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CONTENTS

WARFARE IN THE IRON AGE OF WESSEX

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Introduction

This paper was originally presented as a lecture to a conference on warfare organised by the Prehistoric Society in Oxford in April 1989. Since then I have been caught in two minds about its publication, but was eventually persuaded that it would contribute to the recent revival in interest in the British Iron Age. I must begin with an examination of the study of warfare by archaeologists. In preparing the original lecture I was intrigued to discover that very little had been written on the topic in recent years. Fashionable theoreticians were clearly of the opinion that activities such as exchange, ritual and the environment were much more important themes.

A brief examination of the indices in two of the latest books on theoretical archaeology emphasise the point. In *Social Theory and Archaeology* Shanks and Tilley (1987) do not refer to warfare at all (but 'exchange' gets 15 references), nor does Hodder in *Reading the Past* (1986), ('exchange' gets 18 references). If we examine two books on the use of Anthropology by Archaeologists there is an interesting dichotomy. In *The Present Past* Hodder (1982) has chapters on technology and production, subsistence strategies, social organisation, ritual and art but none on warfare which rates only three references in the index. In Orme's *Anthropology for Archaeologists* (1981) warfare again does not rate a chapter but does form a substantial part of a chapter on 'contact'. In more general archaeological introductions to British Prehistory such as the *Social Foundations of Prehistoric Britain* (Bradley 1984) and *Prehistoric Britain* (Darvill 1987) warfare is cited more often but in general these references are simply to functional explanations for certain archaeological features.

The paucity of serious discussion of the topic is in marked contrast to its importance in the anthropological literature (Ferguson 1984a). The variety and detail of the literature is extensive and it involves complex and vitriolic debates which are of direct relevance to archaeology. The apparent lack of archaeological interest must derive from the general political climate in which archaeologists operate. Most of the present generation of archaeologists were educated in the 'sixties and 'seventies when the climate of opinion in Universities was strongly anti-war. However, this does not necessarily dictate a lack of interest in the subject. American Anthropology was stimulated in the study of war at a time when the scholars involved were trying to use their research to influence public perceptions of the Vietnam War. The lack of interest expressed by British Archaeologists in the topic could well have been directly related to their isolation from contemporary conflict and it might be no coincidence that three archaeological meetings on warfare have been organised since the war in the Falklands.

I must emphasise that this is not a criticism of contemporary archaeologists. I would not single out the present generation as any more biased by contemporary problems than previous generations. The dominant framework for the analysis of warfare before the 'sixties was the invasion hypothesis and most of the work focused on the precise source of the different invading groups. This debate was primarily concerned with the explanation of culture change in the archaeological record and was seriously biased by the recent history of the British Isles, particularly the threat of invasion in the Second World War.

My position is that archaeology and the study of the past is always dependant on the problems of contemporary society. It has to be relevant to people other than

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archaeologists. The 'facts' – the objects and sites – do not give a picture of the past, the picture is created by individual archaeologists and is subject to their own particular ideas and histories.

Definitions

The most commonly quoted definition of warfare is that used by Malinowski (1964, 247): 'an armed contest between two independent political units by means of organised military force, in the pursuit of tribal or national policy'.

There are, however, several problems here, the definition excludes such specific types of conflict as civil war and individual action. The identification of 'political units' in the archaeological record is controversial and it seems prudent, for our purposes, to widen the remit of participants to simply include 'organised groups'.

Malinowski's definition also stresses the armed nature of conflict, and some writers insist that war must involve casualties to either side. It is worth bearing in mind that Britain was, for several years after the Falklands were recaptured, still technically at war with Argentina. This is not just a legal issue specific to the developed state, it is quite common for conflict in small societies to involve ritualised aggression which does not result in injury to any of the participants. The important principal appears to be the threat of violence.

Let us therefore use a more refined definition of warfare proposed by Ferguson (1984b, 5). Warfare is 'organised purposeful group action, directed against another group, that may or may not be organised for similar action, involving the actual or potential application of lethal force'. The point of this definition is that it includes a wide variety of different forms of behaviour. Warfare is a historical process and as such its manifestations will change.

This definition has implications for archaeological study, it is sufficiently loose for me to believe *a priori* that after the introduction of agriculture warfare was a constant feature of the prehistoric societies of the British Isles. Obviously there are anthropologically identified societies which are peaceful. Such societies (for example the Inuit) are, however, found in extreme environmental situations and they do not indicate that extended periods of peace were ever an important feature of developed agricultural communities. Consequently the aim of the archaeologist should not simply be to identify warfare in the archaeological record, we can assume that warfare is present. The archaeologists should instead understand the nature of warfare and the manner in which it influenced the changes in society. It has been argued that warfare is one of the important mechanisms by which loosely organised tribal societies are transformed into hierarchically ordered states (Cohen 1984) and archaeology could usefully contribute to this analysis.

The purpose of this introduction is to delimit the term "warfare" in such a way that it can be applied to the archaeological record. I will examine the role of warfare in the Iron Age, the period extending from the seventh century BC to the Roman conquest, and in Wessex, a very loosely defined area of central southern England. In fact most of my examples will be from Dorset and will relate to the excavations at Maiden Castle (Sharples 1986, 1987 and forthcoming). However, the interpretation should be relevant to all of Wessex and to the sequence at Danebury (Cunliffe 1984 a,b) in particular. It is not necessarily relevant to other areas that might appear to be superficially similar such as the Welsh Marches or the Upper Thames.

The Broad Patterns

The evidence for warfare in Wessex derives from four basic types of information:- the nature of the settlements, the artefacts that could be used as offensive or defensive

weapons, burials showing evidence for violent death, and the historical sources.

Historical sources. I shall largely ignore these, they relate mostly to the Roman conquest (Rivet 1971), and although of some relevance to the immediate pre-Roman period they have little to tell us of the preceding 600 years. We know that there were considerable changes in the Late Iron Age in southern England and the social organisation of warfare is thus likely to have been transformed during this period and as a response to the Roman invasion.

Most of the other historical sources which have been used to discuss the nature of Iron Age warfare tend to be generalisations based on the assumed pan-European similarities of Celtic society (cf Hill 1989). Again we should question the relevance of these sources to our understanding of the Wessex Iron Age. The archaeological evidence clearly indicates that Wessex was an area with little contact with continental Europe (Sharples forthcoming). The Irish historical sources have even less application, they were created in a Christian society perhaps a thousand years later than the period with which we are dealing. Mallory has made a detailed analysis of the references to weaponry in the *Tain* and shown that they are very different to those used in the earlier Iron Age societies (paper presented to a conference on warfare held at Oxford).

Burials. The evidence for violent death found on human skeletons can not be easily overlooked, but there are a number of features which restrict its relevance beyond a simple confirmation that warfare did indeed exist. The first is that there are few well documented occurrences of individuals with such wounds. This is largely due to the poor burial record for the Iron Age, but even when a large assemblage of burials is recovered the evidence is insignificant. The first 10 years excavations at Danebury recovered the remains of at least 70 individuals of which only four had wounds on the skeleton indicative of violent death (Hooper in Cunliffe 1984b, 470). Furthermore of these four, one might be a post mortem wound and two others show signs of healing, although death was probably a direct result of the wound. It has to be emphasised, however, that violent death does not necessarily indicate warfare, it can be the result of punishment and religious sacrifice, of which northern European bog bodies are classic examples (Parker Pearson 1986). The evidence for head hunting, though often quoted, is also negligible. The Danebury report makes a point of singling out these examples, (Walker *in* Cunliffe 1984b) but the evidence is unconvincing. The eight skulls represented could be a result of the excarnation practices which produced the bulk of the human remains on the site or because skulls are easy to identify. It is also significant that the equally important recovery of articulated limbs and pelvic girdles is not given the same prominence in the interpretation of the site.

The most famous skeletal evidence for warfare remains the 'war cemetery' at Maiden Castle and it is necessary to examine the interpretation of these burials in slightly more detail. Wheeler's interpretation is worth repeating.

> 'First the regiment of artillery which usually accompanied a legion was ordered into action and put down a barrage of ballista arrows. The arrows have been found about the site, and buried amongst the outworks was a man with an arrowhead still embedded in one of his vertebra. Following the barrage, the Roman infantry advanced up the slope, cutting its way from rampart to rampart until it reached the innermost bay, where some circular huts had recently been built. These were set alight, and under the rising clouds of smoke the gates were stormed and the position carried. But resistance had been obstinate and the fury of the legionaries was aroused. For a space, confusion and massacre dominated the scene. Men and woman, young and old, were

savagely cut down before the troops were brought to heel. A systematic slighting of the defences followed, whereafter the legion was withdrawn, ...and the dazed inhabitants were left to bury their dead... The task was carried out anxiously and without order, but even so, from few graves were omitted those tributes of food and drink which were the proper prerequisites of the dead' (Wheeler 1943, 61-62).

There are a number of assumptions here which can not be supported by even the most superficial examination of the data. The story is largely based on the 'war cemetery', burials, but it does not mention that these were placed in an established Late Iron Age cemetery, and that less than half the burials show evidence of violent death. All the burials were carefully placed in the orientation, and with the offerings, that would be expected from other cemeteries of this date in southern Wessex. The number and quality of the objects in the graves is exceptional and would indicate that some trouble had been spent gathering together material which might reflect the status of the deceased, for example two individuals were accompanied by legs of lamb. Furthermore at least four individuals had wounds which had at least partially healed (Wheeler 1943, graves P19a, P20, P27, P36, 352-356), indicating that the burials occurred some time after injury.

It is likely that Wheeler's lurid picture gives a biased emphasis to the defensive significance of a hillfort, and as the war cemetery is clearly an exception related to the Roman occupation of southern England, it can not help us understand the wider nature and purpose of Iron Age warfare. I will, however, return to the significance of Late Iron Age Durotrigian burials at the end of this paper.

There are other deposits from Wessex, notably the scatter of human remains in the South Cadbury entrance, the 'massacre level' (Alcock 1972, 105) and the Danebury 'charnel pits' (Walker *in* Cunliffe 1984, 451) which have been compared to the Maiden Castle 'war cemetery'. Both of these deposits are difficult to interpret. They date to the final Iron Age or post conquest period and recent work (J D Hill pers comm) suggests that they are more likely to be highly structured ritual deposits than evidence for endemic warfare.

Weapons and defences. One of the most interesting features of the archaeological record in the first millennium BC is the alternation between periods producing a proliferation of defended settlement, and periods when weapons are common.

For the three hundred years preceding the beginning of the Iron Age the archaeological record is dominated by the recovery of large numbers of objects which seem to be designed for warfare; swords, shields and spears are the most obvious forms but the ubiquitous axe may also be an equally effective weapon. The inception of the Iron Age involved the almost complete disappearance of these weapons (including the axe) and the appearance of a distinctive class of settlement, the hillfort, which has (until recently) been assumed to have a largely defensive purpose.

Hillforts dominate the archaeological record in Wessex for the next 500 years, yet there is practically no evidence of weaponry more sophisticated than the sling, a tool appropriate to a pastoral society dependant on sheep farming. In the two centuries before the Roman conquest there is evidence for a change when swords and spears once again return to the archaeological record, and the hillforts are abandoned.

Even when we examine the archaeological record in greater detail we can trace this dichotomy between weapons and hillforts. One of the few areas in southern Britain in the Early Iron Age where weapons are relatively frequent is the River Thames, where hillforts and defended settlements are rare (see Wait 1985 for recent distribution maps, although it is unlikely that the swords of the 'Middle Iron Age' figure 2.3, date to the '4th – 2nd centuries BC').

The chronological sequence at Maiden Castle exhibits some of the subtlety in the changes that were taking place (Sharples forthcoming). After the construction of the small Early Iron Age hillfort there appears to be a period of almost continual rampart construction. The traditional interpretation is to describe this construction in terms of five distinct phases; the small hillfort, the extended hillfort, multivalation, heightening the inner rampart and finally the redesign of the entrances (Wheeler 1943). I have argued elsewhere that the evidence recovered by Wheeler is to be explained best by a continual process of construction. Recent excavation (Sharples 1986) revealed a rebuilding of the original rampart and ditch which was missed by Wheeler, and his own excavation of the inner rampart of the extended hillfort revealed several periods of rampart refurbishement which did not fit into his simple scheme of four phases of activity (Wheeler 1943 pl X). An analogy for the construction process may be the painting of the Forth Road Bridge – a never ending task which once finished has to be started all over again – but it should not be stretched to far. I do not envisage a professional team of defence builders, it seems more likely that construction would be an annual event which would attract an influx of people from the surrounding communities (Sharples forthcoming).

This period of construction comes to an end in the third to second century BC, and from this time onwards the defences were only sporadically maintained. Settlement encroached onto the area immediately behind the rampart and the quarry hollow (which was the source of the material used in the major rampart constructions) was infilled by a succession of houses, working areas and occupation material (see Sharples 1987 and forthcoming for details of this sequence).

Examination of the distribution of slingstones in this sequence is interesting. In the early quarry-hollow fills, when the ramparts were the focus of attention, slingstones are present but not in great quantities. In the later periods when the ramparts were neglected the quantity of slingstones increases considerably, and in the small area of the recent excavations there were two hoards each with over 500 slingstones. Wheeler discovered three hoards with over 10,000 slingstones in the eastern entrance and these probably belonged to this later period (Wheeler 1943, pl XVI). In the final period of occupation, the number of slingstones recovered in the recent excavations remains roughly the same but the size and frequency of the hoards suggests a decrease as other weapons, notably spears, become more important.

Although the dichotomy between the weaponry of the Late Bronze Age and Late Iron Age and the defended sites of the Early and Middle Iron Age has been noted by other archaeologists, there has been no concerted attempt to explain it. Bradley (1984, 122) suggests that the weapons of the Late Bronze Age do not necessarily indicate warfare as the evidence for armed conflict is rare. Hillforts would therefore indicate an increase in conflict, he suggests they 'represent actual warfare' although he does not present any evidence, or indeed arguments, to suggest why. The preferred definition of warfare used here does not distinguish between the threat or practice of warfare, and it cannot be accepted that hillforts indicate an unambiguous increase in warfare. Indeed we are probably well advised to avoid suggestions of 'increases' and 'decreases' as it is impossible to compare the relative threat of a sword, shield, spear or slingstone.

It is clear from this analysis of the sequence at Maiden Castle, and by comparison with other sites, such as Danebury, that hillforts do not have a single function. A variety of different activities can be associated with these sites and with time the importance or perhaps the emphasis on certain activities changed dramatically. I have argued elsewhere (Sharples 1990) that even within the initial period of defensive construction the aims and purpose could change dramatically.

Interpretation

There are three problems which can now be examined with this general framework in mind: the origin of hillforts, the development of regional territories in the Middle Iron Age, and the appearance of weapons and personal wealth in the Late Iron Age.

The origin of hillforts. This problem is primarily related to the change from bronze to iron technologies around 700 BC. In the Late Bronze Age control over the metal resources is seen to be one of the most important features of those societies (Bradley 1984). There is good evidence that extensive trade routes linked southern England, Brittany, Ireland and Iberia at this time (Rowlands 1980) and it has been argued that elaborate bronzes were used to define status within the community (Pearce 1983), and the regional groupings which divided the landscape (Thomas 1989, 265). Control over the exchange networks and the inter-community alliances that provided mechanisms for this trade would therefore be a principal cause of conflict.

In a society where exchange was an important and competitive process it is the individual who can develop alliances and debts by the distribution of goods, and who can muster the human resources necessary to succeed in warfare. The archaeological record is dominated by weapons because the primary purpose of warfare would be to kill individuals and so acquire wealth and status. Conflicts occurred at an individual level because individuals controlled the desired resources.

The increase in the use of iron in the seventh and sixth centuries seriously undermined this society as the exchange networks across the western seaboard of Europe collapsed. Iron can be found throughout the region (for southern England see Salter and Ehrenrich 1984, 47) and could be produced to a sufficient standard for most tools to be made by local craftsmen. Consequently the social relationships which defined territories and which were manipulated to establish status within the community could no longer be sustained.

On a local level the small scale and specialised farmsteads which were so widespread in the later Bronze Age (Barrett 1980) had to be abandoned because they depended upon the network of exchange relationships for the supply of essential goods. Groups were forced into larger more self sufficient communities which had 'direct control over land and agricultural production' (Thomas 1989, 278). It was the control over agricultural production which was the focus for warfare in the Iron Age.

The characteristic feature of the earliest hillforts is that they were permanently occupied by large communities with very little sign of status distinctions within or between settlements. Late Bronze Age enclosures, such as Bindon Hill (Wheeler 1953) had, in contrast, been very sparsely occupied. In Wessex Early Iron Age hill forts are all roughly the same size and have single ramparts and ditches with simple entrances (Cunliffe 1984c, fig 2.9). Pottery was the most important artefact in these communities and what little potential there was for identifying status and specialist production involves a group of distinctive fine wares (known as scratch cordoned bowls and Dorset wall-sided bowls). Petrological work at Maiden Castle (Brown *in* Sharples forthcoming) suggests that the Dorset bowls were locally produced but it has been argued (Cunliffe 1984c) that the Wiltshire scratch cordoned bowls may have a more centralised production. Nevertheless, compared with the Late Bronze Age the evidence for specialised production, status identification and long distance trade is negligible.

One of the most important features of the Early Iron Age hillforts is the presence of considerable grain storage capacity in the form of '4-post' granaries and pits (Gent 1983, Cunliffe 1984c, Fig 2.10). Storage of large quantities of grain may be essential for a community which could no longer use extensive reciprocal trading relationships to see it through an agricultural crisis.

In these fragmented societies the primary motive for warfare appears to have been to

control land capable of supporting a large community. The earliest hillforts are situated in positions with easy access to large areas of rich and diverse agricultural land. This is clear from an examination of the position of hillforts in south Dorset; Maiden Castle, Abbotsbury Castle, Poundbury and Chalbury are all situated such that they controlled large areas of chalk upland which was extensively cultivated in the Bronze Age, and large areas of low lying land with access to permanent water supplies. The sites of Maiden Castle and Chalbury, seemingly the most densely occupied and longest lived settlements, were better positioned to exploit these resources.

The appearance of hillforts at these locations suggests that the land controlled was also actively fought over. The position allowed the establishment of a much larger community than was otherwise supportable from the agricultural resources, and hence gave this community an advantage in any conflict. Support for this argument comes from the knowledge that there are other adjacent areas where hillforts are lacking. In Dorset these include Purbeck, the central chalklands and Cranborne Chase, all of which were extensively occupied during the Iron Age. None of these areas has the diversity of resources necessary to support the larger hillfort populations. Cranborne Chase is the best example, the settlements at Gussage (Wainwright 1979) are extensively documented and only small atypical and unfinished hillforts appear to exist (RCHME 1975, XXIV).

The main contrast with the Late Bronze Age is that power and wealth were associated with land ownership and the community, not with the individual. Defences are necessary because the death of any individual was relatively unimportant, the primary goal of warfare would be to displace a community and appropriate its land.

The development of regional territories. During the third and second centuries BC there is a marked change in the ceramic industries of southern Britain. There are new styles, new forms and new methods of production. In the Hawkesian nomenclature this would have been the change from Iron Age 'A' to 'B', in more recent work the appearance of regional styles such as the 'saucepan pot continuum' is used as a defining characteristic (Cunliffe 1984c, Fig 2.13).

These changes in the ceramic record coincide with changes in settlement. The effort put into the construction and refurbishement of hillfort defences is dramatically reduced, and there is a much more intensive and systematic occupation of the interior of the remaining hillforts (Cunliffe 1984c, Fig 2.17). These changes appear to correspond with a shift from warfare between local kin based communities competing for access to local resources to warfare between the occupants of geographically defined territories.

This would suggest that the period of Early Iron Age warfare led to the emergence of a hierarchy with kin groups based in certain hillforts which gradually achieved widespread control over large territories. In Dorset and the adjacent areas of Somerset there are two main hillforts of this period which are large enough to suggest their inhabitants were in competition with Maiden Castle: South Cadbury and Hambledon Hill (though Badbury Rings may be an equivalent site in east Dorset). These hillforts are some distance apart and appear to have acquired control over their own locality.

The control and prominence of these communities is symbolised solely by the construction of large multivalate defences which, as Bowden and McComish (1987) point out, are clearly not practical defences. There is no evidence from the material culture that these settlements contain individuals of high status. Indeed the availability and variability of the material culture in the early Middle Iron Age appears to have been deliberately suppressed (Sharples 1990).

The sequence around Hambledon Hill is particularly interesting, it illustrates very clearly the changes in hillfort occupation during the Iron Age. The first possible hillfort is a large hilltop enclosure on Hod Hill, less than a mile to the south of Hambledon Hill.

These hilltop enclosures have not been discussed in detail here as they are a Late Bronze Age phenomenon and do not appear to be settlements or necessarily defensive. The first hillfort was built on the north end of Hambledon Hill and is a small, 3 ha, Early Iron Age fort similar to Chalbury, Poundbury and the first Maiden Castle. This hillfort increases in size gradually and less extravagantly than Maiden Castle, growing in two stages to a maximum of 10 ha (RCHME 1970, 82) compared to the 18.5 ha of Maiden Castle. In the second century BC I would suggest that Hambledon Hill was abandoned, and the inhabitants moved to build the hillfort on Hod Hill (RCHME 1970, 263). The defences on this fort enclose an area of 22 ha, almost directly comparable with the area enclosed at Maiden Castle. This hillfort was occupied up to the Roman conquest (Richmond 1968).

The reason for moving from Hambledon may have been that the area enclosed at Hambledon was a narrow steep sided ridge which created major difficulties when it came to laying out a regular ordered settlement with streets and zones of specialist activity. The large area of flat ground on Hod Hill in contrast was ideal for this purpose, it is still possible to identify streets of houses in the unploughed area in the south east corner (RCHME 1970). It is also notable that the defence of Hod Hill was by a single low bank and ditch which is relatively insignificant when compared with the defences at Maiden Castle and South Cadbury, highlighting the lack of emphasis placed on defences in the later Iron Age.

The movement to Hod Hill coincided with the appearance of ceramics which, in their form and the nature of their decoration, define a territory which coincided with many of the present boundaries of Dorset but which extended into east Somerset (Cunliffe's Maiden Castle/Marnhull style). This territory must represent some kind of political alliance between the principal hillfort communities which were in competition with similarly defined territories to the west, north and east.

Warfare in this period would be very different to the local small scale conflicts between neighbours envisaged for the Early Iron Age. It would, of necessity, involve well organised incursions into distant and probably unfamiliar territories. Such expeditions would require careful planning, and they would also require the deployment of considerable resources.

It is possible that the increasing pressure to control resources led to the changes in the settlement and material culture record. An increased economic specialisation seems to be the prime aim of the reorganisation of the later Middle Iron Age. Alliances were split from the small self sufficient kin groups characteristic the Early Iron Age, and organised into larger fraternities possibly on the basis of age, sex and skills. These represent an increasing dependency on specialist activities with some of their needs being met by exchange with other similarly specialised groups. This move would have allowed an intensification in production making people free to acquire craft skills which in turn allowed for the production of specialised and high quality tools and weapons.

The appearance of personal wealth. Developments in the Late Iron Age appear to be a direct reversal of the developments at the beginning of the period, a result of the specialisation which occurred at the end of the Middle Iron Age. In the territory of the Durotrigies a variety of artefacts are produced at restricted locations and redistributed widely. Shale bracelets are very common, coming from Kimmeridge on the Purbeck coast (Calkin 1953). Briquetage increases indicating salt production probably all round the coast but particularly in the Fleet and Poole Harbour (Farrer 1975). The quantity and quality of iron working increases and we can identify sites such as Hengistbury Head as possible specialist production centres (Salter *in* Cunliffe 1987, Sharples 1990). The most interesting commodity is, however, pottery. In the final period at Maiden Castle over 99% of the pottery found on the site comes from industries based around Poole Harbour

(Brown *in* Sharples forthcoming), specialist industries now completely dominated ceramic production throughout Dorset.

Initially these industries were probably designed to emphasise the growing importance of the region and to distinguish it from surrounding communities. Once such exchange networks arose, however, they provided a mechanism through which individuals could compete. Consequently there is a breakdown in the rigid and very homogeneous settlement structure typified by the streets lined with similar houses found in hillforts like Maiden Castle and Danebury. Indeed many hillforts (including Danebury) were abandoned and the settlement record came to be dominated by small, undefended settlements.

Several such settlements have been identified in the area around Maiden Castle; Poundbury (Green 1987), Fordington Bottom (Chowne 1988), Whitcombe (Aitken 1967), Alington Avenue (Davies et al 1986) and Maiden Castle Road (Woodward and Smith 1988). The distinctive feature of these settlements is that they are associated with extensive systems of ditched enclosures which are presumed to represent field boundaries. A large area of these land divisions, with well defined droveways, were exposed at Alington Ave (Davies et al 1986). Land divisions similar to these are not a feature of the Early or Middle Iron Age in Wessex as all the examined 'Celtic' field systems are Bronze Age in date (Barrett 1980). Their reappearance suggests that, what had hitherto been communal land, administered and farmed from the hillfort, was being appropriated by individual farms.

Similarly the development of distinctive burial rites in the Late Iron Age emphasises the importance of the individual. In the Middle Iron Age the principal form of burial appears to be excarnation and consequently there is very little evidence for burial in the archaeological record (Wait 1985). Occasionally individual burials are found to have been placed in abandoned grain storage pits, but these can be associated with other ritual deposits placed in similar positions. Both these rituals, excarnation and burial in storage pits, would limit the significance of the individual and symbolically tie them to the community. The development of cemeteries in Dorset with individual graves and proscribed body positions in contrast emphasises the importance of the individual. The presence of grave goods indicates that wealth was also being used to define status.

The Late Iron Age societies of Wessex would appear therefore to indicate a fragmentation of the corporate leadership symbolised by the massive communal defences of hillforts such as Maiden Castle and South Cadbury. A more rigid and individual hierarchy was established on the basis of control over trade and manufacturing industries. These had become increasingly important during the Middle Iron Age as the principal means by which the regional territories, established about 300 BC, were defined. In these Late Iron Age societies power was in the hands of individuals and could be acquired by killing others. Consequently personal weapons such as swords and spearheads, were required.

Conclusion

I have skated over a number of different topics in this paper and need to finish by summarising the main arguments. At the beginning I discussed the nature of warfare and how we should approach an archaeological study of the topic by realising that it was endemic, dependant in its structure on the nature of society and primarily aimed at acquiring power within that society. I have examined the evidence for warfare in the Iron Age of Wessex and argued that there was a basic pattern which contrasted large communal defences with personal weapons. This can be understood by the change in the nature of wealth during the period. An emphasis on agricultural production invested power in the communal ownership of the land in the Early and Middle Iron Age, whereas, in the Late Bronze Age and Late Iron Age an emphasis on redistribution and specialisation invested power in the individual.

It might be felt that this paper is something of a sham in that I have not actually discussed how people go about killing each other. How do you attack a hillfort? Can slingstones be used in large scale inter tribal raiding? I would argue that this criticism misses the point. In the introduction I made it clear that warfare, as I intended to discuss it, involved ritualised display and threatening behaviour. I believe that the bulk of the evidence for warfare in the archaeological record is created as a deterrent, or to symbolise the nature of the conflict rather than actually practice the act. This should not seem strange to twentieth century scholars as the bulk of our national resources have been concerned with a planned conflict over world hegemony which if it had actually taken place would have reduced the world to a prize not worth winning.

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