



## Book Reviews

### **THE LATER PREHISTORY OF NORTH-WEST EUROPE: THE EVIDENCE OF DEVELOPMENT-LED FIELDWORK BY R BRADLEY, C HASELGROVE, M VANDER LINDEN AND L WEBLEY**

*Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015. 456 pp, 117 figs, 5 tables, 1 appendix. ISBN 978-0-19-965977-7, hb, £90*

The Valletta Convention of 1992 brought about a sea-change in the quantity of archaeological interventions in advance of development. For the first time, it was clearly stated in an international convention that development should be preceded by a proper assessment of sites for their archaeological potential; that where considered appropriate more detailed investigation should take place; and that the work should be conducted by qualified practitioners. Naturally different countries interpreted these provisions in different ways; and of course a convention is not a law, though it may become the basis for a legal framework, if lawmakers in individual countries and parliaments see fit. Nevertheless, most archaeologists in most countries have welcomed the arrival of the Convention, since it gives them a legitimate reason for involving themselves in the work of developers – who would otherwise not be very keen in having the archaeologists there, to say the least. The problem has been that conducting an archaeological investigation does not, in itself, mean that the world knows about what was found. Hence the rise of what in Britain and Ireland is known as ‘grey literature’: reports produced for the developer who paid for the fieldwork, sometimes embargoed for further dissemination, but more often a casualty of lack of money with which to carry out a full post-excavation analysis, in advance of publication in a professional journal.

This book, a sequel to the project conducted by Richard Bradley for Britain and Ireland alone, and published as *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland* (2007), represents an attempt to look at the situation in recent years across a significant chunk of north-west Europe: from Denmark in the north, to northern, western and south-western France in the south (including Alsace and Lorraine), from Ireland in the west to western Germany in the east (mainly Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and parts of Hesse and Schleswig-Holstein); and including the whole of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. The project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, was led by Bradley and Haselgrove, while Vander Linden and Webley were employed to collect the data. This must have been a mammoth task, and it is greatly to the credit of all concerned that the project proceeded as planned and resulted in a handsome book.

An introductory chapter describes the issues that surround development-led archaeology: organisational differences, funding, the question of post-excavation work, and so on. The situation is different in all the eight countries considered, and in federal countries like Germany or Belgium, different in different states or constituent parts. Different challenges face archaeologists in all these countries, and thus faced the researchers who collected the data for this project. Nevertheless, it is evident that most regional authorities were co-operative; one

cannot judge to what extent commercial operators did likewise, but presumably many, if not most, were helpful.

After this opening, the book is organised by period, six of them, from the Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic, down to the early Roman period. Interestingly, although the volume of information varies greatly by period, with an enormous bias towards the first millennium BC, the chapters vary in length much less: most are around 40-45 pages, and only the last (250 BC to early Roman) is longer, at 66 pages. This was presumably a conscious decision not to show preference to any particular period, but to deal with all even-handedly. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that some periods have produced more and 'better' information than others, as Fig. 1.6 makes clear: down to 2000 BC there are less than 100 sites for each chunk of time but after that point a huge leap in numbers, with some 800 for the last couple of centuries BC. In total, 5768 investigations were examined, 94% of them development-led; these are available in a database which can be consulted via the Archaeology Data Service.

The first period-based chapter deals with the Mesolithic and Early Neolithic, and here it is quite striking that much of what is 'new' is in fact already published. Thus the chapter briefly discusses the dating programme published as *Gathering Time* (Whittle et al 2011), the large number of Neolithic houses discovered through development projects in Ireland, and the divergent views on the adoption of agriculture in the British Isles; here, the continuity thesis of Julian Thomas is rightly criticised, not so much on the basis of new evidence from development-led excavation as on the lack of *any* substantial evidence to support his views. More information from recent work is available from Denmark and France; various significant sites are mentioned in both countries, but here we come to a facet of the book which makes it a little difficult to use: some sites are included in the database, their names appear in italics in the text, and their bibliographical details are given not in the text but in the Appendix (which lists something under 400 sites); others are simply named in the text along with their bibliographical reference. It is not, on the face of it, clear why the two sets of sites are treated differently since some in the Appendix reference publications as old as 1998, while many of those referenced in the text have been published in the last 10 years.

The following chapters cover the subsequent periods: 'Regional monumental landscapes (3700-2500 BC)', looking at megalithic monuments, causewayed enclosures, and a small section on settlements; 'Barrow landscapes across the Channel, 2500-1600 BC', mainly about the Beaker period and the barrow building phenomenon; 'Changes in the pattern of settlement (1600-1100 BC)', concerning settlement and burial sites; 'The expansion of settlement (1100-250 BC)', where the volume of information starts to pick up, especially in the funerary record; and 'Total landscapes (250 BC to the Early Roman period)', where the authors stress the huge volume of material that has emerged from rescue projects in recent years. One can point to individual elements that do not receive the attention they might deserve (for instance early hillforts, of Bronze Age date, the norm in much of Germany and further afield; oppida are necessarily accorded quite brief treatment); but these reflect the bias in what development-led fieldwork has produced. Since the period of data collection stopped at 2011, crucial sites such as Must Farm, near Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, currently (2016) under excavation, do not appear.

Finally, there is a short chapter assessing the value of the project: 'The research in retrospect'. Here the limitations of the exercise are stressed – notably the question of whether one can write a

prehistory of an area based solely, or even mainly, on rescue excavations; whether there is such a thing as a prehistory of north-west Europe (answer: not really; each area is different and had different trajectories in the past); and wider questions of settlement and economy. The final couple of pages address those questions that recent scholars have found most fundamental (social evolution, core-periphery models, and the like). Presumably space did not allow for a longer consideration of these matters, which is a pity, as the authors' views would have been welcome.

It is easy to see why the production of a book on the outcomes of this important project was not an easy matter. As the authors themselves recognise, there is bound to be a tension between the story already known (from all kinds of fieldwork, not just rescue work) and the story that development-led work can produce. Neither is complete in itself; you cannot consider one without the other. Hence the reference to many older works, especially in the earlier chapters, where the volume of new work is much smaller (the problem is much less acute in the later chapters, where enormous numbers of sites have turned up in development work). There is also an obvious difference in the style of writing between the earlier and the later chapters: the former are very much Richard Bradley, his style and his archaeological concerns, while the latter seem to represent a more fluid approach in which the voice of Colin Haselgrove, while clearly present, is not dominant.

While you could not consider this book a comprehensive guide to the prehistory of north-west Europe, equally you could not properly consider that prehistory without this book. Like Richard Bradley's 2007 work, it provides an indispensable survey of what has been happening in the countries considered over recent years – not only rescue work, but other types of archaeological fieldwork as well. To what extent the picture is now clear varies between periods; in general, the earlier the period the less well-known it remains, development or not. But we have this book to thank for making this so clear.

It is refreshing to read a book where attention to detail has been allotted such importance: the bibliographic entries in French and German are, for once, immaculate (I am less qualified to speak about Dutch and Danish), and I only noticed a couple of minor typos in the main text. The price is unfortunately beyond the pockets of most private buyers, but the database is freely accessible. All in all, this is a worthy outcome of a highly important project.

## References

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Whittle, A, Healy, F, and Bayliss, A, 2011. *Gathering Time. Dating the Early Neolithic Enclosures of Southern Britain and Ireland*, Vols 1 and 2. Oxford: Oxbow Books

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*The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor*

The Later Prehistory of North-West Europe: The Evidence of Development-Led Fieldwork Hardcover € Dec 19 2015. by Richard Bradley (Author), Colin Haselgrove (Author), Marc Vander Linden (Author), Leo Webley (Author) & 1 more. It provides a vital current overview of European later prehistory, as well as a much-needed counterpoint to more detailed research. \* Dr Anwen Cooper, Current Archaeology \* reassesses long-established assumptions and narratives within the prehistoric archaeology of north-west Europe Offering fresh perspectives for those with an interest in academic and commercial archaeology, it also highlights the potential for grey-literature and big-data projects to change the scope of academic archaeology.