

Uwe Süssenbach, *Die Stadtmauer des römischen Köln*. Aus der *Kölner Stadtgeschichte*. Greven Verlag, Köln 1981. 104 pages, 57 figures.

For the many people who visit Köln, drawn by its rich wealth of Roman and Medieval remains, Dr. Süssenbach's book provides at once an introduction and a guide to one of the city's most impressive monuments. The vast circuit of Roman walls, once nearly 4 km long and enclosing nearly 97 hectares, is rightly known in the modern day as the Roman city's Monument no. 1. It is refreshing to find that so specialised an interest as a Roman city wall can form the subject of an attractively presented and well-illustrated volume such as this.

It must be said, of course, that the study of a city wall is a relatively easy task. A wall fixes the limits of a city's growth at some point in time, and throughout its subsequent history, it rarely disappears completely. In the case of Köln, where medieval and modern street-lines follow its outer edge round virtually the whole circuit, its course is well known and marked. It is also suitably massive, so that there is a good chance of substantial archaeological remains at many points on its line. Despite the high costs of examination and excavation which are a product of its sheer size, a city wall is often one of the easiest of a Roman city's monuments to trace, locate and study.

This modern bias must not be forgotten. There have been notable excavations at Köln within the city area, but much of its interior layout for all of the Roman history remains unclear. What exactly lay inside those 97 hectares, and why was such a massive circuit of walls built round it? How did the Roman colonists at Köln view their defensive walls? To them, doubtless, the public buildings of the city, the paraphernalia of Roman life, were the most important aspect. The walls, if they were considered at all, were probably designed to impress, to show off Roman power, and to act as a deterrent. It is doubtful, therefore, whether most Roman inhabitants of Köln would have thought of the walls as 'public monument no. 1'.

Quite apart from these historical speculations, this book touches on the problems in dating the walls archaeologically. To be sure, Tacitus does mention the walls of the colony twice, once in a passage of speechwriting, and once in a section recording a fire which swept almost to the walls of the city. Both events date within his narrative to the 50s AD. It is unlikely that Tacitus himself had seen the walls of Köln. His speeches are dramatic debates, and in this case the walls are mentioned only as symbols of Roman authority. The second reference to the walls could also be interpreted as a literary phrase, implying that the fire had stretched 'up to the outskirts of the city'.

Despite these reservations, if one can accept that Tacitus was aware of walls existing round the Colonia at this date, which walls does he mean? Süssenbach rightly draws attention to the so-called 'Ubierturm' or harbour tower at the south-eastern corner of the city. This shows that there were buildings of some size and pretension on the site prior to the stone wall being built. No mention or discussion is included in this context of the earlier legionary fortress which occupied the site, and which must itself have had defences. Is it not possible that the colony established under Claudius first took over the existing turf-and-timber defences of the legionary fortress, leaving the stone walls to be built at some later date? Without better archaeological evidence for the date of the stone walls, and for the overall development of the site as a settlement of the Ubii, through Roman legionary fortress to colony, it is still guesswork to state that the circuit of stone walls was built in AD 50. There is a danger that this will become an accepted and unthinking horizon, which might cause other archaeological discoveries to be wrongly dated.

Süssenbach rightly takes up most of the book in a description of the surviving remains, not only the impressive Römerturm with its peculiar decorations, but other fragments in such unlikely places as the sacristy of the Cathedral, incorporated into the wall of a block of flats, and within a tobacconist's kiosk. It is pleasant to see that the city of Köln is prepared to take the preservation of its Roman walls so seriously, and also to see how the preservation of each small piece of wall – perhaps on its own not so significant – can contribute in sympathetic hands to an impressive presentation of the whole monument.

The decorations of the Römerturm, also found in fragmentary form in other towers on the circuit, have for a long time fascinated and puzzled scholars. The author draws attention to the *opus reticulatum* patterning on the walls of Fréjus as a possible parallel, but the black-and-white effect is not found there. A closer parallel, both black and white work and a similar spiky effect, is found on the curious monument at Cinq-Mars la Pile, in the Loire Valley. The suggestion that the topmost element of the decorative scheme on the Köln Römerturm is a later addition is of interest.

The book is overall a compact, attractive and readable account of this major Roman monument. It is well presented, with well-chosen coloured and black-and-white photographs. It thus complements and enhances the work of excavating, exposing and preserving the city walls which has been carried out to such good effect in recent years.