Rinyo-Clactonian. There were few European terms, and those were seemingly restricted to the Iron Age Hallstatt and La Tène cultures; in truth, Continental Europe and its peoples and doings were sparsely represented.

But no more. In 341 pages of close text, with many black and white maps and site plans, the authors outline the prehistory of north-west Europe (the British Isles, north-western France, the Low Countries, north-western Germany and Denmark) from the 'Late Foragers and early Farmers' to the early Roman period, covering in six chapters a timespan from about 8000 BC to about 50 BC. Chapter 2 describes the Mesolithic and the coming of the Neolithic and farming; chapter 3, the monumental Neolithic; chapter 4, the Early Bronze Age and the Beaker Folk; chapter 5, the later Bronze Age; chapter 6, the Early Iron Age; and chapter 7, the later Iron Age (to use old money). These chapters are preceded by an historical review of essentially twentieth-century British/European prehistory research and followed by a retrospective review of the research given in the volume. The text chapters are followed by a lengthy appendix listing the sites cited in the text, a 100-page reference list and short index. It is worth having the volume just for these extras. This is a straightforward, time and data-driven, timely, well written précis and no doubt will form the basis for similar titled university courses today.

Where have many of these new sites and their new data come from? The authors remind us very, very frequently: from development-led fieldwork. They make it clear that this is a biased data set, one that essentially excludes major/protected sites and so effectively whole classes of monument (many in chapter 3), but rather is complementary; it is the domestic and small, often funereal, structures that dominate. Larger/monumental structures are not neglected (many have been re-researched in the last twenty years), but are given their dues and set, where possible, in wider geographical and cultural contexts.

This is not a book that can or should be read lightly; it is clearly focused on its audience and correctly assumes some prior knowledge, so it is perhaps churlish to complain that the captions of the many plans/diagrams, taken from the original sources, are often rather sparse, making the figures difficult to fully comprehend for most non-professional (field) archaeologists.

But what of an isolated Britain? The chapters show that, 'culturally', Britain and Ireland drop in and out of north-western Europe, which itself has only rare times of cohesion (Jutland seems to be singular for much of prehistory, and Ireland, often, too). There are other surprises – the Atlantic seaboard is not important throughout all time – and delights; the main chapters finish with the gradual encroachment of the Romans into the Iron Age north-west (invoking an odd feeling of *schadenfreude*). It is splendid to be led to appreciate all this in a single source, one that is a great exemplar of a dichotomy – an (authoritative) and focused overview.

Rinyo-Clactonian Ware, you are missing from the index, long renamed Grooved Ware. This sounds less romantic, but is geographically neutral and a more accurate description, far more in keeping with twenty-first century, less insular, prehistory research, as is so very succinctly described in this book.

ROBERT IXER

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Caithness Archaeology: aspects of prehistory. By A HEALD and J BARBER. 235mm. Pp 176, 85 b&w ills, diagrams and maps. Whittles Publishing, Dunbeath, 2015. ISBN 9781849951517. £20 (hbk).

AOC Archaeology Group have been working in the north of Scotland, and specifically Caithness, for many years now, and the authors of this book have had decades of experience in the area in various guises. Although some smaller articles have appeared from that work (eg Heald and Jackson 2001), this is the first opportunity to read a more comprehensive overview of the prehistoric remains they have been researching and understand where the thinking on this, until recently, neglected area of Scotland has taken them.

And that is very much the thinking provided here: the detailed excavation reports and desk-based assessments are left to another series (presumably!) of publications or referred to where required and available. What we are tantalised with are the ideas and the context – the who, when and where, with a sprinkling of what and how. It is clear that this is a homage to those who both came before and who worked with the authors, especially the local people, who play a prominent part in the discussion of a roughly chronological romp through the Caithness landscape. There is an opening statement on

the book itself from the authors that states categorically that 'the narratives are skewed and predisposed', more akin to 'conversations' than an academic book on the archaeological research undertaken (p 11). For me, this was actually very welcome. I enjoyed reading this volume because it was unhindered by the detail of context numbers and detailed descriptions of individual sites. There is the odd hiccup with such an approach – for example, archaeological jargon still creeps into the odd page here and there with no explanation, or certain chronological periods or themes, like the Mesolithic or Wags, are given less attention than others – but this is a minor point; the aim is clear and the style is engaging, and that cannot be a bad thing!

What of those ideas? Well, the conversational style masks a serious engagement with the materiality of the Caithness past: for example, highlighting the complexity of broch sites, underlining their longevity and examining their reworking over time, where the architecture and the finds both tell intertwining stories; or the diversity of Iron Age burial and the emphasis on the importance of burial rites, and the continued presence of the burial itself within societies in conveying social messages among the living, highlighting the potential of family plots.

However, the key areas repeatedly explored across the various aspects of Caithness archaeology are people and presentation. Both form large parts of the discussion of various monument types, helping to explain what has been understood to date, what is visible on the ground and, indeed, what might be invisible below the ground still to discover, and the authors have a very big axe to grind regarding the display and promotion of the Caithness past. It is clear that they are frustrated with what is currently presented to the public, in both its detail of how the monuments are, or are not, conserved and interpreted, to broader marketing deficiencies and inaccessibility. The recent rise and rise of the Caithness Broch Project (www.thebrochproject.co.uk) may help to alleviate some of this, but even this is only a foot in the door of the incredible wealth of research possibilities and promotional opportunities. The preface states that Caithness is 'one of the richest cultural landscapes in Europe', and having worked briefly in the area I would have to agree, and yet archaeological research is generally limited to those undertaking community-led research or the pre-development investigations in advance of wind-farms on the uplands. Both are crucial to the vibrancy of the mainly prehistoric story told here, but the abiding thought from this book is that even this has barely scratched the surface of what awaits to be understood about the Caithness past, and what *that* can tell us about Scotland's past.

Heald, A and Jackson, A 2001. 'Towards a new understanding of Iron Age Caithness', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, **131**, 129–47

Simon Gilmour

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The Oxford Handbook of the Valley of the Kings. Edited by Richard Wilkinson and Kent R Weeks. 255mm. Pp xvi + 627, 69 b/w ills, 11 tables, 3 maps. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016. ISBN 9780199931637. £97 (hbk).

The Valley of the Kings (Biban el Moluk) on the western bank at Luxor (ancient Thebes) must be one of the most emotive archaeological sites in the world – it was the burial place of the Egyptian New Kingdom pharaohs of the eighteenth to the twentieth dynasties (1570–1070 BC). Some of the royal tombs have been open and visited since antiquity, as is evidenced by graffiti on their walls; for example, Greek in the tomb of Rameses VI (KV 9) and Coptic in Rameses IV (KV 2). Our Fellow Richard Pococke visited in September 1739, left his graffito and noted 'signs of about eighteen [tombs] … though now there are only nine that can be enter'd into'. Giovanni Belzoni (who left the Valley in 1819) and Victor Loret in the 1890s found more tombs, and Theodore Davis, after his excavations and finding further tombs, wrote in 1912, 'I fear that the Valley of the Tombs is now exhausted' – all were proved wrong in 1922 when Howard Carter found Tutankhamun (KV 62), and two more unidentified tombs (KV 63 and 64) noted here that have been found in more recent years.

There is a vast literature on the Valley, ranging from the popular and highly illustrated to the excavators' reports and more detailed publications (Reeves 1990; Reeves and Wilkinson 1996). While this large 'handbook' belies that word in its title with its size and 643 pages, it is the most detailed exposition to date of the Valley until further discoveries will certainly be made. Some of the secrets/problems the Valley still hides are the missing tombs of Thutmose II, Rameses V and VIII and Ahmose (whose