

wider (not just Stonehenge, Altamira and the Parthenon, but Art Deco cinemas, and soon, surely, the nastier excesses of modernist architecture). Bits of the blanket are patchily enforced, but working out the criteria for choosing which bits of an infinite demand for preservation can be given the small and finite supply of resources, is horrid.

Philosophically, the question is insoluble: we don't know future criteria of value, so we can't tell what will be valuable in the future. Practical valuation has to depend on an uneasy attempt to measure, usually in money terms, considerations of utility (e.g. reuse of old buildings), of associative/symbolic value ('the first Welshman', 'Shakespeare slept here'), and information (the least easy to translate, since historical and prehistorical understanding usually has zero technical application and zero cash value in itself).

The mechanics of preservation, which is what this book sticks to, certainly are formidable. Bigger still, and needing to be addressed just as urgently, are the ethics of how to choose the miniscule percentage of old things that are to be kept -- or come to that, why we preserve anything at all. A London conference a couple of years back tried to work out why we find value in old things and didn't reach a rational answer. Probably there isn't one, beyond the continuity between respect for the past and respect for the future. If we plan to give our children Star Wars, why should pre-dynastic Egypt matter? Flinders Petrie, quoted by Lipe, had an answer, of the right philosophical character, eighty years ago:

A work that has cost days, weeks, or years of toil has a right to existence. To murder a man a

week before his time we call a crime; what are we to call the murder of years of his labour?... Every tablet, every little scarab, is a portion of life solidified; - so much will, so much labour, so much living reality.... The work of the archaeologist is to save lives; to go to some senseless mound of earth ... and thence bring into the comradeship of man some portions of the lives of this sculptor, or that artist, of the other scribe...

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JOHN COLES, The Archaeology of Wetlands. University Press, Edinburgh, 1984. 111 pp. £11.00 and £5.50 ISBN 0-85224-503-3 and 489-5.

Reviewed by Nigel Holman

Wetlands archaeology has been receiving considerable attention recently, both inside and outside the profession. Firstly there was the 1983 Prehistoric Society conference, then the discovery of the Archaeological Personality of 1984, the Cheshire peat-bog body christened Pete Marsh, and now a short book by John Coles, an archaeologist whose experience, on the Somerset Levels Project and elsewhere, ideally suits him to the task.

A wetland, the book states, is "any area of land covered by water for part of each year, or of each day or which has been drowned by water at anytime in its existence" (p. 1). In this way, the sub-discipline of wetlands archaeology is distinguishable from the submarine discipline of underwater archaeology and the specialist area of shipwreck research. The potential scope is enormous, we are told that 6% of the total land area of the world is covered with wetlands thus defined, and Coles emphasises

this coverage by making reference to sites from Australia dated c. 10,000 bc to medieval Northern Europe. An outline of the history of research serves to place modern-day activities in a context of early work which, we are reminded, was not restricted to the Swiss Lakes and the Somerset Levels as many, at least in Britain, tend to assume. Notably though, we are presented with discussions of the practical, technological and philosophical issues raised by wetland sites. As is made abundantly clear in this book, the quality of preservation in wetlands has something to offer virtually all archaeologists, whatever their paradigmatic preferences.

The book is written in the form of an extended essay, with no list of contents. Chapters are headed "First Principles", "Methods" and "Sites and their Landscapes" and have an ordering of themes which seems at times rather unexpected. However, for purposes of review, four categories of discussion can be abstracted from the text:

1. Environmental and ecological. Such data have been emphasised over the last 25 years or so and were the principal motivations for the initiation of many wetlands project. The variety of fauna and flora at both micro- and macro-scales is covered briefly and both general texts and specific case studies are cited. For the majority of archaeologists, this is the least eye-opening of the categories and John Coles neither wastes his own, nor our time, repeating what is available elsewhere. He clearly has bigger fish to fry.

2. Cultural. The important point is made that the preservation on wetland sites of artefacts entirely or partly made up of organics opens up new approaches to 'group ethnology' (to use David Clarke's phrase). Such an approach considers a much wider range of a

total cultural assemblage than merely inorganic remains (principally, of course, pottery and/or lithics) which survive on dry sites. However, it is reasonable to caution that re-definition of archaeological cultures will surely require more than the frequently isolated wet sites which are commonly the subject of investigation. From this point of view, as well as from others, large-scale regional research designs are perhaps most likely to produce satisfactory results.

3. Behavioural. The potential for previously unanticipated developments in this field is discussed quite extensively throughout the book. Several classes of data frequently found in waterlogged sites will be discussed in this review, being those which the reviewer regards as being of particular interest.

The common lack of post-depositional displacement provides possibilities for intra-site spatial studies of a kind which are impractical or unwise on dryland sites. The same feature will allow the study of residues which, while not being the most glamorous of research topics, should provide useful insights into various aspects of artefact function. Tree-ring studies, which have often been seen in the past solely in terms of the construction of regional chronologies, are now demonstrating that they are of potential value in identifying construction phases both within settlements and individual structures (aided by micro-stratigraphical analyses) as well as demonstrating the chronological relationships between sites within a region. All these will be of value in clarifying archaeological time-scales and identifying different hierarchies of social relationships.

The fossilised prehistoric landscapes of Dartmoor, western

Ireland and elsewhere, which have been preserved through blanket bog growth and recorded during recent years, have been consistently shown to be a valuable source of archaeological data. Though few organic remains survive, and dating is often problematical, they shed light on land-use patterns involving both single and multiple communities.

4. Public presentation. It is, above all, refreshing to see a concern for this aspect of archaeology in a general text such as this. George Macdonald's wise words which John Coles quotes deserve reproduction here: "It may be the wet and frozen site archaeologists who save the neck in terms of public support of those archaeologists...whose results are totally incomprehensible to the public" (p. 54). Waterlogged sites tend to provide a range of fascinating everyday and more esoteric items whose popular appeal is enhanced by their surprising (sic) preservation. However, they also provide 3-dimensional remains which are far easier to present to the public than many characteristic dry sites yet are a more fulfilling experience for archaeologists and non-archaeologists alike. The inescapable conflict between all the possible options for a site are discussed. All the options (preservation, excavation and presentation, as well as combinations) are important for the healthy development of the discipline. Coles gives his considered opinion and stresses that alliances with nature conservationists, to whom wetlands also have a considerable interest, can help the cause of preservation of archaeological sites and landscapes. The example of the preservation of a length of the Sweet Track running under a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) in the Somerset Levels provides an example for such developments. The airing of similar issues at a session of the 1984 Conference of the Theoretical

Archaeology Group bodes well for the future.

The Archaeology of Wetlands also provides us with a wide-ranging and comprehensive summary of the techniques required to move towards achieving the potential outlined above. This is drawn from both the practical experience gained by the author in the Somerset Levels and from foreign projects whose frequently innovative approaches merit consideration by British archaeologists.

However, as is clearly pointed out, there is a considerable price to be paid in order to realise the potential outlined above. Survey and excavation techniques are invariably costly, requiring sophisticated equipment and the co-operation of specialists in order to gain the maximum yield of data. It is perhaps this question of expense which brings the conflict between wet and dry sites into sharpest focus. Decisions are difficult enough, evidenced by the continuing debate over the competing claims of rescue and research, but now in many places we, and our paymasters, are being tempted into new and expensive, but potentially very rewarding, ventures. While providing no ready-made answers (he would be very likely to deny that any exist), John Coles emphasises the need for research in complementary environments yet continues to stress the importance of preservation as a central theme in any research design.

The text is relatively short, a little over 100 pages which also include 62 (often over-reduced) photographs and line-drawings, and offers little 'slack' at which a reviewer might pull. Nevertheless, in many respects it points the way forward in wetlands archaeology. In addition, the combination of pragmatics and ethics is a particularly welcome feature and is one upon

which all archaeologists, 'wet' or 'dry', would do well to dwell.

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JOHN COLLIS The European Iron Age. Batsford Press, 1984. 192 pp, 52 figs and plates. £17.95 (Hard), £9.95 (Soft). ISBN 0-7134-3415-1 (Cased), ISBN 0-7134-3452X (Limp).

Reviewed by John Alexander

Many who work in this field have talked of writing a book with this title, but none have dared appear in print. The knowledge required for it is immense, scattered, and in a dozen or more languages. John Collis comes to it with the advantages of nearly two decades' work in the central and western European mainland and a command of the ancient languages needed, and is therefore well qualified to attempt a synthesis. He has written an excellent and useful book aimed not at specialists but at the community at large, and can only be faulted for promising in his title something which he never apparently intended to perform. The same kind of promise was made some years ago by V. Megaw with his title Art of the European Iron Age, which equated European with La Tène art and ignored all the other schools. Collis concentrates on a zone of Europe which stretches S.E.-N.W. from the Aegean coastlands through Italy and Central Europe to the British Isles and does not discuss either Scandinavia or northeast Europe on one side or Iberia on the other, as his maps (e.g. p. 27) show. His selection of a special zone of study is legitimate and fascinating, but it excludes nearly half of Europe, and the title should be different. If he were to change his title it would also be as well to drop 'Iron Age', a now out-dated concept, when his real study is the first millennium B.C.

He is interested in four problems: the development of

Aegean and Italian iron-using states; the spread northwards of their commercial influences into Central Europe; the rise and southward spread of Celtic (la Tène) peoples; and the impact of the expanding Roman Empire in north-western Europe. Within this framework he has written a most informative book. That it is intended for the intelligent general public is shown by an introductory chapter on 'Attitudes to the Past' which sets out his position as 'a prehistorian viewing the world from Central Europe'. It is a pity, however, that in it he castigates Diffusion as 'a dangerous and misleading concept' (p. 14) and illustrates it with the wilder shores of eccentricity, for he had to go on and admit that what he is discussing undoubtedly involves the diffusion of ideas and techniques as well as objects, especially for the knowledge of iron-using.

The heart of the book lies in the next four chapters. Two, entitled 'The Old Order' and 'Reawakening in the East' describe the Mycenaean world of the Aegean and the rise of iron-using Aegean and Western Asian states. It is disappointing that the Phoenicians, whose influence in the Central and West Mediterranean coastlands was so great, and who preceded the Greeks there, are not better considered and are not mentioned in the index. The Greeks and Etruscans in the chapter headed 'The Trade Explosion' are dealt with more faithfully, although some of the illustrations (e.g. 16a-b) need replacing. In Central Europe the coverage is excellent and the illustrations superb. The period 500-250 B.C. is headed, rather surprisingly for one standing in Central Europe, 'The Tide Ebbs', but this great period of Celtic expansion and the phases of La Tène is well described and has many unfamiliar and useful illustrations.