



# The Archaeological Journal

## Book Reviews



**THE IRON AGE IN NORTHERN EAST ANGLIA: NEW WORK IN THE LAND OF THE ICENI.** Edited by John A. Davies. Pp. iv and 105, Illus 77. Archaeopress (British Archaeological Reports British Series, **549**), 2011. Price £24.00. ISBN 978 1 407308 85 2.

This volume stems from a conference held in Norwich in 2008 which examined how research on the Iron Age in northern East Anglia has moved on since the last review, thirteen years earlier. The papers from the previous meeting, with Davies again taking an editorial role (J. Davies and T. Williamson: *Land of the Iceni. The Iron Age in northern East Anglia*, 1999), reset the agenda for much subsequent work on the Iron Age across the region.

So how then has our understanding changed since the 1990s? The answer is quite a bit, but this book is more selective in scope than its predecessor. Five of eight chapters focus on coinage and / or other items of Iron Age metalwork, nearly all of which date after *c.* 100 BC. At one level, this is fair enough, given the wealth of new finds from metal detecting and / or reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme, but it leaves Matt Brudenell's timely review of later Bronze Age and earlier Iron Age pottery as the only paper dealing explicitly with material from the first 700 years of the Iron Age — about which we know far less. The book also has surprisingly little to say about the impact of interventions linked to development of knowledge of Iron Age settlement and land use, probably the single most important advance since the 1990s in most regions of Britain. Apart perhaps from near the coast, the intensity of development-led fieldwork across East Anglia seems broadly similar to elsewhere and I would have expected a commensurate increase in our understanding of Iron Age settlement patterns, but if so, occasional references in Brudenell's paper and in Sophie Tremlett's review of sites recorded from the air are as close as we get. And if Iron Age landscapes do not figure prominently among the new evidence amassed by developer-funded excavation, this in itself is unusual enough to warrant discussion.

These comments should not detract from the many new insights that are on offer in the book. Brudenell, for example, notes the ubiquity of later Bronze Age sites, albeit mostly near watercourses, with obvious implications for current models of settlement expansion later in the first millennium, and Tremlett highlights the presence of rectilinear coaxial field systems along the Broadland interfluves. For a site of such importance as Snettisham, there has been remarkably little excavation, and Hutcheson's account of the 2004 intervention on Ken Hill, which revealed remains of a possible Romano-British temple, is of significant interest. So too is Marsden's inventory of around *c.* 150 new Iron Age coin finds from this site, although no information is provided about the find-spots,

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presumably withheld due to the intensity of illicit metal detecting here. Whilst understandable, this is to be lamented, since spatial patterns in the coin finds could hold the key to unravelling the chronological development of the Snettisham complex, as analysis of the smaller but otherwise similar multiple hoard site at Hallaton has shown (V. Score: *Hoards, hounds and helmets. A conquest-period ritual site at Hallaton, Leicestershire*, 2011).

John Talbot offers a major new study of Iron Age coin production, based on a comprehensive die study; he posits an intriguing mixture of diversity and unity — specific design elements point to the existence of distinct ‘mint groups’, whereas the mixing of coins in circulation and adherence to common weight standards imply the existence of an overarching entity, exerting a tight control over coin production. Meanwhile, coin legends provide the starting point for Daphne Nash-Briggs, who builds on modern DNA studies, which suggest a north European genetic contribution to the pre-Roman population of eastern England, by proposing that some names and / or titles might be of German etymology, while others may be Roman. She argues that some Iron Age inhabitants of East Anglia might have spoken a Germanic language. Whilst as yet unproven, this provides a glimpse of what multidisciplinary studies may have to offer in the future. Two chapters by John Davies complete the volume: one assessing how representative of Iron Age material culture the Norfolk Museums collections are, and what this tells us about the inhabitants; the other discussing the significance of boar representations.

In a succinct but valuable conclusion, Davies reviews the extent to which the models of Iron Age society set out a decade ago must now be modified and he highlights some additional features that helped give Norfolk a distinctive identity in that period. Such variations are no longer viewed as a deviation from the norms of Iron Age social and cultural development, but rather as part and parcel of a variable and complex whole that we have yet satisfactorily to characterize. This well-presented volume will be of interest and offer food for thought to Iron Age archaeologists far beyond the land of the Iceni.

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