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Prehistory without borders

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PREHISTORY WITHOUT BORDERS: THE PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE TYNE-FORTH REGION. Edited by Rachel Crellin, Chris Fowler, and Richard Tipping. Pp. viii and 244, Illus 119. Oxbow Books, 2016. Price: £45.00. ISBN 978 178570 199 3

Initiated by Chris Fowler and Peter Topping in 2009, and followed-up by an AHRC-network grant held by the editors, the Tyne-Forth Prehistory Forum brought together archaeologists from all backgrounds interested in the prehistoric communities of south-east Scotland and north-east England. Seven meetings and field-trips were held throughout the two regions between 2010 and 2012 to further communications and form new connections across the Anglo-Scottish border. The number of participants almost doubled over the two years, from 79 to 158 (p.10). This book is the outcome of the Forum, which is currently ‘dormant’ (p. 14). Like the various meetings, it aims to inspire new cross-border research.

The national political boundary that exists today implements different heritage legislation and funding schemes within the two regions, which the editors list in their introduction as potentially complicating collaborations between archaeologists working within these geographically comparable areas. Sharing their experience from Continental European and Scandinavian projects, Chapter 2 (Haselgrove, Vander Linden, and Webley), and Chapter 3 (Hüglin) exemplify such inherent difficulties in cross-border research at a larger scale. However, the editors highlight the great potential within the Tyne-Forth area, and the comprehensive Table 1.3 (pp. 3–7) identifies similarities in research themes across the Anglo-Scottish border, highlighted by the respective research frameworks ScARF (<http://www.scottishheritagehub.com/>) and NERRF (<https://www.durham.gov.uk/research>).

The book presents a collection of some papers from the Forum meetings and a few additional contributions. Most papers stem from a university context, including Ph D research and collaborations with national museums staff and independent researchers; others present commercial work or their own research interest. The focus is on presenting research results. One obvious omission in this compendium, regretted by the editors (p. 11), is the work by volunteers. While the reasons behind the final composition of edited volumes are always complex, the editors make it clear that the rich and important contributions by local individuals and groups, who certainly participated in the Forum meetings, should form an integral part of future work. Their projects on topics which are prehistoric cornerstones between the Forth and Tyne, such as rock art, hillforts and environs, and Roman/Iron Age interactions, are only highlighted in the introduction. Specific contributions on such topics would have made this a more rounded volume. The editors also note that only ‘[a]round half of the chapters in this volume analyse data from both sides of the Anglo-Scottish border’ (pp. 13–14). This highlights the very problem, which justified the Forum project in the first place: the limited amount of existing *systematic* cross-border work.

What this edited volume does present is a very useful collection of individual case studies from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Late Iron Age that consider material from either side of the border to varying degrees, which hence determines how much of a wider conclusion each can offer. Following reflections on the history of research and the creation of its record (Halliday; Cowley; Tipping), papers presenting comprehensive analyses of funerary practices nested in social networks (Fowler and Wilkin; Warden, Caswell, and Roberts) and of Bronze Age

settlement patterns (Waddington and Passmore) are complemented with thoughtful studies of specific site types (Tipping, Verrill, Bradley, Housely, and Saville; Will; Proctor; Hamilton). Artefact studies on pottery (Edwards; Millson), metalwork (Cowie, O'Connor, and Uckelmann), or quern-stones (Heslop) contain a level of detail that will appeal to the specialist, while introducing current thinking to the non-specialist and linking results to wider debates beyond the area. This volume is undoubtedly a treasure trove of scholarly information and the individual contributions offer valuable details as well as grander narratives on specific themes.

What the individual cases have not quite achieved is to move the debate beyond their particular scope. Some material or time periods may lend themselves more to cross-border research than others; the Iron Age has been highlighted. However, while crossing national boundaries may be difficult, not many chapter boundaries were crossed either. Little comparison or cross-referencing between chapters occurs. Connections between papers would surely have been discussed at Forum meetings, but any cross-fertilizations regarding content and results are not explicitly reflected upon. Thematic interrelations were perhaps hindered by ordering the chapters more or less chronologically, contrary to the thematic order of the Forum meetings. While this coordinates with the national and regional research frameworks, a chance may have been missed to relate themes across time and place.

The editors are, however, very much aware of the core question of the Forum and the book: 'Is the 'Tyne-Forth region' good to think with?' (p.13). By assessing the individual contributions together they conclude that these 'cannot be combined to argue that there was a distinct Tyne-Forth region or sense of community throughout prehistory' (p. 13). The real conclusion seems to be that as much as we should not be constrained by national borders, we should perhaps also move beyond the 1950s-60s concepts of 'provinces' by Hawkes and Piggott (created then specifically for the Iron Age, admittedly). By evoking a Tyne-Forth region, yet another boundary is drawn, while prehistoric communities would have simultaneously connected at different levels and in different contexts: locally, regionally, and supra-regionally. In this context, some papers suggest to explore other categories such as upland/lowland (e.g. Millson, p.109) or local/long-distance (Fowler and Wilkin, p. 129-130), which stretch across the Anglo-Scottish border, the Forum area and beyond. The reviewer very much agrees with the editors' conclusion that we need to approach the archaeological record at these varying scales and acknowledge that prehistoric boundaries were malleable and circumstantial. In teasing out details between Forth and Tyne, this book can facilitate more linked-up thinking geographically, as well as thematically, and more work seems possible to progress such a 'Prehistory *without* Borders'.

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