

Nico G. A. M. Roymans, *Tribal Societies in Northern Gaul*. Cingula 12. An anthropological perspective. Albert Egges van Giffen Instituut voor Prae- en Protohistorie, Amsterdam 1990.

This study sets out to characterize late pre-Roman Iron Age society in the area roughly between the Seine and the Rhine with three specific aims in mind: to provide an overall picture of social cultural organization; to explore regional differences; and to define the trajectories of change apparent during the Later La Tène-period and into the beginnings of the Roman era. The author unashamedly adopts the anthropological approach, which has found favour in British archaeological research in recent years, preferring to develop systematic, comparative and processual perspectives rather than the technochronological or culture historical models which have hitherto dominated research in the region. Stated starkly in this way it might sound as though this book is yet another self-indulgent, and jargon-ridden product of which rather too many have appeared in the last decade. Such fears are entirely without foundation. Roymans' approach is firmly founded on empirical research and his application of theory and the building of models is judicious and constrained. More to the point the material is presented with great clarity – the text is entirely user-friendly and in no way attempts to overawe the reader.

The scene is set in chapter 2 with a brief consideration of the ethnicity of North Gallic tribes summarizing the present state of thought on the Celtic/Germanic question. Then follows, in chapter 3, a detailed study of social political organization of the region relying largely upon the classical sources, especially Caesar and Tacitus, but with some reference to the Irish vernacular texts. Particular emphasis is (rightly I believe) placed on patronage and clientship as the prime articulating factor in the more advanced socio-economic systems in the region. Simply stated the elite maintain their status by success in warfare thus acquiring tribute, captives and booty which they are able to distribute down through the social hierarchy or to exchange for exotic luxury goods. These prestige goods are used in displays signifying paramount status. The system is in a state of unstable equilibrium and may thus change rapidly.

Having provided a workable social model the author then proceeds to present and discuss the data relevant to a selection of social sub-systems, religion and ritual (chapter 4), agriculture (chapter 5), the circulation of gold (chapter 6), Mediterranean trade contacts (chapter 7), settlement pattern (chapter 8) and mortuary ritual (chapter 9). The approach throughout is empirical. The full range of data has been researched and is presented *in extenso* supported by summary lists and an excellent series of maps. The patterns are allowed to emerge and are then drawn together in a series of conclusions which contribute to the developing model.

What emerges with great clarity is the sharp dichotomy between the southern fringe and the northern zone within the research area. This has long been apparent, and frequently commented on, but never before has the full range of evidence been amassed and the stark differences been so decisively displayed.

At the simplest level of explanation, as the author so persuasively shows, the differences in the archaeological distributions can be explained by the different social systems prevalent in the two zones, the southern being more complex with a more developed hierarchic structure. This manifests itself in the emergence of a variety of settlement forms, including large complex agglomerations of the kind generally categorized under that unsatisfactory and ill-defined term *oppidum*, and a very distinct hierarchy in the mortuary record, the elite being able to demonstrate their social status with weapons, vehicles or imported southern prestige goods. The cumulative evidence for a complex social hierarchy focuses on two distinct regions, the Aisne-Marne and the Trier region. This conforms nicely with the documentary data, mainly Caesar's *Commentaries*, which strongly implies that the Suessiones, Remi and Treveri were the most socially advanced of the tribes encountered in the mid first century B.C.

So far so good, but having structured the model to this degree it is necessary to stand back and see it in a broader context and this the author does in his final, albeit very short, chapter. The model he adopts is a version of the currently-popular core-periphery model. The southern zone he sees as a periphery to the south (Mediterranean world) but also as a core within the research region, its periphery being the northern zone from just north of the Somme to the Weser. East of the Weser and extending up into Jutland the area of the West Germanic Jastorf Culture, with its emerging elite burials and evidence of internal social differentiation, he sees as another 'core' interacting with the communities of the Trier region. Given this patterning it becomes easier to understand the confused perceptions of the classical writers who were prepared to assign ethnic identities – Celtic and Germanic – to the two socially complex 'core zones' – but were unsure

of what to make of the tribes of the less developed 'periphery' in between. Standing back still further it is necessary to ask why the tribes of the southern core (i. e. the Marne-Aisne and Trier regions) developed their complex hierarchical structure. Of the two possible (but not mutually exclusive) factors which the author considers – external stimulus from the Mediterranean world and autonomous regional development based on agrarian productivity – Roymans tends to favour the latter as the prime mover on the grounds that the pattern of hierarchization which we observe in the Late La Tène-period was very similar to that which happened in the same area in the Late Hallstatt – Early La Tène-period. Thus, he argues, it is more likely to be a factor of the productive capacity of the land than of external stimulus. The situation is perhaps a little more complex and it could be argued (as the reviewer has done) that the emergence of the elite in the southern zone in the Late Hallstatt–Early La Tène was the result of it serving as a periphery to the prestige goods economy of the West Hallstatt cultural zone which owed its development to sudden access to Mediterranean luxury goods. In other words the catalyst in both periods was external stimulus. But what surely needs to be emphasized is the crucial geographical position of the southern zone in relation to the natural north-south routes across western Europe. At those times when trade between the Mediterranean and the north intensified it was inevitable that the Aisne-Marne and Hunsrück-Eifel regions should reap the benefits.

Roymans' volume brings together and synthesizes a vast array of disparate data making it readily accessible. If this were his only achievement we would be much in his debt, but this book is far more than a mere collection of data, it is a bringing together of archaeological and historical evidence in an attempt to arrive at an understanding of social complexity and dynamics. As such it is entirely convincing and will, I am sure, help to persuade those who hitherto have found the anthropological approach uncongenial that this is the way forward. In short "*Tribal Societies in Northern Gaul*" is an important book which deserves to be widely read.

Oxford

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