ISSN 2516-1016

Later Prehistoric Finds Group

Issue 21 2025/2026

Welcome to the latest edition of the LPFG Newsletter. We are delighted to bring you a variety of news from the world of later prehistory. Trevor Creighton brings us new research from Butser Ancient Farm, working with veterans to reconstruct an ancient wall, Jennifer Beamer gets down to her own reconstruction as she brings us new research making chalk spindle whorls, and from whorls to weights, Ted Levermore and Stephen Patton are putting together a gazetteer of perforated ceramic weights and want to know if you would like to get involved and/or get in touch with data for the project. Rounding out the issue, Antony Lee reviews a conference publication on that subject so dear to our hears: hoarding. If you would like to contribute anything to our next issue then please get in touch using the information at the back of the newsletter. But for now we hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter!

A chalk spindle whorl reconstructed by Jennifer Beamer. Read more about these on page 9.

Welcome

The Later Prehistoric Finds Group was established in 2013, and welcomes anyone with an interest in prehistoric artefacts, especially small finds from the Bronze and Iron Ages. We host an annual conference and publish an annual newsletter, in addition to a series of datasheets providing short, accessible introductions to different classes of objects. Members receive all our new publications via email, and you can download back issues for free on our website.

Membership is free; if you would like to join the group, please e-mail LaterPrehistoricFindsGroup@gmail.com.

To submit articles, notes, or announcements for the LPFG newsletter, please e-mail lpfgnews@outlook.com. Guidelines are available on the website, but please feel free to e-mail with any questions.

Who we are at the LPFG

Chair: Matthew Hitchcock

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Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the 2026 edition of the Later Prehistoric Finds Group Newsletter! We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed their time and expertise to writing and editing this excellent edition. On behalf of the LPFG Committee, I would like to thank all our members as they continue to support the group and help to promote the study of later prehistoric finds.

At the end of last year, we hosted another successful online symposium which brought together a diverse and exciting mix of researchers and research from a range of different fields within later prehistoric studies, also launching for the first time a series of short lightning talks which promoted focused and engaged discussions. The videos of these talks will be available online via our YouTube channel, which can be found by searching for 'Later Prehistoric Finds Group.'

Our newsletter has switched to an annual occurrence, and will be published toward the beginning of each year. As always, we welcome contributions about any aspect of prehistoric archaeology, including formal academic papers, short stories and comic strips. A peer-review process is provided for each contribution. If you would like to contribute to our next issue, please send any abstracts or submission ideas to laterprehistoricfindsgroup@gmail.com

Our annual AGM will be held online on 21st May, and I will be stepping down as chair after two years. If you are interested in the role, or any others with the group, please do get in touch!

On behalf of the whole LPFG Committee, we hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter and we wish you all the best in whatever aspect of later prehistoric archaeology in which you may be involved!

Dr. Matthew Hitchcock (LPFG Chair)

An earth wall experiment at Butser Ancient Farm

Trevor Creighton

The Experiment

In 2021, a team of site staff and volunteers from the military veterans' charity Operation Nightingale constructed an experimental roundhouse at Butser Ancient Farm, Hampshire. It was based on a Late Bronze Age roundhouse excavated in 2020 at Dunch Hill on Salisbury Plain. The archaeological model presented as ten postholes cut into chalk in a c. 6.5m diameter sub-circular layout. An eleventh posthole was located slightly off-centre. No evidence of a floor, walls, or ring ditch were identified (Wessex Archaeology, 2021, pp. 7–9).

The experiment was designed principally to test the functionality and post-demolition visibility of earth mass walls. The absence of walling evidence in the archaeological record suggested the use of ephemeral materials and engineering. Earth walls have seldom been experimentally evaluated in southern Britain and are unlikely to have good archaeological visibility, especially on truncated sites. Their use was, therefore, both a good fit with the archaeological evidence and an opportunity for a novel experimental project. The options explored were non-load-bearing embanked turf, embanked unconsolidated earth, double-walled insulated gabion, and chalk cob.

Construction

The dimensions, configuration, and orientation of the original were duplicated and postholes were dug into a chalk geology broadly comparable with that of the original site. Oak posts were placed in the postholes and horizontal lintels were jointed to their tops, creating a load-bearing ring beam around the post circle, c.1.5m in height. Non-load-bearing walls were created within the spaces between adjacent posts. The result was a series of eight discrete wall sections plus an entrance, giving the structure the form of an irregular polygon (Fig. 1). Two wall sections were embanked with turf and three with loose soil. Wattled panels were installed between adjacent post pairs as revetting for the embanked soil/turf (Fig. 2). These were secured at the top by inserting the ends of c. 30mm-diameter upright stakes (sails) into holes drilled into lintels. Their bases were inserted into holes c. 30–40mm in depth, the minimum depth estimated to be sufficient to resist the lateral load of the embanked soil/turf. There were no stake holes identified in the archaeological model, likely because such shallow holes would be unlikely to survive even slight truncation. A wattled gabion wall section and two of chalk cob completed the wall circuit.

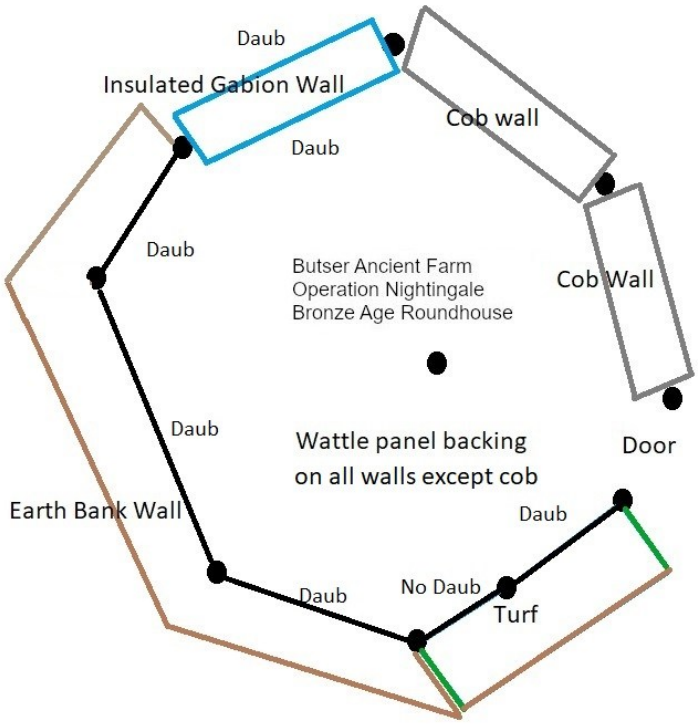

Fig. 1: Schematic of wall construction methods (Butser Ancient Farm 2021).

Fig. 2: Post and lintel frame with wattle panel revetting (photograph by the author).

Observations

Revetted walls

Soil and turf were piled against the panels from outside the post ring (Fig. 3). At this point the sails of one wall section began to buckle inwards. There was a risk that the ends of the sails would be forced from their anchoring holes, causing the embanked soil to collapse. To prevent this, sturdier bracing posts (c. 50mm in diameter) were installed on the inner side of the wattled panel, abutting the existing sails. They were similarly anchored into shallow holes in the earth and lintels.

This effective repair produced pairs of almost conjoined stake holes in the ground. The expectation is that the post-abandonment archaeology will reflect this repair. In fact, features of similar morphology are encountered in the archaeological record. Rather than being associated with repair they are often interpreted as unrelated individual postholes or ascribed specific structural functions (e.g. Addyman, Leigh, and Hughes,1972, pp. 17–31).

Fig. 3: Photograph of an embanked turf wall section during construction (photograph by the author).

This method of abutting one vertical member against another would be equally effective for complete replacement of almost any post and could be expected to leave a similar archaeological trace. The experimental evidence, although far from conclusive, lends support to interpretations of dual postholes in the archaeological record as potentially attributable to repair or replacement.

Cob walls

The cob walls are comprised of small chalk lumps (<30mm) and organic fibres bound with a crushed chalk and water mix (Fig. 4). They are freestanding between adjacent posts. It is anticipated that the post-abandonment archaeology of walls or structures of similar construction would have low to zero visibility within a short timeframe. However, they might be recognisable by proxy.

Contemporary block chalk walls are constructed on stone or brick plinths to alleviate water damage and consideration was given to using a ground spread of flint nodules as a base for the experimental build. As there was no evidence for this in the archaeological record the idea was dismissed.

There are, however, instances of stone scatters associated with prehistoric buildings, such as with Late Bronze Age roundhouses excavated at Black Patch, West Sussex. The excavators proposed that the structures used earth-fast post and lintel frames with benches cut into a gentle chalk slope acting as rear walls (Drewett et al., 1982, p. 338). The buildings' fronts were slightly downslope where benching was impractical. There was no evidence of walling but a scatter of flint nodules in the area of the conjectured front wall line led the excavators to suggest that they consisted of low banks of flint (Drewett et al. 1982, p. 338).

Although useable, irregular flint nodules are a poor choice for stable drystone walling. An alternate explanation of the flint scatter is that it represents the residue of a dampcourse for a long-vanished chalk cob wall. A more radical alternative is that it was a remnant of a flint cobble wall that had been bonded with mortar, perhaps made from a crushed chalk and water mix similar to that used in the experimental build.

Fig. 4: Constructing chalk cob wall (Butser Ancient Farm 2021).

Neither method has been evaluated at Butser, but since the cob wall has proven durable neither possibility should be dismissed.

Other examples exist of enigmatic stone spreads associated with the archaeology of prehistoric structures which lack direct evidence of walls (Harding 2023, pp. 212–226). There is a persuasive argument that earth walling was more abundant than presently assumed (Loveday 2006). This example of the functionality of chalk cob lends support to both this hypothesis and to the idea that stone scatters may be diagnostic of otherwise vanished earth walls.

Although these observations are very preliminary, they do have potential to support existing structural theories and to provide stepping stones towards novel interpretations of archaeological features.

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Emerging from stone: Creating chalk whorls from bedrock

Jennifer Beamer

Fig. 1: Whorl C after initial carving. Note the fine lines produced from the carving process and the chalk dust transfer on the wooden flooring (photograph by the author).

In the world of textile tool materials used globally, chalk is a rarely used resource — except for in the chalk downlands, as can be found in southern Britain. Danebury hillfort in Hampshire is one of England's most iconic Iron Age sites due to the seminal strategy and archaeological standards employed during its excavation (1969–1988). It provided extensive insights into cultural transformation during its period of use, which were contextualised further through the subsequent Environs project (1989–1996). Most recently, my doctoral study foregrounded the unusual character of the social behaviours and textile tools from this site, including the use of chalk (Beamer, 2022).

In my thesis, I adopted a craftsperson view of textile tools and discussed ways in which researchers can distinguish prehistoric loomweights from oven bricks, and spindle whorls from beads. While hypotheticals are useful, they cannot substitute practical knowledge derived from experimentation. Supported by a small research grant from EXARC, the John Kiernan Experimental Archaeology award, I embarked on an experiment that would create applicable critical contextual information to the whorl assemblage from Danebury.

Chalk as whorls

Chalk, a type of sedimentary rock, is soft, porous, and easy to quarry and carve. These agential qualities influence the resulting textile tools, and the best way to interpret why the Danebury whorl assemblage appears as it does is to make faithful replicas. The whorls from Danebury tend to be comparatively heavy, with some weighing 100g or more — for context, the Centre for Textile Research's experimental clay whorls weighed up to 18g (Andersson Strand & Nosch 2015), and the heaviest whorls used in published experiments were 52g (Kania 2015) and 120g (Grömer 2005).

With no published guidance on how to carve chalk whorls, the construction of replicas became a proof-of-concept experience. Armed with a blunt utility knife, a putty knife, and a steel awl, the first whorl emerged from compressed white dust — a chalk whorl weighing 90.2g (Whorl B). Though there are small metrical differences between the archaeological example and the replica, they are functionally the same (see Table 1). The dissimilarity emerges when comparing them aesthetically.

ID	Diameter (mm)	Height/thickness	Perforation (mm)	Mass (g)
SF 1935	35mm	16mm	7mm	20g
Whorl A	35mm	16mm	5mm	26.3g
SF1986	59-64mm	24-27mm	12-24mm	82g
Whorl B	52.5mm	24-27mm	8-12mm	90.2g
SF 2410	89mm	35mm	22mm	230g
Whorl C	84-87mm	30.5mm	8-15mm	291.5g

Table 1: Selected whorls from the Danebury hillfort assemblage and the replica whorls modelled after them as part of the Spindle for Weaving experiment.

The edges of the archaeological example, SF1986 (Cunliffe 1984, p. 402, Fig. 8.167), were more rounded than those of the replica, and the perforation was noticeably larger. A precise discoid shape was created in the replica for gathering data on potential use-wear, rather than make it visually appear identical to the original whorl. Carving being a reductive process, recording the whorl's starting shape and how it appears at the end of the project may yield insightful details about the longevity of these tools. The whorls may have initially been created to be oversized for a reason.

Chalk as substance

Though chalk was plentiful and expedient for the making of whorls and loomweights at Danebury, clay was also used at that site. To discern whether this was a random choice or governed by social rules or changing societal needs, a broader view of the landscape is warranted. Suddern Farm, one of the settlements near Danebury, yielded an assemblage of clay weights only, despite there also being six chalk whorls and the site being located near two chalk quarries (Beamer, 2022, pp. 303–304). Further archaeological evidence and experience accrued during the creation of a replica chalk whorl may help to unpick how these depositional patterns related to social behaviours in the past.

The friability of chalk exerts agential qualities on the craftsperson, implying that certain morphological outcomes may be more practical. Discoid shapes are the easiest to make with chalk, but biconical may not have been difficult to produce — a personal realisation made through this project. The Danebury chalk whorl assemblage yielded 29 (14 complete) discoid whorls and 9 (8 complete) spherical whorls. A reasonable assertion, then, might be that discoid whorls (such as the one illustrated in Fig. 1) are the most practical for the range of methods used and yarns desired.

Embedding sites within the historic landscape and considering the implications of those prior temporal periods on the subsequent inhabitants is also critical. The collapse of expansive Bronze Age exchange networks between c. 800–500 BCE, indicated by the changing role of bronze (Needham, 2007), increasing importance of ceramics (Haselgrove and Pope, 2007), and a reduction in the monumentality of mortuary practices (Brück, 2006), may have facilitated the creation of new manifestations of those networks, possibly drawing on the local landscape and existing physical and metaphorical relationships. Sites which reside on chalky substrate, like Gussage All Saints, Hengstbury Head, Hod Hill, Maiden Castle, Easton Farm, Winnall Down, and Blackbury Camp, have all yielded textile tool assemblages using both chalk and clay. This may not only be due to the local availability of these materials, it could also be the result of a long-term relationship with chalk as a significant substance at these sites.

Uffington Horse, still visible today, was constructed in the Bronze Age using chalk (Pollard 2017), and the atypical behaviour of geoglyph construction during this period makes this an unusual activity. Conversely, the ditches of both Danebury (Cunliffe, 1984) and Maiden Castle (Sharples and Ambers, 1991) have evidence of weathering, indicative of regular cleaning episodes typical for reinforcing the defensive structures of ditches and ramparts. This process

would have revealed fresh, white chalk which contrasts with the green of turf ramparts. The stark whiteness of chalk may have symbolised something important to the people who resided in these chalklands, and was carried into the present by Iron Age people in ways that differed from their Bronze Age predecessors. This transformation process of chalk as an important substance as it became coded into new social norms may explain why it was frequently chosen for making whorls.

Chalk as mediator

There may be metaphorical connections mediated through chalk that are being expressed at Danebury and in the wider chalkland landscape. Such connections might include embedding objects into places, whereby the creation and ownership of chalk whorls may be a social reference to that landscape and the people who lived there in previous generations. Developing novel ways to connect people to a region could have been consolidated by using chalk for textile tools to create new ways to express their identity. The use of chalk may also have carried a more obvious interpretation, that of cremation — which was a common mortuary practice throughout the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods.

Throughout my doctoral study, there were moments of reverence observed in which chalk had seemingly been utilised in structured depositional practice. Roughly half of the chalk loomweights analysed in the depositional analysis of pits at Danebury were complete, implying a deliberate removal of functional tools for the purpose of discard. Furthermore, at the nearby site of Bury Hill, most of the chalk loomweights were burned and deposited together with other burned textile tools, suggesting the possibility of a full decommissioning of textile production at the site (Beamer, 2022, pp. 298–299). The relatively humble morphologies displayed in the whorl and loomweight assemblage should not overshadow the cosmological importance they may have played in British Iron Age society.

Conclusion

Presence of decoration and morphology have been useful typological methods of organising assemblages for the archaeological researcher, but they are still arbitrary divisions. More closely examining the material used in constructing textile tools may reveal hidden biographies that connect people to specific landscapes and the ways meaning was created and reinforced through the use of specific materials, and provide potential answers to the question of why the whorls look as they do.

A thorough investigation of the textile tool assemblage from Danebury and its environs, and experiments conducted so far, have foregrounded the possibility that chalk remained an important substance during the transition from the Bronze to the Iron Age. Haughton et al. (2021) suggest that other trade networks, such as the movement of bronze, may not have influenced technological and subsistence practices regarding textile production to the extent to which they are typically discussed. While it may be the case that trade networks involving metal were important, and subsequent collapse devastating, the cultural exchanges may have had a diffused effect on other technologies, such as textile production. In this way, the selection and adoption of ideas, practices, and perspectives of other groups may have been subsumed into existing traditions and perhaps mediated through the socially governed mechanisms of dress. Through this lens, regional identity may have been more strongly maintained because of chalk in its role as mediator. Pope (2022) has related similar sentiments focussing on the effect of far-ranging ideas that extended beyond the physical movement of people, and the way they could become filtered, modified, and reinterpreted within existing communities. This implies that an emphasis on bronze hoarding at the close of the Bronze Age, for example, may have prompted people to seek out new ways to transmit technological ideas which increased interest on wool products and sheep husbandry — and in the case of Danebury, a desire to connect to the local landscape and a real or adopted ancestral past.

Based on the evidence assembled so far, I believe that chalk served as an important material in the cosmological world view of Iron Age people, and its material properties may both explain why it was a dominant choice for spindle whorls and loomweights and how those material affordances influenced the resulting morphological characteristics. The chalk ditches of Danebury might have been echoed by the chalk whorls of spindles, with both serving as referents to a metaphorical and literal past.

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Jennifer Beamer is an independent scholar and archaeologist currently in the analysis and writing stage of the Spindling for Weaving project, which will be published open access on EXARC in 2026. She was awarded a PhD for her research on textile production and tool deposition at Danebury by the University of Leicester.

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Towards a gazetteer of prehistoric ceramic weights in Britain

Ted Levermore and Stephen Patton

We are exploring the feasibility of compiling a regional gazetteer of prehistoric perforated ceramic weights, with a view to expanding it to a national scale. Our goal is to assemble a dataset that includes typological variation, contextual associations and site-level information, to enable comparative analysis across regions and periods. This could become a substantial resource, helping specialists engage in more detailed exploration of this artefact type than is currently possible.

We warmly invite contributions in any form: advice, opinions, data, or offers to undertake archive reviews. Collaborations with specialists, researchers, and field archaeologists are especially welcome.

Weights as artefacts

Perforated clay weights are typically associated with domestic activity in prehistoric Britain, from the Early Bronze Age to the Latest Iron Age/Early Roman Period. Research has demonstrated that many of the common forms would have functioned well as warp weights on looms (Mårtensson, Nosch, and Andersson Strand, 2009; Beamer, 2022). However, variation in form and size within type, alongside an array of contextual associations, leaves some room for speculation as to whether this function is consistent through time and space (cf. Poole, 1995; 2008; Levermore, 2024). Nevertheless, their widespread presence points to broad interpretive value, especially in terms of settlement structure, craft production, and other regional trends. But, without a sufficiently large and detailed dataset, such as the one we aim to compile, it remains difficult to assess with certainty the full scope of these objects and their variability.

Their research potential

Although commonly found across settlement sites, weights have often been treated as minor finds and, perhaps because of this, like many categories of artefact, they have received relatively little synthetic analysis (cf. Brudenell, 2021). In Britain, typological studies are confined either to large-scale excavations (e.g. Danebury Hillfort) or to limited comparative discussions (e.g. Major,

1982; Barford and Major, 1992; Haughton et al., 2021), which suggest the presence of broader patterns but do not yet offer sufficient scale. By contrast, European studies have demonstrated that international-level approaches are possible and can yield informative insights into perforated weight use and distribution (e.g. Kneisel and Schaefer-Di Maida, 2019).

As finds specialists in commercial archaeology, we both routinely handle large volumes of material and recognise, despite the brevity of many of our assessments, that the research potential of our data is significant but remains largely untapped. Indeed, through our work we have observed recurring trends for clay weights, in southern and eastern Britain, that we believe warrant further investigation. To address this, we hope to start with a gazetteer for the south and east, covering as many of these finds as possible. Rather than produce a simple catalogue of sites where they occur, our intention is to develop a more nuanced synthesis to aid in our work. We hope this might contribute to a broader understanding of these artefacts and prompt deeper analysis of the role and significance of perforated weights in British prehistory.

If you have relevant data or are interested in collaborating, please get in touch.

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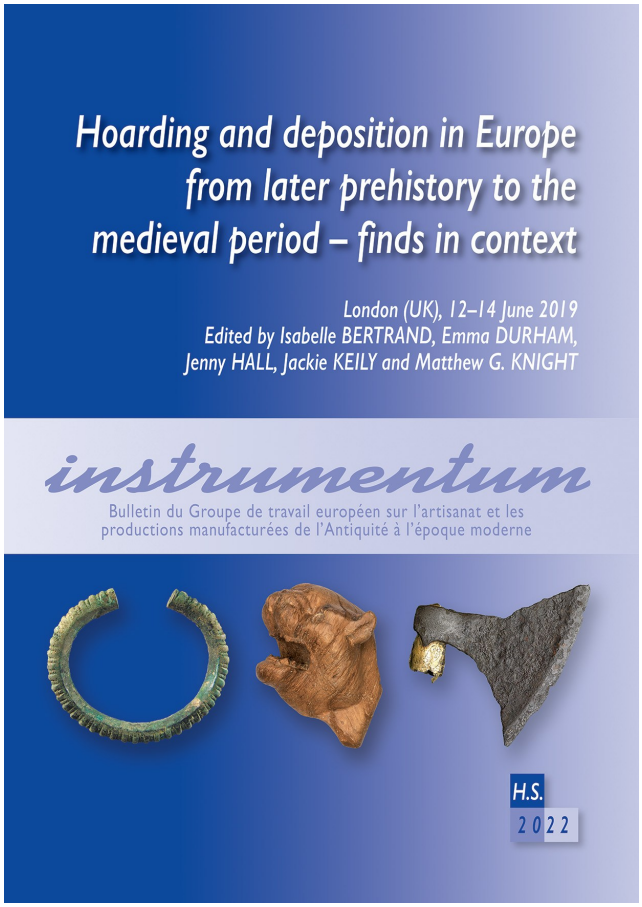
Book Review

Hoarding and deposition in Europe from later prehistory to the medieval period — finds in context

Bertrand, I., Durham, E., Hall, J., Keily, J., and Knight, Matthew G. (eds). 2022. Instrumentum H.S. pp.155 ISBN: 979-10-90534-77-3. €20.00.

Antony Lee

This volume represents the publication of a conference of the same title held at King's College in London between 12–14 June 2019. The conference was jointly hosted by the Later Prehistoric Finds Group, the Roman Finds Group, the Finds Research Group, and Instrumentum, with the latter producing this resultant publication. The conference attracted 127 participants from across Europe and saw the presentation of 32 papers and further poster displays. 13 of the papers are represented in this volume, accompanied by an introduction by the conference organisers and an invited conclusion chapter by Richard Bradley.



The volume is divided into three sections: 'New Discoveries: casting fresh light on depositional practices' (four papers), 'Deposition in wet contexts' (four papers), and 'Hoarding and deposition: process, meaning and practice' (five papers). The geographical and temporal range of the papers is impressive, and reflective of the organisations involved. The Roman period is the most frequently represented, especially the late Iron Age/Roman transition, with seven papers discussing it. The Bronze Age and earlier Iron Age, Early Medieval, and Medieval periods are each represented by two papers. Geographically, the UK (five

papers) and France (four papers) are the most common foci, with others considering Dacia (two), Italy (one) and Austria (one). Twelve of the papers are written in English, with Berthon and Brunet's paper in French. With improvements in digital 'real-time' language translation tools, multi-lingual volumes will hopefully become more normalised in future.

The volume has a light editorial touch, especially with regard to definitions of what comprises hoarding and special deposition. Each author has been free to apply their own concepts and approaches, with some engaging more directly with the theoretical complications than others. With this in mind, the third section of the volume, containing the more theoretically-focussed papers, might conceivably have been presented first to underpin the discussions in later papers. The contributions by Adams and Knight particularly stand out as valuable in this regard, respectively exploring the importance of considering the objects missing from hoards as much as those present, and time-depth within hoard assemblages. This is not, however, to suggest that earlier papers are lacking useful observations and arguments. Many of the authors share a desire to move beyond describing the technical composition of deposits to considering their social contexts of their deposition. Egri and Rustoiu, for example, explore how the changing compositions of jewellery in Dacian silver hoards reflect the symbolic status, even after death, of powerful sacred women. Gostenčnik considers a range of varied depositional acts across the changing urban biography of the Roman town of Magdalensberg, and Berthon and Brunet consider how residual ethnic identities can be detected through cremation burials.

The importance of considering changing practices over time is also a recurring theme of the volume. Many papers explore longer periods of deposition rather than single instances, such as the papers by Knight, Clark, Bertrand, and Bankhead and Caple, and this is also reflected in Bradley's conclusion chapter. Bradley considers the changing motivations for hoarding, sometimes preserved in Classical and Medieval literary sources, and argues for the value of exploring the possible origins of hoarding practices in deeper prehistory.

The physical volume is produced to a high standard, printed on glossy paper stock and with copious colour illustrations throughout. A minor criticism, though one which does not detract from the content of the volume, is that its design aesthetic now seems a little old fashioned. It also seems strange that the author's names have been relegated from the title pages of their contributions to appear only at the footer of subsequent pages.

The individual papers presented here are of value beyond the sites and periods to which they directly pertain, and reflect that the deliberate deposition of objects into the ground is a messy,

complex, and situational phenomenon. The volume's scope and varied topics of discussion ensure that it will be of interest to studies of the long durée of such practices, though the lighter original conference organisers – to explore the phenomenon of hoarding through specific case studies across a broad chronological and geographical spectrum. Sophia Adams (p. 92), in envisaging the emotive and sensory complexities of depositional acts, calls for us to 'bring these moments alive and give voice, movement and scent to those people living almost 3,000 years ago'. This sentiment suitably reflects this volume's interesting and valuable contribution to the broader literature on hoarding.

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