



## Book Reviews

### **LATE IRON AGE CALLEVA: THE PRE-CONQUEST OCCUPATION AT SILCHESTER INSULA IX. SILCHESTER ROMAN TOWN: THE INSULA IX PROJECT VOLUME 3 BY MICHAEL FULFORD, AMANDA CLARKE, EMMA DURHAM AND NICHOLAS PANKHURST**

*Britannia Monograph Series no. 32, 2018. 532pp, 171 B&W and col figs, 85 tables, pb, ISBN 978-0-907764-45-8, £75.00*

This volume is the latest in a series of recent publications that have expanded our understanding of Late Iron Age *oppida*. Presenting the results of the Silchester Town Life Project, which ran from 1997 to 2014, this volume details the stratigraphic information, finds and environmental remains of Late Iron Age date (c. 10 BC–45/50 AD) recovered during the excavation of Insula IX. This area was chosen to excavate partly as it provided an opportunity to understand the sequence of occupation within the town from the Late Iron Age to post-Roman period. As such this is the third volume to report on these excavations following those that detailed the Mid-Roman (Fulford & Clarke 2011) and Late Roman (Fulford *et al.* 2006) deposits. Two volumes are forthcoming that cover the deposits dating to the Claudian-Neronian and late first to mid second century, respectively. The volume usefully updates and compares the knowledge gained about Iron Age Calleva during the Forum Basilica excavations between 1980–86 (Fulford & Timby 2000), providing a refinement of previous phasing and interpretations. Although Calleva remains one of the most well excavated *oppida* found in Britain, the authors estimate that only approximately 1.2% of the interior of the settlement has been investigated (p.4), demonstrating that there is much to uncover at Calleva and within British *oppida* in general.

The structure of the volume follows that of a typical excavation report; Section 1 covers the stratigraphic evidence from the excavations, Section 2 the finds evidence (including coins, brooches, pottery, coin moulds, small finds, glass vessels and querns), Section 3 the Environmental evidence (including animal and insect remains, plant remains, charcoal, pollen analysis, radiocarbon dating, micromorphology, geochemistry) and Section 4 the overall discussion, written by Prof. Mike Fulford. The main body of text is supported by 110 pages of appendices that catalogue the finds and environmental evidence, accompanied by an impressive digital repository held by the Archaeology Data Service (ADS):

[https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/calleva\\_reading\\_2018/index.cfm](https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/calleva_reading_2018/index.cfm)

Section 1 outlines the stratigraphic evidence recorded during the excavation. The archaeological features mostly represented negative features dug into the underlying natural horizon (Silchester Gravels). The earliest evidence was ten probable Neolithic tree-throw holes, dated using radiocarbon analysis. As is often the case with Late Iron Age sites (eg, Crummy *et al.* 2007), the lack of discernible stratigraphy and the similarity between finds assemblages has meant that it was difficult to establish exactly what features/structures dated to the pre or post conquest period (p.8–9). There is a clear sense that, amid difficult circumstances, it was possible to identify primary (construction of features) and secondary (later deposits) activities within this phase of occupation, which is an important contribution more generally to the understanding Late Iron Age/Early Roman transition period in Britain.

The excavated evidence from Period 0 (c. 10 BC–45 AD) was split into three phases. Phase 1 is represented by a probable Enclosure ditch (11631) and a number of postholes, which represent the stratigraphically earliest Late Iron Age features. Although there was little or no stratigraphic relationship between them, the excavators have interpreted the postholes as representing up to eight buildings, with some sub-divisions, based on alignments and similarities in size and shape. A number of similar Late Iron Age structures have been found elsewhere in Britain (eg, Moore 2003), which may have provided useful comparisons to strengthen this argument. A brief discussion of these structural forms and contrasting examples is provided in Section 4 (p.377–8). Phase 2 includes the setting out of two perpendicular trackways, which align with the trackways uncovered during the Forum Basilica excavations (Fulford & Timby 2000, pp26–9) and the construction of a large hall (Structure 9). The hall, measuring c.48m in length, is interpreted as a monumental building, likely associated with the wealth and power of 'several successive 'royal' residences' within Calleva (p.377). An interesting and enigmatic feature, the hall has little parallel in Iron Age Britain, albeit with a few possible examples (p.26). The exact ground plan and function of the building will no doubt provide some debate, but considering the Continental connections to Calleva, comparable ground plans would have been useful to support this interpretation. Within Phase 2 seven enclosures were also set out and provide a picture of intensive occupation, reminiscent of many *oppida* on the continent, such as Condé-sur-Suippe or Villeneuve-Saint-Germain. The final phase of activity (Phase 3) saw the reconstruction of the large timber hall (Structure 10), the amalgamation of several enclosures and the construction of several new buildings and deep wells. The recovered information from Structure 10 provide details about the layout and function of the building including parallels with those found on the Continent (pp30–3). One of the most interesting structures is a possible post-built temple or shrine (Structure 14), of a broadly similar size and layout to Late Iron Age shrines at Harlow and Danebury. Although there is little evidence for ritual deposition associated with the Later Iron Age structure, it was overlaid by

several pits that contained evidence for animal sacrifice (pp37–8), perhaps suggesting the continuation of ritual practice (note: these pits form a later stage of activity that will be reported in a later volume). A total of 14 Pit Groups were also identified across the site. These groups are described together, due to the difficulty of identifying the date and function of these features (pp46–9). Integrating the description of these pits alongside the structures or compounds that they were likely associated may have provided a greater clarity to the context for the limited material culture found within them (eg, rubbish or ritual). The tables and figures throughout this section were clear and concise, providing information for the phasing of different features in an accessible manner. The figures also included several reconstruction drawings that demonstrate a real sense of ‘life’ in the *oppida* during the Late Iron Age (p.27).

Section 2 provides a detailed account of the Late Iron Age finds recovered during the Insula IX excavation. Forwarded by a detailed description of the issues of residuality across the site, including the deposition of large quantities of pre-conquest material in post-conquest features, this section pulls together all the Iron Age material, whether recovered from contemporary or later features. The excavated features at Silchester provide numerous opportunities that make this and the following Section (3 – Environmental Evidence) particularly useful for later analysis. The discovery of several deep wells, measuring more than 3 m in depth, provide a rich setting for the survival of artefacts and ecofacts not usually recovered from Iron Age contexts in Southern Britain. The wells also provide further opportunity to understand the specific stratigraphic sequences that led to their construction and infilling (eg, Roskams *et al.* 2013), which are discussed in part in Section 3 (Micromorphology of Refuse Disposal).

Section 2 provides far too much information to discuss in detail in this review, however, several examples demonstrate the detail and wider context in which this material was considered. The analysis of the relatively small coin assemblage (Haselgrove) was considered alongside those recovered from the Forum Basilica excavations and the wider area, highlighting differences in the chronological profile of each group and thus each area. The spread of recovered coin moulds (Allen) across Insula IX suggest that perhaps that lots of different people within the settlement were involved, in on stage or another, in the minting process. The analysis of the recovered brooches (Crummy) found broad comparisons with *oppida* settlements in eastern (Colchester, St Albans) and southern Britain (Winchester, Chichester). In addition, the analysis suggests that the design of local examples was influenced from western areas of Britain (p.115). The extensive discussion of the pottery (Timby), both local and imported, includes breakdowns across features (including the Pit Groups), as well as examination of the assemblage on both a regional and continental basis (pp209–213). This fine grained analysis considers the positioning of Calleva on the edge of two potting traditions, which may have implications for the positioning of *oppida* in general (Haselgrove 2000, 106). Finally, the

examination of organic residues from pottery sherds (Colonese, Lucquin, Timby and Craig) show interesting variances in dietary practices including a lack of consumption of dairy products within Calleva in comparison to surrounding areas. The vast array of evidence presented within this section provides a great deal of information to understand the activities within Insula IX during the Iron Age, but will also provide a great compendium for those scholars examining the Late Iron Age material culture in southern Britain in general

Section 3 details The Environmental Evidence; an equally diverse and useful corpus of information. The Animal bone evidence (Ingrem) exclusively considers the material from secure deposits (well, ditches etc.) and provides a useful analysis of changing animal husbandry practices over time. In addition to the usual assemblages (cattle, pig etc.), the evidence includes some unusual animals including a miniature dog burial (pp274–6) associated with the large hall building (Structure 9). Although dog burials have been found in contemporary ritual contexts, small dogs are unusual in Iron Age deposits, with Clark stating that this may be the smallest dog yet recorded in Britain. Extensive waterlogged deposits, particularly found in wells, are also unusual for *oppida* sites in Britain, providing a unique opportunity to examine plant remains, insects, pollen and phytoliths to reconstruct the environment during the Late Iron Age. In particular the Charred and Waterlogged plant remains (Lodwick) allow an impressively detailed understanding of arable practices and the trade of imported food stuffs from the Mediterranean, spawning a number of separate articles (Lodwick 2014; 2017). The evidence suggests that even in this ‘urban’ environment that crop processing was undertaken at a household level and that cultivation (of cereal production and grassland resources) was present in the areas surrounding the *oppidum*. The extent of cereal production is provided by the examination of the phytoliths from one of the Late Iron Age wells (Elliot), which suggested that grassland dominated the natural environment surrounding the settlement (p.345). Iron Age agriculture is often overlooked in the examination and interpretation of Late Iron Age *oppida*, making it impressive to see the detail that this type of material can bring in understanding a single site and in a wider comparison to evidence with other *oppida* across Britain (pp311–312). A small-scale radiocarbon programme (Barnett) was targeted on ‘more ambiguous features’ due to the relatively well dated ceramic typologies already afforded for Silchester. This decision may have been a missed opportunity to refine existing typo-chronologies, which have been argued are often too late when compared to the results of Bayesian methodologies (eg, Hamilton *et al.* 2015). This material, however, could serve a future dating programme to test the sequences developed during this and earlier excavations. A series of other useful and interesting analysis are provided (Wood Charcoal, Pollen Analysis, Elemental Geochemistry, Micromorphology), however, there is little space to discuss those results here.

The final Discussion of this substantial volume (Fulford) details a comprehensive and updated interpretation for life in the *oppidum*. This section covers more detailed discussions such as the buildings and compounds uncovered within Insula IX, to broader settlement-wide considerations, such as the development of the layout, chronology and changing levels of occupation. Building on previous excavations and the results of the Silchester Mapping Project (Creighton & Fry 2016), the discussion provides a comprehensive and important update to the knowledge of Iron Age occupation at Calleva, including a broader understanding of activity both prior to the foundation of the *oppida* and following the Roman conquest of Britain. The discussion builds on earlier evidence to provide a detailed understanding of the activities that took place in the settlement, including a thriving trade network (imported goods including pottery), the production of food (growing crops in the surrounding landscape, keeping animals in pens), coin production, iron and bronze working (although no furnaces were uncovered) and textile production (the recovery of spindlewhorls). It would have been particularly useful to place this updated understanding of Calleva within a wider consideration of British *oppida* more generally. Only a few pages are dedicated to comparative analysis in this volume, in comparison to the recent Stanwick publication (Haselgrove 2016) and despite a recent surge in *oppida* studies in general. Although Silchester is often considered as an outlier in the Late Iron Age, increasingly evidence from other British *oppida* suggests that there was a similar level of trade and a comparable density of occupation and general layout with other sites (eg, Stanwick, Bagendon). A detailed comparative analysis of *oppida* settlements and update to the understanding of these settlements over time is long overdue and there is no doubt that the information provided here will form an important component of that analysis. Overall, this volume provides an important step forward in better understanding the *oppidum* at Calleva, *oppida* settlements across Britain and on the Continent and social relations in the Late Iron Age in general.

#### **Footnote – 7.6.19**

Since the initial publication of this book review, I have been contacted by the authors who have provided additional information regarding the radiocarbon dating program. Further scientific dating has been undertaken for the Claudio-Neronian archaeology within Insula IX and Bayesian modelling of these and the Late Iron Age dates which will be included in the forthcoming Silchester volume. The interesting and exciting results of this programme of work will be of interest to all those who examine the Late Iron Age to early Roman transition period.

#### **References**

Creighton, J. & Fry, R. 2016. *Silchester: Changing Visions of a Roman Town; Integrating Geophysics and Archaeology: the Results of the Silchester Mapping Project 2005–10*. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies

- Crummy, P., Benfield, S., Crummy, N., Rigby, V., & Shimmin, D. 2007. *Stanway: An Elite Burial Site at Camulodunum*. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
- Fulford, M. & Clarke, A. 2011. *Silchester: City in Transition: the Mid-Roman Occupation of Insula IX c. A.D. 125–250/300: a Report on Excavations Undertaken Since 1997*. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
- Fulford, M., Clarke, A., & Eckardt, H. 2006. *Life and Labour in Late Roman Silchester: Excavations in Insula IX from 1997*. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
- Fulford, M. & Timby, J. 2000. *Late Iron Age and Roman Silchester: excavations on the site of the forum-basilica, 1977, 1980–86*. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
- Garland, N. 2017. Conference review of 'Late Iron Age oppida: a review of recent and current research into Late Iron Age British towns and their landscape'. *PAST Newsletter of the Prehistoric Society* 86, 14–15
- Hamilton, W., Haselgrove, C., & Gosden, C. 2015. The impact of Bayesian chronologies on the British Iron Age. *World Archaeology* 47 (4), 642–60
- Haselgrove, C. 2000. The character of oppida in Iron Age Britain. In: V. Guichard, S. Sievers, & O.H. Urban (eds), *Les processus d'urbanisation à l'âge du fer: actes du colloque Glux-en-Glenne, 8–11 juin 1998*, 103–110. Glux-en-Glenne: Centre archéologique européen du Mont Beuvray
- Haselgrove, C. (ed.) 2016. *Cartimandua's Capital?: The Late Iron Age Royal Site at Stanwick, North Yorks, Fieldwork and Analysis 1981-2011*. York: Council for British Archaeology
- Lodwick, L. 2014. Condiments before Claudius: new plant foods at the Late Iron Age oppidum at Silchester, UK. *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 23 (5), 543–549
- Lodwick, L. 2017. Agricultural innovations at a Late Iron Age oppidum: Archaeobotanical evidence for flax, food and fodder from Calleva Atrebatum, UK. *Quaternary International*, 460, 198–219
- Moore, T. 2003. *Rectangular Houses in the British Iron Age – Squaring the Circle? In: J. Humphrey (ed.), Re-searching the Iron Age: selected papers from the proceedings of the Iron Age Research Student Seminars, 1999 and 2000*, 47–58. Leicester: University of Leicester
- Roskams, S., Neal, C., Richardson, J., & Leary, R. 2013. A Late Roman Well at Heslington East, York: ritual or routine practices? *Internet Archaeology* 34

*Nicky Garland*

*Newcastle University*

Review submitted: April 2019 *The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor*