



The Archaeological Journal

Book Reviews



HEADHUNTING AND THE BODY IN IRON AGE EUROPE. By Ian Armit. Pp. xii and 259, Illus 86. Cambridge University Press, 2012. Price: £60.00. ISBN 978 052187 756 5.

This book explores how the human body played a vital role in ritual violence using case studies from Iron Age Britain, France, Spain, northern Italy, Germany and the Czech Republic. It is structured by theme and draws on a wide variety of evidence, such as human remains, architecture and primary literature. It is well illustrated throughout and the location maps are a welcome feature. Unlike many discussions of this period, it draws heavily on anthropological literature, particularly for the practice, meaning and purpose of headhunting. The author also utilizes identity and body theories to explore notions of corporeality, warrior-hood and animal-human hybrids in Iron Age communities.

The multidisciplinary nature of the case studies explored prevents the book from becoming a gazetteer or simply an overview of the published evidence. Instead, this unusual approach offers new interpretations of particular objects and sites, such as the famous site of Entremont in France (pp. 170–97), and the artistic representation and ritual deposition of the human head in this period (pp. 69–120). Armit presents these analyses using clear and accessible language, so a reader unfamiliar with one strand of the evidence is not excluded from, or becomes disengaged with, the theme under discussion. The author deconstructs and critiques the popular but flawed ‘Celtic Cult of the Head’ theory and instead offers a cross-cultural and more nuanced perspective of these Iron Age communities. Armit successfully demonstrates that a uniform approach to the human remains, and other artefacts associated with the manipulation, display and deposition of the body and body parts, cannot be applied across Europe, due to the heterogeneous nature of these communities. This represents an important step-forward in the discussion of ritual violence in this period, making it more comparable with recent bioarchaeological and North American literature (e.g. M. Bonogofsky (ed.): *The Bioarchaeology of the Human Head: Decapitation, Decoration and Deformation*, 2011). This is most evident in his discussion of the Roquepertuse site in France, where its changing nature is examined in close relation to wider socio-political shifts in the region (pp. 167–96).

This dynamic book is not without its flaws, and it is accepted that some may result from lacunae in the published literature. At points, it is not precisely clear which phases of the Iron Age are being discussed, and whether the examples of ritual violence presented were contemporaneous (e.g. such as evidence from Atlantic Scotland, Hampshire and France, pp. 204–22). More information about normative burial practices would have been welcome, so as to place the deposits in context, especially considering the broad geographical scope of the book. Additionally, despite highlighting the rare occurrence of

The final version of this review will appear in *The Archaeological Journal* 170 for 2013.

subadult and female bodies in ritual behaviour, little to no discussion is included about age and gender roles within these communities, which would place these observations in context.

Overall, Armit presents a diverse range of evidence to show that the human body, in particular the head, was incorporated into violent activities and rituals by people from Scotland to Italy; he is also careful to acknowledge that the majority of the evidence for headhunting comes from southern France. Through the use of anthropological evidence, the author raises alternative paradigms for the ritual manipulation of the human body by Iron Age communities, and cautions against a static pan-European hypothesis for this behaviour.

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