churchill Hospital site. Can further evidence of post-conquest manufacturing activity be identified? If so how does the material culture relate to other LIA-early Roman transition sites? To what extent was this a 'local' industry as opposed to an influx of outside talent attracted by the availability of specific raw materials?
  - *Zone potential: D General; E High*
- 8. Does the appearance of technological knowledge from *Verulamium* and non-literate stamps indicate an influx of 'apprentice-potters' from *Verulamium*? Can the material culture of both areas provide any further insights?
  - *Zone potential: N/A*
- 9. How can we explain the increasing uniformity of production in the late Roman period? Is there evidence for greater centralised control on the landscape, supply of materials etc.?
  - *Zone potential: N/A*
- 10. Did the success of the industry feed into the material wealth of the LAA? If so how did this manifest itself and what does this tell us about the status of potter communities and local landowners?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
- 11. How do pottery production areas compare? Is there further evidence for formal layouts (like at Lower Farm), or for clean and well ordered sites (i.e. Churchill Hospital), sites with mixed quality production (quantities of wasters etc.), or less well ordered sites?
  - *Zone potential: D General; E High*
- 12. The fabric series of Roman pottery for the Oxford area was developed in the 1970s by Young and has remained the framework by which more recent pottery has been dated; however significant quantities of pottery from recent investigations such as at Headington, Blackbird Leys and Minchery Farm could contribute to a more detailed fabric series.
  - *Zone potential: N/A*
- 13. Can further domestic settlement or burial evidence (e.g. like those close to kilns at Rose Hill) tell us more about the consumption, status and cultural identity of the potters?
  - *Zone potential: D General; E High*
- 14. Can further workshop areas and manufacturing infrastructure and material culture be identified?
  - *Zone potential: D General; E High*

#### Other trade

- 15. Can we identify whether the sourcing of quern and millstones changes over time?
  - *Zone potential: N/A*

#### **4.7 Transport and Communication**

- 1. Is there any evidence for channel management, riverside settlement or trade along the Thames or along other watercourses?
  - *Zone potential: B General; C General; D General*

2. Can further exposures of the Alchester-Dorchester Road be examined (e.g. as at Baynards School, Barton); what can these tell us about the use and management of the road? What can the apparently re-alignment of the crossing point over Bayswater Brook tell us about the use of the road in the 4<sup>th</sup> century?
  - *Zone potential: E High*
3. Can evidence for river/stream crossing points be identified?
  - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D General; E General*
4. Is there any evidence that a route way across the Thames Floodplain was maintained in the Roman period?
  - *Zone potential: ; B General*
5. A number of Roman road routes are proposed through the LAA; can these be confirmed by physical evidence? What is the evidence for east-west routes in the landscape and of what significance were these routes? Can the proposed north-south route across the Oxford Gravel Terrace (Banbury Road) be confirmed?
  - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D General; E High*

#### **4.8 Material Culture**

1. The regional fabric series for pottery (including non-local fabrics) requires further work (see Fulford 2010). Can the existing framework of Roman fabrics be enhanced in terms of the identification of vessel types?
  - *Zone potential: N/A*
2. A review of the evidence from the Potable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) and museum archives would be productive – can this provide further information on Roman artefacts such as metalwork? For example, the distribution and chronology of coins and brooches
  - *Zone potential: N/A*
3. A synthesis of Roman ceramic building material from the LAA may be of value; could the quantity of material indicate further farmstead or villa sites? If so would further analysis of the distribution of CBM assist in identifying possible locations?
  - *Zone potential: N/A*
4. More work needs to be undertaken on Roman finds from rural sites looking for variations in supply, function and wealth.
  - *Zone potential: N/A*

#### **4.9 Ceremony and religion**

1. Is there any further evidence for the continuation of Late Iron Age pit burials in the area? What were the criteria for burial? When did this practice cease?
  - *Zone potential: A General; B General; C General; D General; E High*
2. Can the extent and character of rural cemeteries and their relationship to routeways be identified (e.g. North Oxford, Rose Hill-Iffley)?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
3. Can any continuity be demonstrated between late Roman cemeteries and early Saxon burials (e.g. in north Oxford where there is proximity with Saxon burials)?
  - *Zone potential: A High; B General; C General; D General; E High*
4. In the absence of any known temple sites can the PAS or other stray find-data provide evidence for concentrations of religious artefacts or carefully placed deposits?
  - *Zone potential: N/A*

5. Is there any evidence for deposition in the Thames or Cherwell within the LAA during this period?
- *Zone potential: B General; C General*

**Compiled by Ruth Beckley and David Radford**

**For full acknowledgements please see the online Oxford Archaeological Plan Introduction document.**

### **Bibliography**

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Medlycott, M, & Brown, N, 2008 Revision of the Regional Research Frameworks for the Eastern Region

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*Thames Solent Regional Research Agenda 2010. Available at [http://oxfordarch.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=564](http://oxfordarch.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=564) (accessed 24/10/11)*

Fig 1: Simplified geology map (areas of gravel island and Amphthill Clay have been amalgamated and are not shown, please see introduction document for a detailed surface geology map).

