

John Pearce on optional depth study: 'Ruling Roman Britain, AD 43–c.128'

part 1 (context): begins at 07:29 and ends at 32:26 (25 mins)

This shorter section is addressed mainly to the 'conquest' element of the Roman Britain depth study. It considers the different ways in which the conquest can be described and interpreted, with a focus on the value of literary evidence, especially the biography of Agricola. It sets the scene for the more detailed focus on the Vindolanda tablets in the second part of the presentation.

part 2 (focused discussion): begins at 32:26 and ends at 49:27 (17 mins)

This longer section examines the Vindolanda writing tablets as evidence for the 'Frontier Policy...' element of the Roman Britain depth study, especially for a 'bottom-up' view of the frontier. The tablets and their context are briefly introduced before investigating individual tablets (set as prescribed sources), focused on the birthday invitation (Tab. Vindol. 2.291), the military strength report (2.154) as well as the description of British cavalry (2.164) and journey expenses (2.185).

-1st 90 yrs (1/4 of province's existence) dynamic period for establishing Roman rule/character of province

-Compare and contrast different sources e.g., histories and archaeological documents

-extension of Rome's de facto power (through violence or diplomacy)

-creation of geographical and ethnographic knowledge (interesting place of Britain)

-institutions to govern and exploit

-economic effects

-interactions between indigenous and Roman culture

-military/frontier policy/resistance/effects of Roman rule

-The conquest story – process during 1st C AD (lots of authors writing about this 40yr period, but references)

-Less literary material after the governorship of Agricola (Tacitus' biography – unique systematic history for place on fringes of Roman empire – Agricola compared to predecessors in Britain – over-influential on our understanding of the conquest?)

-Mapping campaigns by governor AD 43-84/5 (rapid conquest of Southeast, then much slower until Agricola)

-Explanations in Tacitus: military aptitude, experience, character

-impact of Iron Age socio-political structures?

-Centralised polities in SE Britain? vs fragmented upland societies

-Rational process of conquest? Reputation/material gain

-Frontiers vs imperium sine fine

-Imperial impediments

-Testing the Agricola vs. archaeological + epigraphic evidence e.g. lead ingot found in Wrexham 2019 (familial context and partisanship; genre and purpose – annals, ethnography, history, biography, encomium, forensic? – good men + bad emperors?)

-Conquests of peoples vs. conquest of landscape

-few references to Britain in historical sources after Agricola

-Archaeological/epigraphic evidence for conquest – how do we use it?

Part 2: Vindolanda writing tablets

- representation of Roman power (garrison established in early 80s end of Agricola's governorship – 4th +5th C AD)
- Remains of late Roman fort + civilian settlements outside that fort (good preservation of organic material – stratified phases of military occupation)
- end of reign Hadrian/Trajan – tablets date
- Auxiliary garrison. not Roman soldiers but Northern Belgian & Dutch soldiers
- Flavius Cerialis (in charge of 9th unit of Batavians – lots of documentation of him and his household)
- Written in old Roman cursive
- How can we use them as sources?
- Letter format or admin documents
- Birthday invitation – evidence of female literacy, relationships between aristocratic women/families of fort commanders, evidence of travel between forts, aristocratic lifestyles, military postings
- vs. TVII 233 (draft letter, fragmentary)
- PS Tab. Vindol. II. 154 Strength Report – world of soldiers, split of garrison at Vindolanda (only 300 soldiers present there), flexibility of garrisoning, movements of soldiers, patrol and policing of landscape, inventory of frontier army v. detailed, uses of this info, living conditions of ordinary soldiers
- Mostly internal communications, few refs to indigenous publication
- PS Tab Vindol. II. 164 – the Britons – resistance, Briton fighting habits, landscape, recruitment (?), processes of conquest, refs to exploitation of local resources in other tablets
- Vindolanda tablets online, Roman inscriptions of Britain
- How the army operates at a local level to control a landscape

Creating activity(ies)/resource(s) for your video

Decide purpose and (if appropriate) whether for classroom viewing or out of classroom viewing (e.g. flipped learning)

Ideally start with a pre-viewing activity/resource

Then an activity/resource for the watching phase

Then post-viewing

Extension: create your own extension

[Or just select one]

Appoint a spokesperson and have notes/resource etc ready for screensharing

Learning Objective: Students have a better understanding of the concept of source utility and what we can learn through different sources.

Starter/pre-viewing: Stills from actual video as starter of different types of sources e.g. pics of Vindolanda tablets, site map, archaeological material – what are these? Can we match them to different key words e.g. epigraphic, archaeological, etc.

Watch video (part 2): Blank table, Ss decide what headings of areas of life in Roman Britain that we can learn about from sources, put these headings on a table as they're watching e.g. social, transport, economy etc.

Post-viewing activity: Discuss headings that Ss have come up with. Agree what headings should be Pre-prepared table with pre-decided headings based on those in video, students have other sources e.g. different Vindolanda tablet, piece of administrative source, passage from Tacitus, piece of archaeological material. Ss fill out the table, then present to everyone else. (Extension: think about the overall reliability and utility of your source).

Plenary: Class debate – if you could only have one of the sources to learn about Roman Britain, which one would you choose? Justify your choice.

Homework: exam-style source utility question

Example of idea for table:

	What does the source tell us about Roman Britain?			
Type of Source	Military	Social	Economic	Landscape
Vindolanda Tablet 1				
V Tablet 2				
V Tablet 3				
Excerpt from <i>Agricola</i>				
Archaeological material e.g. iron rod, coin?				
Inscription e.g. <i>Laterculus Veronensis</i>				