Book Reviews

HOARDS, HOUNDS AND HELMETS. A CONQUEST-PERIOD RITUAL SITE AT HALLATON, LEICESTERSHIRE BY VICKI SCORE

University of Leicester Archaeological Services 2011.302 pp, 59 photographs (B&W and colour), 13 maps, 9 plans and sections (some grouped), 87 tables and graphs, plus catalogues. ISBN 978-0-9560179-6-3. Hb £32.00 + p&p

This hardback monograph presents the results of one of the most exciting Late Iron Age and Romano-British finds of recent years in the United Kingdom: the hoards (now popularly termed the "Hallaton Treasure") and associated features excavated at Hallaton, north of Market Harborough, in Leicestershire. Following an initial metal detecting find of over 200 Iron Age and Roman coins in 2000, a collaborative project between University of Leicester Archaeology Services (ULAS) and the Hallaton Field Work Group undertook survey and excavation for the next nine years. The project eventually recovered at least 16 hoards of Iron Age gold and silver coins and Roman *denarii* – nearly 5300 coins in all. There were also copper-alloy brooches, armlets, silver and copper-alloy ingots, additional copper-alloy objects including parts of a La Tène style tankard and a sword chape, a silver mount and a silver bowl, and parts of several different Roman cavalry helmets including a highly-decorated helmet bowl and at least six, probably seven different decorated cheek pieces. Over 400 coins were recovered from within the bowl of the helmet alone.

The principal significance of this find is that the majority of the artefacts were recovered from excavated contexts. Located just off the brow of a slight hill, a series of gullies and ditches (and perhaps a palisade) broadly defined a relatively open space, with the deposition of small groups of objects into these features, and a series of small pits. Many of the items were possibly placed into small hollows or scoops within the original ground surface, however, some perhaps in bags; and were associated with a spread of animal bone, (predominantly of pig) which probably derived from feasting episodes. At least two, possibly three dog burials were also recorded. The 'entrance' through the ditches and/or palisade was the apparent focus for much of this depositional activity, which began in the later 1st century BC, but no Roman coin later than Claudian issues of AD 41-42 was recovered. The main phases of deposition seem to have been during the early to mid-1st century AD – the very late pre-Roman Iron Age, and (perhaps) the immediate aftermath of the Roman invasion of Britain.

This hilltop space was clearly the setting for a series of ritualised practices (q.v. Bell 1992) during this period, and perhaps indicates the existence of an open-air shrine or sacred space of some sort. Although there is evidence for ring gullies and other settlement features of later 1st to 2nd century AD date just *c*. 100m north of the hoard site, a larger than average number of Roman coin and metalwork ploughsoil finds in the immediate vicinity may indicate that this locale continued to have some form of ritualised significance well into the 2nd century AD, though the emphasis might have shifted slightly further to the north-west. Compared to other well-known Iron Age and Romano-British shrine and temple sites such as Hayling Island, Uley and Wanborough, however, there was a marked lack of features that could be associated with a more formal demarcated ritual space.

Although Vicki Score of ULAS is the principal author, the volume features excellent specialist contributions from Nicholas Cooper and Simon James (the metalwork and other objects, or so-

called 'small finds' a somewhat regrettable term to be using these days), the animal bone (Jennifer Browning), palaeo-environmental analysis (Angela Monckton), the pottery (Patrick Marsden), the coins (Ian Leins), the initial assessment of the Roman helmet components (Marilyn Hockey and Simon James), a discussion of the results and 'sacred space' at British sites (Vicki Score) and also a wider-ranging synthesis and interpretation (Colin Haselgrove).

The volume takes a relatively conventional approach to the evidence, with the excavated features described separately to the finds recovered from them, although some attempt at a more contextual approach has been made by including 'working shots' of many of the key objects *in situ* after initial exposure, or during excavation. I personally thought that this approach worked rather well, and it is refreshing to see working shots of excavators on site and people holding the freshly excavated artefacts, giving both these items and the project a human dimension. The last 110 pages of the volume comprises the catalogues of the 5000+ coins and also the animal bone. Although it is laudable that these have been published in full, it may have been possible to put some of this information on the Archaeology Data Service in order to reduce the overall cost of the volume, but coin specialists would disagree with this.

There are many interesting nuggets of information contained within these reports – for example, the faunal report details how the pig remains from the site featured a marked under-representation of right forelimbs, which has resonances with the selectivity applied to animal remains elsewhere in Britain, as at the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age midden site of Llanmaes in the Vale of Glamorgan (Lodwick and Gwilt 2007), and in Iron Age funerary contexts and 'structured' deposits in East Yorkshire (e.g. Fenton-Thomas 2011; Giles 2000; Parker Pearson 1999; Piccini 1992). The importance of dogs in ritualised practices during the Iron Age and Roman periods has also been reiterated by this find (q.v. Smith 2005, 2006). This will rekindle interest on the nature of cosmological beliefs during the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. These results suggest that, although there may well have been local interpretations and understandings, there was nevertheless some form of wider underlying concept of the 'correct' way of treating animal remains in certain contexts. The wide-ranging interpretation by Haselgrove also highlights the extremely important implications for understandings of the development of Iron Age coinage, in addition to the original landscape context and setting of some other Iron Age and Romano-British hoard finds in Britain, such as Haverhill in Suffolk, Mark's Tey in Essex, Silsden in West Yorkshire or Cadeby in South Yorkshire. These may also have represented 'open-air' ritualised sites where those particular places in the landscape were themselves amongst the principal factors behind such ritualised acts of deposition, rather than being marked by more tangible built structures which delineated 'formal' sacred space (Smith 2001). Interestingly, the site at Hallaton was also far from being an isolated 'sacred grove', as there is evidence for 'domestic' settlement relatively close by.

The site and this volume also have considerable importance for discussions of acculturation or 'Romanisation', and the complex social and political relationships that existed between the expanding Roman Empire and indigenous 'native' societies immediately prior to and after the Roman conquest of Britain. Where did the Roman helmet and cheek pieces come from, for example? This was an elaborate artefact made of sheet iron, then covered in sheet silver and gold leaf (Hill 2012; Hockey and James this volume). The evidence from the coins within the helmet suggests that they were deposited sometime in the 30s-40s AD. Were the helmets and coins part of a diplomatic gift to potential allies preceding the conquest? The property of a British upper rank cavalryman who had fought for the Romans abroad as an auxiliary? Or were they war booty from slaughtered Roman cavalrymen during the conquest? The latter explanation is less likely given that these objects were high-status parade helmets, unless they were captured from a baggage train or the personal possessions of Roman officers. It is also possible that they were

from a Roman unit stationed in Britain *before* AD 43 in order to advise and to support an ally before the conquest (q.v. Creighton 2006). All of these are fascinating interpretative possibilities.

There is one major aspect of the Hallaton excavations missing from this publication – the Roman cavalry helmet and cheek pieces, which have recently finished conservation at the British Museum by Marilyn Hockey, Fleur Shearman and Duygu Camurcuoglu, and are now on display at Harborough Museum (Hill 2012). It does seem a shame that the helmet and the cheek pieces will be published as a separate volume, thus separating these objects to some extent from the contexts in which they were found, a very traditional approach to artefact analysis and presentation. On the other hand, this would have added to the time taken for this publication to come out, and would no doubt have considerably increased the cost of such a final publication too. The combined cost of two hardback books may well prove more expensive than a single large paperback volume, however. At £32.00 the book is relatively reasonably priced for a hardback volume, although as with many such publications, it is again a pity that it did not go straight into paperback instead. This would further reduce costs, and would mean that more university libraries, field units, local societies and individuals (especially those working in commercial field archaeology) would have been able to afford it. The volume deserves a wider circulation than it may receive.

Some of the maps, plans and artefact photographs are in colour which is welcome, and although some of the plans seem to have been reproduced at too great a scale, with relatively thick lines and heavy shading relative to other similar images, in general the volume is well illustrated – with the notable exception of the helmet and cheek pieces of course. These are only shown before and during conservation, though of course these artefacts will feature in the proposed second volume. All in all, this was a well-written, well-edited and well-illustrated volume, if perhaps as previously stated let down only by the lack of the most iconic finds from the Hallaton Treasure, and the slightly high cover price.

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