

HILARY E. M. COOL und C. PHILO (Hrsg.), **Roman Castleford Excavations 1974–85, Band 1, The Small Finds**. Yorkshire Archaeology, Band 4. West Yorkshire Archaeology Service, 1998. 421 Seiten, 164 Abbildungen, 50 Tabellen, 45 Tafeln.

The rescue excavation of limited areas of two successive forts and their *vici* in northern Britain might seem unremarkable enough to make this separate publication of the finds (other than pottery) on a fairly lavish scale an over-ambitious undertaking. But the intrinsic interest of some of the groups and the care and thought which have gone into their study amply justify the decision. The excellent quality of the illustrations also deserves praise; the illustrators can too often be taken for granted, yet their contributions are central to a successful and usable finds report.

The excavations revealed parts of two successive, late-first-century forts of different sizes, along with four phases of civilian occupation of which the two earliest were the *vici* to the forts, the third a mid-second-century, stone-built settlement, and the fourth a rather nebulous phase of late Roman activity including burials. The report on the excavations themselves is not yet published, which is a pity because, as will be seen below, questions of site-formation should be central to our understanding and interpretation of the objects recovered and thus of the site itself.

Since the reports were prepared some time ago they are rather traditional in that the finds are dealt with by material rather than grouped by function irrespective of material as is now more usually the case – a problem freely admitted in the Introduction. Some of the groups of material have yielded information which should be flagged up here. Amongst the metal and related items, the most noteworthy is a series of ceramic moulds for casting spoons and for decorated copper-alloy flasks: the latter came from a pit within the second-phase fort, whereas the former were from a pit containing third- to fourth-century

pottery. The flasks are of a type which is rare as site-finds. Also unusual is a set of three copper-alloy saddle-plates of the type depicted on some cavalry tombstones embellishing the front and rear triplet straps. 142 brooches were found in the excavations, a remarkably high number and made the more interesting by the observation that only one was broken. Another unusual group was the large quantity of glass vessels, almost all for drinking, from the second-century Structure AX, a group so far unique in Britain. There was a large quantity of waste leather deposited in a midden towards the end of the occupation of the first-phase fort. It contained a number of interesting pieces including covers with draw-strings for small, circular shields, some tent-fragments and part of a saddle-horn. Perhaps the most surprising fact was that most of this leather was from goat-skin. The specialist notes the low representation of goat in bone assemblages from sites in the north-western provinces, and wonders whether this may be another commodity which was shipped up from the Mediterranean to the frontier armies. Both the leather and the bronze-casting suggest a higher level of manufacture and maintenance than is often envisaged at forts. Other interesting finds groups include bone (with antler and ivory) and the stone sculptures.

The concluding section on "Life in Roman Castleford" seeks to use the objects and their contexts to draw conclusions on the uses to which the various excavated structures were put. The attempt is understandable, but there are deeper issues which need to be addressed. The processes of site-formation are increasingly appreciated to be central to analysis and interpretation. In this report, M. BISHOP confronts this issue in his study of the military equipment of metal. He notes that a large number of the deposits on military sites which yield significant quantities of such material are abandonment deposits. Thus the material is not the result of random, casual loss, but of selection for discard. This must inevitably skew the representation towards the more fragile or the more difficult to maintain; for instance *lorica segmentata* may be greatly over-represented by comparison with chain-mail. It may also help explain the selection of the leather objects in the Phase 1c midden. His comments should be required reading.

The concluding section tries to 'read' the uses to which buildings were put from the objects found in them. Sometimes this is on the basis of a numerically small collections of objects upon which little weight can be put. More serious, perhaps, is again issues of site-formation. The discussion makes it clear that there were identifiable episodes where material was brought from outside the immediate area for re-use (for instance, the levelling deposits over the burnt granary in Structure AW). This certainly means that artefacts already discarded elsewhere could be incorporated into such deposits; analyses of building function using such material would inevitably be compromised. There is also an implicit assumption, commonly made, that artefacts from structures are in some way casual 'losses' from use and therefore reflect the activities carried out in a structure/area. But this is not necessarily the case, both because of vagaries of site-formation and because of preferential recovery of large and/or valuable items. Moreover, there may be crucial distinctions between the provenance and significance of objects incorporated into make-up or use surfaces as opposed to those deposited onto such surfaces. Sometimes the authors are able to address these distinctions as in the analysis of the deposits associated with Structure AX. Furthermore, objects which get into the archaeology are in a sense 'dead', either through loss or discard. As is widely acknowledged, patterns of discard may have only indirect relationships with patterns of use. For instance, several items of military equipment were found in the *vici*, were they used and/or discarded there, or did they get there subsequently from the fort as 'rubbish'? This might significantly affect the interesting topic touched on here of the relationship between the forts and *vici* as seen through the artefacts. In this reviewer's opinion, it is increasingly going to be essential to address such questions before undertaking functional analysis from objects. Perhaps in this case much of the concluding section should actually have prefaced the report?

The authors of the individual reports and of the concluding discussion are aware of some of these issues and do try to take them into account. Their not progressing further may perhaps be to do with the variable quality of the site records and/or the lack of a full stratigraphic report. It would, for example, have been very useful to have had distribution plots of many of the categories of artefact to aid in the sort of analyses outlined above. Castleford is a good example of why stratigraphic and artefact reports need to be integrated, to the benefit of both. But the authors and editors have done a very good job, and that some of the questions posed above can be posed at all (if not yet answered) is a testament to the intellectual quality of the report and the stimulus it provides to further thought about interrogating artefacts.