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SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN SOUTHERN BRITAIN IN THE IRON AGE

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The paper explores aspects of the social and economic development of southern Britain in the pre-Roman Iron Age. A distinct territoriality can be recognized in some areas extending over many centuries. A major distinction can be made between the Central Southern area, dominated by strongly defended hillforts, and the Eastern area where hillforts are rare. It is argued that these contrasts, which reflect differences in socio-economic structure, may have been caused by population pressures in the centre south. Contrasts with north western Europe are noted and reference is made to further changes caused by the advance of Rome.

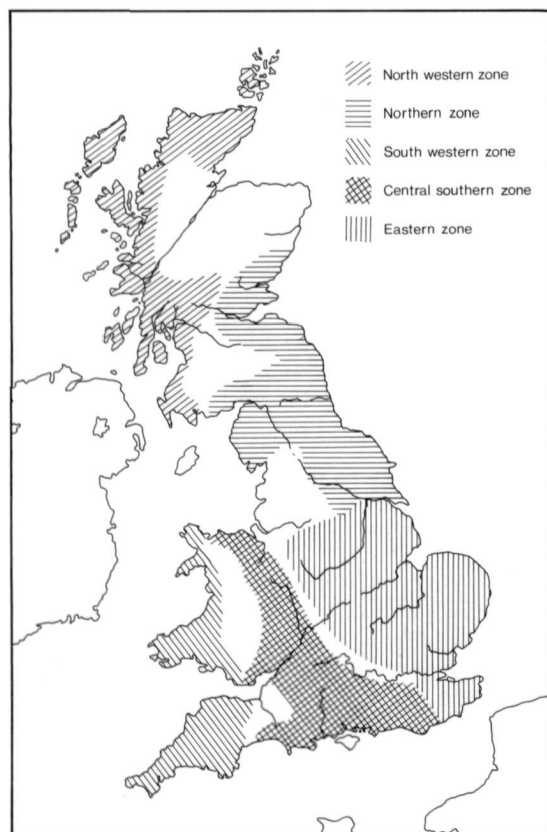


Fig. 1. The principal socio-economic zones of Britain by the second century BC.

Introduction

The last two decades has seen an intensification in the study of the Iron Age in southern Britain. Until the early 1960s most excavation effort had been focussed on the chalklands of Wessex, but recent programmes of field-work and excavation in the South Midlands (in particular Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire) and in East Anglia (the Fen margin and Essex) have begun to redress the Wessex-centred balance of our discussions while at the same time emphasizing the social and economic difference between eastern England (broadly the territory dependent upon the rivers flowing into the southern part of the North Sea) and the central southern arc which surrounds it (i.e. Wessex, the Cotswolds and the Welsh Borderland). It is upon these two broad regions that our discussions below will be centred.

Beyond the two south eastern zones three further regions can be broadly defined (fig. 1): a south western zone, including western Wales, Cornwall, Devon and western parts of Somerset; a large northern zone, in which there is a considerable range of variation, and a north western zone, including the extreme north and west of Scotland, the Western Isles and Orkney and Shetland. In each, the settlement evidence suggests different systems of socio-economic organization and different rates and directions

of development. While these areas are of considerable interest in their own right it is the south and east of the country which are of immediate concern to the theme of this volume.

Chronology and change: 1000-400 BC

It the period from before 1000 BC to about 400 BC (Ha B - La T I) the British Isles was in close contact with continental Europe. The range of metal types found widely distributed in the island (weapons, metal vessels and horse trappings) show that continental types were being brought in in some quantity, presumably by a complex of social exchange mechanisms, and ingeniously copied and improved by British craftsmen (for a summary see Cunliffe 1978a, 137-157). Meanwhile hillforts were being widely constructed in most parts of the country in a variety of styles incorporating vertical walling of timber, stone or a combination of the two, in a manner closely similar to continental forts of the Ha B and C (*ibid*, 243-255). The impression given by a survey of the surviving evidence is of a degree of uniformity over much of the country heightened by extensive exchange networks across the North Sea. By Ha D - La T I, however, the volume of imports had declined.

In the seventh and sixth centuries significant divergent developments can be detected in Wessex, in particular in Wiltshire and western Hampshire. Simply stated there appears to be a rapid increase in the number of hillforts constructed, and highly distinctive decorated pottery styles appear, first the All Cannings Cross styles with haematite-coated furrowed bowls and deeply stamped and incised decoration and later the Meon Hill style typified by haematite-coated scratched-cordoned bowls. On present evidence they date to the seventh and sixth centuries respectively but the All Cannings Cross styles may begin a little earlier. One possible implication of these innovations is that social pressures may have led to a greater emphasis on territoriality which manifested itself in the need to build substantial defensive structures

and to express ethnicity through distinctive decorative styles, of which pottery is archaeologically the most evident. The reasons for these supposed "social pressures" are at present difficult to define but one line of argument which commends itself is to suppose that the Wessex population was reaching the holding capacity of the land through a combination of factors such as population growth and decrease in soil fertility due to environmental constraints or over-cropping. In support of such an explanation it can be shown that active arable exploitation of stable plots of land had already been underway in Wessex for at least half a millennium before the sixth century and it is highly likely that the thin, poor-textured, chalkland soils were by now showing signs of exhaustion. A further relevant observation is that there appears to be a notable increase in the number of sites found dating to after the seventh century (Cunliffe 1978b). Thus, while positive statements are ill-advised at present, it is fair to say that there is a growing body of evidence which points to stress among the Wessex population as early as the seventh/sixth centuries. As we shall show these trends became intensified.

The characteristic settlements in Wessex at this time are hillforts and homesteads. Of the hillforts, Danebury provides an extensively excavated example. In its early phase (sixth-fifth century) the defences consisted of a massive timber-revetted rampart, fronted by a ditch, enclosing an area of c. 5 ha, pierced by two entrances set in opposite sides of the enclosure. The occupation inside appears to have been dense, with groups of circular houses set between areas reserved for grain storage pits (Cunliffe 1982b). Other extensively explored examples include the first phases of Maiden Castle, Dorset and Winklebury, Hants. A number of other forts have been sampled but usually only by sections through ramparts and gates (e.g. Torberry, Sussex, Yarnbury, Wilts and Blewburton, Berks). In general these forts are of similar sizes (4-6 ha), univallate and often have two entrances.

The contemporary settlement sites, as best

exemplified by the early phases of Little Woodbury, Wilts., Meon Hill, Hants., Old Down Farm, Hants. and Gussage All Saints, Dorset, are all of similar type, consisting of a fenced or ditched enclosure containing circular houses, granaries and storage pits appropriate to a unit of extended family size. The possibility of larger settlements and of unenclosed homesteads is hinted at by scraps of evidence but the picture is still very incomplete.

Whether or not similar developments were experienced in other parts of southern Britain it is not yet possible to say. Hillforts were certainly being built and occupied in other areas, e.g. Wandlebury and Wilbury on the Chilterns, Crickley Hill, Leckhampton and Shenbarrow on the Cotswolds and Hunsbury further to the north along the Jurassic ridge, while many of the Welsh borderland hillforts are likely to have been in use at this time. But the impression given by the available evidence, inadequate though it is, is that Wessex differed from the rest of Britain in the density of its early hillforts and settlements and in the highly distinctive nature of its decorated pottery styles. We might therefore tentatively conclude that the social stresses inherent in southern British society at this time had become intensified in Wessex giving rise to a number of chiefdoms focussed on fortified hilltops, the tribal unity of the core area being reflected in distinctive pottery traditions shared by a number of communities.

The centre south: 400-1000 BC

The social processes briefly outlined above became further intensified in the centre south in the period 400-100 BC. A survey of the Wessex and Sussex data shows quite clearly that after about 400 BC the number of hillforts maintained in use dramatically declines while, in parallel, a few sites not only continue but become more strongly defended and are sometimes enlarged. This process is well illustrated by the Sussex Downs where on each block of downland, naturally defined by river valleys,

one hillfort seems to rise to dominance at the expense of all others. The same process is evident on the block of chalkland between the rivers Test and Bourne, on the Hampshire/Wiltshire border. Here, of four evenly spaced early forts, only Danebury emerges dominant, the other are abandoned. (For further discussion and references see Cunliffe 1978a, 268-278.) Clearly until every fort has been adequately sampled it will be impossible to produce an accurate picture of this process but fig. 2 attempts to contrast the overall distribution of hillforts with those forts which, on a variety of topographical and cultural evidence, can be shown to belong to the period 400-100 BC. While it must be stressed that the data used for the lower map is very uneven and open to re-interpretation (and some sites which should be shown may have been omitted simply for lack of evidence) the overall impression is of a striking evenness of spacing. We are looking here at a landscape divided into a number of distinct territories each dominated by a single hillfort.

These developed hillforts (a term used to distinguish them from early hillforts) share a number of superficial characteristics in common:

- a. Their defences were built, or rebuilt, in a glaciis style, i.e. the rampart was given a sloping front continuous with that of the inner face of the ditch. Vertical walls or fences may have been set on the rampart crests (for summary Cunliffe 1978a, 249).
- b. Rebuilding on previously occupied sites might significantly extend the defended area (e.g. Maiden Castle, Hambledon Hill, Yarnbury).
- c. The entrances show signs of elaboration. The gates were often inturned, while outworks were frequently constructed. Several cases were known in which an earlier second gate was blocked.
- d. Multiple lines of defence were sometimes built to increase the depth of protection.



Fig. 2a. Hillforts in Southern Britain: all hillforts.

A number of developed hillforts, which have been adequately examined, show that the intensity of internal occupation was considerable. In some cases, in the Welsh borderland forts of Credenhill, Croft Ambrey and Midsummer Hill, and the Hampshire fort of Danebury, there is clear evidence that the interiors were now arranged in functional zones divided by roads and that buildings were erected in rows with a degree of regularity, maintained through many phases of rebuilding, which must imply

the exercise of control over considerable periods of time. All these structural characteristics conform to what might be expected of a social structure in which coercive power was centralized in one location forming the focus of a well-delimited territory. A further reasonable inference is that the developed hillforts may well have served as redistribution centres for their territories (Cunliffe 1978a, 273). Such evidence as there is tends to support this contention.

Clearly, in such a socio-political system there



Fig. 2b. Hillforts in Southern Britain: forts for which there is evidence suggesting occupation in the period 400-100 BC.

will have been a considerable degree of variation. It would be wrong to suppose that all developed hillforts were of equal status or that a status, once achieved, remained unchanged over several centuries. A fort serving as the seat of a paramount chieftain would have had the balance and intensity of its functions altered if the status of its leader became that of a vassal: similarly an increase in status might also be expected to affect the archaeological record. We must assume a situation of flux, but unfortun-

ately the present state of the archaeological research does not allow us to test the assumption.

There are hints of differences in status (or intensity of occupation) between sites. Some forts (like Maiden Castle, Dorset, Hambledon Hill, Dorset, Yarnbury, Wilts. and Danebury, Hants.) are well defended with complex entrances; others (like St. Catharine's Hill, Hants., Winklebury, Hants. and The Trundle, Sussex) have less substantial defences and comparativ-

ely simple entrance earthworks. Whether these differences are the result of status, duration of use, or local stylistic factors it is difficult to say - differences of this kind are likely to reflect a complex of variables.

Some general patterning does emerge from the wealth of disparate data. It is, for example, possible to suggest that the developed forts of the North Downs and the North Weald (Surrey and Kent) did not grow out of existing hillforts but were built in the fourth century or later on virgin sites - an observation which would suggest that the socio-political system, represented by the developed forts spread late to this region (Cunliffe 1982c, for details of individual sites). Less substantial indications hint that a similar late extension from the Wessex area may have led to the construction of many of the forts of Devon east of the river Exe. The evidence is however sparse.

The situation in the Cotswolds is even less clear, in spite of the large number of surviving sites, but given that there were many forts in the area in the period before 400 BC and that some (e.g. Bredon Hill, Worcestershire and Rainsborough, Northants.) continued to be used and refurbished after c. 400 BC, it is fair to assume that the Cotswolds, like Wessex, were part of the core area within which hillfort development was continuous over a long period. Moreover, a number of Cotswold forts, mostly unexcavated, exhibit physical characteristics closely similar to the developed hillforts of Wessex. The same generalization appears also to be true for the Welsh borderland but while complex sequences have been demonstrated (e.g. at Midsummer Hill and Croft Ambrey), dating evidence is at present imprecise.

In summary we are suggesting that hillfort development can be divided into three broad phases (fig. 3):

a. 1000-600: Early hillforts widespread but not densely packed.

b. 600-400: Hillfort occupation and building continues sporadically but in Wessex hillfort

building intensifies and forts become densely packed.

c. 400-100: The emergence of developed hillforts serving as central places in well defined territories, covering a broad arc from Sussex through Wessex and the Cotswolds to the Welsh borderland. In Wessex continuous development from earlier sites can be demonstrated but to the east in the North Downs region, and, less certainly, to the west in East Devon, there is some probability that most developed forts were newly founded. The nature of continuity in the Cotswolds and Welsh borderland is less easy to define. If we can regard developed hillforts as representing a socio-political system, it is reasonable to suggest that by the third century BC the whole of the centre south from the Channel Coast to North Wales was part of a single zone.

We have suggested above that the situation in Wessex before c. 400 BC was one in which increasing stress led to the development of a number of strongly defended chiefdoms bound together within a broad tribal configuration. What then, in social and economic terms, does the new pattern of larger territories dominated by single strongly defended hillforts imply? At one level it must mean a coalescence under more powerful leaders but it could also, in part, reflect a greater degree of economic centralization, the forts now providing both a means for articulating exchange and a source of manufactured goods. It is certainly true that the range and number of tools, weapons and ornaments dramatically increases after the fourth/third century and it is tempting to see in the great rise in the number of sheep, and the large quantity of artefacts relating to the manufacture of woollen fabrics, some suggestion that in Wessex, at least, there may have been the specialized production of woollen fabric, presumably for the purpose of exchange.

Another factor which cannot be ignored is the considerable military strength of the developed forts. Complex entrance fortifications and the presence of quantities of sling stones (e.g.

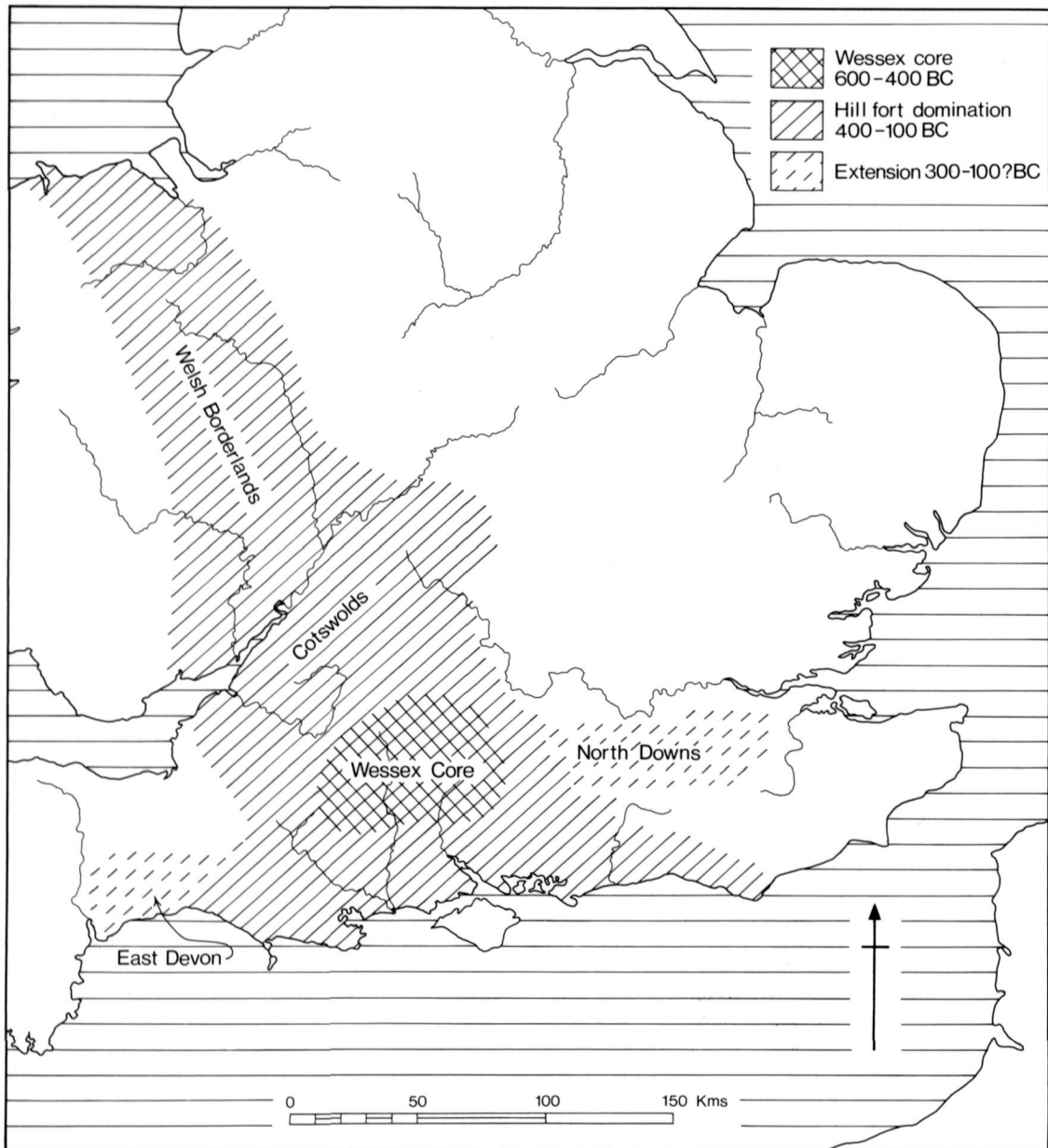


Fig. 3. The development of the hillfort-dominated zone.

at Maiden Castle and Danebury) are a reminder of the need for defence, while evidence of periodic burnings, together with mutilated human remains from a number of forts, leaves little doubt that attacks were not infrequent. The developed hillforts must, then, reflect the increasing stress under which society was now coming. That warfare was endemic is a strong probability.

One notable feature of the hillfort-dominated zone is the broad similarity throughout of styles of construction, material culture and economy. But certain regional variations are apparent. In the form of hillfort entrances, for example, it is possible to distinguish two localized methods of constructing entrance hornworks, one centred on Hampshire, the other on Dorset, while recessed guard chambers are a recurring feature in the Welsh borderland and the Jurassic ridge. But even more noticeable are different regional styles of pottery decoration. The principal divisions are shown on fig. 4. Space does not permit a detailed discussion of them (but see Cunliffe 1978a, 45-8). Suffice it to say that the pottery styles of the hillfort-dominated zone differed significantly from those of the east of England. Within the zone four broad categories can be recognized, each of which seems to have originated in the fourth century BC and had, by the second century, developed highly distinctive decorative motifs. Moreover the firmness of the boundaries between the styles suggests that they may represent distinct tribal groupings, the decoration being a conscious demonstration of the ethnicity of each group. The validity of this assertion is considerably strengthened when the style zones of the third/second century BC are compared with the known tribal boundaries early in the first century AD immediately prior to the Roman invasion of AD 43: the saucupan pot styles (group 5 on fig. 5) correspond precisely with the territory of the Atrebates, the Dorset styles (group 2) marking the territory of the Durotriges. The decorated "Glastonbury wares" of group 1 correspond with the easternmost part of the Dumnonii while the decorated "Glastonbury wares" of group 3 represent

exactly the territory of the southern Dobunni who are, in the first century AD, numismatically distinct from the northern part of the tribe. The distribution of West Midlands styles (group 4) is a close fit to the northern Dobunni. Thus, the tribal groupings, known historically and numismatically in the first century AD, are already recognizable as ethnic entities in ceramic styles going back to the third century BC or even earlier. We may therefore argue that the ceramic differences of this early period are likely to reflect ethnic groups, who recognized themselves to be different from their neighbours and demonstrated these differences in various ways, one of which, pottery decoration, is readily recognizable in our very defective archaeological record.

The saucupan pot assemblage of group 5 offers the possibility of a further refinement. Within the overall zone it is possible to define certain style preferences which have distinctive distributions. Three of these, Groups 5B, C and D, have overlapping distributions which suggest that no strict social boundaries existed but the fourth, group 5A, appears to form a tight pattern having sharp boundaries with all its neighbours. The implication would seem to be that here lay a distinct sept of the larger tribe. The suggestion is, of course, highly speculative but the fact that it is precisely this region that formed the core of a territory, defined by its own pottery traditions and the rapid growth in the number of hillforts in the preceding period (sixth-fifth centuries), adds support to the view that the nuclear Wessex territory may have retained its identity from the sixth century. Significantly, perhaps, this same area remains a distinct numismatic anomaly even into the early first century AD.

In summary we may say that the picture which is beginning to emerge of this period suggests that a number of distinct chiefdoms existed, represented by developed hillforts. These were evenly spread throughout central southern Britain but can be grouped in larger entities, representing tribal divisions, which continued to be maintained up to the time of the Roman inva-

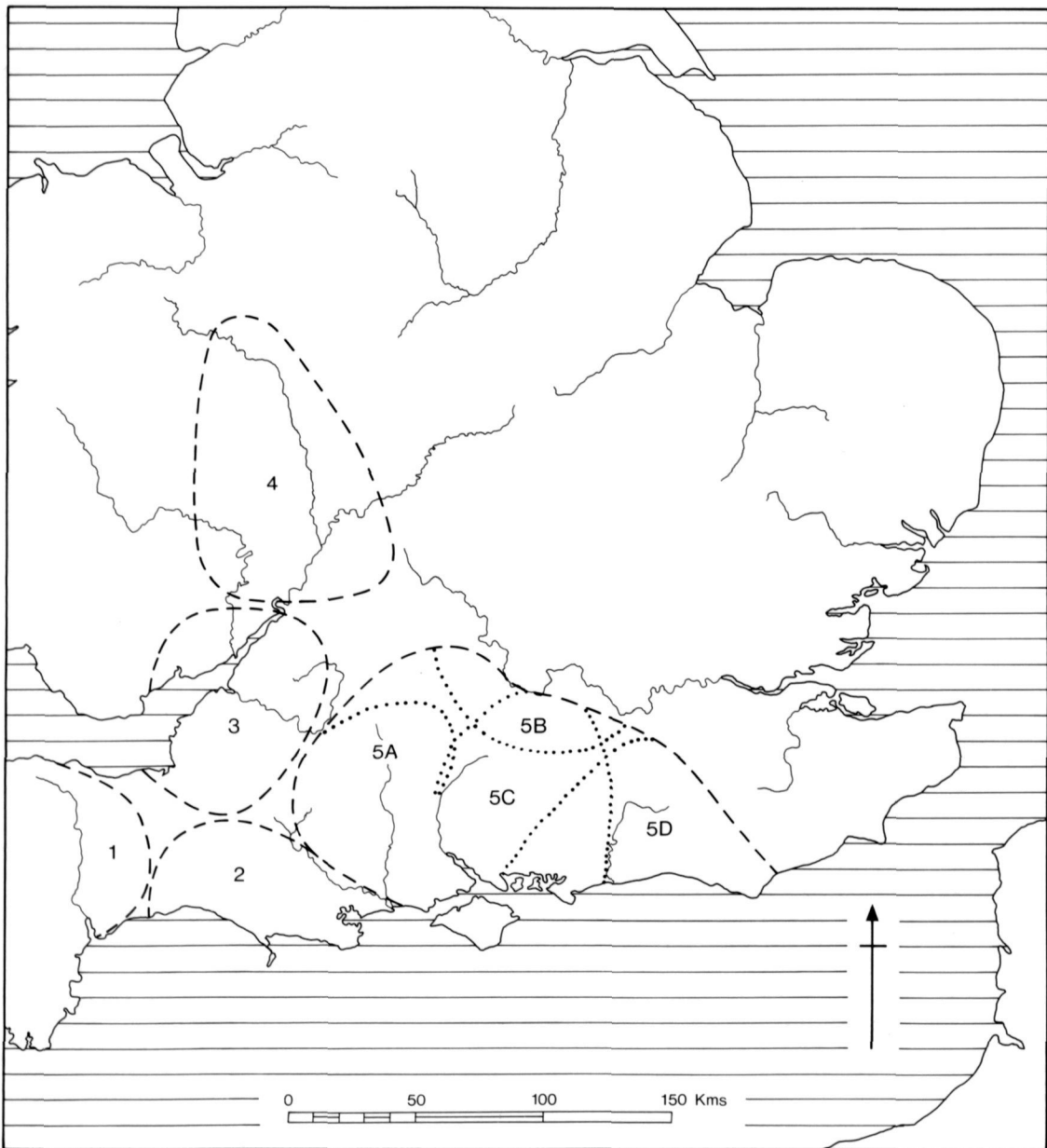


Fig. 4. Regional pottery styles within the hillfort-dominated zone:

1. Glastonbury wares of East Devon;
2. Maiden Castle-Marnhull styles of Dorset;
3. Glastonbury wares of Somerset;
4. Malvernian pottery of the West Midlands;
5. Saucepan pot styles.

sion. Some of these tribes or septs may well have originated as socially distinct groups in a much earlier period.

Finally, something must be said of settlements lower in the hierarchy than hillforts. In Wessex many are known and some have been excavated. A recurring feature is that they often occupy sites which had already been settled and, in effect, are merely a continuation of the existing settlement pattern (e.g. Little Woodbury, Gussage All Saints and Old Down Farm) representing units of extended family size. A new type of settlement also appears in the third or second century. Known as banjo enclosures, these are smaller settlements (c. 1 ha) defined by ditches which also delimit a long entrance approach. It is possible that they were occupied by smaller family units of inferior status but until several have been adequately excavated further speculation is unwise. Settlements were particularly densely packed in Wessex and in some areas seem to have been as close as 1 km one from another.

Elsewhere in the centre south very little is known of settlement form and location but detailed field-work in the Upper Severn valley (Spurgeon 1972) suggests that, here too, small enclosed homesteads were densely packed into the congenial parts of the landscape, while the recent excavations at Beckford, Worcs. will undoubtedly add significantly to our knowledge of the settlement of the Lower Severn valley.

The eastern zone: 400-100 BC

The eastern zone of Britain can best be defined as the area drained by rivers flowing into the southern part of the North Sea (fig. 5). Its cultural integrity can be gauged from pottery distributions. The earliest well-defined type, the scored wares of the Bredon-Ancaster style dating roughly to the fifth to second centuries, lies wholly within the area north of the Thames (Cunliffe 1978a, fig. 3.5) while the later decorated bowl and jar styles cover the same regions but extend the western and southern limits (*ibid*,

fig. 3.8). The entire ceramic tradition of this eastern zone, from the fifth century, is in marked contrast to that of the centre south. The further significance of the decorated groups will be returned to below.

The eastern zone had little geomorphological uniformity but is divided into a number of micro-regions, the principal being (from south to north) the North Downs, the Lower Thames valley, the Chilterns, the Upper Thames valley and Ouse valley, the Northamptonshire Uplands, and the Trent-Witham zone. Strictly, then, we are dealing with three ridges of hills, each with major ancient trackways running along them, separated by major complexes of river valleys.

The most striking aspect of the settlement archaeology of this zone is the paucity of hillforts in comparison with the centre south. Fig. 2 shows that there are some but recent work suggests that a number of those in East Anglia should now be deleted since they are likely to post-date the Iron Age, while the majority of those remaining very probably pre-date c. 400 BC. In other words in the period from 400-100, when the centre south was developing into a hillfort-dominated landscape, the eastern zone was almost devoid of forts. The generalization must however be qualified. We have already suggested above that there was an extension of developed hillforts along the North Downs as far as the river Medway in an area where previously there were few forts. This region is therefore best considered to be one that passed from the eastern zone to the hillfort-dominated zone sometime in or about the third century.

Isolated hillforts are also found along the Chiltern ridge but dating evidence is inadequate. Ravensburgh Castle, Herts. and Wilbury, Herts., which may be typical of the region, seem to have been occupied in the fifth-fourth century but there is little evidence of later use until the first century BC-first century AD. Only at Wandlebury, Cambs. is evidence of active occupation in the period 400-100 reasonably convincing. The overall impression given is that the majority of the Chiltern hillforts were out of

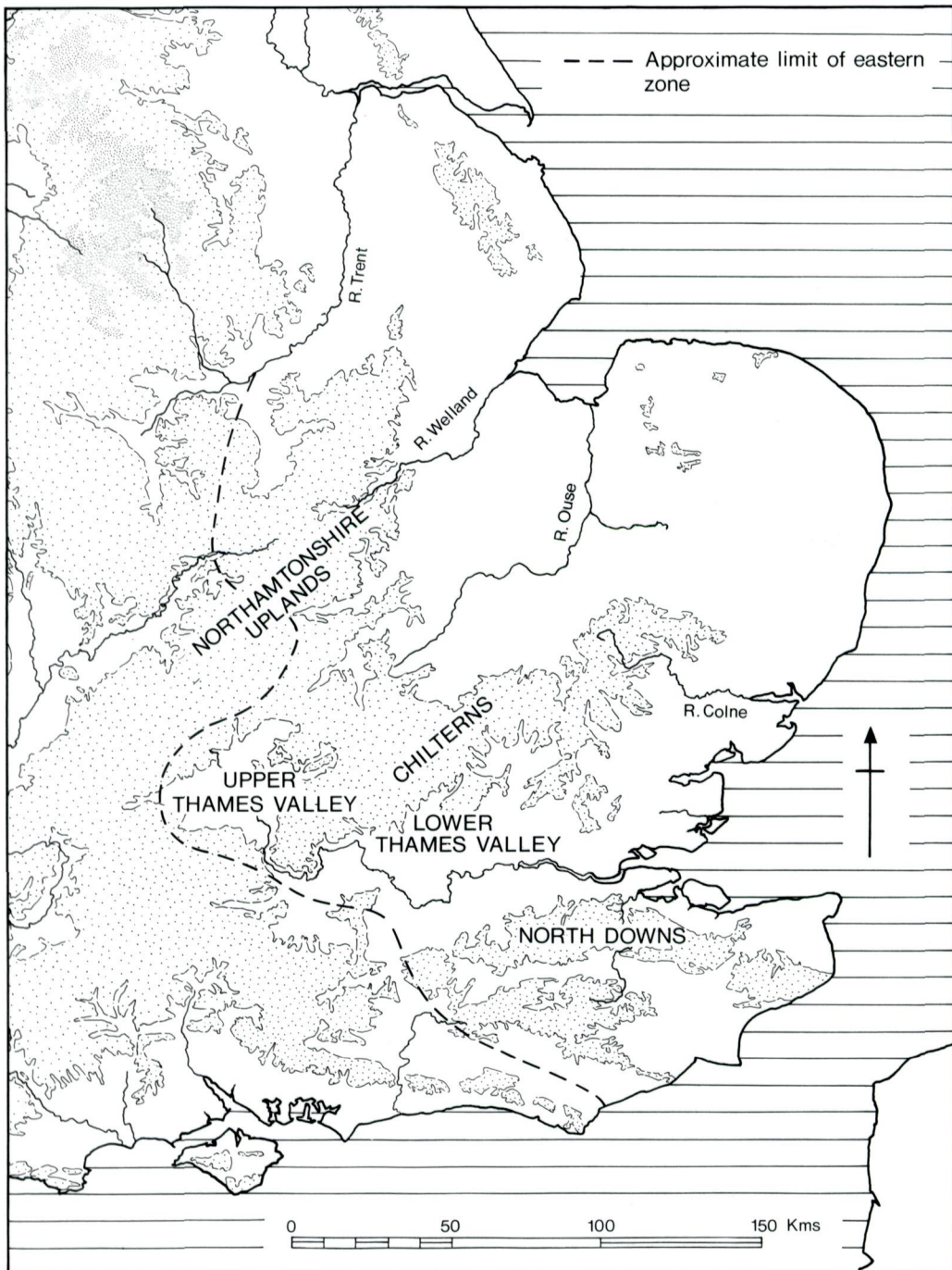


Fig. 5. The Eastern zone.

use by c. 400 and, with rare exceptions, were not reoccupied until the century or so before the Roman conquest. The situation is closely similar to that in Northern France, Belgium and Luxembourg (p. 176).

The Northamptonshire Uplands are notably devoid of hillforts but Hunsbury was refurbished and continued to be occupied into the second or first century BC. It is best regarded as an eastern outlier of the Cotswold hillfort-dominated zone.

If, then, we accept that the hillfort-dominated zone of the centre south represents a distinctive socio-political organization we must suppose that the social, economic and political systems of the eastern zone were of a very different kind. Unfortunately evidence which may allow us to examine these problems further is difficult to find. The impression given by the Ordnance Survey map of Iron Age Britain (published 1962), that much of the eastern area was sparsely settled, is quite wrong as recent surveys in Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Essex have shown. Indeed in some areas of Northamptonshire settlements were as densely packed as in Wessex and while such densities cannot be expected to extend over all the varied soil types we must now accept that the region supported a substantial population.

A number of settlements have recently been extensively excavated in Northamptonshire (e.g. Twywell, Wakeley, Aldwinkle, Blackthorn, Moulton Park and Fengate) to add to the two previously excavated sites of Draughton, Northants., and Colsterworth, Lincolnshire. In Essex the sites of Little Waltham and Mucking are broadening our understanding of a hitherto little-known region, while in the Upper Thames the work of the Oxford Archaeological Unit has concentrated on the problems of Iron Age rural settlement of which two important excavations at Farmoor and Ashville, are now fully published, while others, at Hardwick and Claydon Pike (Glos.) are described in interim reports. This brief, and very incomplete list, gives some idea of the range of data which has become available in the last ten years.

Two generalizations may be made: the basic settlement form seems to represent the single family or extended family unit, the boundaries frequently being enclosed by a ditch and presumably a bank with a fence or hedge on it, but much larger groupings of houses and other domestic structures are found (e.g. Twywell, Ashville, Claydon Pike and Little Waltham), suggesting larger agglomerations of population of village size. Since no site of this kind has yet been fully excavated it is impossible to speculate on population size or even on duration of occupation but the apparent contrast to the situation in the centre south is significant. It may be that these larger agglomerations represent settlements which carried out some of the functions of the hillfort communities but until we know more of them, of their variety and of their spatial relationships to the homesteads it would be unwise to speculate further.

We have already referred to the pottery of the eastern zone as differing from that of the centre south. One point of particular note is that, with certain exceptions, most of the assemblages lack distinctive decoration. If one accepts the view that highly decorated and distinctive pottery groups are a reflection of the desire of the community to express their ethnicity, then that desire would appear to be little felt among much of the population of the eastern region. The exceptions are, however, of some interest. Four highly decorated groups can be recognised (Cunliffe 1978, fig. 3.8) (fig. 6), all of which lie close to the border between the eastern and centre south zones. Such a pattern might well be anticipated on a border zone where communities would wish to offer a statement of their internal unity and their difference from their neighbours. While the evidence fits well with the model, other explanations should not be overlooked. The Hunsbury-Draughton style for example is distributed in the territory of the Hunsbury fort which could be regarded as an outlier of the centre south zone, while Stanton Harcourt-Cassington style occupies an economically important region where Cotswolds, Chilterns and Wessex chalkland converge on the Upper Thames valley. Such a favoured area may

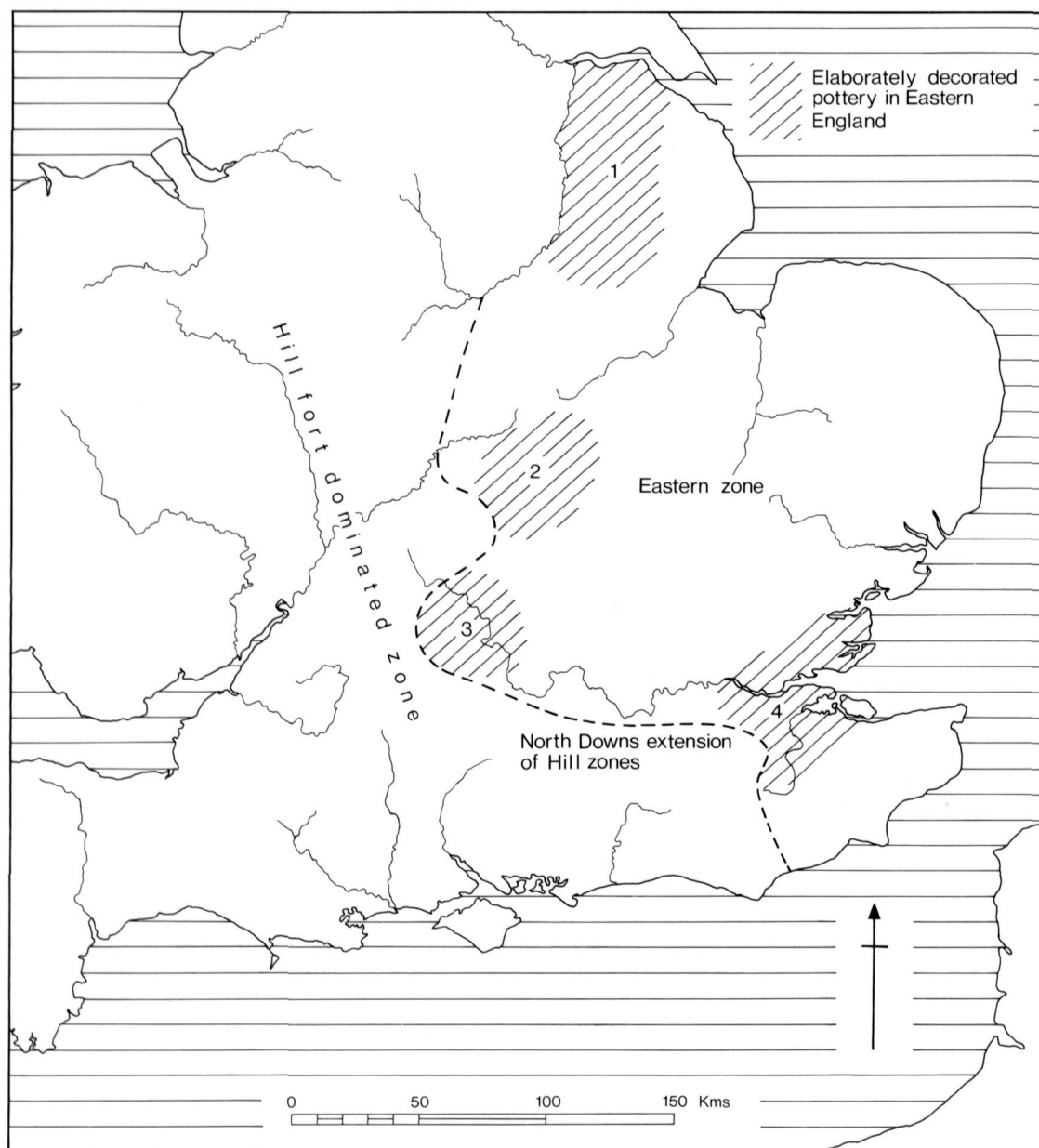


Fig. 6. Regional pottery styles of the Eastern zone:

1. Sleaford-Dragonby style;
2. Hunsbury-Draughton style;
3. Stanton Harcourt-Cassington style;
4. Mucking-Crayford style.

(For details see Cunliffe 1978a, fig. 3.8).

well have developed a centralized political structure of its own. At best the examples show the potential complexities of a border region and the difficulty of drawing hard boundaries on archaeological distribution maps.

The broader implications of the eastern and central south zones

We have seen that in the period c. 400-100 BC it is possible to define two areas in the south of Britain which have markedly different settlement patterns, the one dominated by hillforts, the other mostly without hillforts. We have also shown that in the hillfort-dominated zone, and along its border, highly distinctive styles of pottery decoration can be recognized which may be thought to demonstrate a strong ethnic identity in these areas, in contrast to most of eastern England where pottery appears to be largely undifferentiated stylistically. These two disparate types of evidence lead to the same broad conclusion - that the social systems of the two zones must have been markedly different. From the evidence briefly outlined we may characterize them thus:

Centre south - strong chiefdoms based on hillforts, organized into larger confederacies (septs or tribes) using distinctive pottery styles as insignia. The hillforts perform central place functions. Society is in a state of stress and warfare is endemic.

Eastern - lack of centralization in production and authority except at isolated points and on the interface with the centre south zone. No evidence of stress or warfare.

The differences are striking and call for explanation, but such is the nature of the archaeological evidence that no firm conclusions can yet be reached. One line of approach worth exploring, however, is that stress caused by population growth may have continued to be a factor. We

have already suggested this as a reason for the development of the hillfort-dominated society of the centre south and the argument might be extended to suggest that the converse, i.e. lack of population pressure, may have allowed the more open settlements of the east to have developed in comparative peace. Beyond this point the argument becomes even more speculative, but controlled speculation leading to the formation of testable hypotheses is justifiable.

If population pressure, caused by the population level and holding capacity of the land converging, is a formative influence in the centre south, in contrast to the east, then it must be assumed that one or more of the following factors was in operation:

- a. the rate of increase of population in the two zones differed;
- b. new land for surplus population was available in the east but not in the centre south;
- c. technological innovation in the east led to greater productivity;
- d. the greater diversity and quality of soil type in the east allowed productivity to be maintained or increased;
- e. changes in microclimate adversely affected the centre south but not the east.

In practice any or all of these factors may have had a causative effect leading to the social differences noted. Simply listing them suggests directions for further detailed research.

One observation of potential relevance can be made on present evidence. In the Wessex area the number of sheep increased dramatically throughout the Iron Age. The usual explanation is that flocks were developed to provide food as the woodland environment suitable for cattle and pigs was progressively cut down (Clark 1947). But another explanation may be that the vast flocks of sheep were required to provide manure to maintain the fertility of arable fields. To add a dynamic to the equation, as the natural fertility of the thin chalk soils declined and more of the high down was broken to extend the arable so sheep would have been required in increasing numbers. A byproduct of this develop-

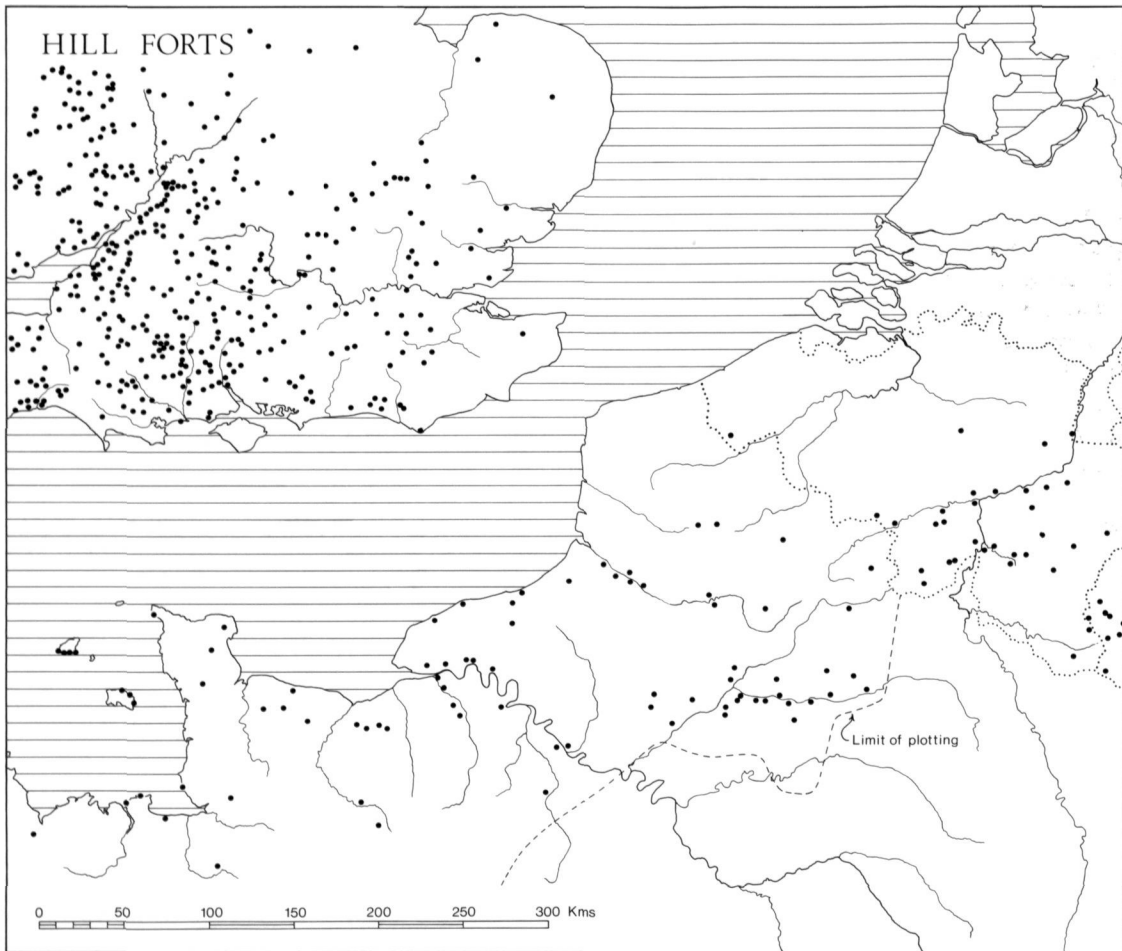


Fig. 7. Hillforts in north western Europe. After OS map of Iron Age Britain; Marien 1971; Leman-Delérive 1980; Graff 1963; Wheeler and Richardson 1959; Jorrand 1976; Schindler and Koch 1977; Leman-Delérive and Lefranc 1980.

ment was wool and since there is ample evidence for extensive spinning and weaving on most settlements in central southern Britain it is clear that wool was being exploited on a large scale. Woollen garments were an item which could easily be exchanged. This simple chain of observation, borne out by archaeological evidence, links increasing need for grain to the rise in number of sheep and the potential use of the byproduct, wool, as an item of exchange. No doubt it belies the true complexity of the situation and of the different regional strategies that

must have been developed, but it shows how the theoretical problems raised above can be brought closer to the reality of the archaeological data. It is reassuring to be able to record that a series of research programmes now in operation will have much to contribute to these questions.

Britain and the Continent

It is not the purpose of the present paper to

explore the evidence from the adjacent parts of continental Europe in any detail but certain generalizations can be made. Fig. 7 presents a gross plan of all hillforts in Britain, Belgium and parts of northern France and Luxembourg, structures which we know can span the whole of the first millennium. Clearly one cannot base detailed arguments on such disparate data but assuming the surveys in each country to be of approximately equivalent thoroughness then it is clear that the hillfort-dominated zone of central Southern Britain is quite exceptional in the density of forts recorded. It is equally clear that an arc of hillforts extends through Normandy to the Marne and the Ardenne, leaving a substantial part of Nord and Pas de Calais, Belgium and Holland without defensive structures of this kind.

Little modern excavation has been undertaken in the forts of this part of north western Europe and that which has been done consists, almost without exception, of trial trenching through the ramparts and ditches. Work of this kind, while undoubtedly useful has limitations when considering duration and intensity of occupation. However the general picture to emerge has a degree of consistency. Many of the sites can be shown to have been occupied in the period approximately 1000-400 BC (e.g. Saint Pierre-en-Chastres, and Fort Harrouard, in France and Etalle, Salm-Chateau, Tavigny-Alhoumont, Buzenol, Kemmelberg, and Hastedon, in Belgium), some (e.g. Saint Pierre-en-Chastres, Fort Harrouard, Tavigny-Alhoumont and possibly Hastedon) were reoccupied again in the middle of the first century BC at which time a number of other forts were built on virgin sites (e.g. Duclair, Gros Cron (Bellefontaine) and Cherain-Brisy). The site lists are far from complete but contain the forts for which sound data is available. The implication would seem to be that evidence for hillfort occupation between 400 and 100 BC is lacking, or at least rare, in this region.

There are, of course, dangers in basing too much on the evidence of a few rampart sections (and further east in Luxembourg at both Otzen-

hausen and Altburg occupation continued into or began in this middle period) but as a broad generalization it is fair to say that the east of England, northern France and Belgium seem to have shared a similar settlement pattern history which saw hillforts in use in the first half of the first millennium BC, up to the beginning of the early La Tène period, followed by a period of abandonment, with a spate of fort building again in the troubled times of the first century BC. The contrast of this pattern to that of central southern Britain is dramatic and serves further to emphasize the aberrant nature of the socio-political system of this hillfort-dominated zone.

The first century BC: an epilogue

Some time about 100 BC Britain's contacts with continental Europe were invigorated. A western trade axis developed, linking the centre south of Britain with Atlantic sea routes and ultimately, via the Garonne and the Carcassonne Gap, to the Romanized Mediterranean (Cunliffe 1982a), while links between the Belgae of the Somme valley and the communities of the Thames valley developed an intensity which supports Caesar's assertion that Belgic settlers migrated to Britain, an event which led to the parallel cultural development of the two areas both before and after Caesar's invasion. A decade of turmoil, created by Caesar's presence in Gaul, soon gave way to a period of ninety years during which the new Roman province traded extensively with the east of Britain culminating in the creation of a regular trade network extending along the Rhine frontier zone to reach the tribes occupying the regions of Essex and Hertfordshire (Partridge 1981, 351-352).

The events and implications of this period of economic revolution cannot be considered here in any detail but since they serve to bring to an end the old order which we have been discussing, the immediate effects should be mentioned by way of an epilogue.

Two major changes can be recognized in the

settlement pattern of southern Britain. First, there developed in the eastern zone, extending to adjacent parts of the centre south, large fortified enclosures or *enclosed oppida* located at significant route nodes especially where major land routes cross rivers. Some may be associated with or replaced by large open settlements. These oppida must reflect a reorganization of existing economic systems to facilitate intensified long distance trade (Cunliffe 1976a). Their appearance accords well with what might be expected of the effects of the proximity of the Roman economic system. Second, the majority of the strongly defended hillforts of the centre south seem to have been abandoned at about the same time. Some may have continued as religious centres (*e.g.* Danebury), or as farms or may have been refortified later (*e.g.* South Cadbury and Hod Hill), but the intense and densely packed occupation of the second century BC came rapidly to an end. On present evidence only at Maiden Castle does occupation seem to have been continuous but by this time the fort may have begun to assume the functions of the eastern oppida. Although dating evidence is necessarily imprecise, the end of the developed hillforts seems to have occurred within the period 100-50 BC in Wessex and probably also in the Cotswolds, but how long afterwards forts continued in use in the Welsh borderland cannot yet be assessed.

The rapid end of hillforts in the south must mark the collapse of the social system which supported them. The simplest way to explain this is to suppose that the economic reorganization, which came about gradually as the result of the increasing proximity of the Roman world between *c.* 100 BC and AD 43, dislocated the British socio-political systems to such an extent that those that were unstable simply collapsed. If we are correct in arguing that the hillfort-dominated landscape represented society that was under increasing stress, then its disintegration at this time is only to be expected.

How communities readjusted economically to the changed conditions and what kind of political systems evolved are questions currently

under investigation but the data base is of reasonable quality and holds out hope that significant advances in knowledge may be attainable.

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