

Fingerprinting the Iron Age, edited by Cătălin Nicolae Popa and Simon Stoddart. Oxbow Books, 2014.

Review by Kris Lockyear

When I was a student in Southampton, UK, in the late 1980s, “identity in archaeology” was a hot topic. Siân Jones was undertaking her PhD research which was later published (1997) and has become one of the principal books on the subject, and volumes derived from the newly-formed *World Archaeological Congress*, such as that edited by Shennan (1989), were being published (see C. N. Popa and S. Stoddart, chapter 27, for an analysis of citations). The aftermath of the fall of communism added impetus to the subject as nationalist ideologies co-opted archaeology for the purposes of state formation, leading to Colin Renfrew declaring at the 1992 “EuroTAG” conference that identity in archaeology should be a major focus of research and publication in the discipline. As my own research led me to examine the Late Iron Age in the region of modern-day Romania, by necessity I had to deal with issues of national identity which had a profound impact on previous work. I doubt that any of us at the time would have predicted that thirty years later, in the age of Brexit and Trump, identity politics would be still such a relevant topic.

The current volume is the result of a conference of the same name held in Cambridge in September 2011, topped and tailed by introductory and concluding chapters written by the editors. The papers include 13 from south-eastern Europe, eight comparative papers from elsewhere in Europe, and four broader overview papers. The editors have made an excellent job of editing the texts producing a very readable volume. The quality of the majority of the figures is excellent, and many are in colour. One minor gripe is that some of the graphs are a bit small making the labels almost impossible to read. Thankfully, the dreaded pie-chart only makes one appearance and as always, a bar chart would have been more informative. There are a few minor slips in consolidating the bibliography where papers are differentiated by ‘a’ and ‘b’ but are not so differentiated in the text.

Rather than review each paper in turn, it will be more fruitful to examine this volume thematically.

One of the fascinating aspects of both the conference and this volume is the wide variety of theoretical perspectives used ranging from culture-history to post-modern approaches with the usual buzz-words of hybridity and entanglement making appearances. The authors from the former-eastern bloc show a wide variety of perspectives, possibly more wide-ranging than those from, or trained within, the anglophone world. Staša Babić’s fascinating paper (chapter 24) rightly challenges the idea that somehow there should be a linear progression from culture-history through processualism to post-processualism, and argues that there is a disintegration of approaches within archaeology. She also comments on the inherent power-relationships in academia between the anglophone world and those countries whose

languages are less wide-spread. This is one of the motivations behind the current push to “decolonise the curriculum” in the United Kingdom. This wide variety of approaches is one of the strengths of the volume, especially as not all those approaches match those of the editors. There is one omission I find curious. Although the fall of communism is now thirty years ago, its impact on the study of this period was profound, but it not much discussed here (I. Vranić, chapter 15, touches on the topic). Katherine Verdery’s seminal *National Identity under Socialism* (1991) was key, for me, in disentangling Romanian publications on the late Iron Age up to the end 1989 and beyond, and yet is not cited by any of the authors.

At the core of this volume, of course, are debates regarding identity, my second theme. The authors have interpreted this widely, from ethnic identity, through to identity based on gender (e.g., B. Dimova, chapter 5), status (e.g., C. N. Popa, chapter 11) or martial prowess (Y. Inall, chapter 21). Unsurprisingly, the “Celts” and other large-scale ethnic groups mentioned in the sources, feature highly. John Collis (chapter 25) complains, rightly, that his critique of the use of the concept of “the Celts” has oft been misrepresented. He reprises that critique, especially in the light of the publication of “Celtic from the West” (Cunliffe and Koch 2010), which he notes that “we must waste time and money refuting.” Unfortunately, that refutation has fallen on deaf ears as we are now up to Volume 3 (Koch and Cunliffe 2013, 2016)! Peter Wells (chapter 26) also doubts the usefulness of using these large-scale ethnic identifications derived from the classical sources. Other authors in this volume are less critical, with Sándor Berecki (chapter 3), for example, discussing whether certain buried persons were “Dacians or Celts?” (p. 14) and some just avoiding the argument altogether and by using the neutral phrase “late Iron Age” (C. N. Popa, chapter 11), a strategy with which I have a great deal of sympathy. If nothing else, it seems inherently unlikely that the majority of the occupants of Europe at that time would identify closely with a large-scale grouping such as these. Within Roman studies, a similar critique of what it means to say someone is “Roman” has been debated for many years.

Many of the papers examine how material culture may be used to reflect a person’s identity, as more widely defined, at a smaller scale. A number discuss how identity is a construct, and how it is fluid and changing, for example papers by Ivan Vranić (chapter 15), Louise Campbell (chapter 19), Elizabeth Foulds (chapter 20) and Peter Wells (chapter 26). Campbell’s discussion of social identity theory (pp. 213-6) is especially interesting. One can be forgiven, however, for wondering if everything we find in the archaeological record is related to identity, with only Wells (esp. pp. 312-3) noting that some artefacts, especially mass-produced ones, are reflections of economic factors rather than identity. Foulds’ discussion of beads is an interesting case. She argues that the colour of the beads is important. Colour and dress is clearly one aspect of the construction of identity. The sea of bright orange at a Denver Broncos home match contrasting strongly with the colours of the visiting team is emblematic of “them and us” and an example of the contextual construction of identity. The unremitting drabness of blacks, greys and dark colours of commuters heading into London, however, is surely an attempt at anonymity, there is no “other”. Is anonymity also an identity? In Foulds’ case, the widespread use of yellow beads in study areas as widely spread as eastern Scotland

and south-west England seems to me to be an unlikely expression of group identity. Other explanations deserve to be explored.

Having spent twenty-years examining everything from undergraduate essays to PhD theses on the topic of identity, I have one reoccurring complaint: often the research puts the cart before the horse. By that I mean that the results of the analysis of the archaeological material is assumed to be connected to identity before the analysis has even been undertaken. "Identity" is not the only game in town and unfashionable explanations such as the economy may well influence or create the patterns we see in our data. How might a distribution pattern which reflects identity differ from that created by trade routes, or the distributions of manufacturing centres? Should we not think about alternative explanatory frameworks and examine which fits our data best? The effort expended in developing an ever-more sophisticated understanding of the nature of identity has not been matched by an effort to link that understanding to the archaeological record, and — essentially — to distinguish between alternative explanatory frameworks.

The third theme I wish to discuss is the use of burial evidence. Most of the papers in this volume use burial evidence to examine questions of identity of one sort or another. The rituals around disposal of the dead are clearly linked in all cultures to identity, both of the wider group and the more immediate one. One truism, however, that seems to have been overlooked in many of the papers is that the dead do not bury themselves. Grave goods are a reflection of what the *living* want to impart and may, or may not, reflect the identity of deceased when alive. To pick but one example, Figure 18.4 in the paper by Peter Ramsel (chapter 18) shows the contents of grave 520 from Pottenbrunn. The body was of a male in his late 40s or early 50s. The grave goods suggest an identity which combined warrior (weapons), hunting (red deer, fowl bones, arrow heads) and possibly a druid (small tools and knives, mortar-like stone, etc.). An alternative explanation is that those involved in the burial ritual were a warrior, a hunter and a druid. This does not detract from the likely elite status of the deceased, but does provide an alternative viewpoint. This facet of burial data is nicely illustrated by Inall (chapter 21) who, in her discussion of martial identities, notes that the spears she is studying sometimes occur in the graves of children and women, and similarly Popa (p. 118) notes two cases of child burials with weapons.

The final theme I wish to briefly mention is that of the sources. Most of the papers, at some point, refer to written record which is invariably from the classical Mediterranean, and many find that the sources are more often a hindrance than a help, for example papers by Bela Dimova (chapter 5), Vladimir Mihajlović (chapter 10) and Ivan Vranić (chapter 15). In 1974 Mircea Babeş argued that: "archaeologists must work independently, and if possible uninfluenced by historical data and theories" (1974, p. 242, translation KL). This is a perspective with which many of the authors in this volume would agree.

In conclusion, this is a fascinating book providing a wealth of contrasting perspectives and deserves to be read as a collection, rather than cherry-picked for just those papers closest to one's own interests.

Babeş, M. 1974. "Puncte de vedere relative la o istorie a Daciei preromane," *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie* 25(2): 217–244

Cunliffe, B. and J. T. Koch (eds.) 2010. *Celtic from the West. Alternative Perspectives from Archaeology, Genetics, Language and Literature* (Oxford: Oxbow Books).

Jones, S. 1997. *The Archaeology of Ethnicity* (Routledge, London and New York).

Koch, J. T. and B. Cunliffe (eds.) 2013. *Celtic from the West 2: Rethinking the Bronze Age and the Arrival of Indo-European in Atlantic Europe*. (Oxford: Oxbow Books).

Koch, J. T. and B. Cunliffe (eds.) 2016. *Celtic from the West 3. Atlantic Europe in the Metal Ages — questions of shared language*. (Oxford: Oxbow Books).

Shennan, S. J. (ed) 1989. *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity* (One World Archaeology 10, Unwin-Hyman, London).

Verdery, K. 1991. *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*. (University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles and Oxford)

1. Tribute to John Alexander (Simon Stoddart)
2. Introduction: the challenge of Iron Age identity (Simon Stoddart and Cătălin Nicolae Popa)
3. The Coexistence and Interference of the Late Iron Age Transylvanian Communities (Sándor Berecki)
4. Identities of the Early Iron Age in North-eastern Slovenia (Matija Črešnar and Dimitrij Mlekuž)
5. Royal Bodies, Invisible Victims: gender in the funerary record of Late Iron Age and Early Hellenistic Thrace (Bela Dimova)
6. Mediterranean Wine and Dacian Conviviality. Ancient and Modern Myths and Archaeological Evidence (Mariana Egri)
7. Sarmizegetusa Regia - the Identity of a Royal Site? (Gelu Florea)
8. The Ethnic Construction of Early Iron Age Burials in Transylvania. Scythians, Agathyrsi or Thracians? (Alexandra Ghenghea)
9. Negotiating Identities at the edge of the Roman Empire (Marko Janković)
10. Tracing Ethnicity Backwards: the case of the "Central Balkan Tribes" (Vladimir Mihajlović)
11. The Quest for Group Identity in Late Iron Age Romania. Statistical Reconstruction of Groups based on Funerary Evidence (Cătălin Nicolae Popa)

12. Changing Identities of the Iron Age Communities of Southern Pannonia (Hrvoje Potrebica and Marko Dizdar)
13. Indigenous and Colonist Communities in the Eastern Carpathian Basin at the Beginning of the Late Iron Age. The Genesis of an Eastern Celtic World (Aurel Rustoiu)
14. Ancient Thrace between the East and the West (Nikola Theodossiev)
15. 'Hellenization' and Ethnicity in the Continental Balkan Iron Age (Ivan Vranić)
16. Central Places and the Construction of Collective Identities in the Middle Rhine-Moselle Region (Manuel Fernández-Götz)
17. Fingerprinting Iron Age Communities in South-West Germany and an Integrative Theory of Culture (Oliver Nakoinz)
18. Iron Age Identities in Central Europe: some initial approaches (Peter Ramsli)
19. Negotiating Identity on the Edge of Empire (Louisa Campbell)
20. Personal Adornment in Iron Age Britain. The Case of the Missing Glass Beads (Elizabeth Foulds)
21. Spoiling for a Fight: using spear typologies to identify aspects of warrior identity and fighting style in Iron Age South Italy (Yvonne Inall)
22. Communal vs. Individual: the role of identity in the burials of Peucetia (Olivia Kelley)
23. A View from the South (West). Identity in Tyrrhenian Central Italy (Simon Stoddart)
24. Identity, Integration, Power Relations and the Study of the European Iron Age: implications from Serbia (Staša Babić)
25. The Celts: more myths and inventions. (John Collis)
26. Material Culture and Identity. The Problem of Identifying Celts, Germans and Romans in Late Iron Age Europe (Peter Wells)
27. Fingerprinting the European Iron Age. Historical, Cultural and Intellectual Perspectives on Identity and Ethnicity (Cătălin Nicolae Popa and Simon Stoddart)