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GARETH WILLIAMS (ed.), *A Riverine Site Near York: A Possible Viking Camp?* British Museum Research Publication 224, 2020. 21 x 29.2cm, x + 157pp, illustrated. ISBN 9780861592241. Price: £36, pb.

In 1996 two metal detectorists discovered one of the most important Viking sites in Northern England. Yet the site has had a very chequered and at times bizarre history and even now, although Gareth Williams and the British Museum are to be congratulated for salvaging what is known about the circumstances of discovery and what was found and bringing it to publication, it remains anonymous in their report, due to an agreement made many years ago between York Archaeological Trust (YAT), the metal detectorists, and the landowner. This volume is therefore an invaluable resource for those studying artefact and coin assemblages, and even as a case study in archaeological ethics and in what happens when the Treasure system fails, but without knowledge of the spatial context it fails to fulfil its potential for those interested in the history and archaeology of Viking Northumbria.

The site wasn't brought to archaeological attention until 2003 when the detectorists - Mark Ainsley and Geoff Bambrook - found a new concentration of objects associated with human bone. Realising the significance of this, they approached the Yorkshire Museum with what came to be described as the Ainsbrook hoard. Richard Hall, Deputy Director of YAT, was alerted, and the British Museum also became involved, as the finds were legally classified as Treasure. The hoard was first thought to have come from a Viking boat burial, as several clench nails had been recovered, and YAT conducted a rescue excavation, but whilst they found a large hole left by Ainsley and Bambrook there was no trace of a burial. At the same time English Heritage undertook a geophysical survey of a much larger area, revealing a large sub-rectangular ditched enclosure, as well as possible rubbish pits, also reported here albeit without a location plan. It was at this point that the detectorists revealed that, in addition to the 121 items reported as 'the Ainsbrook hoard', over the last 7 years they had made many other finds from neighbouring fields, including up to 282 Viking weights, 2 pieces of hack-gold, 70 pieces of silver, and 106 late 9th-century coins. They came from an area of some 31 ha. These finds are all catalogued in this volume and many are illustrated. As well as Viking weaponry there were also more mundane iron tools, many of which they had initially discarded in the hedgerows, but which were now collected. However, many of the finds had already been sold on eBay, some ending up with private collectors in North America, including a spectacular Irish horse harness mount (p.64) which can sometimes be viewed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

English Heritage agreed to fund exploratory excavations, to be undertaken by YAT, but it was a large area to investigate. In total only 0.5 per cent of the total area of the site was excavated. The results were seen as disappointing as whilst metal-working debris and pits were found, few objects were recovered and there was no evidence of buildings, such as those known from York. Nonetheless news began to spread and the site also became known under another codename, ARSNY or 'A Riverine Site in North Yorkshire', but which has now been expanded as 'A Riverine Site Near York'. Scholars could be forgiven for being confused as to just how many new Viking sites there were!

ARSNY is actually on the River Ouse near Aldwark, c.12 miles northwest of York. The placename is significant, as Aldwark is derived from the Old English '*ald, weorc*', or 'old fortification'. It is also the first crossing point of the Ouse north of York; a little further upstream, at Lower Dunsforth, a small Viking hoard dated to the early 870s was found in 1861. In the light of the very similar evidence from Torksey where the Viking Great Army

overwintered in AD 872-3, it is now accepted that Aldwark must have been the location of a hitherto undocumented camp. It falls into a pattern whereby sites occupied by the Great Army are placed at strategic points in the landscape, where major river and road routes converge.

In the light of Torksey, we should also not be surprised by the lack of substantive features. The superficial geology is very similar, comprising a mixture of sandy till covered by small patches of glacial sand and gravel. Extensive wind-blown sand may have both eroded and buried archaeology, and this has been exacerbated by truncation caused by modern deep ploughing, cutting into the Viking occupation layers, leaving only the bases of the deeper pits and ditches, and distributing the majority of objects into the plough-soil. In any case, an Army on the move would not construct permanent structures, and we are left with the residues of trading and the processing of loot in the plough soil.

On the basis of the coins from Aldwark Gareth Williams dates the latest activity to slightly later than Torksey, and it probably post-dates the departure of the Army from Repton, when the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us that part under their leader Healfdene headed back to Northumbria. Williams suggests the fact that the Aldwark camp appears to it is a little smaller than Torksey (c 55 ha) may reflect that the Army split on leaving Repton. Its proximity to York is also important. Excavations within York over many years have failed to recovered any evidence for a Viking camp related to the capture of the city in 866 and 868, and whilst activity at Fishergate declines at that point it does not restart on Coppergate until several decades later. Maybe Aldwark is the missing link.

In this important publication the report on Aldwark is complemented by a valuable survey of Viking hoards in Yorkshire by Williams, and a review of the contribution of single finds to understanding exchange from Jane Kershaw. It is introduced by a tribute by James Graham-Campbell to Richard Hall, who did what he could to rescue the site and whose untimely death robbed us of a great scholar of the Viking North.

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