

# Archaeological dating methods, was: ARCHAEOLOGY VERSUS TACITUS' AGRICOLA was to Paul Burke Re: Grænlinga þáttur

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From: Doug Weller ([dweller\\_at\\_ramtops.removethisdemon.co.uk](mailto:dweller_at_ramtops.removethisdemon.co.uk))

Date: 03/18/05

Date: Fri, 18 Mar 2005 06:00:47 +0000

On Thu, 17 Mar 2005 23:33:17 GMT, in sci.archaeology, I.E\_Johansson wrote:

>  
> "Doug Weller" <[dweller@ramtops.removethisdemon.co.uk](mailto:dweller@ramtops.removethisdemon.co.uk)> skrev i meddelandet  
> news:up0k315fk0tlj932sjpqs8cmpgo9o5bqvm@4ax.com...  
>> On Thu, 17 Mar 2005 21:58:48 GMT, in sci.archaeology, I.E\_Johansson wrote:  
>> [SNIP]  
>> > Many of the Roman sites in England have been dated  
>> > using comparing methods – this or that type of pottery, mosaic etc. Very  
> few  
>> > have been presented with C14 dating from every single layer and every  
> part  
>> > of a building.  
>>  
>> I doubt that you have evidence for this, but in any case, why would you  
>> expect C14 dating to be more accurate than dating using artistic style or  
>> pottery type? I note you don't mention coins.  
>  
> Lets start with the last thing first. OK?  
> I didn't mention coins because what a coin gives is the earliest possible  
> time when exactly that there are over it could have been made given that you  
> aren't dealing with mixed layer due to too deep agricultural activity then  
> it could as you yourself in an alike situation pointed out been placed there  
> anywhere between that date and now.

The correct terminology for what you are referring to is terminus post quem, ('the end after which'. Not all Roman ruins in Britain are found in agricultural areas and of course anything dated by C14 could have the same problems you mention.

>  
> Why I expect C-14 to give better information than pottery. I thought you  
> were a scholar of science. Could be wrong you know. Anyhow C-14 definitely  
> give better dating than artistic work, pottery or such. I personally hold  
> dendrocronology when it's possible to be more accurate but as some pointed

>out the other day it depends on the areas where the tree grow. Could in some  
>cases be hard to establish the 'year-rings'. My supervisor for the C-essay,  
>Vattenvägarna in mot Roxen i äldre tider, Jan Eriksson has always been  
>specialist in dendrocronology and thus I might have been influenced by him.

Since you would be lucky to get C14 dating that is even as accurate as giving you a date with a 95% probability error of being within 100 years, and you might well have an error range of several centuries, I don't think you've made a case.

>  
>Of course I know of the problem when C-14 without calibration (but also with  
>depending on many factors).

Without calibration it's useless. I'm referring to with calibration. Most dating methods have problems, the best thing to do is to use several and not rely on one particular one -- although dendro is very good and can be very reliable in the right circumstances.

Never the less the C-14 dating is much more  
>'specific' than any kind of artistic or pottery comparing methods. First of  
>all the later needs that you have got correct value for the first one to  
>which others been compared. That's definitely not always so. Then you have  
>to admit that neither you, I nor anyone else knows if a specific type of  
>pottery were produced before artifact x which has been used to compare with  
>and how long after that type was done. We only know what have been found,  
>not what's under soil in unexcavated areas. Compared with written  
>documentation that type of dating sucks, which C-14 don't no matter the  
>problems involved.  
>>  
>> > Last days I have looked at some films from excavations of  
>> >Roman Houses, Roman Fort etc in England up to Hadrian's wall. I can't say  
>> >that I would really on any of the Roman period specialist archaeologists  
>in  
>> >cases where both Tacitus and other contemporary with Agricola give other  
>> >dating.  
>>  
>> Snicker. It's fascinating that you can judge archaeologists by looking at  
>> films of excavations, but not surprising that you don't like them.

>  
>I have been on excavations, many times, talked about the excavations of  
>Roman houses and such in England them I never seen directly. I thought I had  
>made it clear to you long ago that I have worked together with  
>archaeologists. In three of my jobs as well as when writing my C-essay and  
>the D-essay/thesis I worked with and had help by archaeologists. I had to  
>because some of the needed validation wasn't mine to make nor was it my MA  
>friends. It took more knowledge for some of it.

So your claim that looking at films led you to the conclusion that you wouldn't rely on 'Roman period specialist archaeologists' isn't in fact the case.. It was what we call a red herring. And you haven't read any detailed publications from British Romano-British specialists dealing with

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the matter. Ok.

Doug>Inger E

>>

>> [snip]

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>> Doug

>> --

>> Doug Weller -- exorcise the demon to reply

>> Doug & Helen's Dogs <http://www.dougandhelen.com>

>> A Director and Moderator of The Hall of Ma'at <http://www.hallofmaat.com>

>> Doug's Archaeology Site: <http://www.ramtops.co.uk>

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