



## Book Reviews

### **KINGDOM, CIVITAS, AND COUNTY: THE EVOLUTION OF TERRITORIAL IDENTITY IN THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE BY STEPHEN RIPPON**

*Oxford University Press. 2018. xxii + 438 pages, 122 figures, 33 tables, Hb, ISBN 978-0-19-875937-9, £85.00*

This study 'of the territorial structures within which past communities managed their landscapes' (p.1) aims, in Rippon's own words 'to explore the origins and development of territoriality across eastern England from a long-term perspective' (p.11) – taking in the Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods. The 'central argument' is 'that political and administrative units across different periods show some strong similarities ... because they were superimposed upon underlying community-based socio-economic spheres of interaction that were far more stable.' (p.11). The basic assumption, about continuity of agricultural use of the landscape, follows from the Fields of Britannia project (Rippon *et al.* 2015) which focused specifically such continuities from the Roman to medieval periods.

The argument proceeds chronologically after a lengthy introduction (pp.1–42), with sections devoted to the Iron Age (pp.43–103), Roman (pp.104–198), early Saxon (pp.199–285) and mid–late Saxon (pp.286–328) periods, followed by conclusions (pp.329–356) and a substantial bibliography, supplemented with 12 online appendices presenting selected datasets. The counties embraced in the study are Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire. Topics involved range from the physical character of the landscape, its agricultural capacity and modes of its division to the nature of settlement and burial types, and the role of artefacts in helping define identities, including ethnic affiliation (bizarrely, Sian Jones' (1997, xiii) summary definition of ethnic identity is quoted verbatim no less than six times at various points in the book). The earlier parts of the volume will be of most interest to readers of PPS, but as the argument is about the *longue durée* some comments will reference aspects of the Roman and later period analyses, as this (Romanist) reviewer, does his best to escape the 'chronological silos' deplored by Rippon (p.12).

The approach is essentially empirical – 'abstract theoretical models' and 'projecting data from one period into another' (p.12) are rejected, though there is a fine line between 'projecting data' and cross-period comparison of distributions, a process which lies at the heart of Rippon's analysis. This sets out distributions of a wide range of evidence, including artefact types,

aspects of settlement and boundary characteristics, and selected place name evidence where considered appropriate. Rippon is quite trenchant on the subject of distribution maps (see eg, p.16, when the summary of the same point at p.256 was quite adequate – emphasising the importance of PAS data for metal finds), and he repeatedly stresses the work (eg, pp.38–39) that has gone into the compilation of up to date datasets (some of which appear as the appendices). These distributions are routinely set against mapping of relief and occasionally against a broad assessment of pre-modern agricultural land capability (Fig. 1.7). In the former case the Chiltern escarpment is heavily accentuated, leaving little doubt about the point that is implied thereby, but also cluttering unnecessarily some of the distribution maps, particularly those (numerous examples) reproduced at very small scale.

The issue of mapping resurfaces immediately at the opening of the treatment of the Iron Age, where the lack of ‘systematic mapping of data’ in some recent reviews of the period is noted (p.43). Thereafter, we are introduced to a summary of the literary evidence for the polities of the later Iron Age, followed by a discussion of coin circulation across the region. This approach results in the definition of four Iron Age coin circulation zones: East Anglia (Icenian), the northern Thames basin, divided into eastern (Trinovantian) and western (Catuvellaunian) halves, and a ‘south-east Midlands’ (unattributed) zone forming the north-western part of the overall study region (Rippon uses the term ‘kingdom’ for the attributed areas, and leaves the question of the status of the south-east Midlands unaddressed). It is only after this sub-regional framework, which effectively informs almost all the subsequent analyses, has been put in place, that the chronological sequence is reversed and aspects of earlier Iron Age archaeology are considered. Perhaps inevitably the selected analyses prove to be consistent with the later pattern.

The coin distributions presented provide general support for traditional interpretations of their associated polities, but the details are inevitably fuzzy, and the situation with regard to ‘Icenian’ coinage, for example, is more complex than is shown here (Fig. 2.5A maps all coinage attributed to the Iceni together), leaving aside the potentially radical rethinking of matters of production and function suggested recently by John Talbot. Another question concerns distributions beyond the limits of the areas mapped here. Only in the case of the Corieltavi are significant numbers of ‘extra-regional’ finds shown, and these are only indicative of part of the overall picture. The framing of the maps does not allow the significant westerly distribution of Cunobelinus’ coinage (beyond the study region) to be shown. More important might have been extra-regional mapping of potins, which are quite widespread across the whole of the study region, and serve to emphasise a link to the south of the Thames; aspects of other distributions suggest that ‘southern Essex stands out as being different’ (p.61), with connections to north

Kent, but the potin distribution north of the Thames does not quite match this pattern, raising (unanswered) questions about the subtle differences in these patterns.

The subsequent sequence of analysis starts with material culture, with an initial focus on selected evolving pottery styles, using Cunliffe's style labels. The basis on which individual sites are mapped as having an assemblage of a particular style is unclear – can the distinctions really be as neat and tidy as they appear, and is it only the absence of a ceramic style to which neat label can be attached that results in the implication of the mapping that Norfolk and Suffolk were largely aceramic in the middle Iron Age? (of course not – 'Care must be taken in interpreting ... in particular the blank area' p.71, but perhaps this needs to be more explicit – the point that the presented data are in many cases very selective samples cannot be overemphasised). As with Corieltavian coinage, the distribution of Scored Ware (identified as an aspect of the 'distinctive material culture' of this region on p.102) is (rightly) extended north-west of the study area. The fact that both distributions would have focused beyond the overall limit of the mapping might suggest some connection between them; although the details of the two distributions in Rippon's south east Midlands are not the same – at the very least they indicate strong influences from beyond the study region to the north-west. In view of the overall emphasis of this study the throwaway admission (in this specific context) that 'some movement of goods through trade/exchange and the movement of people is to be expected' (p.73) seems to be a way of saying that, rather than suggesting interesting complementary or alternative analytical approaches this particular case can be set aside as anomalous.

The extent of treatment of other material types is variable – early and middle Iron Age brooches and late Iron Age torcs and 'horse-fittings' are all mapped on Figure 2.11, but with little more than passing references in the discussion; the striking cross-period regional tradition of spectacular metalwork depositions (Roman coin hoards also receive only a passing reference, at p.198) would surely have merited more detailed consideration. By contrast, more space is devoted to 'loomweights' – here Rippon provides a very useful regional synthesis of evidence for this unglamorous artefact type – though Cynthia Poole's alternative interpretation of these objects as oven furniture perhaps merited more consideration (p.69).

Examination of material culture is followed by consideration of aspects of the regional settlement pattern which include quantification of the trajectory of enclosure of (non-hillfort) settlement sites (p.84), and demonstration that pit alignments are strongly characteristic of the South East Midlands rather than other areas of the study region. These distinctive features represent permeable landscape division within rather than marginal to the region. Linear earthworks are relatively scarce and, like the pit alignments, often not well dated. Examples within 'Icenian' north-east Anglia are interpreted by Rippon as reflecting an east-west

subdivision of this territory hinted at by other aspects of the evidence (including the concentration of torc deposition in eastern Norfolk). In the Chilterns, the interpretation of cross dykes and other linear features appears more debatable and Rippon places more emphasis on a string of early and middle Iron Age hillforts as structures with significance in terms of territorial boundaries. Other hillforts that lie north of the Chilterns in south-eastern Cambridgeshire (Fig. 3.9) are interpreted specifically as being 'designed to control the narrow communication route from the lowlands of the South East Midlands up into East Anglia between two sparsely occupied areas' (p.99). The significance of this boundary area, in Rippon's analysis, is marked by further classes of sites in the Roman period and, more obviously, by a sequence of major linear earthworks in the early Saxon period (Fig. 3.10). Whether having a 'defensive' function or not (p.98) the Oxfordshire linear earthworks of Aves Ditch and the Grims Ditch east of Wallingford are convincing as boundary features at the western margins of 'Catuvellaunian' territory, and both have the advantage of being archaeologically dated to the late Iron Age (or, but less likely, later) on the basis of grog-tempered pottery within the structures.

For such late Iron Age material Rippon retains the label 'Aylesford-Swarling', which he uses in the context of ceramics, certain types of metalwork, cremation burials and the development of 'oppida' (p.63), seen as components of a 'package'. This seems a retrograde step; surely (for example) the Icenian 'decision not to adopt the 'Aylesford-Swarling' cultural package' defined as 'conservatism' (p.101) is better seen as reflecting alternative attitudes to social practice (eg, Hill 2002, 158).

More traditional thinking can be seen in aspects of the approach to the Roman period. Scholars have been deconstructing 'Romanization' for more than 20 years (contra p.168), and the strongly regional character of many aspects of settlement patterns and forms, and of material culture, are well understood. Even the broad level analysis of the recent Roman Rural Settlement project (Smith *et al.* 2016) divides the study region between three of its own units of analysis based on differences in the broad character of this settlement. Roman period topics which are of importance to Rippon's central argument include the definition of *civitas* boundaries, the nature of the urban hierarchy (with an agonised discussion of 'small town' categorisation (pp.115–119)), and the importance of temple sites in the already-defined Iron Age coin distribution boundary zones. Analysis of settlement evidence concentrates on villas; some of the resulting patterns are well-known, but some of the potential regional variation in distribution of particular plan types is less obvious. Consideration of Romano-British material culture mainly concerns pottery, the extensive treatment being a reworking of Rippon's contribution to the Roman Rural Settlement project (Allen *et al.* 2017, at pp.336–352). While one of his foci in the current work is the concentration of early production sites in the boundary zone south of Cambridge (see above, to which a further site at Duxford can now be added

(Anderson & Woolhouse 2016)), a point made by Millett (referenced by Rippon at p.192) in relation to some late Roman industries supports his argument better, since these are major industries, whereas the early sites, albeit that their location is interesting, are only of local importance, though the later Horningsea industry, in similar territory, was much more substantial (see now Evans *et al.* 2017).

For the early Anglo-Saxon period examination of material culture (principally (broad) brooch types from cemeteries) again follows outlines of the historical/documentary evidence and consideration of settlement and cemetery distributions. On the latter, two short points – no distinction is drawn between cremation and inhumation rites, and the assumption (p.260) that graves with no adequate osteological data can be sexed on the basis of their finds is problematic. The extent of survival of the native British of this period, treated in a separate chapter, is the sort of question that lies at the heart of the issues addressed by Rippon. That there was substantial survival in parts of the eastern region is increasingly agreed. The evidence, however, still rests more on broad environmental trends linked with gaps in distributions of distinctively ‘non-British’ settlement components (Rippon particularly highlights Grubenhäuser) and material culture than on concrete indications of other forms of settlement. Claims for ‘extensive evidence for sub-Roman settlement in Hertfordshire’ (p.276) are not yet supported by convincing material remains; this situation may change, and Rippon’s argument that a range of simple handmade pottery conventionally regarded as early Anglo-Saxon potentially represents non-‘Germanic’ communities (pp.281, 285) is interesting, but controversial. Cemetery evidence may play an important part here, but Queensford Farm near Dorchester-on-Thames cannot be included in a list of sub-Roman sites (p.279); analysis by Hills & O’Connell (2009) showed clearly that the latest burials there may date to the early 5th century but no later. This remains a field where significant advances may be anticipated, but current evidence remains patchy.

Finally, fundamental questions of identity can be considered by way of an iconic Romano-British monument, the tombstone of the Catuvellaunian woman Regina (pp.108–9), of whom Rippon notes ‘that Regina regarded this heritage as partly defining her identity’, a view widely found elsewhere. What Regina thought of her identity is unknown. It was proclaimed by her husband, whose very ‘foreign’ (Palmyrene) origin reflected itself in a concern for its own expression, a concern which he then projected on to his wife. The identity ascribed to Regina here is thus of little value for identifying the ways in which the majority of Romano-British individuals defined themselves – the fact that comparable expressions of identity are incredibly rare must be significant. Equally we have no idea of the extent to which proclamation of a Catuvellaunian identity carried any concept of time depth; at what period did a sense of such an identity assume meaning for rural communities, or, to put it another way, who was worried about

boundaries, particularly in the Iron Age, and if they were, what sort of boundaries, beyond the confines of one's individual settlement, were the ones that mattered?

The interest of this book is that it draws attention back to the importance of landscape as a long-term contributory determinant in the construction of communities, particularly at a broader level. The variety of evidence (in a text that is generally in good shape, though the illustrations are far from blemish-free) used to support the case is striking, though inevitably focused on material that seems best to support the case, albeit that some aspects of these interpretations can be questioned. Nevertheless, despite reservations about the detail, which apply equally to the evidence presented for periods after the Iron Age, the broad argument is persuasive, though the case for potential continuities of landscape units of settlement is perhaps more convincing than the ascription of political identities to these units. This is surely the case for the earlier Iron Age, and even with the emergence of named polities in the late Iron Age interpretation of the evidence that links associated material culture, settlement patterns and landscapes is not straightforward.

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