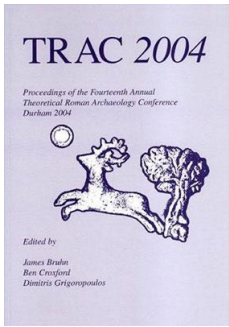

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Brickworks and ladders: exploring intra-regional diversity in the enclosed landscapes of the Parisi

Mick Atha

Introduction

This paper was originally presented as part of a session entitled "Exploring regionalities", within which it provided a landscape perspective on the ways we as archaeologists establish and research our study regions based on our perceptions of past regionality. In order to explore the basis for the current orthodoxy regarding the territory of the Parisi, a firmly eastern Yorkshire perspective is adopted here. In contrast, the doctoral research project of which this contribution is an initial outline, establishes its context with reference to other research into late prehistoric and Roman landscapes across the province of *Britannia*.

As with other regions in Britain, archaeological perceptions of past regionality in eastern Yorkshire have affected approaches to and interpretations of the physical remains of the Iron Age/Roman rural transition. Previous landscape studies have established study areas based on modern county or parish boundaries, such as Fenton-Thomas' (2003) study of the central Wolds and Hayfield's (1987) Wharram Parishes Survey. This is partly, perhaps, because such areas are delimited by boundaries with multi-period socio-political significance, partly a result of the compartmentalisation of data in county SMRs and, in the latter case, due to a history of archaeological research and permitted access in the area. Others have focused on particularly rich archaeological resources but have then defined their study areas using geomorphological rather than political regions, such as Stoertz's *Ancient landscapes of the Yorkshire Wolds* (1997) and Mel Giles' (2000) research on the construction of Iron Age identities in the Wolds. Alternatively, we can employ what is effectively a culture-historical approach, based on the patterning of culturally distinctive material traces and historical references to past socio-political entities, to establish what might be more archaeologically meaningful study regions. The perceived territory of the Parisi, the Roman *Civitas Parisiorum*, is one such region and it constitutes a central problem in the discussions that follow.

Focusing on the Parisi, this paper aims to explore the archaeological origins and validity of this tribal region through a brief review of past research methods and agendas to see how they have engaged with the regional data set to create our present conceptions of the Iron Age/Roman transition in eastern Yorkshire. This review is then used to generate working hypotheses which, when tested archaeologically in future research, might account for the landscape changes observable in this period.

Environmental determinists of the Wolds unite

The unique landscape character of eastern Yorkshire results from the proximity of a series of linked environmental oppositions: of juxtaposed uplands and lowlands, of uplifted chalk bedrock and drift blanketed flatlands, and of almost waterless wolds with thin calcareous soils and water-rich vales with deep silty clays (Fig. 1).

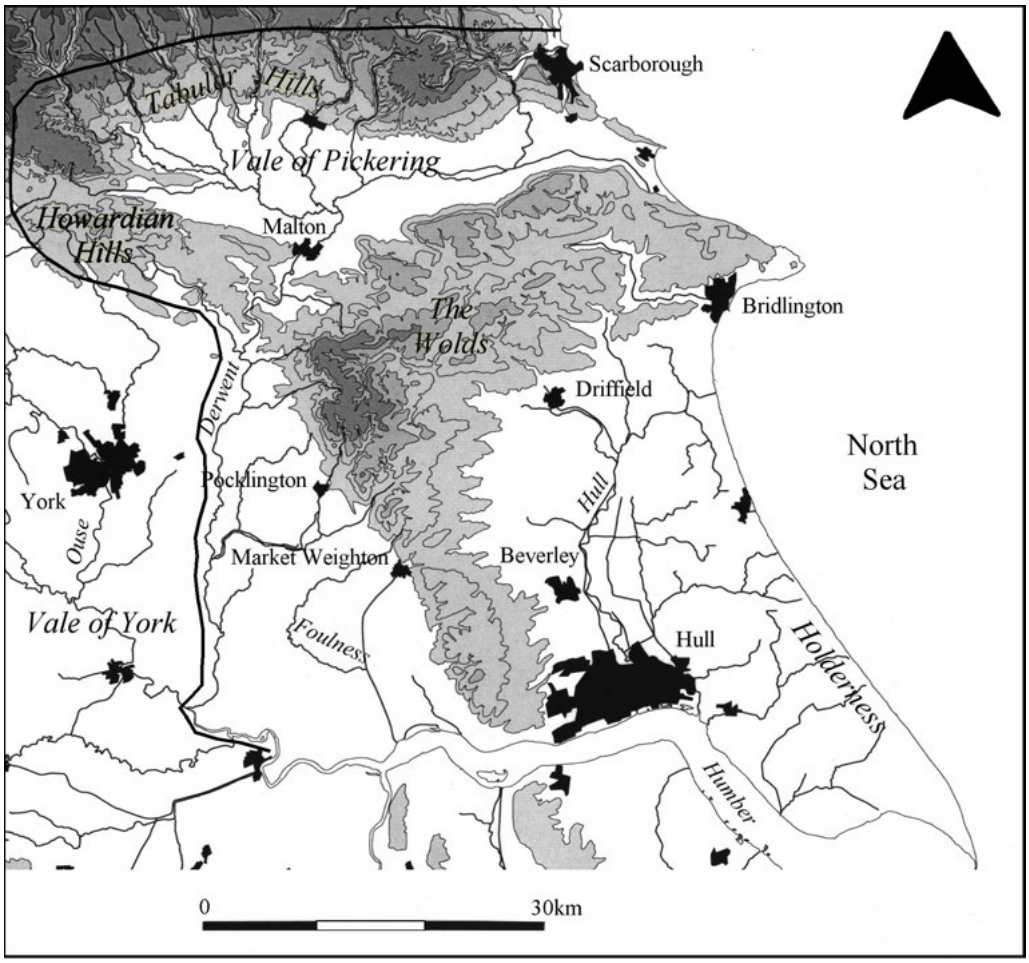

Figure 1: Eastern Yorkshire topography and drainage, showing Ramm's notional Parisian tribal boundary (HarperCollinsCartographic 2000; Ramm 1978, 2)

The study area thus comprises distinct topographical, geological, pedological and hydrological zones which, at their interfaces, offer access to a wider range of resources than those available within such environmentally distinct zones. The present settlement pattern exploits these resource interfaces as demonstrated by strings of middle-late Anglo-Saxon villages identified by their "*–tun*" name endings (Gelling 1974: 94–97) following the spring lines below the scarps of the Wolds and Tabular Hills. Access to water supplies was very probably critical to the past exploitation of the eastern Yorkshire landscape (see Hayfield and Wagner 1995 for a more detailed discussion of this issue).

Apart from the ribbon settlements of the Great Wolds Valley following the Gypsey Race, now the only regularly flowing watercourse in the chalklands, the Wolds have only a scattering

of villages, many with ponds, whilst all major settlements in the region lie in the lowlands on rivers. In recent years, the region's uplands and lowlands alike have seen a dramatic expansion of arable farming and a consequent decline in areas under pasture. This describes the present region, but what of the situation in the study period?

Palaeoenvironmental records suggest that the Wolds were widely and permanently deforested in the early Bronze Age (Flenley 1990: 51). In support of this data, excavations have revealed that some early Bronze Age barrows were constructed of turves (Manby 1980: 312). A cleared landscape is also suggested by the character and positioning of extensive dyke systems which very visibly divided the landscape into large upland and lowland blocks in the later Bronze Age or early Iron Age (Manby 1980: 327–8; Dent 1984: 32). Arguably, such boundaries only make sense functionally, and indeed as socio-political entities, if they existed as prominently visible earthworks in an otherwise open and unenclosed landscape.

Before the intensive drainage and reclamation works of recent centuries, the carrlands and fens of the southern Vale of York, central Vale of Pickering and the lower Hull Valley, would have formed permanent and periodically very extensive wetlands, albeit incorporating islands of higher ground such as Holme-on-Spalding Moor (Halkon & Millett 1999: 12–13; Van de Noort & Davies 1993: 18–19, 34). Present sea levels have existed since the late Bronze Age (Pethick 1990) but a marine transgression spanning the study period led to the formation of an extensive tidal inlet in the southern Vale of York, around Walling Fen (Millett and McGrail 1987: 99; Stoertz 1997: 4). Despite these wetter conditions, research in the Foulness Valley (Halkon and Millett 1999) has shown that, on higher sandy ridges within the creek systems around the edge of the tidal inlet, Iron Age and later communities were exploiting resources such as bog iron, clay, and the extensive woodlands of a largely uncleared landscape, for industrial activity. Moreover, the supposed 'joints of prime beef' (Millett and McGrail 1987: 144) and timber discovered in the Hasholme logboat perhaps suggest the economic importance of waterborne transport to communities in the wetlands – the waterways fulfilling a role similar to the trackways so prominent in the Wolds' landscape in the same period. Similarly, Powlesland (2003: 25; Pers. Comm: March 2004) has noted that, in the Vale of Pickering, higher ridges in the wetlands were apparently connected by trackways, thus providing access to the Derwent and the fenland of the central Vale. Perhaps significantly, such higher ridges were used for square barrow cemeteries in the Iron Age, thus emphasising local boundaries and/or reinforcing claims to such socio-economically important locations.

The importance of such areas lay in their ability to provide a contrasting set of resources to the chalk uplands and their resource-rich, sub-scarp interfaces. The east-west linearity of the settlement pattern below the northern Wolds scarp probably resulted from the desire of adjoining communities to each have access to a north-south 'transect' across a succession of contrasting resources. The integrated exploitation of such zones may have encouraged a transhumant livestock regime, as is fossilised today in the long strip parishes of the wold edge, spanning the lowland carrs to the former upland sheepwalks. It is important to note that although wetlands today are viewed as economically marginal they are also recognised as ecologically important environments – reservoirs of diversity in homogenised agricultural landscapes. Given their diversity, it is questionable whether the Parisi or their forbears would ever have viewed wetlands as marginal: they were rich in material resources and foodstuffs; accessible via waterways to an extensive hinterland; and would probably have been viewed as one facet of a mosaic-like tribal economic structure.

From Arras to Petuaria: two places, one people?

East Yorkshire has long been perceived as a geographical correlate for the territory of the Parisi (Ramm 1978; Dent 1983: 35; Millett 1989: 38), as defined by the bold line following the Derwent on Figure 1 (after Ramm 1978: 2). Ramm's notional tribal region is based on references to the tribe named by Ptolemy in the second-century AD, in the Antonine Itinerary, the Ravenna Cosmography and the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Ramm 1978: 21–3). Ptolemy's positioning of the Parisian town Petuaria in the south of the tribal territory was supported by a reused second-century inscription referring to the town's theatre, discovered at Brough-on-Humber (Ramm 1978: 58–60). The positioning of the tribal *civitas* capital beside the Humber seemingly continued a pre-Roman emphasis on the estuary as a trading conduit with the south and, given the evidence for pre-conquest imports at Redcliff and adjacent settlements, perhaps directly with the continent as well (Crowther *et al*. 1989: 7; Dent 1989: 29; Bishop 1999: 45).

More fundamentally though, the Parisi of Roman mention, were viewed by Ramm (1978: 21) and others (e.g. Dent 1983: 39; Millett 1989: 38) as an historical correlate for the archaeologically-defined earlier Iron Age Arras Culture, characterised by its distinctive use of La Tène style square barrow burials and grave goods (Stead 1979).

From the fifth to the first-century B.C., their extensive, closely-packed cemeteries, often bounded by ditches or stretched out along trackways (Stead 1979; Stoertz 1997: 37-8) presented a strong statement of lineage-landscape ties to the inhabitants of the region. Moreover, within a cultural landscape so structured by its communications network, people travelling through the region would have regularly encountered the cemeteries and been forced to acknowledge such ties. The cemeteries are at their densest in the eastern Wolds, but extend west across the Ouse-Derwent interfluve, north onto the Tabular Hills and east into the Hull Valley and Holderness (Fig. 2).

Interestingly, Ramm failed to acknowledge the significant concentration of square barrows on the moraines between the Ouse and Derwent (arrowed on Fig. 2). Ramm's positioning of the tribal boundary reflected Ptolemy's placement of York in Brigantian territory and he thus preferred to situate the western boundary of the Parisi on the Derwent. It is interesting to note how Ramm's Culture-Historical approach relied heavily on historic records, to the degree that he ignored the contradictory archaeological evidence presented by the interfluvial barrows. But is it not possible that the Ouse, and then the Foss (which in the past flowed through a wide marshy floodplain), formed the inter-tribal boundary between the Parisi and their larger neighbours? If this were the case, the fortress at York was ideally placed to control the inter-tribal border at a point overlooking the routeway along the York moraine, from Brigantia west of the Ouse and into Parisian territory to the east. Millett (1990: 91) proposed that a similar situation existed by suggesting that York's legionary fortress was in fact positioned on neutral ground between the two tribes. However, if we accept that economic and social integration were cornerstones of 'Romanisation', then the highly strategic crossing point of the Vale of York would have been an obvious location for Rome to establish a seat of power. Further, a fortress located at a crossing point of the tidal Ouse provided ready access to an extensive hinterland upstream and the wider Roman world via the Humber downstream. Thus York may have functioned as a port of trade or entrepôt, particularly in the early years of the Roman settlement.

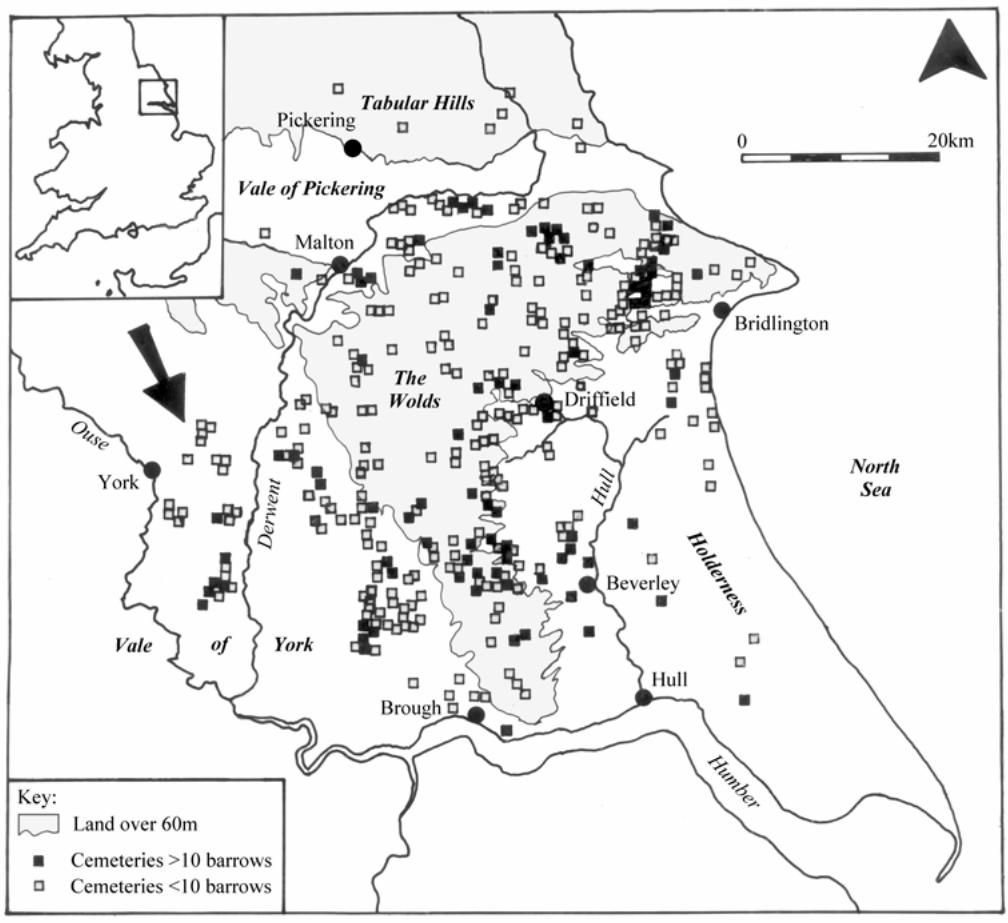

Figure 2: Square barrow distributions (After Ramm 1978, 2)

Problematically, there is a dearth of middle Iron Age settlement contemporary with the barrows, apart from that in Garton and Wetwang Slacks. This apparent absence has led some researchers to postulate that the cemeteries were those of pastoralists, using their massed burial mounds as landscape 'signposts', reinforcing claims to grazing land, whilst living in the peripheral lowlands (Fenton-Thomas 2003: 68–9). This is an attractive idea, particularly when one takes into account the seemingly prominent role played by long-distance tracks or droveways in the exploitation of chalkland landscapes and their sub-scarp peripheries from the late Bronze Age onwards.

However, a potential problem with this model dates from the terminal decline of the communal burial tradition, when a new expression of community, lineage and landscape ties emerged. At the end of the first millennium B.C., the long-established linear communications network began to accumulate strings of contiguous rectilinear enclosures, often termed ladder settlements.

This phenomenon might be interpreted in a variety of ways: a dramatic change in socio-economic organisation by Fenton-Thomas' pastoralists, for example in the face of rapid population growth, or an 'invasion' of new settlers to the region occupying the grazing land. Such notions of mass population movements and external pressures reflect culture-historical and functionalist modes of explanation but the evidence for such events is lacking. A more interesting answer, perhaps, is that the open settlements associated with the barrow cemeteries were close by but are now invisible to remote sensing. My strong preference, based on a review of the landscape setting of cemeteries and ladder settlements, is for the last option.

When the patterning of ladder settlements and square barrows are compared, for example as revealed by Stoertz (1997) in the northeastern Wolds (Fig. 3), the correlation is striking, perhaps not so much in terms of their immediate proximity to each other in many cases, but rather in their occupation of the same landscape blocks delineated by the earlier linear boundaries.

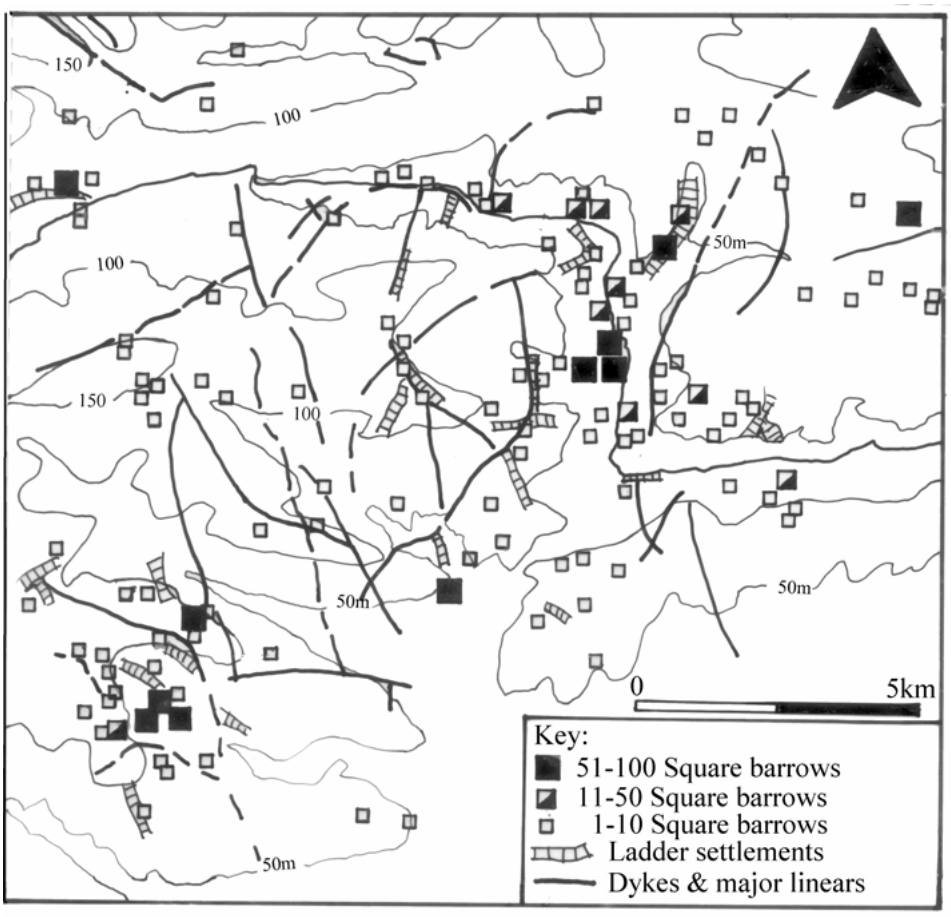

Figure 3: Northeast Wolds – square barrow cemeteries and ladder settlements (After Stoertz 1997, 35 & 66)

For example, the ancient ceremonial focus around Rudston is rich in barrow cemeteries whilst ladder settlements form a halo around them. Similarly, the major cemeteries at Dane's Graves again sit within a halo of ladder settlements and smaller cemeteries. This pattern is repeated across the Wolds where barrows occur. Thus I would argue that the established association of the fifth to first-century B.C. Arras Culture with the later Parisi and their *civitas* capital *Petuaria* is in general terms strongly supported by the coincidence of funerary and settlement patterning in the respective periods.

Native landscapes and Roman landscapes?

Ladder settlements represent an intensification of a process of landscape compartmentalisation conventionally thought to have begun in the late Bronze Age or earlier Iron Age (Manby 1980: 327–8; Dent 1984: 32), when extensive systems of dykes and trackways were laid out. In the Wolds, the strong linearity of the settlement pattern is characterised by ladder settlements, which exploit these trackways or boundary ditches whilst in-filling landscape blocks delineated by dykes. Whilst, in many cases, associated field systems seem to have developed around these communications and settlement foci, the relationships of settlements, trackways and fields are highly variable and complex. Excavations in Garton and Wetwang Slacks area have revealed pre-Roman origins for ladder settlements on the floor of the slack and along the valley side, with further alterations occurring at least as late as the third-century A.D. (Brewster 1980; Dent 1983: 42).

Conversely, in the adjacent lowlands away from the immediate topographic influence of the Wolds' scarps, the field system has more of a co-axial characteristic, similar to the classic "brickwork fields" of South and West Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire (Riley 1980; Chadwick 1997, 1999). Field systems seem to be the dominant structuring factor in the landscape, such that trackways, if present, and settlements appear embedded within them. The pattern at Lingcroft Farm, Naburn, in the Vale of York (Fig. 4) has late Iron Age origins but continued in modified form into the second-century A.D. (Jones 1988).

Lingcroft lies between the Ouse and Derwent just south of York and to the western edge of the area containing a substantial number of square barrows mentioned above. The upland-lowland division between linear settlements and co-axial field systems is, however, far from clear-cut. Figure 5 shows a block of landscape to the east of Blealands Nook in the Wolds, which includes ladder settlements and co-axial type field systems with embedded enclosures, very reminiscent of Lingcroft Farm.

The complex patterning of settlement and field system across the topographic zones of eastern Yorkshire also seems to be somewhat dependent on proximity to Roman zones of influence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, two roadside settlements at Hayton and Shiptonthorpe, aligned on the Brough to York Roman road, dated entirely from the Roman period and revealed the full complement of Roman material culture. However, the spread of Roman material was restricted to a narrow corridor along the road, and a nearby ladder settlement of late Iron Age origin and Roman development at Burnby Lane revealed a comparatively limited engagement with Roman goods (Halkon *et al*. 1999).

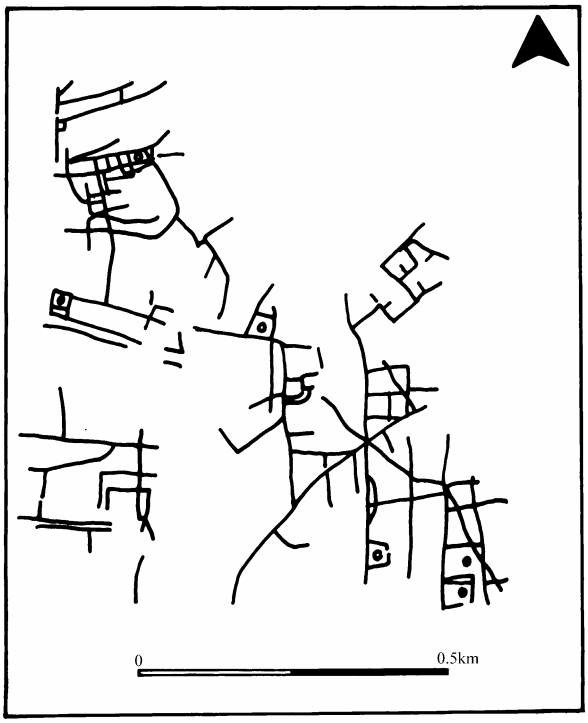

Figure 4: Cropmarks of co-axial field systems at Lingcroft Farm, Naburn, Vale of York (After Jones 1988: 163)

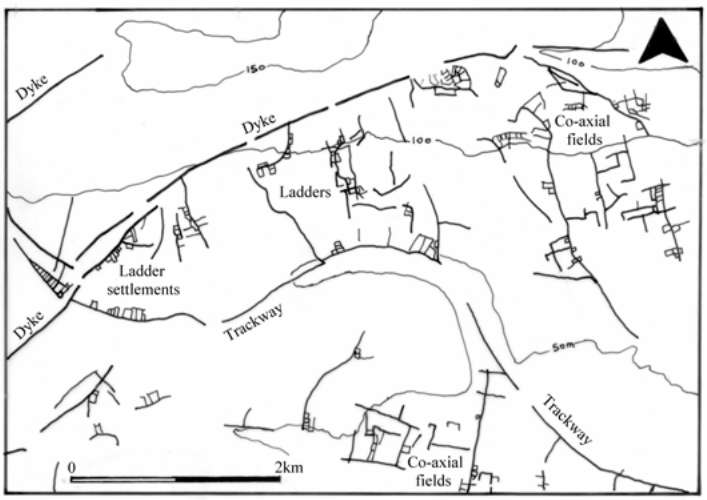

Figure 5: Garton-Wetwang Slacks – showing the relationships between dykes, trackways, ladder settlements and co-axial field systems (After Stoertz 1997: 70)

Significantly, outside areas of direct imperial influence, like those envisaged surrounding forts and towns at Brough, York and Malton and roads in between, many rural settlements reflect this lack of engagement with Roman material culture into the third or even fourth century A.D.. This phenomenon is also reflected in the construction date of villas, which, apart from the early second-century example at Welton Wold just north of the Humber, were all third- to forth-century in date. Welton Wold, like most excavated villas in eastern Yorkshire, was built over and may have developed from an Iron Age farmstead (Mackey 1999: 23–4; Roskams 1999: 53–9).

This then raises the question: why did apparently undifferentiated open settlement with communal cemeteries, such as that at Garton-Wetwang Slacks, give way to enclosed, nucleated settlements with what I would describe as individual household plots and a correspondingly more private treatment of the dead? Also why, when these changes clearly began before the Roman crossing of the Humber, perhaps by as much as two centuries or more, did they continue across much of the tribal territory on a fairly constant trajectory until the third-century A.D.? It is clear from the examples above that farming communities were exploiting the eastern Yorkshire landscape, uplands and lowlands alike, in ways which probably reflected local decision-making within an overarching mixed farming economy. Certainly, the remains of crops and animals recovered from excavated ladder settlements support this general assertion (e.g. Brewster 1980; Mackey 1999).

Shifting scales, different tales: is landscape archaeology the answer?

More fundamentally, these cropmark 'landscapes' of settlement and field systems freeze-frame centuries of development and reordering, conflating many individually significant socio-political landscape changes into broad periodic narratives. Archaeologically robust interpretations of extensive, complex landscapes are difficult if, as is often the case, surface collection and remote sensing, for very good reasons, provide the landscape coverage whilst excavations deliver the detailed analysis. The meaningful integration of such diverse data sets arguably constitutes a central problematic theme in landscape research.

I would argue that, when investigating phenomena such as ladder settlements, we are fundamentally operating on a landscape scale and by necessity must rely heavily on cropmark data – logistics alone, never mind costs or other considerations, prohibit the excavation of huge tracts of the Wolds. That said, we must explicitly acknowledge the limitations of such atemporal data whilst concentrating our minds on the awkward task of meaningfully combining them with data from contrasting remote sensing techniques, surface collection, and crucially, excavation. Landscapes after all contain the results of a peculiar mix of long-term processes, cyclical events and situated, daily practices – thus presenting a singular challenge in their analysis and interpretation.

The overriding impression of settlement linearity in the Wolds and co-axial patterns in the lowlands is rather dependent on scale – in overview the division looks convincing but in detail less so. Thus any "landscape archaeology" that attempts to engage with the extremely complex and extensive remains of fields and settlements of the late Iron Age and Roman period through remote sensing data alone is doomed to failure. Some earlier landscape analyses in the Wolds have perhaps placed too much confidence in atemporal cropmark data, such that organised Roman minds were too easily envisaged behind such regular settlements and field systems (Ramm 1978), or the inhabitants of nucleated 'villages' were imagined farming fields in

common (Dent 1995). Excavation has proven otherwise, at least in terms of the late Iron Age origins of many ladder settlements and co-axial field systems, but we remain largely ignorant of the socio-political circumstances of mass enclosure in the centuries to either side of the conquest. Despite the very obvious atemporality of cropmarks, publications routinely refer to Iron Age and Roman 'landscapes', conveniently glossing over our ignorance of the spatio-temporal development of such phenomena. We have general impressions of a middle Iron Age landscape of cemeteries and open settlement, and later landscapes characterised by the prevalence of ditched boundaries and enclosed, nucleated settlements, but without an understanding of the timing and sequence of their formation, we are restricted to generalised periodic overviews.

In reality, the amount of large scale, low resolution, qualitative cropmark data has for far too long blinded us to the problems associated with a lack of high quality, higher-resolution, quantitative data in many projects 'doing' landscape archaeology. Indeed, in many respects, the inclusion of "landscape" in the title of many research projects seems to have engendered a sense of freedom to hypothesise about the development, function and meaning of "the landscape", far beyond that which the data could ever support. Indeed, I would argue that rather than providing archaeologists with an opportunity for creative writing, the collective interpretation of qualitatively and quantitatively diverse datasets typical of landscape research should be approached with far greater caution than any excavation.

Conclusion

Clearly, brickwork-style field systems and ladder settlements co-exist within the uplands and lowlands of eastern Yorkshire, albeit in very different proportions. That said, one could reasonably hypothesise that these broad morphological differences in lowland and upland settlement and field systems were a reflection of different economic strategies: arable-dominated mixed farming in the drier lowlands, specialised industrial and other non-agricultural activities in higher, drier areas within the wetlands and livestock-dominated transhumant farming in and around the Wolds.

The Wolds' network of trackways was important from the late Bronze Age until the end of the Roman period and probably beyond, presumably for the movement of goods, people and animals. I would argue that the region's highly developed communication network provided the means by which a highly mobile elite could maintain power and control across a wide area. If that was so, where is the late Iron Age material evidence for such social differentiation and why was mass enclosure necessary or desirable from this period onwards?

The coincidence of an intensification of settlement enclosure with the demise of communal cemeteries is striking and I would argue carries socio-political significances reflecting changing expressions of household and community solidity. Could this remarkable landscape transformation really have been the result of a gradual reaction to poorly defined external 'pressures' such as population growth or warfare as we have been led to believe, or are we looking at the material expressions of a social revolution *within* the farming communities of the Parisi?

I hope that through my ongoing research I may be able to test the notion that changing productive and social relations between households, communities and tribal or Roman authorities brought these changes about. Ladder settlements perhaps physically reflect a growing need for households to more intensively connect with their wider community to fulfil

demands for tribute or taxes, whilst maintaining their own social, productive and religious space.

These working hypotheses cannot easily be tested through recourse to culture-historical or functionalist-processual avenues of enquiry and, whilst post-processual archaeology has offered new readings of the data, nature, culture and landscape remain disunited concepts nevertheless. I would therefore argue that in order to transcend this culture-nature dichotomy we will need to investigate, analyse and interpret data across a wide range of scales and resolutions; reflecting temporal, spatial and social variables. This requires a truly integrated landscape approach.

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