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**Hilary E. M. Cool, *Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain*. Cambridge University Press
2006. Pp. 294, 27 line diagrams, 3 half tone illustrations, 43 tables. ISBN 052100327X
(paperback). Price £19.99**

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My fellow soldiers have no beer. Please order some to be sent.

Masclus to Cerialis at Vindolanda

Hilary Cool's book does exactly what it says on the tin, introducing the reader to the world of food and drink in Roman Britain. Cool begins this exploration of culinary delights in Roman Britain by focusing on one of the period's major problems: the overwhelming number of *things* recovered from the Roman period seems to have left students collapsing under the volume of evidence. Cool goes on to present a veritable 'hitchhikers guide' to the archaeological resource available, outlining the range of finds, the nature of their recovery and the ways and means of archaeological analysis and interpretation.

Cool first examines the various sources of archaeological evidence that can be drawn upon, including the food remains, the food packaging, osteoarcheological evidence and written evidence (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively). Each food group is discussed individually, with chapters on meat, vegetables, dairy products and, last but not least, wine and beer. These sections successfully integrate the different sources of evidence available, accompanied by examinations and interpretations of individual datasets (Chapters 6 to 15). The final section of the book turns to some of the research themes these types of data can shed light on, highlighting how 'different strands of information can be combined to show how life was changing'.

The archaeological resource and themes included are consequently divided into bitesize and easily digestible chunks. The evidence itself is presented in a way that relates the recovered artefact with its original function, thus vessel sherds are referred to as food packaging or drinking vessels rather than as statistics and types. In the dry and data-heavy archaeological

reports we are often presented with, the non-specialist reader is often rendered oblivious to ‘what it all means’ due a lack of integration between various specialist reports and the site narrative. As a result, it can be difficult to think of finds other than in a material sense – as bits of pot, glass and bone – rather than in their functional capacity, as jars for oil, drinking cups for wine and joints of meat. In this book however, the dataset and interpretation is artfully presented and interwoven for maximum interest and impact. Roman Britain becomes a tangible place, rather than a concept made up of sherds of pottery and fragments of brick and tile. Cool’s approach forces the reader to consider the *people* of Roman Britain, along with their idiosyncrasies, cultural differences and personal choices.

Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain highlights the profound effect Roman colonists had on the native population. The final chapters of the book examine the changing nature of habits seen in some Iron Age communities building up to the Roman conquest (such as drinking rituals), and the effect geography, chronology, status and demography can have on everyday activities such as eating and drinking. This should perhaps come as no surprise considering the diversity in consumption we see across the country today, but it does bring into focus the huge generalisations that are often made when discussing archaeological evidence.

As an artefact specialist, I found this book particularly interesting from the viewpoint of material culture and how the study of *things* – from any period – informs our understanding of past culture. In producing this book, Cool has touched upon a great range of issues extending beyond the Roman period and the central theme of food and drink. What kinds of materials and artefacts survive in the archaeological record? How do archaeologists treat, analyse and assess finds? What questions can we ask of artefact assemblages? How do we integrate different sources of information? In short, Cool demonstrates the potential of finds when the right questions are asked, and explains how archaeologists go about answering them. Cool explains some of the practicalities behind artefact studies and some inherent problems, for example the effect that sampling strategy may have on the recovered assemblage. This is what makes this book as valuable a resource for students of finds studies as it is for students of Roman Britain.

Cool includes as much of the original evidence in the text as possible and, with well-placed line drawings and tables, the reader can get a real feel for the dataset. This approach means that those reading for academic content can query the data and those coming from a non-

specialist background can understand how conclusions have been drawn. One drawback is the lack of illustrations – some colour pictures or photographs depicting some of the vessels would have helped enormously in trying to visualise some of the artefacts (especially for the non-archaeologist). As such the result hovers between the academic/special interest market and the non-specialist book market. The book definitely nods a head in the direction of the coffee table (which is meant as a compliment) and coffee enthusiasts should not be put off by the lack of glossy pictures. This is an immensely readable and insightful book, reinforced with high quality and exhaustive research from one of the period's leading scholars.

Cool's final sentiment is also worth highlighting. Whilst she has worked wonders with the currently available dataset, teasing out some fascinating insights into the period, her work has been much hindered by poor reporting from archaeologists over the years. She has one major gripe;

“I would like to think that we excavate sites because we are curious about the past and the people who lived in it, rather than to keep us in employment and fill museum stores with boxes of finds”

I am convinced that any student or archaeologist reading this book will begin to appreciate how important much of the data residing in archives, grey literature reports and appendices can be when used imaginatively. What is the point of collecting the many pieces of an archaeological puzzle if we don't try and piece together the jigsaw?

Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain leaves the reader with an appreciation of just how many pieces to that puzzle there are for this period. The archaeological resource for Roman Britain is impressively rich – how many periods can boast the recovery of a jar sporting the original label of its contents: ‘Lucius Tettius Africanus's finest fish sauce from Antinopolis’? This book is an excellent example of artefact studies at its best. The reader is left thinking about the people of Roman Britain and of their eating habits, rather than of the number of a certain mortaria recovered at a certain site. And it is reassuring to know that the Romans were people with wants and desires just like us – they wanted eggs ‘at a good price’ and apples ‘if you can find nice ones’. And, perhaps it is no surprise that the people of Roman Britain liked their wine as much as we do today.