

circumstantial evidence to show that over the last four thousand years the Earth has suffered several episodes of collision with space debris, and that these may well be recorded in what have previously been dismissed as fanciful myths and legends. This is where both the biblical Exodus and Arthurian legend are related to possible real events in environmental history. So as not to break the flow too much, some of the background material is separated out further into appendices.

Certainly anyone who reads this book will have the dates 1628 BC, 1159 BC and AD 540 etched forever in their memory. The deliberate decision to split facts into Part I and other associated material into Part II has many benefits, although it does make reading Part I very frustrating as tit-bits of what is to come keep being dangled in front of the reader's nose, only to be put 'on hold'. After the eloquent case has been made for Baillie's assertion that many of these events are too coincident to be easily

dismissed, he brings us back with a bump to considering what the tree-rings tell us. We are left with the important message that even if tree-rings are not dating the Exodus or King Arthur directly, they are telling us of widespread environmental events that have to be explained somehow.

This is a book with something for most readers: careful logical argument for the sceptical scientist, possible insights into the origins of some of our strongest myths and legends for students of these phenomena, and challenges to some 'established' historical chronologies that require answers. Its contents and extensive bibliography could set many a reader off on years of interesting follow-up material. Some might find the split into two parts and appendices annoying, but for me this underlined the care in presentation of some really fascinating reading.

Martin Bridge

Letters

The Thames in 1957

I UNDERSTAND that, in the recently relaunched London Archaeologist, Fiona Haughey wrote on the changing course of the Thames in relation to archaeological matters.

Interestingly, the late Mr. C. W. Phillips, FSA, who directed the Sutton Hoo ship burial excavation in Suffolk in 1939, in his capacity as Archaeology Officer, Ordnance Survey Office, Chessington, stated "Your letter to the British Museum . . . enquiring about places on the foreshore of the river Thames where Roman and Medieval pottery may be found at low tide has been forwarded here.

"It is difficult to give a satisfactory answer to this question without going into a great deal of detail. There are three areas which should keep you well occupied.

"The first is the foreshore at Brentford, in Middlesex, the second is the foreshore at Tilbury, in Essex, and the third is the whole stretch of tidal marshes at the estuary of the Medway east of Chatham and north of Upchurch.

"This last area was the scene of a large pottery industry in Roman times when nearly the whole of the marshes which are now covered at high tide were dry ground.

"At Brentford and Tilbury no particular success can be guaranteed. All will depend on the present state of the foreshore, the depth of mud, the effect of tidal scour, etc."

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Southwark pottery

CAN I JUST make a small point about the article on pottery recovered in Magdalen Street, Southwark? On p. 26 the author refers to porringers with the initials NRF: surely when there is a pyramidal arrangement of initials like this, the surname is at

the top and the husband's and wife's names below, so that the correct arrangement of letters would read NRF. There is of course ample verification of this arrangement on the 17th-century trade tokens.

This may sound like "nit-picking", but it always amazes me how often this mistake crops up again and again, leading to possible misattribution of ownership. Almost as bad is the habit of assuming that such an arrangement of initials on a piece of delftware invariably relates to a "marriage"!(*pace* the late Frank Britton).

It is also perhaps a pity that this interesting and useful article does not mention where the finds are now to be kept.

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The Spitalfields Roman coffin

ON P. 3 OF THE latest issue of the *LA* are two workers cleaning the coffin lid recently excavated. It says that it is 'Roman'; could it be Romano-Spanish? Would the shell design have any connection with 'Saint James', or Santiago de Compostela, Spain? It is a beautiful overall design. I have not read if the deceased was male or female. Is it possible to date it?

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Blue Plaques

A CORRECTION to *Mosaic* in the latest issue: Wheeler has a blue plaque, at 27 Whitcomb Street, near the National Gallery – chiefly lobbied for by Henry Cleere. I forget when it was installed, but would guess mid- to late 1980s.

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