OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

CHAPTER 26

THE IRON AGE

JODY JOY

1 Introduction

The popular image of Iron Age religion is of religious ceremonies, officiated by druids in sacred groves. Scholarly accounts utilize two main sources of evidence: literary and archaeological. Many are based on evidence gathered largely from classical texts and early medieval Irish and Welsh literature (e.g. Ross 1967; Green 1986). The archaeological evidence which is put forward is often comprised of data which cannot easily be explained by functional interpretations, or common sense. Few studies integrate both literary and archaeological evidence well. A dichotomy can also be observed between accounts based on literary evidence which examine religion and archaeological evidence which is often interpreted as evidence for symbolic, ritual activity.

The chronological and geographical scope of this chapter stretches from 800 BC–first century AD and focuses on Western Europe, particularly Britain and France. This in part reflects biases in the literary evidence and previous work. There are parallels between debates over religion and the notion of the Celts (see Collis 2003). Some studies specifically refer to 'Celtic' rather than Iron Age religion and its distribution is often seen to match the distribution of Celts. Like interpretations of Celts, universal accounts are also popular and similarity in religious beliefs is often implied across large geographical areas and over long time spans.

In this chapter the existence of a single universal European Iron Age religion is refuted. Although regional and temporal similarities can be observed, the specific details of practice are different. Instead it is argued that for the most part Iron Age religion was practised on a local scale. Relationships with the supernatural were negotiated within systems of belief that were intimately bound up and connected with every other aspect of life.

2 Literary Evidence

Like Celtic Art, studies of Iron Age religion occupy their own niche, separate from mainstream archaeology. Studies largely reliant on the literary evidence are perceived by many Iron Age specialists to lack credibility (Fitzpatrick 2007: 289) as an idealized,

universal picture of religion is presented (Fitzpatrick 1991) following a straightforward, uncritical application of the literature (Webster 1994: 1). The way in which textual sources are applied also displays an element of 'pick and choose archaeology': something is mentioned in a text and evidence is then sought from the archaeological record to back it up. Evidence to the contrary is often ignored. Recent trends in archaeological theory also mean that site-specific or regional explanations are often favoured over universal accounts (see Collis 2008: 35). As a consequence many Iron Age specialists now avoid references to religion, or evidence derived from classical and medieval texts, preferring instead to examine ritual practice.

Use of writing was limited among Iron Age peoples (although see Williams 2007) but accounts of them are documented in contemporary Greco-Roman texts. These date to as early as the sixth century BC, but the majority were written after 120 BC when the Romans came into direct contact with Iron Age peoples in southern France (Webster 1995a: 445). It is possible to highlight general themes in this evidence. There are descriptions of different gods (Cunliffe 2005: 573) and there is also broad agreement that people believed in an afterlife (Wait 1995: 491; Cunliffe 2005: 572). A group of religious specialists, the Druids, are referred to by 20 classical authors (see Kendrick 1927; Piggott 1968; Green 1997; Webster 1999: table 1). A broadly consistent account of the Druids as philosophers is portrayed by writers during the second and first centuries BC (Webster 1999: 4; Fitzpatrick 2007: 289). Caesar describes the Druids as a group of religious specialists who acted as intermediaries with the gods. In addition to officiating at religious ceremonies, the Druids also acted as judges arbitrating disputes and as teachers of religious knowledge (Webster 1999: 6; Fitzpatrick 2007: 290). First century AD writers place a different emphasis, describing Druids as magicians or seers (Webster 1999: 4), or portraying them as healers, detailing the importance of natural foci to Iron Age religion, such as sacred groves (Fitzpatrick 2007: 289). Some authors also state that human sacrifice was undertaken (see Webster 1999: table 1; Cunliffe 2005: 573).

There are a number of problems associated with the classical literary evidence. Contemporary classical texts were produced by an external, conquering society (Webster 1995a: 445). Specific passages may have been included to make a moral argument rather than to document historical fact and we cannot be certain of their veracity (see discussion of Tacitus in Hutton 2007: 3–6). As we have seen, the majority of accounts of Iron Age religion were written by Romans describing practices in Gaul in the second–first century BC. These cannot easily be projected backwards in time, or to other regions. Many descriptions relate Iron Age practices to Roman counterparts. For example, the roles of various gods are often equated with, or converted to, their closest Roman equivalent (Webster 1995b; Cunliffe 2005: 573). Other significant practices may have been missed or ignored. For example, the emphasis on the natural elements of Iron Age religion reflect a concern for nature in classical religion (Webster 1995a) and the change in emphasis noted in the literature of the first century AD (see Wait 1985: 204) could be an entirely literary construct (Webster 1995a: 448).

Data gathered from medieval Irish and Welsh literature, written in the vernacular, have also been used as sources of evidence. The literature describes popular myths, first written down by Christian monks. Many of these myths are thought to have ancient origins (Green 1995a: 482) and evidence from these texts has been backtracked onto the Iron Age. Since the mid-1980s the veracity of the Irish and Welsh vernacular literature has been questioned by

historians (see Hutton 1991: 144–50). For example, we do not know what influence the Christian beliefs of the monks played in determining the information recorded (Wait 1985: 12). Monks were also influenced by Greco-Roman literature and it is possible old deities were fitted into a structure inspired by classical religion (Hutton 1991: 296). The age of the texts has also been questioned and few now believe many are older than the eighth century AD, meaning that the pre-Christian past was already semi-mythical before these texts were written (ibid.: 148).

It is important to note that many of the older studies of religion are heavily reliant on Irish and Welsh texts. In addition to the problems with these sources highlighted by historians, the methodology often applied in these accounts of religion was also problematic. Many sought to find similarities between medieval Irish and Welsh and classical texts as a means of validation. However, as Fitzpatrick pointed out, using this approach religion is presented as 'timeless'; 'a tradition flowing uninterrupted from the pre-Roman Iron Age to the medieval' (1991: 127), and temporal changes and spatial differences are lost, despite the fact that the classical literary evidence indicates changes in practices and beliefs over time as different authors describe different time spans and encounter different groups of people (Nash 1976: 120; Webster 1999: 8). As Webster (1997) has noted for deposition in wells and shafts, there is also a danger of 'text expectations': because something is mentioned in texts it must therefore have happened.

Despite problems with the nature of the evidence and its interpretation in the past, classical texts *are* contemporary accounts of Iron Age religion and used critically potentially contain much information (Webster 1995a: 445).

3 Archaeological Evidence

Although recent work has examined everyday ritual practices (see below) for the most part archaeological evidence for Iron Age ritual activity has been attributed to data which cannot be explained easily by functional or practical means (see Brück 1999; Insoll 2004). This section of the chapter is divided into depositional types and contexts, which have been interpreted as evidence for religious beliefs and ritual practice. As with other archaeological accounts of Iron Age ritual and religion this could also be described as a list of the 'unexplainable'.

3.1 Shrines and 'Sacred' Spaces

Occasionally formalized structures, which have been interpreted as shrines or sacred spaces, can be recognized, although it must be emphasized that evidence for prescribed ritual space elsewhere is rare. The term *Viereckshanzen*, or quadrangular enclosure, describes a series of rectilinear enclosures defined by an earth bank and ditch, enclosing an area of about 1 ha. Originally used to describe sites from Bavaria, the term has been extended to sites across Europe (see Büchsenschütz and Olivier 1989). It was widely assumed that these sites served a common cult function, although Webster (1995a: 453) has questioned this interpretation suggesting that the category may cross-cut a variety of site types, and some may have been settlements (see Büchsenschütz and Olivier 1989).

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

Following extensive excavations in northern France another type of site has been uncovered defined by large deposits of artefacts, and human and animal remains, and often structures, within an enclosure (see Brunaux 1988: 12). Similar sites dating to the late Iron Age have also been discovered in Britain, for example at Hayling Island and Harlow (Drury 1980; King and Soffe 2001; Haselgrove 2005). They have been interpreted as sanctuaries with offerings and ritual activities taking place within the enclosure. The most famous French site is Gournay-sur-Aronde (Brunaux 1988: 13–16). Dating from the fourth–first centuries BC, it is located on the slope of a valley near a stream, on the borders of four tribal territories. A huge number of artefacts were deposited including more than 2,000 broken weapons and 3,000 animal bones in a single ditch dated to the second century BC.

These temple sites are quite common in France and they provide evidence for complex rituals and ceremonies which have been formalized through human division of space. They show similarities in form and construction but detailed excavation has revealed that often very complicated but significantly different practices occurred at each of them.

3.2 Iconography

There are very few representations of gods. The majority that survive are made of stone. There are a small number of wooden figures, often from watery contexts, but as wood rarely survives we do not know how widespread they were. In Britain and Ireland (Coles 1990: table 1) anthropomorphic wooden figurines have been discovered dating from the Bronze Age–fourth century BC. These include figures standing in a small boat from Roos Carr, Holderness. A large assemblage of wooden carvings of humans and bits of humans were also recovered from Sources de la Seine, France in 1963 (Deyts 1983). These date from the first century BC–first century AD and are very different in character to the British and Irish figures (Coles 1990: 329). Deyts (1983: 167–72) interpreted them as votive offerings.

Stone carvings are also rare. Up to fifty miniature chalk carvings have been discovered in East Yorkshire on Iron Age and Roman sites. Many of these represent a warrior with a sword positioned on the back. Stead (1988) interpreted these as representing a god, mythical figure, or ancestor and suggested they had a ritual or magical function. A series of early Iron Age statues have been discovered in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. One of the most famous is the statue from Hirshlenden, Germany, of a warrior wearing a neck-ring which originally stood on top of a burial mound dating to 500 BC, or later (Megaw and Megaw 2001: 45). The deceased could have had the status of a warrior, or perhaps some religious authority (see Fitzpatrick 2007: 304). Another is the ragstone head from Mšecké Žehrovice, near Prague, Czech Republic. It depicts a stylized image of a moustachioed male wearing a neck-ring or torque, which has been interpreted as depicting a deity (Green 1997: 59), or hero (Venclová 1998).

3.3 Time

Inscribed bronze plaques from Coligny and Villards d'Héra in France have been interpreted as calendars. Although these date to the late second or early third centuries AD, they are different from Roman calendars and the language used is Gaulish or Gallo-Latin (Fitzpatrick 1996: 385–6). Ross (1995: 433) suggested that the Coligny calendar represents

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

a system of dividing time derived from the knowledge of the Druids. Whether or not the information is derived from Druids, there is consensus that these calendars represent knowledge from pre-Roman times (Fitzpatrick 1996: 386), indicating astronomical knowledge and the ordering of time.

3.4 Burials

Burials provide the most abundant evidence for Iron Age beliefs; the dead are buried by the living and burials are primary evidence for the motivations and beliefs of past peoples (Parker Pearson 1999). Burial practices vary significantly. For example, in Britain from the fifth–first centuries BC two regional inhumation burial rites in East Yorkshire and Devon and Cornwall can be observed (Whimster 1977; Ashbee 1979; Dent 1985; Cunliffe 1988; Nowakowski 1991; Stead 1991a). Middle Iron Age burials elsewhere are uncommon, although some inhumation cemeteries, sited just outside settlements have been recently discovered (e.g. King et al. 1996; Hey et al. 1999; Cunliffe and Poole 2000: 152–70). Cremation burials occur in south-east England (see Birchall 1965; Stead 1976) after 100 BC. Later, local burial traditions can also be identified, for example in south Dorset (Wheeler 1943; Woodward 1993) and Gloucestershire (Staelens 1982).

Rituals associated with the disposal of the dead were often complex. In many cases, interrogation of what may first appear to be a simple deposit reveals a complicated series of preceding events. In southern England throughout the Iron Age, complete bodies and bits of bodies were deposited at settlement sites in pits, ditches and enclosure boundaries (Whimster 1981; Hill 1995; Carr and Knüsel 1997). Several stages, or separate rituals can explain the presence of these bits of bodies. The dead were exposed (perhaps in open pits and ditches, or on platforms) and allowed to decompose for a period before some bits were selected and incorporated into pit or enclosure deposits (Carr and Knüsel 1997: 171). We do not know what happened to the rest of the body, or why some body parts were selected for deposition and not others but there is evidence that some body parts were favoured above others. For example, at some sites skull fragments are more common than other parts of the skeleton (Cunliffe 2005: 552–3).

British burials have been interpreted in many different ways. It is often assumed that people were buried with grave-goods for use in another life. This is seen as proof of belief in the existence of 'other-worlds'. However, not all people were buried with grave-goods and practices varied widely over time and space, suggesting that this belief was not universal, or that to some access to the afterlife was achieved by different means. Indeed, for large parts of the Iron Age in Britain we do not know how people disposed of their dead as no archaeologically visible remains survive. In other societies practising exposure it is believed that the newly dead occupy a liminal state and the soul can only be freed from the body through decomposition. Carr and Knüsel (1997: 168–9) suggest it was important for people to see and smell the decay of bodies and witness the transition from the human to spirit world. The adoption of cremation in south-east England has been used to support evidence from classical authors indicating belief in a human soul and reincarnation as the spirit is released from the body by fire. However, as Fitzpatrick (1997: 239) argues, the association between cremation and the existence of a soul is not universal and the adoption of a new burial rite does not necessarily indicate new religious beliefs.

Fitzpatrick (1997) illustrated the different rituals associated with cremation and burial at Westhampnett, West Sussex, a large cemetery containing over 160 cremation burials. To one side of the cemetery four enclosures were uncovered, which have been interpreted as shrines or a religious site. The remains of cremation pyres were also found on the perimeter of the cemetery. Fitzpatrick (ibid.: 241) suggested a possible sequence of rites undertaken at the site. After death the deceased was adorned in the costume appropriate to age, sex, and status. The body was then carried to the religious site and laid out. Pyre material was gathered and the pyre constructed. Animals were sacrificed and the deceased was placed on the pyre, which was then lit and the body cremated. The pyre was left to cool; afterwards human bone was collected and a selection representative of all parts of the body, costume fittings, and animal remains removed. The pyre site was dug over and the burnt pots smashed. The selected human, costume, and animal remains were taken to the cemetery, wrapped in a cloth or placed in a bag. A grave was dug, in it was placed the wrapped cremated remains, pots and wooden vessels. The burial was then covered with straw and filled in. The final act was to erect a marker for the grave. Each of these stages was suggested to have been marked by ceremonies and rituals and the whole process could have occurred over an extended period of time.

Across much of Britain from the fourth century BC–first century AD there is a tradition of burials with offensive weapons, like swords or spears (Collis 1973; Hunter 2005: 50–6). These graves are relatively rare but are found in all of the 'formal' burial traditions identified above. They are often interpreted as the graves of warriors or seen as evidence for a warrior cult. Although there is a broad tradition of 'warrior burial', the exact details of each burial are different, meaning that the ceremonies, rituals and local context of beliefs leading to each was different (see Price 2008 who makes this point in his interpretation of Viking ship burials). The same argument could also be put forward for burials with mirrors (Joy 2010), or cremation burials containing feasting equipment.

3.5 Bog Bodies

Well-preserved human remains have also been discovered in bogs in Britain, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands, and north-west Germany. They date from 500 BC–AD 100 and many show signs of violent death or 'overkill' (see Asingh 2007; Joy 2009). Describing this evidence and drawing on information from classical texts, Glob (1969) believed these people were victims of ritual sacrifice. They were deposited in bogs as offerings to the gods and may have gone willingly to their deaths, or were perhaps prisoners of war or criminals. However, bog bodies are found over an extended period of time and across a wide geographical area and although practices may be related there can be no single explanation as to why people were placed in bogs. Kelly (2006), for example, noted that many Irish bog bodies were found close to ancient land boundaries, suggesting that the bodies served a protective function.

3.6 Watery Deposition

Deposition of well-made artefacts, particularly weaponry, in watery deposits such as rivers, lakes, and bogs has long drawn attention (e.g. Fitzpatrick 1984; Bradley 1990). Significant quantities of metalwork have been recovered from some rivers in Britain and Ireland,

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

particularly the Thames, Witham, and Bann (Garrow 2008: 27; MacDonald 2007: 178). Of the material discovered in the Thames there is a definite bias towards weaponry, particularly spears, swords, and daggers, although it should be emphasized that coins, currency bars, cauldrons, and brooches have also been discovered (Fitzpatrick 1984: 179, table 12.1). Unlike many Bronze Age artefacts, deliberate breakage was not an important consideration as the majority of artefacts were deposited undamaged (MacDonald 2007: 178).

In continental Europe deposits of artefacts have also been discovered in ancient riverbeds around Lake Neuchatêl, Switzerland, at La Tène, Cornaux, and Port Nidau (Bradley 1990: 157). At La Tène, over a period of 40 years, excavators discovered hundreds of objects, particularly weapons such as swords (see de Navarro 1972), but also items of jewellery, tools, pots, quern-stones, and cauldrons, as well as human and animal remains (Vouga 1923; Dunning 1991; Egloff 1991). Although poorly excavated, many of these objects were found in a former channel of the River Thielle, between the remains of two bridges or jetties constructed in the mid-third century BC (Bradley 1990: 157; Parker Pearson in Field and Parker Pearson 1993: 179; MacDonald 2007: 175). De Navarro (1972: 17) noted that some artefacts were damaged before they were deposited. A submerged bridge was also discovered a few kilometres from La Tène, at Cornaux-Les Sauges (Egloff 1987: 30; Dunning 1991: 368). It is dated to around 300 BC and was repaired in 120–116 BC (Parker Pearson in Field and Parker Pearson 2003: 181). Like La Tène, artefacts uncovered include weapons and tools as well as animal and human remains (ibid.). At Port Nidau, 60 swords and an equal number of spearheads as well as a helmet were discovered from an ancient course of the River Zihl (Müller 1991: 528).

As objects in water could not easily be retrieved, it has long been suggested that artefacts were placed in water as an offering to a deity or god and that water was numinous in Iron Age religion (e.g. de Navarro 1972: 17; Fitzpatrick 1984: 183). Deposits were made from natural locations as well as man-made structures such as causeways and jetties. Deposition in a lake at Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey is thought to have been from a natural rock platform (Fox 1947: 69–70), or possibly a causeway (MacDonald 2007: 174). Objects, including swords and spears, were also found in the River Witham at Fiskerton, Lincolnshire, next to a wooden causeway (Field and Parker Pearson 2003). The quantity of objects deposited varied, ranging from single deposits to hundreds, even thousands of objects. Weapons were frequently selected for deposition and many artefacts were deliberately broken. Deliberate breakage has been interpreted as 'ritual killing' of the artefact (see discussion in MacDonald 2007: 172). Human remains discovered at La Tène, in the Thames (although many of these date to the Bronze Age) and at Llyn Cerrig Bach, have prompted speculation that some artefacts were deposited as a part of burials, or even that human sacrifices took place (for discussions of sacrifice see Webster 1994: 6–8; Aldhouse Green 2001; Hutton 2007: 130–3). Animal bone could represent the remains of feasts accompanying depositional acts. There were no butchery marks on the animal bone from Llyn Cerrig Bach indicating that animals could have been sacrificed (MacDonald 2007: 185).

This data hints at the varied and complicated rituals associated with watery deposition. Many artefacts deposited in rivers in Britain, such as the Battersea Shield (Figure 26.1) and Waterloo Helmet, are well made and ornamented with art. Because of this they are usually considered to have been made for and used by the elite. This raises the question of what were the social and religious contexts and motivations for their deposition and should these necessarily be viewed separately (Fitzpatrick 1984: 185). Despite similarities in the data,

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

FIGURE 26.1 The Battersea Shield discovered in the River Thames near Battersea.

practices varied markedly over time and space. Clearly water was important to Iron Age beliefs and objects may have been deposited as propriety offerings but practices and rituals differed, implying that different kinds of offerings were being made to different gods for different reasons.

3.7 Hoards

Deposition of metalwork such as coins, torques, and weapons also occurred in non-watery contexts. For example, up to 25 hoards of gold neck-rings, or torques, and coins have been discovered across Central and Western Europe (Fitzpatrick 2005: 159), the majority date from the third–first centuries BC (ibid.: 174–82). At Snettisham, Norfolk at least 12 hoards of objects, including torques, coins, and ingots dating from the second–first centuries BC have been discovered (Stead 1991b) (Figure 26.2).

Unlike watery deposits, hoards can easily be retrieved and many have been interpreted as being deposited for safe-keeping in troubled times. For example, Stead (ibid.: 455–63) suggested that the remains from Snettisham were hidden as a 'treasury' with the intention of retrieval. More recently this type of common-sense interpretation has been contested as patterns in the positioning and composition of artefacts in hoards have been uncovered. Often hoards are placed in significant positions in the landscape, on hills or in the boundary ditches of settlements (see Hingley 1990, 2005). Deposition at Snettisham was on Ken Hill, an area of higher ground. Excavation of the site in the early 1990s also revealed a large enclosure but it is not certain if it is contemporary. Many of the artefacts were deliberately damaged, some were even melted. These factors caused Fitzpatrick (1992) to argue that it is not possible to rule out the interpretation that the Snettisham deposits were votive. Many other hoards contain artefacts that were deliberately broken or artefacts that could have easily been recycled. The hoards of torques and coins were buried close to springs or lakes, or within man-made enclosures; specific types of coin were also selected and torques were often broken before they were deposited (Fitzpatrick 2005: 172). As a result

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

FIGURE 26.2 Nest of torques, known as Hoard L, discovered at Snettisham, Norfolk in 1990.

of these unexplainable factors, hoards are now most often interpreted as votive offerings and potential sources of information on systems of belief (Hunter 1997: 108).

Like offerings in water, practices varied and valuable objects were selected for deposition indicating the central role of religion and ritual activities in social negotiations of power. For example, many hoards from England and Wales dating to the middle decades of the first century AD, like Severn Sisters, Glamorgan, contain artefacts that mix Roman and Iron Age technologies and styles (Davis and Gwilt 2008: 146). These most commonly appear at the 'frontier regions', which saw most resistance to Roman occupation.

3.8 'Religious Equipment'

Some objects whose function cannot easily be explained have been interpreted as specifically religious or ritual objects (see discussion in Fitzpatrick 2007). For example, Fitzpatrick

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

(1996: 389) suggested that anthropomorphic-handled short swords, found in small numbers across Europe, were used in practices or ceremonies associated with marking and keeping time. Headdresses, such as the 'crown' from a grave at Deal, Kent have been interpreted as symbols of status worn by religious leaders (Stead 1995: 86). Depictions of human heads wearing horned helmets or headdresses are also found on the bronze handle escutcheons of wooden buckets from first century BC cremation burials at Alkham, Aylesford (Figure 26.3) and Baldock (see Fitzpatrick 2007: 303).

3.9 'Archaeology of the Everyday'

In his classic study *Ritual and Rubbish in the Iron Age of Wessex*, Hill (1995) demonstrated that finds from prehistoric settlements may well have been just as meaningful to those depositing them as objects from graves or hoards. He found that often pits and ditches were filled in ordered ways with clear patterns or rules dictating associations between artefacts and the particular fill layer they were placed in. For Hill, 'these patterns demonstrate that excavated settlement evidence, and the associated artefacts and ecofacts, were structured according to symbolic schemes, rationalities and common senses very different from our own' (1995: 126). Deposition in pits and other settlement contexts is part of everyday practice but this practice was grounded in belief and these actions, although they may not make sense to us, are entirely logical given a particular awareness of the world (see Brück 1999: 321).

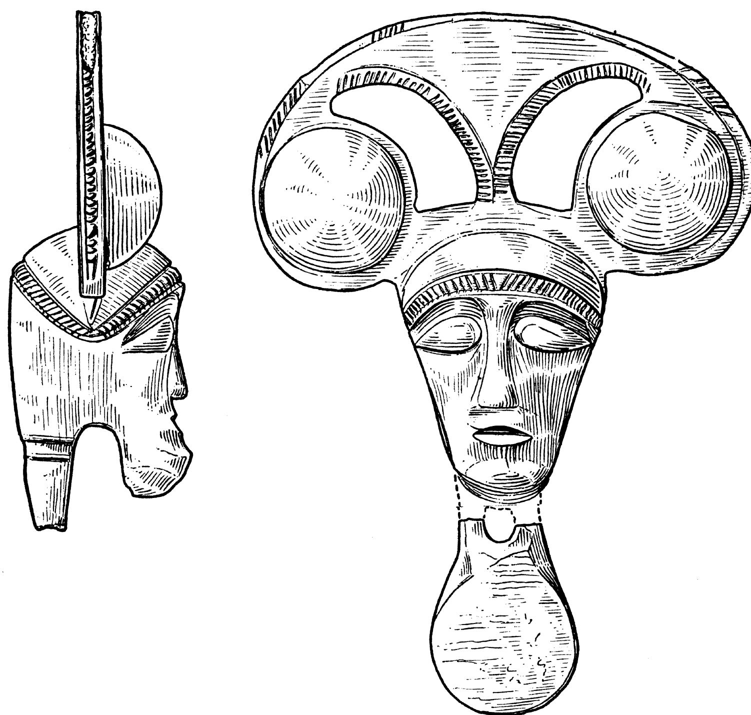

FIGURE 26.3 Bucket escutcheon, figure with headdress, from a burial at Aylesford, Kent.

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

In Britain and Ireland the entrances to roundhouses, dating from the late Bronze Age and throughout the Iron Age, are often orientated to the east or south-east. Practical explanations include the suggestion that it was to allow in more light, for privacy, or to avoid prevailing winds (see Hingley and Miles 1984: 63). Others have indicated this layout had cosmological significance (Parker Pearson 1996: 119), linking the position of doorways to the orientation of shrines (Wait 1985: 177), the rising sun (Oswald 1997: 94), and the 'correct' direction to enter a roundhouse (Hill 1994: 6). Pope (2007) has recently challenged this cosmological model on the basis that it implies a universal explanation and that we cannot so easily set common-sense ideas against cosmological ones. There is no reason why these explanations should be contradictory given a particular understanding of the world. It was propitious to orient doorways towards the rising sun. At the same time doorways were orientated towards the morning light and through standardization doorways in settlements did not face one another, ensuring privacy.

4 Future Directions

Interpretations of religion based on literary accounts and ritual based on archaeological evidence should be reintegrated. The way in which both strands of evidence have been studied is problematic. Literary accounts are too often taken at face value and changes over time neglected, meaning that a universal Iron Age religion is presented. Fitzpatrick (2007) has attempted to look for evidence of religious practitioners, such as the Druids. Although he argues that there is little evidence for an organized priesthood throughout much of the Iron Age, importantly he uses the full range of evidence to reach his conclusions.

Until recently the archaeology of ritual and religion has been an account of the unexplainable. However, as accounts of the 'everyday' demonstrate, religion is manifest in everyday life (Hill 1995; Brück 1999; Insoll 2004; Bradley 2005; Whitley and Hays-Gilpin 2008: 17) and all actions take place within the context of a particular belief system. Following Brück (1999), Iron Age people applied a specific view of the world to all actions and future research should focus on understanding systems of belief. The motivations behind structured deposition in pits may not make practical sense from our perspective. However, for Iron Age people deposition was clearly important and may have served practical functions to mark boundaries and/or served as offerings to deities. Depositional events may also have marked events in the life cycle, such as marriage, or the transition from juvenile to adult, or significant times of year, linked to agricultural, solar, and lunar cycles (Jones 2007).

With the notable exception of Green (1995b), associations between religion and gender have been relatively neglected. Many objects discussed above are martial in character and were most probably associated with men. Ritual artefacts and deposition associated with women are less obvious (see discussion in Fitzpatrick 1984: 186–7). In Britain mirror burials (Giles and Joy 2007) have been viewed as the female equivalent of male warrior burials but discoveries such as the burial from Bryher, Isles of Scilly (Johns 2006), which contained weapons and a mirror, should caution us over putting forward simplistic gender associations. Accounts based on literary evidence highlight the role of male Druids acting as mediators with the gods. However, as MacDonald (2007: 187) points out, classical texts also detail the role of religious women (see also Green 1995b: ch. 7), for example Tacitus

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

describes 'witch-like' women in his description of the Roman attack on Anglesey. Religious roles were likely not as clearly defined as they are today. For example, the man from Deal, Kent, buried with a priestly crown or headdress as well as weapons may have performed different roles throughout his lifetime as 'warrior', 'leader', or 'religious specialist'.

5 Conclusions

It is easier to summarize what Iron Age religion is not rather than to detail what it is. On the whole, it lacks images of deities and formalized, humanly made religious structures like shrines or temples. Intentional deposition dominates the archaeological record but this was rarely recorded in contemporary Greek and Roman accounts. The location of deposits was important. They were most often made in water or located in relation to water in the landscape, high places, or boundaries. These locations may have been numinous. Many objects were broken or 'ritually killed' before they were deposited. The structured nature of more everyday deposits in pits, enclosure ditches, and post-holes, and the complex ceremonies associated with disposal of the dead, also show beliefs were not divorced from everyday life. Different social dimensions of religion can also be viewed. Evidence for religious practice of the elites is most evident in the archaeological record, for example rich graves, or the deposition of well-made martial equipment in rivers. Social status can be enhanced through religious practice. By officiating at religious ceremonies and conducting them in a particular way it is possible to emphasize a certain viewpoint.

Practices varied across time and space and there is no evidence for a single Iron Age religion. Instead the evidence points to local patterns of belief and behaviour, but with some common conceptions such as the importance of water. Despite the problems of interpreting the archaeological data and reconciling this with the literary evidence, understanding belief systems is essential to understanding Iron Age society.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Andrew Fitzpatrick, Duncan Garrow, J. D. Hill and Ben Roberts for reading previous drafts of this chapter, and Stephen Crummy for his help with illustrations. All errors remain my own.

Suggested Reading

Ross (1967) and Green (1986) give excellent accounts of Iron Age religion primarily using literary evidence. Webster (1994; 1995a; 1995b; 1997; 1999) examines the literary evidence critically. Wait's (1985) study of religion in Britain is extensive, but now dated. Cunliffe (2005: 543–78) provides a concise summary. Kendrick (1927) and Piggott (1968) are the classic

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

accounts of the Druids. Cunliffe (2010) provides a recent, succinct introduction to the Druids. MacDonald (2007: 171–89) gives an up-to-date summary of watery deposition, but see also Fitzpatrick (1984) and Bradley (1990). Glob (1969) produced the classic study of bog bodies. Brunaux's (1988) account of sanctuaries in Gaul is engaging. For accounts of hoards see Hingley (1990, 2005), Hunter (1997), and Fitzpatrick (2005). See also Hill (1995) for explanation of structured deposition in pits and Brück (1999) for her discussion of ritual.

References

Aldhouse Green, M. 2001. *Dying for the Gods: Human sacrifice in Iron Age and Roman Europe* (Stroud: Tempus).

Ashbee, P. 1979. 'The Porth Cressa cist-graves, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly: A postscript', *Cornish Archaeology*, 19: 61–80.

Asingh, P. 2007. 'The bog people' in P. Asingh and N. Lynnerup (eds), *Grauballe Man: An Iron Age bog body revisited* (Moesgaard: Jutland Archaeological Society), pp. 290–323.

Birchall, A. 1965. 'The Aylesford-Swarling Culture', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 31: 241–367.

Bradley, R. 1990. *The Passage of Arms: An archaeological analysis of prehistoric hoards and votive deposits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

—— 2005. *Ritual and Domestic Life in Prehistoric Europe* (London and New York: Routledge).

Brück, J. 1999. 'Ritual and rationality: Some problems of interpretation in European archaeology', *European Journal of Archaeology*, 2(3): 313–44.

Brunaux, J. L. 1988. *The Celtic Gauls: Gods, rites and sanctuaries*, trans. D. Nash (London: B. A. Seaby Ltd).

Büchsenschütz, O. and Olivier, L. (eds) 1989. *Les Viereckschanzen et les enceintes quadrilaterals en Europe Celtique* (Paris: Proceedings of the 9th Colloquium of the AFEAF).

Carr, G. and Knüsel, C. 1997. 'The ritual framework of the early and middle Iron Ages of central southern Britain' in A. Gwilt and C. Haselgrove (eds), *Re-constructing Iron Age Societies* (Oxford: Oxbow Monographs 71), pp. 167–73.

Coles, B. 1990. 'Anthropomorphic wooden figures from Britain and Ireland', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 56: 315–33.

Collis, J. 1973. 'Burials with weapons in Iron Age Britain', *Germania*, 51: 121–33.

—— 2003. *The Celts: Origins, myths and inventions* (Stroud: Tempus).

—— 2008. 'The Celts as "grand narrative"' in A. Jones (ed.), *Prehistoric Europe: Theory and practice* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), pp. 35–53.

Cunliffe, B. 1988. *Mount Batten Plymouth: A prehistoric and Roman fort* (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, Monograph 26).

—— 2005. *Iron Age Communities in Britain: An account of England, Scotland and Wales from the seventh century BC until the Roman Conquest*, 4th edn (London: Routledge).

—— and Poole, C. 2000. *The Danebury Environs Programme: The prehistory of a Wessex landscape*, II/iii: *Sudden Farm, Middle Wallop, Hants, 1991 and 1996* (Oxford: English Heritage and Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, Monograph 49).

—— 2010. *Druids: a very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Davis, M. and Gwilt, A. 2008. 'Material, style and identity in the first century AD metalwork, with particular reference to the Severn Sisters Hoard' in D. Garrow, C. Gosden, and J. D. Hill (eds), *Rethinking Celtic Art* (Oxford: Oxbow Books), pp. 146–84.

Dent, J. 1985. 'Three cart burials from Wetwang, Yorkshire', *Antiquity*, 59: 85–92.

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

DEYTS, S. 1983. *Les bois sculptés des sources de la Seine (XLII supplément à Gallia)* (Paris: Editions du CNRS).

DRURY, P. J. 1980. 'Non-classical religious buildings in Iron Age and Roman Britain: A review' in W. Rodwell (ed.), *Temples, Churches and Religion: Recent research in Roman Britain*, BAR British Series 77 (Oxford: BAR), pp. 45–78.

DUNNING, C. 1991. 'La Tène' in S. Moscatiabó (eds), *The Celts* (Milano: Bompiani), pp. 366–8.

EGLOFF, M. 1987. '130 years of archaeological research in Lake Neuchâtel, Switzerland' in J. M. Coles and A. J. Lawson (eds), *European Wetlands in Prehistory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 23–32.

——1991. 'Celtic craftwork at La Tène' in S. Moscati, O. H. Frey, V. Kruta, et al. (eds.), *The Celts* (Milano: Bompiani), pp. 369–71.

FIELD, N. and PARKER PEARSON, M. 2003. *Fiskerton an Iron Age Timber Causeway with Iron Age and Roman Votive Offerings: The 1981 excavations* (Oxford: Oxbow Books).

FITZPATRICK, A. P. 1984. 'The deposition of La Tène Iron Age metalwork in watery contexts in southern England' in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds), *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain* (Oxford: University of Oxford Committee for Archaeology), pp. 178–90.

——1991. 'Celtic (Iron Age) religion: Traditional and timeless?', *Scottish Archaeological Review*, 8: 123–8.

——1992. 'The Snettisham, Norfolk, hoards of Iron Age torques: Sacred or profane?', *Antiquity*, 66: 395–8.

——1996. 'Night and day: The symbolism of astral signs on later Iron Age anthropomorphic short swords', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 62: 373–98.

——1997. *Archaeological Excavations on the Route of the A27 Westhampnett Bypass, West Sussex, 1992*, II: *The Cemeteries* (Salisbury: Wessex Archaeology Report 12).

——2005. 'Gifts for the golden gods: Iron Age hoards of torques and coins' in C. Haselgrove and D. Wigg-Wolf (eds), *Iron Age Coinage and Ritual Practice*, Studien zu Fundmunzen der Antike (Mainz am Rhein: Phillipp von Zaberg), pp. 157–82.

——2007. 'Druids: Towards an archaeology' in C. Gosden, H. Harrerow, P. de Jersey, and G. Lock (eds), *Communities and Connections: Essays in honour of Barry Cunliffe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 287–315.

FOX, C. 1947. *A Find of the Early Iron Age from Llyn Cerig Bach, Anglesey* (Cardiff: The National Museum of Wales).

GARROW, D. 2008. 'The time and space of Celtic Art: Interrogating the "Technologies of Enchantment" database' in D. Garrow, C. Gosden, and J. D. Hill (eds), *Rethinking Celtic Art* (Oxford: Oxbow Books), pp. 15–39.

GILES, M. and JOY, J. 2007. 'Mirrors in the British Iron Age: Performance, revelation, and power' in M. Anderson (ed.), *The Book of the Mirror* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press), pp. 18–34.

GLOB, P. V. 1969. *The Bog People: Iron-Age man preserved* (London: Faber and Faber).

GREEN, M. 1986. *The Gods of the Celts* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton).

GREEN, M. J. 1995a. 'The gods and the supernatural' in M. J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London: Routledge), pp. 465–88.

——1995b. *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, virgins and mothers* (London: British Museum Press).

——1997. *Exploring the World of the Druids* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd).

HASELGROVE, C. 2005. 'A trio of temples: A reassessment of Iron Age coin deposition at Hayling Island, Harlow and Wanborough' in C. Haselgrove and D. Wigg-Wolf (eds), *Iron*

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

Age Coinage and Ritual Practice, Studien zu Fundmunzen der Antike (Mainz am Rhein: Phillipp von Zaberg), pp. 381–418.

Hey, G., Bayliss, A., and Boyle, A. 1999. 'Iron Age inhumation burials at Yarnton, Oxfordshire', *Antiquity*, 73: 551–62.

Hill, J. D. 1994. 'Why we should not take the data from Iron Age settlements for granted: Recent studies in intra-settlement patterning' in A. Fitzpatrick and E. Morris (eds), *The Iron Age in Wessex: Recent work* (Salisbury: Trust for Wessex Archaeology), pp. 4–8.

——1995. *Ritual and Rubbish in the Iron Age of Wessex: A study of the formation of a specific archaeological record*, BAR British Series 242 (Oxford: BAR).

Hingley, R. 1990. 'Iron Age "currency bars": The archaeological and social context', *Archaeological Journal*, 147: 91–117.

——2005. 'Iron Age "currency bars" in Britain: Items of exchange in liminal contexts?' in C. Haselgrove and D. Wigg-Wolf (eds), *Iron Age Coinage and Ritual Practice*, Studien zu Fundmunzen der Antike (Mainz am Rhein: Phillipp von Zaberg), pp. 183–205.

——and Miles, D. 1984. 'Aspects of Iron Age settlements in the Upper Thames valley' in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds), *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, Monograph 16), pp. 52–71.

Hunter, F. 1997. 'Iron Age hoarding in Scotland and northern England' in A. Gwilt and C. Haselgrove (eds), *Re-constructing Iron Age Societies* (Oxford: Oxbow Monograph 71), pp. 108–34.

——2005. 'The image of the warrior in the British Iron Age: Coin iconography in context' in C. Haselgrove and D. Wigg-Wolf (eds), *Iron Age Coinage and Ritual Practice*, Studien zu Fundmunzen der Antike (Mainz am Rhein: Phillipp von Zaberg), pp. 43–68.

Hutton, R. 1991. *The Pagan Religions of the ancient British Isles: Their nature and legacy* (Oxford: Blackwell).

——2007. *The Druids* (London: Hambledon Continuum).

Insoll, T. 2004. *Archaeology, Ritual, Religion* (London: Routledge).

Johns, C. 2006. 'Iron Age sword and mirror cist burial from Bryher, Isles of Scilly', *Cornish Archaeology*, 41–2: 1–80.

Jones, M. 2007. 'A feast of Beltain? Reflections on the rich Danebury harvests' in C. Gosden, H. Hamerow, and P. De Jersey (eds), *Communities and Connections: Essays in honour of Barry Cunliffe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 142–53.

Joy, J. 2009. *Lindow Man* (London: British Museum Press).

——2010. *Iron Age mirrors: a biographical approach*, BAR British Series 518 (Oxford: BAR).

Kelly, E. P. 2006. *Kingship and Sacrifice: Iron Age bog bodies and boundaries*, Guide No. 35 (Dublin: Archaeology Ireland Heritage).

Kendrick, T. D. 1927. *The Druids* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd).

King, A. and Soffe, G. 2001. 'Internal organisation and deposition at the Iron Age temple on Hayling Island, Hampshire' in J. Collis (ed.), *Society and Settlement in Iron Age Europe: Actes du XVIIIe Colloque de l'AFEAF, Winchester (April 1994)* (Sheffield: J. R. Collis Publications), pp. 111–24.

King, R., Barber, A., and Timby, J. 1996. 'Excavations at West Lane, Kemble: An Iron Age, Roman, and Saxon burial site and a medieval building', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 114: 15–54.

MacDonald, P. 2007. *Llyn Cerrig Bach: A study of the copper-alloy artefacts from the insular La Tène assemblage* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press).

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

Megaw, R. and Megaw, V. 2001. *Celtic Art: From its beginnings to the Book of Kells*, rev. and expanded edn (London: Thames and Hudson).

Müller, F. 1991. 'The river site of Port Nidau' in S. Moscati, O. H. Frey, V. Kruta, et al. (eds), *The Celts* (Milano: Bompiani), pp. 528–9.

Nash, D. 1976. '"Reconstructing Poseidonios" Celtic ethnography: Some considerations', *Britannia*, 7: 111–26.

Navarro, J. M. de 1972. *The Finds from the Site of La Tène* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Nowakowski, J. A. 1991. 'Trethallan Farm, Newquay: The excavation of a lowland Bronze Age settlement and Iron Age cemetery', *Cornish Archaeology*, 30: 5–242.

Oswald, A. 1997. 'A doorway on the past: Practical and mystic concerns in the orientation of roundhouse doorways' in A. Gwilt and C. Haselgrove (eds), *Re-constructing Iron Age Societies* (Oxford: Oxbow Monograph 71), pp. 87–95.

Parker Pearson, M. 1996. 'Food, fertility and front doors in the first millennium BC' in T. C. Champion and J. R. Collis (eds), *The Iron Age in Britain and Ireland: Recent trends* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press), pp. 117–32.

——1999. *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing).

Piggott, S. 1968. *The Druids* (London: Thames and Hudson).

Pope, R. 2007. 'Ritual and the roundhouse: A critique of recent ideas on the use of domestic space in later British prehistory' in C. Haselgrove and R. Pope (eds), *The Earlier Iron Age in Britain and the Near Continent* (Oxford: Oxbow Books), pp. 204–28.

Price, N. S. 2008. 'Bodylore and the archaeology of embedded religion: Dramatic license in the funerals of the Vikings' in D. S. Whitley and K. Hays-Gilpin (eds), *Belief in the Past: Theoretical approaches to the archaeology of religion* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press), pp. 143–66.

Ross, A. 1967. *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in iconography and tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd).

——1995. 'Ritual and the Druids' in M. J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London: Routledge), pp. 423–44.

Staelens, Y. J. E. 1982. 'The Birdlip Cemetery', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 100: 19–31.

Stead, I. M. 1976. 'The earliest burials of the Aylesford culture' in G. de G. Sieveking, I. M. Longworth, and K. E. Wilson (eds), *Problems in Economic and Social Archaeology* (London: Duckworth), pp. 401–16.

——1988. 'Chalk figurines of the Parisi', *Antiquaries Journal*, 68: 9–29.

——1991a. *Iron Age Cemeteries in East Yorkshire: Excavations at Burton Fleming, Rudston, Garton-on-the-Wolds, and Kirkburn*, English Heritage Archaeological Report 22 (London: English Heritage).

——1991b. 'The Snettisham treasure: Excavations in 1990', *Antiquity*, 65: 447–65.

——1995. 'The metalwork' in K. Parfitt (ed.), *Iron Age Burials from Mill Hill, Deal* (London: British Museum Press), pp. 58–111.

Venclová, N. 1998. *Mšecké Žehrovice in Bohemia: Archaeological background to a Celtic hero 3rd–2nd centuries BC* (Sceaux: Chronothèque 2).

Vouga, P. 1923. *La Tène: monographie de la station publiée au nom de la commission des fouilles de La Tène* (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann).

Wait, G. A. 1985. *Ritual and Religion in Iron Age Britain*, BAR British Series 149 (Oxford: BAR).

OUP CORRECTED PROOF – FINAL, 8/10/2011, SPi

——1995. 'Burial and the otherworld' in M. J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London: Routledge), pp. 489–511.

Webster, J. 1994. 'The just war: Graeco-Roman texts as colonial discourse' in S. Cottam, D. Dungworth, S. Scott, et al. (eds), *Proceedings of the 4th Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Durham 1994* (Oxford: Oxbow Books), pp. 1–10.

——1995a. 'Sanctuaries and sacred places' in M. J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London: Routledge), pp. 445–64.

——1995b. 'Translation and subjection: Interpretation and the Celtic gods' in J. D. Hill and C. G. Cumberpatch (eds), *Different Iron Ages: Studies on the Iron Age in temperate Europe*, BAR International Series 602 (Oxford: BAR), pp. 175–84.

——1997. 'Text expectations: The archaeology of "Celtic" ritual wells and shafts' in A. Gwilt and C. Haselgrove (eds), *Re-constructing Iron Age Societies* (Oxford: Oxbow Monograph 71), pp. 134–44.

——1999. 'At the end of the world: Druidic and other revitalisation movements in post-conquest Gaul and Britain', *Britannia*, 30: 1–20.

Wheeler, R. E. M. 1943. *Maiden Castle, Dorset* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Whimster, R. P. 1977. 'Harlyn Bay reconsidered: The excavations of 1900–1905 in the light of recent work', *Cornish Archaeology*, 16: 61–88.

——1981. *Burial Practices in Iron Age Britain: A discussion and gazetteer of the evidence c.700 bc–ad 43*, BAR British Series 90 (Oxford: BAR).

Whitley, D. S. and Hays-Gilpin, K. 2008. 'Religion beyond icon, burial and monument: An introduction' in D. S. Whitley and K. Hays-Gilpin (eds), *Belief in the Past: Theoretical approaches to the archaeology of religion* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press), pp. 11–22.

Williams, J. 2007. 'New light on Latin in pre-conquest Britain', *Britannia*, 38: 1–11.

Woodward, A. 1993. 'Discussion' in D. E. Farwell and T. I. Molleson (eds), *Poundbury*, II: *The Cemeteries* (Dorchester: Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society Monograph Series 11), pp. 215–39.