



## Book Reviews

### **CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON THE FIRST MILLENNIUM BC: PROCEEDINGS OF THE IRON AGE RESEARCH STUDENT SEMINAR 2006, EDITED BY OLIVER DAVIS, NIAL SHARPLES & KATE WADDINGTON**

*Oxbow. Oxford. 2008. 248pp, 77 B&W figs, 33 tables, ISBN 978-1-84217-326-8 (£35)*

This is the second volume to derive from the annually held Iron Age Research Student Seminars (IARSS) which were established in 1998 as an informal forum in which to present current research projects. The last volume covered the 1998-2000 conferences (Humphrey 2003) with this attractive successor based entirely on the conference held in Cardiff in 2006. Sufficient time has elapsed between these volumes for this one to represent an entirely new generation of scholars which allows for some broader reflections on the direction of recent Iron Age research. Richard Hingley (2004) reviewed the first IARSS volume for the Prehistoric Society and it is perhaps pertinent to revisit some of the points he raised in order to gauge the state of Iron Age studies.

One of the most significant contrasts between this volume and its predecessor is the large number of papers here from researchers working in heritage management or commercial archaeology (six of the fourteen contributors). Such a widening of participation is encouraging and highlights the potential and quality of research being undertaken in the commercial sector. As the editors point out, there has also been a substantial increase in the number of papers available (fourteen in this volume; ten in Humphrey 2003) indicating both the increasing success of the conference and the health of Iron Age research in general.

The focus of the papers in the volume is British centric, with twelve of the papers considering British material, and the remaining two discussing Ireland and the Channel Islands. Of those papers concerned with Britain, ten focus on Southern England, the vast majority dealing with Wessex, whilst Scotland and Wales are the focus for only one paper each. Of course, the pattern here somewhat reflects the location of the conference, and publication of previous IARSS sessions in Edinburgh (2005) and Glasgow (2002) would undoubtedly provide greater numbers of papers on northern Britain. However, there does appear to be an enduring trend in Iron Age studies to concentrate on central southern England, a criticism which has also been levelled at other recent Iron Age volumes (Hingley 2007). Despite pleas to redress the balance of research to include greater discussion of the rest of Britain (Bevan 1999; Haselgrove *et al.* 2001) there seems a continued tendency by each generation to return its focus to Wessex.

Also notable in this volume is the lack of contributions from colleagues beyond the British Isles. Correspondingly, there are few papers, Driscoll and McGarry being exceptions, which discuss the British Isles in a wider European context or which examine aspects of the continental European Iron Age. This reflects an overall trend in postgraduate research over the last twenty years which, despite an increasing number of doctorates focusing on the Iron Age, has seen a steady decline in those dealing with continental material. This may suggest a need for IARSS to engage with those working on the continental Iron Age and perhaps for greater links with the Iron Age student workshops held elsewhere in Europe. Over the long-term, there is a danger that the divergence of research between Britain and the rest of Europe may lead to an increasing division in approaches and methodologies, as well as limiting the dissemination of research, with the concomitant threat of parochialism setting in on both sides of the channel.

In 2004, Hingley noted a disparity between contributors to the comparable volumes resulting from the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference and that from IARSS, leading him to suggest Iron Age research seemed less gender biased. This volume does not support such optimism, containing eleven male authors and only three female. The pattern of research also generally repeats that noted by Hingley: of male researchers focusing on landscape archaeology and females on material culture and palaeopathology. I am more uncomfortable than was Hingley in drawing broad ranging conclusions from such patterns, and papers here by Rennell and Waddington certainly break down such boundaries. However, it is perhaps concerning that patterns should be observable at all and that they appear relatively undiminished. Considering the settlement and landscape research interests of many prominent younger female researchers in British Iron Age archaeology (eg, Mel Giles and Rachel Pope) we should surely expect this trend to alter in future.

Broad patterns aside, what of the individual papers? The volume commences with an introductory paper which places the volume within the wider context of first millennium studies in Britain and outlines the coherent theoretical perspective of the editors. The rest of the collection is split in to three groups: settlement studies, deposition and material culture, and experimental archaeology (although with only one paper in the last category). This broadly reflects the divisions seen in Humphrey's volume and those in other Iron Age edited volumes. However, the papers in each section ensure that such simple divisions are not especially meaningful; Waddington and Rees for instance both

contextualise deposition and practice within the wider settlement landscape, Brudenell uses ceramics to re-examine problems of chronology, whilst Driscoll contextualises material culture patterns in the Channel Islands in terms of wider European exchange networks.

Throughout the volume recurring topics, including the nature of 'structured deposition' in various forms (Morris; Lally; Madgwick; Waddington) and the role and meaning of settlement boundaries (Davis; Rees; Toase) dominate, continuing the trends established in earlier Iron Age volumes (eg, Gwilt & Haselgrove 1997). Yet, whilst the geographic focus on Wessex may continue, the earlier models derived from these regions have certainly not been perpetuated. An encouraging new perspective is apparent, which runs through many of the papers, whereby a range of new methodological approaches are applied to the theoretical challenges posed by earlier researchers. In the first section on landscapes, for example, Rennell uses GIS to explore the visual landscapes of Hebridean settlement, whilst Rees systematically examines the role of re-cutting and modifying boundaries. The focus on middens by a number of papers (Waddington; Tullet) also marks a desire for a new generation to re-examine these enigmatic monuments. Landscape studies by Davis and Toase also take a localised level of analysis to explore paradoxes in the relationships between enclosures, noticeably moving beyond the meta-analyses of many of their forbears. Other papers emphasise the potential of the wealth of new data available, such as the increasing burial evidence from Ireland (McGarry) and the settlement data-sets presented by rescue archaeology, assessed by Rees and Brudenell.

In studies of treatment of the dead and deposition, many papers again cut across the boundaries once applied between human and animal; ritual and functional. Lally forces us to reconsider the discreet definitions of treatment of the dead, developing more nuanced, agency-centred ways of understanding the treatment of human remains. Redfern meanwhile suggests violence was more prevalent in certain sectors of the populace than is often assumed. Papers by Madgwick and Morris explore in more detail the patterning behind animal bone groups, noting the problems in the definitions of these deposits and the processes behind them. All four papers are characterised by critical and systematic approaches to the re-examination of 'structured deposition', testing the assumptions that have developed over the last fifteen years concerning Iron Age deposition practices. The final paper, by Rhys, asks us to move beyond analysis to reconstruction, exploring the dynamism and difficulties of attempting to reconstruct Iron Age life-ways. This appropriately concludes the volume by reminding us of the key goal of dissemination to a wider audience and the unique challenges such endeavours provide, an area of discussion frequently neglected in comparable studies of the Iron Age.

Characteristic of all the papers here is their use of new methodologies combined with considered theoretical perspectives. Some papers clearly present work-in-progress, reflecting their origins in ongoing research, meaning that, for some, their full conclusions and implications are yet to be realised. However, the papers are consistently of a high standard and all make a significant contribution to the study of the Iron Age, offering new insights which will undoubtedly stimulate debate. Overall, this volume indicates that Iron Age postgraduate studies are in rude health and the editors are to be commended in bringing together such a vibrant range of papers and in completing the volume so quickly after the conference (no mean feat). The quality of this volume and the papers here-in, leads one to hope that IARSS volumes will emerge more regularly in future in order to maintain the dynamism displayed here.

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