



Book Reviews

CARTIMANDUA'S CAPITAL? THE LATE IRON AGE ROYAL SITE AT STANWICK, NORTH YORKSHIRE, FIELDWORK AND ANALYSIS 1981–2011, EDITED BY COLIN HASELGROVE

Council for British Archaeology (CBA Research Report No. 175), York. 2016, 530+ xxi pp, 292 illustrations, hb, ISBN 9781902771984, £40.00

The massive Iron Age earthwork complex at Stanwick has long been regarded as a Brigantian 'royal' site, dating to the period of the Roman conquest. First excavated by Mortimer Wheeler in the early 1950s, the site's importance is suggested both by its dimensions, which far outstrip any contemporary settlement in the region, and by its strategic position in the Tees Valley; lying close to Scotch Corner, it was well-placed to oversee routeways leading east-west across the Pennines, as well as the main north-south route between southern and northern Britain. The fieldwork reported in this substantial volume was conducted primarily in the 1980s by Colin Haselgrove, along with a large team of collaborators. Whilst excavation focused on the enclosure known as the Tofts, which forms the hub of the Stanwick complex, targeted fieldwork was also conducted in other areas to provide the basis for a thorough review of the site as a whole.

The volume is divided into five parts. Part I sets out the background to the project, detailing the various programmes of research conducted at Stanwick since it was first surveyed in the mid-nineteenth century, and providing detailed descriptions of the earthworks and their landscape setting. In Part II, a series of chapters present the detailed archaeological evidence from the 1981–89 excavations. Most important is the evidence from the Tofts itself, where Site 9 comprised an extensive, open-area excavation (although still representing a relatively small proportion of the internal area of the enclosure). What is perhaps most striking is the sheer density of settlement activity and the rapidity with which successive structures were built, used and replaced over the relatively limited period of the site's use, from around 80/70 BC to AD 65/75 (perhaps five or six generations at most).

The earlier structures, dating to Periods 1–3 (first century BC), comprised a succession of small enclosures and circular buildings; if the excavated area is anything to go by, these must have been fairly numerous across the enclosure,. The most striking features of the succeeding Period

4, from around 30/20 BC–AD 30/40, are two successive timber circles represented by unusually large postholes which may have supported tower-like superstructures. Haselgrove suggests that these may have been monumental ritual buildings, analogous to those found on Irish ‘royal’ sites like Navan and Knockaulin a few decades earlier. This period also sees clear evidence for the arrival of imported Roman pottery, well before the Claudian invasion. Finally, in Period 5, dating to around AD 30/40–65/75, we see the appearance of circular stone buildings and the construction of the massive perimeter earthwork, nearly 7 km long, that established the complex as an unavoidable presence in the landscape. This enormous enclosure appears to have its closest parallels among continental rather than British oppida. This period also produced significant quantities of imported Roman material, including samian pots and fine glass vessels, argued to derive perhaps from a diplomatic gift intended to formalise links between Rome and the Brigantian elite.

The detailed chronological framework for these interpretations is provided by Derek Hamilton’s Bayesian analysis of the site sequence, which forms the final chapter of Part II. Here, 58 radiocarbon dates, many of them obtained as part of Hamilton’s PhD research (with Bayesian analysis in mind), provide the backbone for a detailed analysis of the site sequence. The Bayesian results are carefully evaluated against both the evidence of imported objects and the broader historical background of the Roman takeover. Of particular interest is the conclusion that the complex was abandoned before Roman occupation of region in AD 70s, under-scoring the close link between the Stanwick complex and the indigenous elite.

Part III comprises specialist reports on the various artefacts recovered, as well as chapters on the arable economy, animal husbandry and the surprisingly large assemblage of human remains (at least twenty individuals). Especially striking was the presence of inhumations associated with the rampart around the Tofts; in the narrow excavated section (Site 3), two crouched inhumations were uncovered along with the partial remains of a third adult, two children and four infants. At least two of the adult males bore evidence of weapon trauma to the head. The unexpected density of these human remains suggests that many more must lie along the length of the enclosure boundary; indeed Haselgrove speculates that around 200 individuals might be represented, with potentially vastly more around the much larger perimeter rampart. The Stanwick Environs form the focus of the two chapters that comprise Part IV. These include a detailed re-evaluation of the well-known Melsonby hoard, one of the largest Iron Age metalwork finds in the whole of Britain. Found in 1843 close to the south-east of Stanwick, it is argued here to potentially derive from a high status burial, perhaps contemporary with the later stages of occupation at Stanwick.

For many readers, the most valuable section of the book will be Part V, which provides an impressive (c. 120 page) synthesis of the results and their implications. Written almost entirely by Colin Haselgrove himself, the eight chapters provide great depth on subjects ranging from the agricultural context of the Stanwick landscape to the structure of Iron Age communities, and the evaluation of the written sources for the Roman annexation of northern England. Haselgrove is at pains throughout to stress the sophistication of the Stanwick complex, placing it on a par with territorial oppida in southern Britain such as Colchester and St Albans (despite long-held and unjustified scepticism that such a complex could have existed among the supposedly backward northern communities). Indeed, it seems beyond doubt that Stanwick was a royal site, intimately linked to the fortunes of the historically-documented Brigantian queen Cartimandua (an ally of Rome, notorious for having betrayed the indigenous war-leader Caratacus after his defeat in AD 51) and/or her estranged consort Venutius. Overall, this is an immensely useful volume, wide-ranging and full of ideas, which will provide a new basis for our understandings of the Iron Age in northern England and provoke discussion for many years to come.

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Editor