

Book Reviews

Matthew Symonds, *Protecting the Roman Empire. Fortlets, Frontiers and the Quest for Post-Conquest Security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, 251 p.

There is no doubt that the most common subjects of the historiography regarding the military aspects of the frontiers of the Roman Empire are, by far, the major military sites such as legionary fortresses, auxiliary forts and the civilian cores that developed in their vicinity (generally known as *cannabae legionis* and *vici militares*). However, in the past several years, some researchers focused their interest on the so-called minor fortifications, known as watchtowers and fortlets, ubiquitous physical components within each distinct sector of the Roman *limites*. Their functionality is so particular that the only way to (truly) understand them in relation with the micro landscape of each distinct frontier area is to analyze them within the larger context of the Empire, using every available source, from written records and old archaeological excavations to geophysics and geo-statistical data. The book that we want to present it briefly in the following pages focuses precisely on this type of minor frontier fortifications, not in a descriptive manner but in a way that tries to understand their functionality in relation with the general Roman policy of ensuring and consolidating their post-conquest frontier security, commonly known as *pax Romana*.

Matthew Symonds' *Protecting the Roman Empire. Fortlets, Frontiers and the Quest for Post Conquest Security* published in 2018 at Cambridge University Press is an extended and well documented monograph built around the subject of the Roman provincial security and the network of the so-called *outpost* - the fortlets (medium-sized military installations called, *praesidia* or milecastles) and the watchtowers (commonly known as *turres*). The studied area is represented by the western part of the Roman Empire, the *limites* located on the modern territory of Germany, Britain, Switzerland and France, within a timespan falling between the 1st - 4th centuries CE.

In his quest to understand how the frontier control is strengthened, Symonds argues that these *outposts* (freestanding fortlets, frontier fortlets and watchtowers) are absolutely necessarily in the *longue durée* process of consolidating the control of borders and their communities, along with the disintegration of the small-scale threats such

as reduced barbarian riders or different types of thieves and insurgents (the so-called *hit and run* bands, as P. Southern named them).

A strong point of the book is that Symonds analyses the outposts in frontier context (linear frontiers, river frontiers, coastlines and *limes* roads), combining the archaeological data from the western frontiers of the Roman Empire with the subtextual data (papyri and *ostraca*) from the Eastern Desert *praesidia*, in an attempt to reconstruct the everyday life of the soldiers garrisoned in these minor fortifications.

The book is divided into three main parts, eight chapters and an introductory section, through which the author acquaints us with the main concepts of the monograph: *fortlet* and *tower*. According to Symonds, the fortlets are small military enclosures designed to hold a reduced number of soldiers drawn from the auxiliary forts (the number varies from type to type) in order to ensure the security of certain border areas. Their construction pattern is less predictable compared to the auxiliary of legionary camps, thus, their planning being different from case to case (the barrack blocks or the gateways are, however, common aspects). The watchtowers on the other hand are the smallest military installations within the Roman frontier security system, their main purpose being the surveillance of certain border areas and transmission of messages to fortlets or even auxiliary forts.

In Part I, *Consolidating Conquest*, the author pointed out the fact that, in various regions of the Empire, the number of the outposts grew rapidly as a direct consequence of changing the imperial policy in terms of Rome's boundaries, the focus being moved from the territorial expansions and offensive campaigns on the process of consolidating the frontiers. Following these aspects, the component chapters of this part discusses the presence of the outposts in two specific frontier landscapes: the river frontiers or the *Waterways* (Chapter 2) and the *limes* roads or the *Highways* (Chapter 3). The case studies from the 2nd chapter are the Danube *limes* in Raetia, the Lower Rhine sector and Exmoor Coast, questioning the planning and the changing architecture of the fortlets, their relations with the main military bases but mainly their main role within the coastal control and surveillance. The 3rd chapter follows the same interpretations based on case studies, this time being analyzed the spatial pattern along the *limes* roads from Wales, Germany and Scotland (the Gask Ridge system and the southwestern area of Scotland). Symonds highlights the so-called *fort-fortlet-fort* pattern developed especially as a road security system in which the fortlets played a major role in the commutation network, being rather security installations than trading outposts.

Border Control is the 2nd part of the monograph in which Symonds makes a very intelligent and interesting comparative analyses between the three most illustrative artificial frontiers of the Roman Empire: *Hadrian's Wall* (Chapter 4), *The Antonine Wall* (Chapter 5), *The Upper German and Raetian Limites* (Chapter 6). The major similarities and differences are given by the fact that each artificial system is designed to respond to a specific situation, defined mainly by the landscape, the military pattern, the late Iron Age background and the local population.

By analyzing their design and function separately, Symonds underscores the fact Hadrian's Wall was constructed not as a frontier that regulated the *intra* or *extra provinciam* traffic but more as a complete architectural novelty designed to stop the small-scale attacks by the rapid interventions of the troops garrisoned in the milecastles, with the help of the turrets' surveillance. In turn, the Antonine Wall is argued to be not a mechanical import of the Hadrian's Wall design (a design which took almost no account of the landscape) but a new and adapted frontier system to the realities of Scotland. Hence the irregularity of the Antonine fortlets compared to the milecastles, the flexibility of the inner planning and spatial distribution of the minor installations being a strong argument for Symonds to consider the Antonine Wall a more efficient and well-planned frontier system.

The Upper German and Raetian *limes* is considered to be a more flexible system compared to the other to artificial frontiers. This frontier system is dominated by *localism*, its dynamics creating an irregular spatial distribution in the use of the outposts. The geographical conditions and the human factor, together with the military tactics and decisions created a responsive frontier, a system that is characterized by a fully adaptation to the indigenous dynamics, being, as the author mentioned, *a mercurial frontier*.

Finally, for the analyses to be complete, Symonds outlines the purpose of the fortlets and the watchtowers in the 3rd and the 4th centuries. In the part called *Provincial Collapse*, the author focuses on the use of the outpost in a series of areas that were not previously included in the Roman security system. In contrast to the 1st - early 3rd outposts, Symonds considers that the late ones are more adapted to the local context, although they play the same security role, countering the reduced threats. The *Late Highways* (Chapter 7) and the *Late Waterways* (Chapter 8) are shaped in such way to fit the local terrain for local purposes, giving the examples of the outpost near Cologne or Stainmore pass.

Returning to the title of the book, we can say the main idea of the author is that the outposts – the fortlets and the watchtowers were more than necessary in those areas where the *pax Romana* needed an increased level of security. The density of such military installations is a conclusive barometer for the security of a particular region. The role and the daily life of the garrisoned troops is highlighted by the means of internal planning and the written records of the soldiers that served on the Roman frontiers.

The aspect which I do not necessary fully agree with is that Symonds does not consider the possibilities that the fortlets could have played a role in establishing trade relations with the indigenous barbarian populations, aspect confirmed by several discoveries from the frontier of Dacia Porolissensis.

In the end, we want to underscore that the work of M. Symonds is of great importance and a step forward in understanding the complex mechanism of the Roman frontiers and their security. We believe that by adding new data from other provinces that were not included by the author in his study, like Pannonia, Dacia, Moesia, Thracia or Asia, the established analysis model will be both reconfirmed and refined.

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Alina Streinu, Vase antice de sticlă din colecția “Maria și Dr. George Severeanu”. /The Glass Vessels in the “Maria și Dr. George Severeanu” Collection. Seria Colecția “Maria și Dr. George Severeanu” III. Editura Cetatea de scaun, Târgoviște, 2019, 264 p. (212 p. text with illustrations + 50 coloured plates). ISBN 978-606-537-447-8.

The Glass Vessels in the “Maria și Dr. George Severeanu” Collection represents the third volume of “Maria și Dr. George Severeanu” Collection Serie aiming to an as complete publication of the artefacts from this collection as possible in the near future. The above-mentioned collection represents probably one of the largest private collections of antiquities from Romania, today being part of the Bucharest Municipal Museum. The Collection is displayed in George Severeanu Museum, the house owned by the Severeanu family, recently restored, being one of the most beautiful History Museums in Bucharest and