A FORGED GLAMOUR: LANDSCAPE, IDENTITY AND MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE IRON AGE BY MELANIE GILES


This attractively produced book is a very welcome addition to the literature on Iron Age Europe. The greatest among its many strengths is the author's demonstration of exactly how concepts such as identity, agency, and performance can be investigated through close examination of specific archaeological evidence and how such an investigation can help us understand what life was like for people who lived in the past.

The author's stated purpose is to use the archaeological evidence to explore the lives and deaths of the Iron Age inhabitants of East Yorkshire in northern England. She accomplishes this goal through examination of their monuments, settlements, economy, patterns of social interaction, and practice of rituals, especially those involving the treatment of the dead.

The text is divided into eight chapters. The first is a theoretical discussion of past and present approaches to the issues examined in the book. They include landscape, ethnicity, culture history, society, agency, personhood, identity, and the material culture of archaeology. The next six chapters present the archaeological evidence as it relates to these topics. Chapter 2 concerns earthworks and landscape management. The next chapter examines locations of cemeteries and their related settlements, and the character of houses. Chapter 4 is about the physical aspect of the people and demography, and it includes diet, disease, and trauma evident on the skeletal remains. Chapter 5 concerns burial ritual and grave goods. The performance of rituals involved in the burial of the dead is the main topic of Chapter 6; the discussion broadens to consider other aspects of life in terms of performance. Chapter 7 examines burial practice with respect to movement; graves are often situated close to flowing water, and objects placed into burials often come from long distances away. The concluding chapter uses the Wetwang Village chariot burial to demonstrate how much can be learned through close analysis of one exceptionally well documented grave.

The author explores in detail a number of themes that are of contemporary interest in archaeology as well as in other social and historical sciences. I highlight three of them here. The most fundamental theme, recurrent throughout the book, is the question of what life was actually like for the communities of Iron Age East Yorkshire - how people experienced their lives, and how we can learn about that subject through study of the material evidence, interpreted in terms of theory developed in several social science disciplines.

A second theme is the connectedness of the lives of these late prehistoric peoples. The author demonstrates throughout that everything surrounding the human communities and their environment is linked in a web of relations - the natural world, the cultivated landscape, houses, tools, weapons, ornaments, and human bodies. She explores the ways in which individuals are bound to their communities, for example through joint labour efforts in the construction of the massive earthworks still evident in the landscape. Connections between individuals, families, and communities are examined as means of learning about how societies worked. The author
draws from ethnography to suggest that in small-scale societies such as those of Iron Age East Yorkshire, individuals are not so much vying for power, as many current approaches suggest, but instead are striving to "live well" - to devise social and economic strategies for their communities that will enable them to thrive without recourse to potentially destructive competition. This idea is important. Its application to other contexts in prehistoric Europe, and elsewhere, could lead to a constructive rethinking of how past societies actually operated.

The third theme is the role of action in the creation and reinforcement of social relationships at all levels. This theme has been developed in other works, and the author cites a variety of relevant studies, but in this book, in which the author relates ideas to specific material evidence, it is presented exceptionally well. Individuals fashion their identities through interaction with others. Social relationships between members of communities are shaped through communal projects, such as the construction of earthworks and the practice of ritual, including that associated with burial but also in rituals carried out in the process of everyday life.

Giles's approach to the study of these themes is through theoretically informed analysis of the archaeological evidence in the Yorkshire Wolds during the Iron Age, especially that pertaining to landscape and burial. This cultural context is familiar to many archaeologists working in Europe through earlier publications of burial materials from the "Arras Culture," represented principally by graves often situated in rectangular ditched enclosures and containing chariots with ornate fittings and other decorative grave goods such as brooches and glass beads. The author situates her study in the context of earlier research conducted in this region, from the late eighteenth century into modern times, noting the questions posed and interpretations offered by earlier investigators. The discussion includes earthworks, especially linear structures, settlements, and deposits, but the focus is on the abundant and well documented burials, many hundreds of which are available for analysis. In order to shed light on the practices represented in the archaeological material, the author brings into discussion historically documented experiences and practices. In writing about the importance of local sources of water and of good grazing land, she recounts nineteenth-century struggles over access to these resources. In noting the mythical, as well as the economic, importance of water in the region, she cites folktale that demonstrate peoples' concern with the special properties of water. She consults ethnographic information where it is relevant, for example regarding the ethos of small-scale societies to operate in ways that emphasize "getting along" rather than competing for power, and the kula ring as a model for thinking about exchange of goods over distances.

The main focus of the author's approach is on applying specific archaeological data to address the principal issues of the book, outlined in Chapter 1, through the main themes. While landscape, settlements, and deposits are discussed, most of the text concerns the richest body of data available from the region, that of graves - their structure, contents, and arrangements. Her study is based on the analysis of 815 well documented burials from a number of different cemetery sites. She presents the pertinent data concerning burial practice, grave structure, and performance of funerary rituals, and full examination of the wide range of grave goods which are found in the burials. These include textiles, pottery, metal vessels, brooches and other personal ornaments, mirrors, weapons, tools, and chariots. Especially noteworthy are detailed discussions of brooches (pp. 135-140), with a useful chart showing the 13 main types; glass beads (pp. 143-150), also with a chart; weapons (pp. 163-170); and chariots (pp. 190-206). Particularly interesting is analysis of the process and performance of burial ritual (pp. 175-178, 206-212), with two colour illustrations reconstructing the performance of the funerary ceremony that resulted in the archaeological remains of Wetwang Slack grave 454 (p. 212).

In addition to systematic discussion of specific categories of objects, the author provides integrated treatment of several well documented and complex burials. For example, grave K6, in
the center of a square barrow in the cemetery at Kirkburn, contained well preserved skeletal remains of a young woman and an infant, along with a significant set of personal ornaments. The author reviews different interpretations of this burial to introduce the chapter on aspects of the physical anthropology of the skeletal populations of Iron Age East Yorkshire. This discussion includes consideration of age, sex, disease, injuries, and diet. The recently (2001) excavated and very well documented chariot burial of Wetwang Village serves as an instructive example of all of the potential information that these Iron Age graves can offer. The author demonstrates how the location and character of this burial relates to many of the topics in the book. The grave contained the skeletal remains of a mature adult woman who was buried with a mirror, personal ornaments, an ornate chariot, horse harness gear, and remains of pigs. Analysis suggests that this woman was of special status in her community, that she possessed old objects that were buried with her, and that some of the items in the grave indicate long-distance contacts. Of special interest is the author's suggestion of a connection between the reflective properties of the mirror and those of a pond near to which this burial was situated. Such suggestions can lead to the development of whole new perspectives on why people behaved (and behave) the ways they did (and do).

This book is particularly important in demonstrating how close analysis of archaeological materials enables us to examine systematically major theoretical questions regarding social and ritual aspects of human societies. Among the social theorists whose writings are brought into the discussion are Pierre Bourdieu on practice and *habitus*, Andy Clark on embodied cognition, Anthony Giddens on agency and structuration theory, Erving Goffman on performance, and Mary Helms on crafting.

The text is very well written and is thorough in providing citations for all ideas, materials, and sites mentioned. The author skillfully connects each chapter with the preceding and succeeding chapters, making it easy for the reader to follow the development of her argument throughout the book. The bibliography is extensive and inclusive. The copious illustrations - mostly maps, site plans, drawings of artefacts, and graphs - are of very high quality. Especially interesting are the two colour reconstructions of the process of burial of Wetwang Slack grave 454 mentioned above, showing in detail both the performative aspects and the material culture that the author discusses in the text. The only thing I would have added to the book is an index, which would have been useful for looking up references to the different sites and categories of objects.

The book will serve as an excellent introduction for students interested in British prehistory. The themes explored are of great current interest in the social sciences generally, and for that reason, archaeologists, historians, and others interested in early Europe or the human past will find the book instructive and enjoyable. For professionals in the field of archaeology, it is a model of how big questions can be addressed by close attention to the archaeological data.

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