

The Thames through Time

The Archaeology of the Gravel Terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames

The early historical period: AD 1–1000

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Preface

The gravels of the river Thames have seen some of the most intensive archaeological activity in England. Discovery in this region has been closely (although not exclusively) linked to aggregates extraction, with the size and depth of gravel quarries providing opportunities for investigation of multi-period remains over unusually large areas. As a result, the Thames Valley now offers an exceptionally rich resource of archaeological data.

Excavation remains at a high level in the region. The publication of individual site reports continues on an ongoing basis, but much of the existing synthetic work for the area was either undertaken some time ago, or covers only parts of the valley rather than the valley as a whole. As the bibliography for the present volume bears out, information tends to be dispersed between a large number of different sources. Consequently intellectual access to archaeological information, even from such a relatively well studied and published region as this, has remained laborious and on the whole restricted to those specialising in this area.

This volume has been designed to address these shortcomings by providing a new overview of the late Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon archaeology of the valley as a whole, comprising the Upper Thames from the source of the river to the Goring Gap, and the Middle Thames from the Goring Gap to the start of the tidal zone at Teddington Lock. Beyond this point the story becomes very largely that of London, which is not considered in detail. For the most part, we have drawn on existing published sources, and reports on major sites that are either being prepared for publication, or remain unpublished. It has not been possible, within the scope of the present project, to undertake detailed research to the level of individual Sites and Monuments Records or findspots. New discoveries are occurring all the time, and in time will undoubtedly modify the picture presented here.

The volume has been structured around a number of themes, rather than taking the more conventional approach of chronological narrative or gazetteer. Our aim was to avoid a rigid focus on the form, location and dating of individual sites, and to explore how far other kinds of evidence can support interpretation at a broader level. Inevitably this has led to a rather longer volume than would otherwise have been the case, and to some repetition of information between chapters, although we have tried to keep this to a minimum.

We hope that the volume will provide a useful resource for archaeologists excavating, researching, curating, teaching and studying the archaeology of this region for some years to come. At the same time, we have attempted to make the volume accessible to readers beyond the specialised archaeological community, by including a certain amount of general contextual and background information, and particularly through the use of a number of detailed Features that display key information about important sites and topics.

The project has been made possible by a grant from English Heritage from the resources of the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. Here, as elsewhere in the country, the resources of the fund have provided a welcome opportunity to review archaeological results from the region at a broader level than is generally possible within the development-led excavation environment.

Further volumes currently in preparation in the Thames Valley Landscapes monograph series will present overviews of the prehistoric evidence from the same study area.

*Anne Dodd, Editor
October 2006*

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Summary

The gravel terraces of the river Thames have revealed a wealth of archaeological information about the evolution of the landscape of the region, the development of the settlement pattern, and past human occupation. Much of this has come to light in the course of gravel quarrying, which has been so extensive that the Thames Valley now provides one of the richest resources of archaeological data in the country.

This volume provides an up to date overview of the archaeological evidence from the valley for the late Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods, broadly speaking the first millennium AD. The area studied in detail comprises the Upper Thames Valley, from the source of the river to the Goring Gap, and the Middle Thames Valley, from the Goring Gap

to the start of the tidal zone at Teddington Lock.

A summary of evidence for the character of the river and the vegetation and environment of its floodplain is followed by a detailed account of the evolving settlement pattern as currently understood from archaeological evidence. The authors then consider what archaeology can reveal about the late Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon populations of the valley, and their changing lifestyles, culture, identities and beliefs. This is followed by a review of the evidence for production, trade, transport and communication, and the archaeology of power and politics. The volume concludes with a discussion of the state of knowledge today and its limitations, and emerging themes and problem areas for future research.

Zusammenfassung

Die Schotterterrassen der Themse haben eine Fülle an archäologischer Information über die Entstehung der Landschaft dieser Region, die Entwicklung der Siedlungsräume, sowie vergangene menschliche Tätigkeiten hervorgebracht. Vieles davon kam im Zuge von Schotterabbau ans Licht, und der großflächige Abbau machte das Themse Tal zu einer der reichsten Quellen für archäologische Daten landesweit.

Dieser Band präsentiert eine aktuelle Übersicht der archäologischen Befunde des Tales für die späte Eisenzeit, die Römische und die Angelsächsische Periode, also allgemein gesprochen für das erste Jahrtausend n. Chr. Der genauer untersuchte Bereich umfasst das obere Themse Tal, von der Quelle bis zum Goring Gap, und das mittlere Themse Tal, vom Goring Gap bis zum Beginn der Gezeitenzone am Teddington Lock.

Die Eigenschaften des Flusses, sowie der Vegetation und Umwelt seines Überschwemmungsgebietes, werden zusammenfassend dargestellt und gefolgt von einem detaillierten Bericht über die Entstehung von Siedlungsräumen, basierend auf dem gegenwärtigen Stand archäologischer Quellen. Die Autoren erläutern die Aussagen der Archäologie über die spät Eisenzeitliche, Römische und Angelsächsische Bevölkerung des Tales und deren wechselnde Lebensführung, Kultur, Identität und Glauben. Darauf folgt ein Überblick über die Befunde für Produktion, Handel, Transport und Kommunikation, und eine Besprechung dieser Quellen in Bezug auf Macht und Politik. Der Band schließt mit einer Diskussion des heutigen Wissensstandes und seiner Grenzen, sowie neu aufkommender Themen und Problembereiche für zukünftige Forschungsprojekte.

Résumé

Les terrasses de gravier du fleuve de la Tamise ont révélé une abondance d'informations archéologiques concernant l'évolution du paysage dans la région, le développement des types d'habitats et l'occupation humaine passée. Une grande partie de ces dernières ont été mises au jour lors de l'extraction de gravier, qui a été tellement vaste que la vallée de la Tamise constitue désormais une des ressources les plus riches de données archéologiques du pays.

Ce volume fournit un compte-rendu actualisé des preuves archéologiques de la vallée de la Tamise pour les époques de l'âge du Fer tardif, des périodes romaines et anglo-saxonnes, ou bien approximativement le premier millénaire de notre ère. La région étudiée en détail comprend la vallée haute de la Tamise, depuis la source du fleuve jusqu'à Goring Gap, et la vallée moyenne de la Tamise, depuis Goring Gap jusqu'à l'entrée de l'estuaire à Teddington Lock.

Un résumé des preuves disponibles concernant le caractère du fleuve ainsi que la végétation et l'environnement de la plaine d'inondation est suivi par un compte rendu détaillé de l'évolution des types d'habitats tels qu'ils sont actuellement interprétés à partir des traces archéologiques. Les auteurs considèrent ensuite ce que l'archéologie permet de révéler sur les populations de la fin de l'âge du Fer, romaines et anglo-saxonnes dans la vallée ainsi que l'évolution des modes de vie, de la culture, des identités et des croyances. Cette section est suivie d'une étude des preuves concernant la production, le commerce, le transport et la communication ainsi que l'archéologie du pouvoir et des politiques. Le volume conclut avec une discussion sur l'état des connaissances aujourd'hui et ses limitations, ainsi que les thèmes émergents et les problèmes à considérer pour la recherche future.

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