



Book Reviews

CELTIC ART IN EUROPE: MAKING CONNECTIONS EDITED BY C GOSDEN, S CRAWFORD AND K ULMSCHNEIDER

Oxbow Books, 2014. 400 pp, 206 illus incl. 32 col plates and 92 B/W, 5 tables, in English, German and French. ISBN 978-1-782976554, (hb) £60

Celtic Art in Europe: Making Connections is written as a celebration of the work of Vincent Megaw to mark his 80th Birthday: it is very much a statement of respect of the research contribution of Ruth and Vincent Megaw to Celtic Art over the last 50 years. There is no doubt this is a standout book. It is full of excellent articles: thirty seven in total. Some academic and some are personal tributes to both Vincent and Ruth Megaw, written by specialists in this field of research alongside knowledgeable individuals. Some are written with an excellent sense of humour, a clear passion for their work and all telling indicators of the great respect which is held for the lifetime Megaw research partnership. It is well-written, extensively illustrated and concisely edited, and certainly an excellent addition to a large corpus of books on European Celtic Art currently available. There are good reasons why it was nominated as one of *Current Archaeology's* books of the year in 2015.

To be clear however, this is not a book for those new to Celtic Art. For those wanting an introduction to the wider ranging subject of Celtic Art and the Celtic world there are many other publications which cover the basics of artefact types, styles and their meaning, as well as the many synthetic discussions which cover the definitions of art itself (eg Megaw and Megaw 2001, and the recently published Farley and Hunter 2015 to name just two). This book's focus is on the art and artefacts from the European Iron Age; the core of Ruth and Vincent Megaw's research. It doesn't cover old debates about the definition of the 'Celtic' identities but instead focuses on the detail of current research on material culture.

This book is timely and reflects current interest in Celtic research coinciding with current reviews and the major exhibitions held in London and Scotland (as well as the Prehistoric Society's own 2016 [Europa](#) conference) and is therefore very topical at the moment, as these have all been celebrating a wide scope of research. This book is just one such opportunity to present some of the areas of research currently being taken forward. It covers a wide geographical range showing how far Celtic studies have developed and what we are continuing to learn. The spread of artefacts such as carnices and torcs and the motifs and decorations replicated throughout Continental Europe as explored in these contributions demonstrate how much we continue to learn about trade, networking and exchange of populations in later prehistoric Europe.

So the contributions in this book cover impressive ground: they showcase a wide range of material culture and exploratory studies of diverse artistic styles all of which represent Celtic Art. There are studies of finds and sites from Poland (Bochnak) to Portugal (Koch, Quesada Sanz) and from the Balkans (Popovic, Egri) to the Braes of Doune, Scotland (Hunter). A vast array of artefact types, such as jewellery, weapons and decorative objects are discussed alongside detailed studies such as sword decoration from Iberia and across Europe (Quesada Sanz, Lejars). Pottery from Romania, Slovakia and the Balkans (Rustoiu, Březinová, Popovic), beads from Pannonia (roughly modern eastern Austria, western Hungary and the northern Balkans –

Potrebica and Dizdar) and, obviously, torcs from Germany and England (Echt, Stead). Many are accompanied by excellent distribution maps. Delightfully, there is even an article on that most rare of artefacts, an Iron Age animal-headed horn – a carnyx (Gleirscher): this study of this representative artefact of the European Iron Age brings together opportunities to look at multiple meanings of art, design, the idea of the warrior and warfare. In addition there are articles on the history of the study of Celtic art (Collis) which shed new light; on motifs (Olivier); discussions on why (human) faces appear in such frequency on artefacts (Egri, Venclová and Royt) as recurring symbols seen throughout the period and in many different ways. There are also articles that focus on designs of animals (Foster, Kaul), many of which are stylised, such as those depicted on the Basse-Yutz flagons from Basse-Yutz in northeastern France, and currently held in the British Museum (Frey).

The article by the late Paul Jacobsthal (skilfully assembled by the editors by drawing upon archival material from Paul Jacobsthal archive) reveals the significant role Vincent Megaw played in developing the Jacobsthal archive at the Institute of Archaeology in Oxford. This, along with the whole volume itself, shows how Oxford, from a British research perspective at least, has been driving forward research for the last few years, with published volumes that have focussed on the technological study of Celtic Art and examination of its production in context (eg, Garrow & Gosden 2012; Garrow *et al* 2008 the current Celtic Art in context project). Their work in putting together this publication therefore also serves as an opportunity to highlight how researchers at Oxford are taking stock of what research is going on and the current state of research on ‘Celtic’ Art.

The Oxford connection means that there are a good number of papers in this book which focus on the British contribution to the wider European context of Celtic Art. The papers include a particularly nice paper on the Snettisham hoard (Stead) as well as a highly discursive contribution on the distinctive artefact known as the Torrs Chamfrain (Briggs), a particularly unusual bronze horse headpiece (its different interpretations and its restoration). There are also excellent discussions of sites such as Fiskerton (Fitzpatrick) as well as a more general overview of the metalworking tradition in north eastern Scotland which presents some superb detail (Hunter). We are also given some excellent insights into ‘frontier art’, covering the period of uncertainty at the end of the Iron Age as the Roman republic and Empire flexed its muscles across Europe.

From the British perspective two papers really stood out for me. The first is John Collis’s discussion of the Sheffield connections to Celtic Art through John Obadiah Westwood, who, as Collis explains, wrote the first article he could find on the subject and maybe even invented the term itself. This article is great as it shows that even with a well-covered topic such as this we continue to be surprised. The second, is the discussion of the open air ‘ritual’ site of Hallaton in Leicestershire (Haselgrove and Score). The site is unusual in Iron Age Britain. While it clearly appeared to serve a religious purpose, despite the absence of a focal building or structure, a large number of deposited pig bones were recovered which suggested communal feasting. Most significantly have been the discoveries at this site of large numbers of Iron Age coins, a beautiful silver bowl and a Roman cavalry helmet (which is beautifully illustrated here). Sites such as Hallaton allow us to question some of our key assumptions, including chronologies (the helmet may have originated from the (late) Iron Age rather than Roman contexts), as well as the character of these types of sites (with no building or focal point) and even the significance of particular animals (the overwhelming percentage of pig bones). The local museum has built a new display entirely around the artefacts recovered (and at a time when austerity cuts continue to put pressure on Museums nationally (and internationally)), and by doing so has been able to raise the profile of sites such as this. As the authors highlight in their conclusion this site is important

for a number of reasons and helps us to remember the significant impact single sites can have on the development of our understanding of the late Iron Age/Roman transition in England.

Overall this book is well produced and presented. It has a crisp presentation style, and the cover, although simple, is effective and features a beautiful photograph of Auchenbadie armlet. Black and white photographs throughout as well as colour (located at the back of the book) make this an attractive volume. Unusually (and impressively) the editors have ensured this book is multi-lingual; many of the papers are in English with a smaller number in French and in German. The French articles have also English summaries. This isn't a standard occurrence in many edited books, however, as a rather useless mono-linguist I was particularly grateful for this, and I believe it adds much and certainly makes this book stand out from many such edited volumes and monographs.

This sheer breadth of this book shows us how much we continue to research this topic and this period. Current researchers are able to focus so much on the details in their studies because of the broad plinth on which Celtic Art studies has been built on over the last 50 years or so. That foundation is the result of the work of pre-eminent scholars in this field such as Vincent and Ruth Megaw, to whom this book is so fittingly dedicated. This is an excellent tribute to the work of these scholars and is wholeheartedly recommended as a fine edition to European later Iron Age studies.

References

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Review submitted: May 2016

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