

Tom Moore, *A Biography of Power: Research and Excavations at the Iron Age 'oppidum' of Bagendon, Gloucestershire 1979-2017*, (Oxford, Archaeopress Archaeology 2020). xxv + 667pp., many b/w and col. ill., maps, tables. Paperback, £85.00 [ISBN: 978-1-78969-534-2].

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This long-awaited volume reports the findings of a long-term project at Bagendon, which began with a re-examination of unpublished excavations of 1969-71 in the bottom of the Bagendon Brook valley. It was clear that to put those results in context, between 2008 and 2016 LiDAR and geophysics was used to explore the whole of the valley. Four new sites were identified with three enclosures, two of Middle Iron Age date, and a Roman period villa, being sampled by small cuttings. The other enclosure, possibly Late Iron Age/Early Roman, was not excavated. Much of the area within the earthworks was found to be empty space lacking permanent structures. The geoarchaeological evidence suggests it was a mosaic of open woodland, grassland, and wood pasture. It is likely that it was used for animal herding such as sheep, cattle and horses, the latter indicating a particularly high-status role of the settlement. Reporting the outcomes might have been a tedious exercise; however, with the images being placed close to the appropriate text, there is a feeling of being taken on a personal tour of the landscape.

The Middle Iron Age occupation both at Scrubditch (2012-13) and Cutham (2014) sites, dated to the 3rd century BC and were contemporaneous. They appeared similar to the 'banjo' enclosures found in Southern England, but of smaller area and different morphologies, and both contained a round house. It is possible that they had roles of directing livestock movement between the Cotswolds and Thames valley, and the management of livestock, sheep, cattle, and horse in the valley. That they were certainly part of long-distance trade routes is indicated by the discovery of an inhumation burial of a female who probably had her origins somewhere in Wales, and samples from pig and horses indicated the same origin.

In the valley bottom the evidence from the unpublished, 'legacy', excavation of 1979-81, intended to examine Clifford's findings of 1954-6, suffered problems with the survival of aspects of the archive as well as different modes of recording and techniques that have developed more recently. The artisan occupation at the mouth of the settlement was confirmed with traces of iron smelting and smithing, coin minting and possibly bronze working. The high status imported pottery and brooches probably belonged to domestic occupation further up the valley.

The geophysics indicates that the valley bottom settlement contained small enclosures with pits possibly representing industrial activity as well as domestic structures and stretched considerably beyond the earlier excavated area. Moore speculates that at least 28ha might have been used for permanent settlement. The open areas of the valley were separated from the village by linear features on its north and south sides. Examinations of the pottery from both excavations suggest that the Bagendon settlement began in the early 1st century, perhaps as early as AD20, with relatively coherent focus of activity no later than the AD60s, but with significant activity taking place between AD30 and the AD50s.

The third of the newly discovered sites to be sampled was at Black Grove (2015), an Early-Mid 2nd century small villa of some pretension with a possible second storey and painted wall plaster. This villa was one of several identified above the valley bottom and, like the others, indicated some continuity from the Late Iron Age settlement, perhaps elite families maintaining a presence in an ancestral landscape. This is not to say that they did not also have a property in the newly growing *Corinium*.

Two hundred and sixty-three pages of text are given over to specialist reports which include the findings from each excavation in chronological order. While the depth of detail of each is aimed at the specialist, the summaries at the end of the sections are accessible to the general archaeological audience. Many of the contributions came from the University of Durham, Moore's home institution, thereby allowing collegiate interaction and support. However, where a particular specialism was needed, especially in an understanding of the locality, the contributors are leaders in their fields.

The 'biography' of the book's title now begins in the Middle Iron Age, and it is the relationship with the Late Iron Age that now becomes significant. Moore suggests that the pastoral agricultural roles and the presence of woodland would have been very different from the intensely farmed landscapes in the Thames valley to the south and ideal to access for a different range of economic and cultural communities. These in turn may suggest a seasonal agricultural meeting place, possibly with feasting activities and these roles might presage the Late Iron Age function, with the Cutham enclosure possibly still in use in some way about the time of the beginning of activity in the valley bottom settlement.

The front cover of the volume has a reconstruction of the 'Bagendon Complex' as it might have looked c. AD40-50 looking westwards from the Churn valley, copyrighted by the author, so it has his *imprimatur*. The dominant features are the dykes in the foreground and in the distance on the plateau are the Duntisbourne sites and The Ditches. In the empty space are cattle grazing. The small settlement alongside Bagendon Brook has smoke arising from the buildings. There is no human activity, so it is a blank archaeological canvas on which to conjecture.

Moore suggests that the relatively small population in the valley bottom was augmented at certain times of the year by hundreds or thousands of people. There is limited evidence for such a large seasonal or yearly event. However, an indicator might be the amount of labour needed to modify the Middle Iron Age earthworks and construction of those of the Late Iron Age. One of the outcomes of Moore's mathematical modelling with comparison with similar ditched sites is that they might have been constructed in one episode, perhaps over a season, with a contribution of two individuals from 500 farmsteads. This is a considerable number more than those of the period he identified in the preceding chapter reviewing change from the Early Iron Age to AD150 in the Upper Thames valley, the Cotswolds, and the River Severn, and implies a much wider area from which to draw labour. These earthworks would have been visible from the long-distance valley routes and no doubt the site was chosen to impress. Moore suggests that visitors' experience could have been manipulated by being funnelled through a gateway into the valley, walking up the main track with its artisan trades, especially metalworking with its fire and smoke and the coin making with the other 'Complex' structures on the plateau being invisible. It is difficult to detect signs of wear on the trackway, and to imagining why a hollow way was not formed with such numbers. However, the 'viewshed' analysis was taken from the *inside* of the area, and Moore also points out that in other sites of this type it has been suggested that earthworks were more likely to have been designed to impress from *within* than from without. It is entirely possible that the valley was inaccessible to large numbers of people, with only elite allowed inside. Perhaps the newly discovered, and unexcavated, enclosure with a possible track leading up from the valley might clarify some of these issues. This brings up the problem of where these huge numbers of people were accommodated. There is no indication inside the dykes and so Moore suggests the Duntisbourne enclosures above the valley might be meeting or assembly places. Perhaps seeing into the valley from such a height was equally as enigmatic.

It was Clifford who suggested that Bagendon might be an 'oppidum' largely because of the dykes giving status to this peripheral location which then could be comparable with Late Iron Age Colchester or St. Albans. However, she was not aware of the sites of the Bagendon Complex and Moore argues that since *oppidum* is an ambiguous term, and considering its use in classical sources and the discovery of other Late Iron Age sites with similar attributions, morphology and possible functions, he suggests that the concept of

'powerscape' is more appropriate. This has wide implications and prompts a sustained discussion with valuable insights as to whether Bagendon was the 'Capital' of the Dobunni, and what was the nature of the 'tribe': centralised and unified, or fluid? Would such an entity have 'kings' and were there any other centres of power issuing coins? How was the idea of personal or tribal identity related to assemblies such as is proposed for Bagendon? Moore's discussion of these issues is the most complete and satisfying to date.

The story of the waxing of the power of Bagendon undertaking its social and political role with *Corinium* in its hinterland and seemingly unhindered by the Roman army might seem surprising. It might not be hard to imagine the gradual leakage of people, especially artisans, to the early Roman town as Bagendon's influence slowly waned and it became part of *Corinium's* hinterland. The elite who displayed their power at Bagendon, may well have revealed it also in *Corinium* by the building of Roman style houses. Perhaps the Dobunni coalesced at this time as an entity to enable Roman tax collecting.

This is a sizable volume both in the number of pages and price and it is unwieldy to handle as a paperback. However, the excavation results and then the wider discussions are synergetic and demonstrate that the Bagendon project's methodology of a landscape approach is a powerful tool in developing an understanding of the change and continuity that underlies the mechanisms of power and place in the dynamic socio-political landscape of the Late Iron Age and Early Roman interlude. This is a major personal and academic achievement for Tom Moore and for the many organisations who enabled the individual stages of the work through the 'mosaic' funding.

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