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**Roman Dymock: Archaeological Investigations 1995-2002,
Regional Context**

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and that the settlement was shrinking to a focus outside the areas so far investigated. Occurring during a time of relative peace and security, such a decline is most likely explained as the result of economic or political factors that have left no archaeological trace.

The excavations reported above have little to tell us about the later settlement except that it was not focused on any of the sites. That there was a settlement at Dymock throughout the 3rd and 4th centuries is proven by, amongst other things, the coin finds, both those published and those posted on the Portable Antiquities Scheme website, which indicate on-going coin loss through at least to the house of Valentinian. Local place-name evidence suggests that the Dymock area kept its British identity and language longer than most of Gloucestershire (Smith 1965, 29).

Current evidence therefore does not indicate that Roman Dymock was totally abandoned but that it shrank or changed its character and moved, or both. The sewage works site is located on the edge of a low river bluff overlooking the river Leadon. It is sited on a not inconsiderable slope with higher and more level ground to the west at the location of the medieval church and level ground to the east at the cricket pitch. These topographically more favourable sites may or may not have continued in use. The location of a post-medieval 'stoneberrow' field to the south-west (Fig. 12; Gwatkin 1992) may suggest a further area worth investigating for signs of the later settlement. The character of the later settlement is not known. Whether it shrank to a smaller village, became a scatter of farms, or developed into the estate centre of a local aristocrat remains to be seen. No indication of a late Roman villa has so far been discovered within the immediate area, the little-understood site at Donnington mentioned in to the introduction to these combined reports being, so far, the only nearby candidate.

Regional Context

By TOBY CATCHPOLE

The picture of Romano-British rural settlement in the Severn Vale has become fairly well established. Recent publication of the excavations at Bishop's Cleeve (Parry 1999; Enright and Watts 2002), Tewkesbury (Walker *et al.* 2004), Cheltenham (Catchpole 2002) and Brockworth (Thomas *et al.* 2003) suggest a pattern more indicative of the continuation of late Iron-Age traditions than of major changes after the Roman conquest. This information has recently been summarised by Neil Holbrook in papers to the 25 years of Gloucestershire Archaeology Conference and the Birmingham Roman Archaeology Conference (2006, 108–14). Following Millett (1990, fig 16), late Iron-Age Dymock was within the tribal area recognised by the Romans as Dobunnic, an area of centralised control where the Romans supported existing power structures rather than imposed their own, an argument which is consistent with the available Dymock evidence. A different pattern is suggested by Peter Guest's recent work at a 1st-century site at Lyonshall, Herefordshire, 45 km to the north-west of Dymock, where Iron-Age farming traditions continue similarly but with virtually no evidence of Romanised material culture to indicate changes after the Roman conquest (Peter Guest pers. comm.).

The major difference between Dymock and the recently published sites in the Severn Vale is the evidence for metal working. A recent summary of the Forest of Dean iron industry in the Roman period suggested that a group of centralised production centres could be identified in the

1st two centuries AD, after which they declined (Hoyle *et al.* 2004, 12), perhaps to be replaced by smaller scale and intermittent production at villa estates and towns. It is also possible that production shifted from centres north of the Forest to sites such as Woolaston (Fulford and Allen 1992) and Blakeney (Barber and Holbrook 2000), utilising the Severn fringes of the Forest and the easier transportation to developed markets that access to the river allowed. The influence of Worcester is difficult to assess as the chronology of the iron industry there is not fully understood. Current evidence, however, suggests a predominantly later Roman industry and that large-scale smelting did not commence until several decades after it had apparently ceased at Dymock (Burnham and Wachter 1990, 232–4; Dalwood and Edwards 2004, 41, 45).

Ariconium is the largest of the known centralised centres of the early Romano-British iron industry in the Forest of Dean area. The evidence for the settlement has recently been collected and assessed (Jackson 2003) and there is a strong case that Dymock is similar in many respects, if on a much smaller scale. Jackson argues that indigenous élites continued to control the area, including the iron industry, and that the settlement operated a mixed economy of which iron working was only a part. As at Dymock, there is evidence from *Ariconium* for the production of copper-alloy brooches alongside iron working.

Dymock is not alone as an outlier from the main Forest of Dean centres of iron production. Newent, 5.5 km to the south-east, is known to have ore sources. Ore was mined at Oxenhall near the town in the 19th century and waste cinders from iron production were re-worked from at least the 17th century. The May Hill area, south-west of Newent, is also known as an ore source (Hoyle *et al.* 2004, 89). Unfortunately the only Roman iron-working site so far excavated at Newent was carried out under salvage conditions after a site strip (Erskine 1996) but slag dumps and pits, ditches and gullies containing much slag and Roman pottery were recorded. Presumably much more remains to be investigated in the area.

A potentially interesting parallel to Dymock is *Margidunum*, on the Fosse Way near Bingham, Nottinghamshire, where a series of 1st-century ditched enclosures containing timber buildings and slag filled pits was excavated producing high-quality pottery and metal work (Burnham and Wachter 1990). Both Dymock and *Margidunum* are insufficiently well understood to do more than point out a possibility of a recurring pattern at this stage.

We can therefore see Dymock as one of a group of settlements involved in varying scales of iron production in the Forest of Dean and the surrounding area in the early Roman period. These sites show signs of the trappings of Romanised wealth in their material culture at an early date but, although we now have some evidence that Dymock may have housed a minor establishment of the *Cursus Publicus*, the wider picture on current evidence is that local control over the trade brought high-status items to the indigenous élites, who nevertheless continued their own traditions in many aspects of their lives.

Future Research Directions

By TOBY CATCHPOLE

Much remains to be clarified, not only regarding the early Roman period, about which these excavations have much to say, but also regarding the later phases of activity in the 2nd century