Gen. Pitt-Rivers's Explorations

Author(s): A. W. Buckland

Source: *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 18 (1889), pp. 200-204

Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2842418>

Accessed: 15/06/2014 09:36

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

GEN. PITT-RIVERS'S EXPLORATIONS.

During the recent meeting of the British Association at Bath, General Pitt-Rivers brought out the second of the splendid volumes in which he has recorded the results of his excavations on his own estates on the borders of Wiltshire and Dorsetshire, and we take the present opportunity of laying before our readers a review of the two volumes,¹ hoping in this way to draw especial attention to the work so admirably carried out by the author, who possesses in an eminent degree all the qualifications necessary for explorations of this kind, such as knowledge and experience, wealth and leisure, and, above all, inexhaustible patience and enthusiasm, all which are amply exemplified in the volumes before us, which, by the liberality of their author, are placed in the library of the Institute, having been printed for private distribution only.

The Pitt-Rivers estates are situated just on the borders of Wilts and Dorset, counties full of relics of British and Roman times.

"The region in question," says General Pitt-Rivers in his preface, "strengthened by the dense forests which covered Dorsetshire at that time, appears throughout the early history of these islands to have served as a standing point for first established races, in resisting succeeding waves of immigration from the east. Here the abundance of long barrows shows that the Neolithic folk, of presumably Iberian origin, congregated in large numbers. Here the Goidels or earliest wave of the Celtic population, are shown by Professor Rhys to have resisted the succeeding wave of Brythons coming from the same quarter. Here also Mr. Green has shown in his "Making of England" the West Welsh, of whatever ethnic elements they may have been composed, withstood the Saxons for a long time after the latter had penetrated as far as Wilton."

A border-land such as this seems to offer a peculiarly favourable field for archæological research, especially as it includes a portion of that great forest tract known as Cranborne Chase, which, having for many centuries been free from the plough and the hoe, has preserved the remains within it undisturbed and unmixed with those of a later date.

Thurnam enumerates only twelve long barrows in Dorsetshire, and all on the borders of Wilts; but none of these seem to have come within the district explored by General Pitt-Rivers. Of round barrows he has opened a great number and finds that they all confirm Thurnam's theory, that the makers of these barrows were of a taller race than those who reared the gigantic long barrows, and brachycephalic, instead of dolichocephalic like the more ancient long-barrow people of the Stone Age. The round barrows opened by General Pitt-Rivers were found to be all of the Bronze Age, and contained some fine pottery and flint implements, although apparently fragments only of bronze. These tumuli would seem

¹ "Excavations in Cranborne Chase, near Rushmore, on the borders of Dorset and Wilts." By Lieutenant-General Pitt-Rivers, F.R.S., Vols. I and II, 1887-8.

to prove that the inhabitants of this part of the country, at all events during the Bronze Age, were Celts or Belgæ; but the further excavations of General Pitt-Rivers in the adjoining British villages reveal to us a much smaller dolichocephalic race, resembling so nearly the Neolithic folk of the long barrows of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, as to be regarded by him as remnants of the same people, an idea confirmed by the measurements of Dr. Beddoe and Dr. Garson.

The period to which the relics found principally belong, is included between the coming of the Romans and the Saxon invasion. The people are designated as Romanized Britons, and it is suggested that their extremely small stature may be the result of slavery, or of the taller men having been drafted into the Roman legions.

Among the many curious facts relating to these people, that which seems the most singular is the complete change in the mode of burial. Assuming them to belong to the same race as the long barrow people, we find that not only have they forsaken the rearing of gigantic tumuli, but they seem to have gone to the other extreme, and to have buried their dead in ditches or pits, the latter being apparently disused chalk pits, from which chalk had been excavated for agricultural purposes, and which have been filled up, and afterwards used for sepulchral purposes as being easier of excavation. This change of burial customs may perhaps be due to Roman influence, but in that case we should expect to find burials according to Roman methods; these, however, do not appear to have been found, and from the fact recorded, that in two cases of burial in these pits there seems evidence that death resulted from stoning, the idea suggests itself that these burials were only of the poor or criminal classes, and that the sepulchres of the more wealthy have yet to be found, perhaps in a necropolis at some distance from the villages, an idea which seems reasonable from analogy, and from the very small number of weapons or ornaments found with these remains. But although the Romanised Britons had given up the rearing of long barrows, they do not seem to have forgotten how to throw up gigantic earthworks, for Bokerley Dyke in which many of the relics were found is a great fortification nearly nine miles in length, raised apparently for the protection of villages to the westward, from the Saxon invaders pressing upon them from the East. This great dyke may be compared with the still greater Wansdyke, the date of which has yet to be ascertained, but the sections cut by General Pitt-Rivers in Bokerley Dyke, show the date of that with tolerable precision, as 500 Roman coins, some as late as Constantius, have been found there.

The Romano-British villages of Woodcuts and Rotherley, the chief scene of General Pitt-Rivers's excavations, both lie to the rear of Bokerley Dyke, and in both there are enclosures, entrenchments, and ditches, apparently designed to separate the various quarters into which each village was divided, and which, perhaps, were occupied by different ranks or sections of the population, as was

the case in many ancient cities. At Rotherley, the centre of the village appears to have been enclosed within a circular rampart and ditch, the former at present of insignificant height, but perhaps originally much higher. General Pitt-Rivers points out that these circular enclosures are common in British villages, and says they are sometimes called "sacred circles." The plan on the map is certainly strongly suggestive of the great earthwork surrounding the gigantic stone circles at Avebury, and both bear a considerable resemblance to Irish Rathes, assigned by tradition to the "*little folk*," or fairies, which, taken in connection with the extremely small size of the ancient inhabitants of these Romano-British villages, may point to a racial connection between the constructors.

Most of the relics found in these villages were described by General Pitt-Rivers in a paper published in the *Journal* of this Institute for February, 1888, but we may here briefly recapitulate; they consist chiefly of pottery of various kinds, including New Forest ware and Samian, with British imitations of the latter, and in the barrows of the Bronze Age drinking cups of ancient British make. The bronze and iron articles include many fibulæ of peculiar form and considerable beauty; a few fibulæ of silver and of silver and bronze gilt have also been found, but no gold object is recorded. Of glass, jet, and coral we have a few specimens, but Kimmeridge shale seems to have been the chief substance employed for ornamental purposes. The beautiful engraving on a tablet of this shale found at Rotherley is reproduced on the handsome binding of General Pitt-Rivers's volumes; this is supposed to have been a writing tablet, and to have been covered with wax; an iron stylus has also been found, but no inscriptions of any kind. We must refer our readers to the volumes for the minute measurements and illustrations of the several finds and of the human and animal remains, all of which are given with the greatest possible care and attention to the locality and to the depth of the excavation. An examination of these tables will show the difference between the men and domesticated animals of the Romano-British period, and those of the present day. The horses and cows were small, and it would seem that both were used as beasts of burthen, as iron shoes of both have been found. The horse shoe of that day was apparently lighter and better adapted to the animal's hoof than that now in use. General Pitt-Rivers calls attention to the sinuosity of the edge, which reminds us of one in the Museum at Cirencester, said to be Roman, but which is lighter and more decidedly sinuous than either of those figured in these volumes. These people were evidently agriculturists, cultivating their land in terraces, and the wheat grown by them was of nearly the same quality as that now grown at the same height, and shows an advance upon the cultivation of pre-Roman times. Many querns for grinding this wheat have been found, but no ploughs or other agricultural implements, except some iron spuds, an iron-bound spade, and a reaping-hook; there are, however, some singular articles termed hippo-sandals,

the use of which appears doubtful, but which were either attached to the horses' feet, or to a primitive kind of cart without wheels.

The sheep were tall and slender resembling the St. Kilda breed, and the dogs were of all sizes, one being a Dachshund. The people apparently kept bees, as several perforated pieces of pottery are supposed to have been used as colanders for straining honey, and we may reasonably suppose they made mead or some similar liquor: they also had spindle whorls, some of Kimmeridge shale and some of stone and bone, therefore they made their own cloth, but no specimen of the manufactured cloth has been found. The absence of all traces of religion is very curious, two or three flint implements are regarded by General Pitt-Rivers as having been used as amulets, but there are no images of Roman deities; none of those little figures denominated idols, in stone or terra-cotta; no emblems of sun, moon, or stars; no particular position or orientation of the dead, although most are buried in the crouching attitude common to savages; no stone circles or monoliths, in fact there seems nothing to show that they had any religion at all, which is strange considering the undoubted Roman intercourse which was maintained for centuries, the coins found dating from Caligula, A.D. 75, to Magnentius, A.D. 353. Among the most curious of the discoveries made are several hypocausts of singular construction, the use of which is not quite clear. They are usually square or oblong, cut in the solid chalk, with a trench round covered with flints, and a kind of oval basin at one end, in which it is conjectured the stokers stood to attend to the fire: many flints which have evidently been burnt are found in these hypocausts, and it is supposed these were heated in the furnace, and used as pot boilers. These hypocausts may perhaps have been the public cooking places of the village, or they may have been used after the manner of the Roman hypocausts for heating houses. A somewhat similar structure, but round in form, was described by Mr. Kinahan (in the *Journal of the Institute for February, 1883*) as existing at Cummer, County Wexford, where also pits resembling those at Woodcuts and Rotherley were found. Mr. Kinahan suggests that this circle with the pavement of burnt stones, may have been a place of sacrifice, but cannot understand why stones should be found mixed with the wood ashes. Was this a hypocaust similar to those described by General Pitt-Rivers? We remember having been shown a somewhat similar structure in Cornwall, which was said to have been used for burning the dead.

The elaborate system of drainage in these villages, and the change in that, and in the level of two Roman wells discovered, were pointed out by General Pitt-Rivers in the paper already referred to, as proving a difference in the rain-fall during the time these villages were occupied, and we need not therefore do more than draw attention to this very interesting and important point. The latest recorded excavations in these volumes are those carried out at Winklebury Camp and Hill, and in the adjoining barrows. Winklebury is one mile from Rotherley, and thirteen

from Salisbury: the camp is said to be that of Vespasian, but General Pitt-Rivers says it is certainly not of Roman construction. The finds here are chiefly pre-Roman of the Iron Age, the pottery is rougher, and the flint flakes and implements numerous. The barrows are British, and contain British pottery of several kinds, and bronze implements, but they are surrounded by Saxon graves, and secondary Saxon interments would seem to have taken place in some of the barrows. In the Saxon graves evidence is afforded of orientation of the body in burial. All the skeletons, with one exception, lie with the head to the west, facing north, in an extended position; and with some of them were interred iron knives and other curious articles in the same metal. On one skeleton was found a sort of double fibula of bronze discs coated with silver, and attached to a piece of wood and iron links, beneath which was found a piece of cloth. Some of the skeletons wore on the neck glass beads with spirals of different colours, the adder's bead of the Britons.

It is impossible in a notice of this kind to touch upon every point of interest presented in this valuable work. The reliable anthropological data afforded by it will be fully appreciated by all students of the "science of man." Three distinct peoples are brought before us: the tall brachycephalic men of the bronze age, buried in round barrows; the short dolichocephalic Romanised Britons, possibly and probably the descendants of the Neolithic folk of Thurnam's long barrows; and lastly the Saxons, "all contained within a radius of about three quarters of a mile." The relics, animal, vegetable, and mineral, works of art, and personal ornaments, and relative position of each, have been carefully tabulated, in order to facilitate reference, and the most minute and scientific measurements of the human and animal remains by Drs. Beddoe and Garson are given, all as General Pitt-Rivers is careful to inform us in the interests of truth, and not with the idea of establishing any pet theory. We cannot do better than conclude this notice in the words of the author: "A good deal of the rash and hasty generalisation of our time arises from the unreliability of the evidence upon which it is based. It is next to impossible to give a continuous narrative of any archaeological investigation that is entirely free from bias; undue stress will be laid upon facts that seem to have an important bearing upon theories that are current at the time, whilst others that might come to be considered of greater value afterwards are put in the background, or not recorded; and posterity is endowed with a legacy of error that can never be rectified. But when fulness and accuracy are made the chief subject of study, this evil is in a great measure avoided."

We rejoice to hear that General Pitt-Rivers intends to resume his investigations, and anticipate still more important results from future explorations.

A. W. BUCKLAND.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

PROFILES FROM THE EGYPTIAN MONUMENTS.