



Book Reviews

THE ARRAS CULTURE OF EASTERN YORKSHIRE – CELEBRATING THE IRON AGE: PROCEEDINGS OF ‘ARRAS 200 – CELEBRATING THE IRON AGE’, ROYAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 2017 EDITED BY PETER HALKON

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Two hundred years ago, spectacular discoveries were made at Arras Farm, near Market Weighton, East Yorkshire, where excavations revealed a cemetery including a burial containing a chariot with two horses and another with fine bracelets, a glass bead necklace and a rare gold ring. Numerous finds have been made in East Yorkshire since and the region is rightly renowned for its rich Iron Age archaeology, particularly its cemeteries. This volume presents a collection of papers presented at a conference organised to celebrate the bicentenary of the Arras excavations, held at the Yorkshire Museum, York in November 2017. It is small, but perfectly formed. There are many colour photographs, diagrams and maps and it is a worthy tribute to the many outstanding researchers who have contributed to our understanding of the Iron Age of the region. The editor should also be congratulated on the well-balanced and varied choice of papers presented, ranging from fresh examinations of familiar subjects such as warfare and art, to reports on excavations past and present, as well as a review of the isotopic evidence and an appealing contribution detailing the construction of replica chariots. The final three chapters assess the archaeological evidence from East Yorkshire with a view respectively from the north, south and the Continent. There is also a nice balance between papers presented by well-established researchers and a new generation, but what links both is that they all bring fresh insights to the evidence.

It is difficult to pick out highlights because there is much to admire here, but I was particularly drawn to the chapter by Mark Stephens and Paula Ware presenting the interim results of the excavations at Pocklington. One hundred and seventy-two inhumations were excavated from a cemetery at Burnby Lane, including a chariot burial with horses. As if one chariot was not enough, there is also a brief report on a second cemetery from an undisclosed location which contained a second chariot burial, and perhaps more interestingly, a grave including the remains of an adult male buried with six goats and possibly a dog. As a final party trick, in a postscript, Stephens and Ware also report on the discovery in 2018 of a third chariot burial found at the Mile in Pocklington.

This is truly remarkable because two horses were buried upright in the grave as though they were pulling the buried vehicle. New discoveries are always very exciting, and I look forward to the full reports on these excavations, but a chapter with perhaps longer-lasting currency is a careful examination of some of the female graves from East Yorkshire written by Melanie Giles, Victoria Green and Pedro Peixoto. The so-called 'Queen's barrow' from Arras is a particular focus of study and, through careful examination of the grave goods present in female burials from the region, the authors show how connections between places and people from different generations were made manifest through the selection and placement of particular objects in graves. The women buried with these artefacts, they argue, were charismatic figures who in life were equally as well connected as the grave-goods selected to accompany them in death. A final paper which caught my attention was Mandy Jay's and Janet Montgomery's review of isotopic studies of the remains from the East Yorkshire cemeteries. Written a little over a decade after isotopic analysis first had such a large impact on our understanding of mobility and diet in the region, it presents a balanced and nuanced perspective of the potential and limitations of isotopic studies.

For the last part of this review I want to focus on the two chapters of the volume which aim to examine the archaeology of Iron Age East Yorkshire from the perspective of north and south Britain. Alongside Manuel Fernández-Götz's excellent view from the Continent, which focuses on migration, these papers bring an added dimension to the book presenting the opportunity to reassess exactly how representative the Iron Age of the region is. As Fraser Hunter points out in his 'northern view', the East Yorkshire Iron Age is one that archaeologists working in other regions often look on with envy. The rich burial and settlement evidence, notable excavation reports and impressive regional syntheses all create the impression of, as Hunter puts it, 'a proper Iron Age'. Yet, how representative is the Iron Age of East Yorkshire? Although some regions on the Continent (eg, north-east France) have rich burial traditions, these are a time limited phenomenon and, like Britain, many other areas lacked an obvious burial tradition for much of the Iron Age. As Hunter also points out, compared to other regions, East Yorkshire arguably has 'too many burials and too few hoards.' Hunter's chapter highlights a number of issues in terms of how the Iron Age has been studied which have long been recognised but are still present, such as its tendency to favour one type of Iron Age over another, focusing on regions like East Yorkshire or Wessex with readily identifiable burial traditions and/or settlement evidence of a certain character. In his 'view from the south', Timothy Champion takes a different but related approach, seeking evidence for inhumations in southern Britain. Through careful analysis he shows that, although still relatively uncommon, inhumations were more extensive than was once thought. A lack of direct evidence for chariots in burials also causes Champion to seek evidence for their use in southern Britain by carefully working through the implications of chariotry on the training and care of horses, the technical demands of the manufacture of chariots and also where people may have stored them. At the end of his chapter, Champion questions some previous approaches to Iron Age East

Yorkshire. For example, despite the seemingly large number of chariot burials, he asks how common were chariots in East Yorkshire in the Middle Iron Age? How were the horses raised and kept, etc.? Rather than taking the burial evidence at face value to suggest that chariots were a widespread phenomenon, he argues that only by seeking for evidence such as horse rearing and management and chariot manufacture can it be established if they were a familiar sight on the Wolds.

As the chapters throughout the book well illustrate, our knowledge of the Iron Age has been transformed over the last 30 years because of developer-funded archaeology, but also information collected from other sources such as the finds recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database (www.finds.org.uk). Much of this new information has filled in gaps in our knowledge, particularly for regions which traditionally have tended to be side-lined in Iron Age studies because of a perceived lack of evidence or because the evidence does not fit with how we expect (or want) it to look. Despite this, much of this new information is yet to be fully processed and synthesised against a wider regional and chronological backdrop. It is perhaps illustrative that two of the best books published on the Iron Age in the past decade were focused on Wessex (Sharples 2010) and East Yorkshire (Giles 2012). The idea of different or regional Iron Ages is not new (eg, Bevan 1999; Gwilt and Haselgrove 1997; Hill and Cumberpatch 1995) and, as I have already suggested, we can already present a much richer perspective on the different Iron Ages of Britain, including those that lack burials or extensive settlement evidence. But, as Melanie Giles (1998) pointed out some time ago, by stressing difference, similarities and links between regions and over time have been ignored or neglected. This does not undermine the legacy of Iron Age studies from East Yorkshire to our understanding of the British Iron Age, to which this volume is a worthy monument, but the time is ripe to set the impressive discoveries from the region against the exciting finds also being made elsewhere in a more cohesive and comprehensive way.

References

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