



Book Reviews

HILLFORTS AND THE DUOTRIGES. A GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY OF IRON AGE DORSET BY DAVE STEWART AND MILES RUSSELL

Archaeopress Archaeology. 2017 176pp, 111 illustrations, many in colour, pb, ISBN 978-178-4917159, £30.00

This volume reports on work which forms part of the Durotriges Project established by Bournemouth University in 2009. Although the wider project includes desk-based analysis and a range of field-based surveys and excavation, here the focus is on the geophysical survey of 21 hillfort interiors. This offers a good range of sites from large well known and studied hillforts such as Maiden Castle, Hambledon Hill and Hod Hill to small relatively unknown sites such as Coney's Castle and Lambert's Castle.

The first three chapters set the scene and outline the possible relationships between the Durotriges and Dorset hillforts. Chapter 1 acknowledges the important work of Papworth in 'deconstructing the Durotriges', that is moving the focus away from the historical accounts of the Durotriges and the Roman invasion that derived from the Wheelers' work at Maiden Castle and Richmond's at Hod Hill. The hillforts of Dorset were entangled within this account through the addition of Vespasian's campaign and his attacking of twenty hillforts across southern England. Here the focus is shifted to the archaeological evidence for the cultural 'footprint' of the tribe and is outlined in terms of coins, burial practices and artefacts together with issues of dating. Clearly hillforts need to be included in any reassessment of the Durotriges and the intention of this work was to attempt an understanding of their 'date, phasing, form, structure and possible function' from extensive geophysical survey. This is a major challenge from the outset although the earlier similar project by Payne of Wessex hillforts has shown the importance and potential of comparative survey results across a large number of hillforts.

Chapter 2 discusses the changing definitions of 'hillforts' and puts this work into a wider context. This includes a chronological component ranging from Cunliffe's early large hilltop enclosures to his later forms of developed hillforts. The emphasis is on interiors and discusses the differences, largely from the aforementioned Wessex project, ranging from very limited activity to dense, and sometimes zoned, patterns of pits, gullies and roundhouses suggesting occupation of some form. The next chapter builds on this and presents a summary of investigations into Dorset hillforts. This is a good and very useful account that progresses chronologically starting with 19th century plans, surface finds and small-scale excavations.

Larger excavations started with the Wheelers' work at Maiden Castle in the 1930s and the complexity of findings there are well known. The work of Whitley at nearby Chalbury in the immediate pre-war period, revealed a relatively simple single phase rampart but it is the interior evidence which is particularly interesting with over 70 circular depressions showing on the surface of which four were excavated, three possibly being roundhouses. Dating to c. 600 BC and probably being abandoned by the Middle Iron Age, Chalbury stands in sharp contrast to Maiden Castle and differentiating between the details of the two through geophysics reinforces the challenge faced here. Other important excavations summarised in Chapter 3 included Poundbury, Bindon Hill, Hod Hill, Eggardon, Pilsdon Pen, Maiden Castle again and Hambledon Hill.

The results of the survey are presented in Chapter 4 after a brief introduction to the technology used. Interest in doing this was initiated by an earlier survey of Hod Hill by one of the authors, Stewart, in 2005–7, which showed higher levels of 'internal organisation than had been anticipated'. Interpreting these findings in terms of the social use of space based on the perceived spatial organisation shown by geophysics was seen as justification for establishing a larger comparative set of results. The range of hillforts in Dorset covers the full gamut of sizes and types, from the massive 160 ha Bindon Hill to the small enclosure of North Poorton at only 0.4 ha. Not all Dorset hillforts are included in the survey, some due to tree cover while others are only partially surveyed due to dense vegetation. Even so, the resulting catalogue of a re-surveyed Hod Hill plus 20 other sites is an impressive achievement carried out by Stewart between 2013 and 14.

The catalogue is logically laid out with each site having three sections – The Site, Results and Interpretation. The work is lavishly illustrated with at least two or three colour photographs of each hillfort. Hillforts are not the easiest of sites to photograph and these have been well chosen with a mixture of aerial shots and details of ramparts and other features. The first section of text describes the surface morphology of the site and any previous work that has been done there. There is a new plan of each site which has been redrawn from the RCHME Dorset inventories, five volumes published between 1952 and 1975. It is a good idea to standardise the plans with similar symbology and scales and they certainly look attractive although some are a little confusing to use in conjunction with the text. In the absence of a key, the assumption is that orange represents rampart and grey ditch and, indeed, for some sites this works well (although I did find myself longing for the detail of a good hachure survey!). For others, however, a lack of grey suggests a lack of ditches even though in the text ditches are mentioned. For example, Chalbury is described as having 'a single, low rampart and external ditch' (page 48) whereas the plan shows two and possibly three ramparts and no sign of a ditch.

The results section systematically describes all of the anomalies as shown on a magnetometry plot. For each site there are two versions of the plot, one overlain on the earthwork plan and a larger version with the anomalies labelled. The text in both the Results and Interpretation sections refers to the labelled anomalies. A problem is that the labels are contained within white circles that tend to obliterate much of the anomaly itself so that checking them against the text requires going back and forth between the two plots. The problem is made worse when the first plot is small, as with Maiden Castle, so that individual features are hard to identify and match to the larger interpretation plot. A less obtrusive form of labelling would have aided visual interpretation.

The Interpretation sections are full of useful and thoughtful ideas. Not surprisingly, and as with the earlier Wessex survey, the interiors vary from showing very little evidence for activity to others that seem to have a large number of pits and possible post-built structures and roundhouses of different design. Some of the problems of interpreting geophysical data are illustrated by Pilsden Pen which shows more than 50 roundhouses through the combination of Gelling's excavations of 1977 and the new geophysical work. The suggestion here is that it was 'intensively occupied' although it is acknowledged that the site was probably in use for a long time due to 'phased re-modelling of the defences', and also some of the roundhouse gullies intercut each other showing phased building. Given the life of a roundhouse and the use-span of the site it is surely difficult to make claims such as 'intensively occupied'. Even at Hod Hill with evidence for over 200 roundhouses it is acknowledged that 'it is impossible to state with certainty how much of this represents contemporary habitation'. This gets to the essence of the difficulties of geophysical survey and hillfort interiors – the image is a snapshot of what in reality is a complex chronological palimpsest often spanning several centuries. This is important because it feeds into some of the wider interpretations of hillforts, whether they were permanently occupied or places that were visited for short term occupation by a dispersed community, for example. As this work illustrates, we should avoid simplistic single interpretations for hillforts, they were probably used for a range of activities that could well have changed over a long period of use.

Chapter 5 builds on elements of these arguments and discusses some of the limitations of geophysical survey. It includes much detail on different forms of roundhouses and aspects of the internal organisation of hillforts based on the overall survey results and other evidence. There is also a section on the post-Iron Age use of Dorset hillforts. The final chapter returns us to the Durotriges and is a strong and detailed account of the evidence for certain hillforts being strongholds of the tribe at the time of the Roman invasion. The conclusion is hinted at in the chapter's title – Uncoupling the Durotriges. It starts by reviewing and critiquing Wheeler's and Richmond's arguments for Maiden Castle and Hod Hill being attacked by the Romans, together

with Suetonius' description of Vespasian's campaign. It then moves on to examine the archaeological evidence from the so-called 'war cemetery' at Maiden Castle's eastern gate and the possible parallel at Spettisbury uncovered in the 19th century suggesting that these may be burials not associated with Roman attack at all. This detailed re-assessment argues strongly against Maiden Castle and Hod Hill being strongholds at the time of the invasion and indeed they seem more likely to be hillforts in decline with the focus for occupation having already moved away from them.

Overall this is a book which is important to anyone with an interest in the Iron Age of southern England and, indeed, the Iron Age more widely especially hillforts. The connection between the Durotriges and the evidence gleaned from the geophysical surveys is somewhat ephemeral and it is interesting that the final chapter hardly mentions the survey at all and would stand alone as a strong argument based on solely other evidence. Even so, the catalogue of survey results is an important body of data that will be used often alongside the Wessex geophysical survey in future arguments about the use of hillforts. As the last sentence in the book states 'it is time to consciously uncouple the Durotriges from the hillforts of Dorset and move on'.

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