



Book Reviews

HILLFORTS: BRITAIN, IRELAND AND THE NEARER CONTINENT. PAPERS FROM THE ATLAS OF HILLFORTS OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND CONFERENCE, JUNE 2017 EDITED BY GARY LOCK AND IAN RALSTON

Oxford, Archaeopress. 2019. xii and 222pp, 145 figs, 9 tables, pb, ISBN 978-1-78969-226-6, £45.00

Hillforts are one of the main archaeological features of the Iron Age, as well as of other periods of late prehistoric and early historic Europe. In Britain, hillfort research has long been dominated by the excavations carried out at iconic sites such as Maiden Castle and Danebury, and the large-scale recording of these monuments as part of initiatives such as the Ordnance Survey work (1962). However, there was a need for an updated database for this site category (Forde-Johnstone 1976; Hogg 1975), since even recent syntheses (Harding 2012) were largely based on datasets going back several decades. This gap has now been addressed by a large AHRC project carried out between 2012–2016 in collaboration between researchers from Oxford, Edinburgh and Cork under the direction of Gary Lock and Ian Ralston. The project has produced a freely accessible online database with more than 4000 hillfort entries for Britain and Ireland (<https://hillforts.arch.ox.ac.uk/>). This was put together combining information from existing publications, national, regional and local records, and input from groups of ‘citizen scientists’.

The current volume brings together the papers presented at the final project conference, held in Edinburgh in June 2017. The 12 chapters include contributions directly derived from the Atlas project alongside papers that discuss hillforts in various areas of Europe. The volume starts with a short preface by Eileen Wilkes, chair of the Hillfort Study Group, followed by two chapters by the editors and project directors. Gary Lock reflects on different ways of understanding and experiencing hillforts, including by the broader public, and the design of the Atlas project. The second paper by Ian Ralston provides insights into the history of research and the issue of hillfort definition. He also discusses the criteria that were used to compile the Atlas database.

The following contribution by Ian Brown explores the diversity uncovered by the ‘umbrella’ term of hillfort, using data from the Atlas for England, Wales and the Isle of Man. His paper outlines the potential of the Atlas database for undertaking detailed analysis at a regional and macro-regional scale, as illustrated by a number of distribution maps. As a northern counterpart for this

exploration, Stratford Halliday highlights the particularities of the Scottish record. He shows how the history of classification has shaped understandings of the hillfort phenomenon, as well as reflects on the implications of applying the criteria selected for the Atlas project.

Research into Irish hillforts is summarised in the chapter by James O'Driscoll, Alan Hawkes and William O'Brien. Their contribution exemplifies that the phenomenon of hillfort building and occupation is not restricted to the Iron Age; in fact, in the case of Ireland there is ample evidence for their use during other periods such as the Neolithic, the Bronze Age and the Early Middle Ages. The use of fortified settlements in the early medieval period is the topic of the paper by Gordon Noble and James O'Driscoll, who focus on northern Britain and Ireland. In general terms, the area of these early medieval enclosures was much smaller than in previous periods, with most of the examples in Scotland and Ireland not exceeding one or two hectares.

The following three papers address digital applications and technical aspects related to the project's database. The potential of GIS is explored by Jessica Murray, who uses visibility and movement analysis to provide new understandings of the topographical setting of hillforts in relation to their fortification works. This is exemplified with five cases studies, two of them in southern England, two in Wales and one in Scotland. The paper by M. Simon Maddison also deals with spatial analysis, using the concepts of percolation analysis and threshold distances to discuss different clusters of hillforts. This article perfectly illustrates the potential of the Atlas database for further research in years to come. The more technical aspects of the Hillfort Atlas online database are outlined by John Pouncett. His paper includes a reference to the notable public impact that the project is having: the number of visitors on the website has surpassed all expectations and is probably contributing to make hillforts more attractive destinations than ever before.

The final three papers of the volume present case studies from other areas of Iron Age Europe, by colleagues not directly involved in the Atlas project. Sophie Krausz provides an overview of the archaeology of Iron Age fortifications in France, which is supplemented by some information from written sources for the final century BC (eg, the famous description of the *murus gallicus* fortification type). Fernando Rodríguez del Cueto offers a summary on hillforts in northern Spain, particularly in the modern regions of Asturias and Cantabria. Finally, Axel Posluschny provides insights into fortified settlements in southern Germany.

In sum, this is a very valuable volume that represents the first key publication output of the Hillfort Atlas project – with the announcement of more to follow (Lock and Ralston in preparation). The book has been carefully edited and there are numerous high quality figures, including new distribution maps based on the information from the database. Among the very few weaknesses

of the volume is the rather secondary attention paid to chronology. It is surprising, for example, to find no reference to the recent Bayesian analysis undertaken by D. Hamilton *et al.* (2015). The chronological resolution of the dataset remains one of the main challenges in order to derive socio-historical interpretations from the otherwise extremely valuable information contained in the Atlas. Notwithstanding this minor criticism, we should congratulate and thank the editors for producing this fine volume, and for the enormous amount of work undertaken within the Atlas project. This is a new milestone in the study of hillforts in Britain and Ireland, and can serve as a source of inspiration for similar future studies in continental Europe and beyond.

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