Short Reviews


It is nearly 30 years since anyone attempted to write a detailed history of a single Anglo-Saxon kingdom (why?) and, as such, this book is a magnificent achievement. Undoubtedly this colourful version of Kentish history from the 5th to the 9th century will be widely read by those who enjoy this form of narrative history. Detailed and thorough, it traces the settlement of the region, the meteoric rise of the kingdom and the ensuing twilight years. But it incorporates archaeological data only as wedges to prevent the whole structure rattling and a number of important pieces of published research concerned with Kent from the last twenty years have been overlooked.

Most worrying is the approach itself, one whose validity has been seriously questioned in recent years. The history of much of the period can be likened to a car engine which is misfiring on a number of cylinders, and Witney seeks to make it appear to be running smoothly. The archaeology has to be fitted to this troublesome machine despite ignorance of which cylinders are, and of the correct sequence of, firing. Part of the problem stems from the use of archaeologists' interpretations which turned stylistic analyses into a narrative which would parallel the historical sources, but as the author says, the enquirer is left groping (p. 27). The impression is given that archaeological data must always relate directly to historical (royal and religious) events, data which are pressed and smoothed so that all the gaps are filled; but methodological cracks threaten the structure.

Populations rose and fell and the distribution of woodland is known, but where is the demographic and environmental evidence? The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry under the year 773 informs us that a red cross appeared in the sky after sunset, that the Mercians and the Kentishmen fought at Otford and that strange adders were seen in Sussex. The adders pass unmentioned, but the crossing of a king is deemed relevant, and from this wealth of information about 365 days in the life of a kingdom the author glances the topography of the battle, the route by which the Mercians arrived, and the outcome: 'the greatest single feat of arms performed by the Cantware' (p. 205). Different types of evidence which need not be contemporary are mixed together in leaps in the dark. The Frisian federates, clutching their Jutish-style pottery, await the arrival of the principal characters; enter Hengest and Horsa in three Nydam boats (for there were no others), excellent seamen who fought on foot, fired arrows sparingly and who settled down to nurture those who would inherit their power, aided by numerous hanging-bowl-carrying slaves. The next generation of leaders get involved in the actions at Badon ('Whether or not the Cantware were present at Badon (as they probably were); 'of the battle itself we know only what the British sources tell us'; 'Whatever blood-letting the Cantware may have suffered at Badon'; 'there is little to be gained by speculation of this kind' (pp. 50-51). So why bother? Aethelberht and Offa exchanged cloaks with continental dignitaries and thus wool was a 'readily exportable surplus', 'a major item of English overseas commerce' (p. 194); St Boniface would have been displeased had he known. No-one would deny the author these possibilities but the methodology transfers such occasional details or assumptions to all-embracing facts. It is doubtful that Witney's type of engine will ever be made to run smoothly; perhaps we should check the fuel?

C. J. ARNOLD

Das Sächsische Gräberfeld bei Liebenau Kr. Nienburg (Weser) Teil I (Germanische Denkmäler der Völkerwanderungszeit, Serie A, Band XV). By E. Cosack. 23 x 32 cm. 60 pp., 57 figs., 2 maps, 3 tables, 1 foldout plan. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1982. Price 150 DM.

This volume should become essential reading for everyone involved in the excavation and publication of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. It is the first of a projected series of four
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reports on the mixed cremation and inhumation 4th- to 9th-century Saxon cemetery located beside a tributary of the Weser. For those with little or no German, Dr Albert Genrich provided an English summary in his recent tribute to J. N. L. Myres. The remarkable preservation of cremation pyres (fig. 3), together with post-holes which represent either the pyre structure or markers, and stones used as markers, reveal the sort of evidence English excavators should seek and has enriched our still limited understanding of this burial rite. Medieval and still more modern ploughing has usually removed all traces of the pyres and often the upper parts of the cremation containers as well, but an English Liebenau may yet be uncovered.

The report is limited to area I on the plan and a detailed loose foldout plan is provided at the back of the volume. A catalogue of the burials and other features takes up the greater part of the report (pp. 27-60), together with line-drawings of context plans and the finds (figs. 4-57), with just three plates (figs. 1-3). This data is preceded by a brief introduction, a section describing and discussing the forms and contents of the graves and a short concluding chapter on the interpretation of the evidence (pp. 9-25).

As usual with German reports, the standard of presentation is excellent and the organization generally clear, but I do have one major criticism concerning the numbering of graves and other features. Cosack uses grid squares and gives each feature a letter prefix A to D followed by a number from a running sequence which begins at 1 for each and every square. Thus the inhumation graves have the prefix A and, for example, the first inhumation in square M8 will be A1 and the second A2, while the first inhumation in M9 will again be A1 and so on. Cremations have the prefix B, isolated artefacts C and other features D. It is a cumbersome system in which you need to know the grid square number as well as a feature number and it mixes letters and numbers which, as British postal code users know, is not a good idea. This system can be assumed to have been satisfactory for the original field recording and the subsequent processing of the finds, but there is no good reason why the final published report should perpetuate it, instead of assigning a new running number sequence which avoids duplication of numbers and foreseeable future confusion.

MARTIN WELCH

NOTES


This is a study of the numismatic and documentary evidence for the use of coinage in northern France, concentrating on the 7th century but venturing occasionally into the Carolingian period. Archaeological evidence appears only in asides, and there is no reference to recent English work which might have helped the author’s arguments concerning trade: indeed, the latest references in the bibliography are to works published in 1975. The numismatic discussion, relying very largely on the catalogues of Belfort and Prou, could have been made clearer by the use of tables, and more specific maps. But the discussion of the documentary sources relating to the sale and purchase of land, slaves, and agricultural and industrial commodities contains many useful points; even though Bleiber’s conclusions are couched in the traditional terms of the “feudalisation process” the picture which emerges, of an increasingly lively monetary economy, at least in the north of Merovingian Gaul, is far from traditional. The book concludes with a catalogue and discussion of 110 documents from her area of research — charters, wills, saints’ lives and so on — which appear to mention monetary transactions in the 7th century, and with catalogues of known mint-sites in the area and of the mint-sites of coins in fifteen relevant hoards.

EDWARD JAMES

Mrs Curle has rendered students of Pictish and Viking-Age archaeology a signal service in publishing the rich and varied finds recovered from the Brough of Birsay, Orkney, between the years 1934 and 1974. This is to be followed by a report on the excavations to be written by Dr Raleigh Radford, although this monograph includes an account by Dr John Hunter and Mr Christopher Morris of their small excavation in 1973–74 which was aimed at clarifying the stratigraphy in one of the three areas previously excavated; there are no recorded vertical relationships for the finds from the other two areas reported on here. The Hunter/Morris excavations also provide the only account of animal and organic remains from the site to date, for those from the earlier work can no longer be traced.

Over 600 finds are catalogued by Mrs Curle of which the most significant are undoubtedly the Pictish moulds and other material associated with fine metal-working which together form a highly important assemblage. Some of the other objects also receive detailed discussion (notably the combs), but others might have been commented on more fully (e.g. pin 427 is of the Norwegian ‘Vestfold-type’ of 9th- to 10th-century date, whereas pin 428 is best paralleled by that from the grave of Archbishop Wulfstan who died in 1023), but the excellent drawings make such identifications possible without difficulty.

Mrs Curle is properly cautious about attempting to interpret these finds, divorced as they are from their contexts, for the nature and significance of the Pictish and Norse settlement on the Brough — all the more so while we await the publication of the results of the further excavations by Hunter and Morris. In view of some current controversies, however, it is worth noting that Mrs Curle nowhere suggests that the Pictish settlement was monastic (as is normally claimed), that the Norse material does not suggest a Viking involvement in the area any earlier than the 9th century, and that there was certainly contact between the Norse and the Picts during the period represented by the lower Norse settlement horizon, although the question of a continuing Pictish presence on the Brough could not be resolved.

JAMES GRAHAM-CAMPBELL


The papers gathered together in this volume were originally given at a conference on ‘Environmental archaeology in the urban context’ held at York under the auspices of the C.B.A. in 1979. Most of the contributors are scientists who have valiantly overcome the difficult task of presenting their highly specialized data in a form easily understood by the layman. Indeed, throughout this book there are numerous pleas that environmentalists should not be regarded as specialists ‘providing a service for archaeologists . . . [but rather] . . . one kind of archaeologist working together with others’, and the papers published here show how justified this definition is.

Many of the contributors acknowledge that their specialisms are still in their infancy, and suggest lines along which future work might proceed, but nevertheless the information published here shows what a great contribution environmental archaeologists have already made to our knowledge of urban life in England and abroad in the Roman and medieval periods. There are fascinating glimpses into the conditions which urban man created for himself, from air pollution to the accumulation of deeply-stratified debris, and the promise that future research based on active co-operation with so-called ‘cultural archaeologists’ will elucidate urban life even more clearly. This book essentially presents the state of knowledge at the beginning of the present decade and stands also as a signpost to the future.

HELEN CLARKE

These studies were inspired by a one-day seminar organized by the Society of Antiquaries in 1980 to present recent work on British medieval sculpture. The ten papers then given are now published, together with an additional five, introductions by the three sectional chairmen (Rosemary Cramp for pre-Conquest, Alan Borg for Romanesque and Neil Stratford for Gothic) and prologue and conclusions by the general chairman George Zarnecki. The aim of the seminar was to survey current research and work in progress — this is a recurrent theme — by 'younger' scholars in the field, as well as to present a number of recent discoveries.

In view of the editor's claim that the volume is not intended to present a comprehensive survey, it would of course be churlish to wonder if there is no research into early sculpture being undertaken in Scotland. Indeed, with the exception of Nancy Edwards's paper on the south-east Irish crosses (applying the constructional grid principles of Adcock and Bruce-Mitford to the geometric ornament, and on this basis dividing the Ahenny and related crosses into three quite separate groups) the material presented is entirely English. The main emphasis is on the 12th century onwards, with only four papers on the pre-Conquest period. These include Dominic Tweddle's rather too widely ranging survey of the south and east before 950, which, like Jeffrey West's study of the St Oswald's carved slab, looks at manuscript and textile parallels including the Cuthbert embroideries, which Tweddle ascribes to Winchester but West to Mercia.

Perhaps the most useful feature of the volume is the first publication of new material resulting from recent excavations and discoveries, particularly the Romanesque examples. This includes Deborah Kahn on some fine ornamental and figural carvings from the St Albans chapter house, Richard K. Morris on the Hereford school Billesley tympanum (beautifully displayed in the 1984 Hayward exhibition) and Jane Geddes on fragments from Battle Abbey, Canterbury and Barking. For the Gothic, there is re-assessment rather than new finds. Christopher Wilson reconstructs the figural scheme at St Mary's Abbey chapter house, York, Nicholas Dawton discusses the Yorkshire affinities of the Percy tomb at Beverley while Veronica Sekules's study of a group of local masons (from 14th-century Lincolnshire) follows the same principles of analysis as the recent work in pre-Conquest Northumbrian carving presented by James Lang, an approach which could be described as structuralist. And further evidence for itinerant masons comes in Jill Franklin's early dating of Norwich Priory and the Ely Prior's door.

A common feature is the vivid surviving evidence for the painting of architectural carving, as at Bishop's House, Ely, St Augustine's, Canterbury and St Albans; and the various papers also stress the need for a continuous examination of the centres of influence and for constant comparison of sculpture with works in other media.

The book provides a useful foretaste of the more detailed studies which are promised by the contributors. However, the price is relatively high for a series of short papers, and the chronological range rather wide for the specialist, since the separate articles do not claim to be more than a hint of things to come.

CAROLA HICKS


This is the definitive publication of excavations at Trig Lane 1974–76; reports on specific aspects of the work have already appeared in this journal (Vol. 22 (1978), 84–104) and in The London Archaeologist, 4 (1981), 31–37.
The body of the report is taken up by a description of the development of the medieval waterfront with detailed analysis of the methods of construction of the waterside structures. It is introduced by a short survey of written sources relevant to the site and concluded by a series of specialist reports dealing with scientific dating methods and selected small finds. It will be many years before detailed post-excavation analysis of the finds from this interesting and complex site will be complete and the method of presentation employed here is greatly to be welcomed. The most significant aspects of the excavations are presented to the public through clear descriptions and many photographs and line drawings. The minutaee of interest to the specialist are housed in the Department of Urban Archaeology archive where they may be consulted on request.

HELEN CLARKE


This is the report of an excavation in front of the Swedish Houses of Parliament (*Riksdagshuset*) on Helgeandsholmen (the Island of the Holy Ghost) from 1978 to 1980. The authors and editor are to be congratulated on the very rapid production of this work which, although designed for the general public, also reaches a very high standard of scientific presentation. More thoroughgoing analyses of various aspects of the excavated material are continuing and further, more conventional, excavation reports are forthcoming.

The book firstly sets out the reasons for the excavation (the extension of *Riksdagshuset* involving two subterranean floors for service areas and car parking) and the methods employed in removing the 8,000 m² (50,000 m³) of earth over two years. There then follow chapters on the environment and development of the site from the 13th century to the present day, each written by members of the excavation team. All are lavishly illustrated by line drawings, black-and-white photographs and many excellent colour plates which graphically bring home to general public and specialist alike the wealth of evidence recovered from this highly complex site — the most extensive and elaborate urban excavation to have taken place in Sweden to date. The excellent preservation of organic material on this waterlogged site gives a well-rounded picture of the material culture and standard of living enjoyed in this area of Stockholm in the Middle Ages, although the authors are at pains to point out that it was not necessarily typical for Stockholm as a whole. Some of the site was occupied by the Hospital of the Holy Ghost and it is largely the standard of living of its inmates that is recorded here. Part of the hospital's cemetery was also recovered, and 1,350 undisturbed burials enabled much detailed and useful osteological work to be carried out.

Although it is invidious to select any one portion of the more than 40,000 finds for special mention here, the discovery of eleven ships must be emphasized. The ships date from the 14th to the 17th centuries and cover a wide range of types, from a Scandinavian-type clinker-built vessel, to a 14th-century cog and a 17th-century freight carrier. The information recovered from these well-preserved ships adds enormously to our knowledge of medieval and early modern ship-building techniques; one has already been built in replica and given sea trials, others may well follow this highly successful experiment.

English archaeologists interested in any aspect of urban or maritime studies are urged to consult this excellent volume. The English summary is regrettably short but sufficient, with the illustrations, to enable conclusions to be drawn and parallels to be seen; and it is salutary to see that a complex urban excavation can be published so quickly in a manner that is both ‘popularizing’ and ‘scientific’. Public relations have been well served by this book whose aims could be emulated by urban archaeologists in the British Isles who are becoming progressively less dependent on the public purse and more dependent on individuals for finance.

HELEN CLARKE

This cleverly titled evaluation of Salisbury and Old Sarum results from co-operation between an archaeologist and a local historian, drawing upon the resources of their Sites and Monuments Record. The result is a useful assessment of the archaeological potential of the area, and a justification for further fieldwork to investigate in particular the Iron Age evidence at and adjacent to the hillfort and its continuity into the Roman period; Saxon settlements, to correlate with the many known cemeteries; the Wilton-Sarum burghal relationship; and the archaeology of England's 'most spectacularly successful planted city'. It is also a valuable information source, with a full and up-to-date bibliography.

David A. Hinton


Since the beginning of this century the Swedish government has supported a project, entitled Sveriges Kyrkor, whose aim is to publish descriptions and inventories of all the historic churches in the country. Something more than 650 churches have been published to date, most of them in volumes devoted to individual buildings. The standard of production is consistently high with lavish use of line drawings and plates and the degree of excellence achieved is paralleled only by Sveriges Kyrkor's sister project in Denmark, Danmarks Kirker (reviewed in these pages by D. M. Wilson in 1973). Together the projects in both these Scandinavian countries provide a model which could well be followed by church archaeologists and architectural historians in the British Isles.

The present volume differs slightly from others in the series in that it concentrates on a group of timber churches, both extant and no longer in existence, in the province of Småland and two neighbouring hundreds in the province of Östergötland. The catalogue comprises over 100 churches, greatest space being devoted to those (roughly a half) which preserve their medieval origins. Many of the vanished churches were demolished in the 19th century and can be reconstructed from pre-demolition topographical illustrations, in some cases from excavations which have revealed their ground-plans. The extant churches have been subjected to scrupulous structural examination, often to excavation, and in a number of cases dendrochronology has been used to good effect for dating the softwood timbers of which the churches are built. The whole results in an excellent survey of the typology, development and date of the ecclesiastical buildings of areas of Sweden not otherwise noteworthy for their medieval remains. The author is to be congratulated on her contribution to a series which goes from strength to strength and deserves to be better known outside its home country.

Helen Clarke


This volume conveys the results of the excavations in 's-Hertogenbosch directed by Drs H. L. Janssen from 1977 to 1979. The first half contains an introduction to the topography and an analysis of the results of the excavations in the market place and by the walls, as well as plans of medieval churches, an analysis of the development of house plans and an assessment of the above ground archaeology of a merchant's house of the mid 16th century.
The second half considers the finds, particularly pottery, pipes, glass, bone and metal, including a fine gold ring brooch. The shoes are particularly well interpreted and the series of reconstructed shoe types is most impressive. It is a well produced volume that makes a valuable contribution to medieval urban archaeology.

JOHN CHERRY

The following publications have also been received:


23 papers, 16 on the medieval period, authors include C. Morrisson, D. M. Metcalf, J. Lafaurie, M. Dolley, M. F. Hendy, G. Hatz, C. E. Blunt, P. Spufford, M. Archibald, I. Stewart.


The proceedings of the 1982 Birsay conference, 8 papers, authors include A. Ritchie, C. A. Ralegh Radford, C. L. Curle, C. D. Morris and J. R. Hunter.

*Historic Towns in Essex, an Archaeological Survey.* Edited by J. Hedges. 21 × 29 cm. 104 pp., 66 figs. Chelmsford: Essex County Council, 1983. Price £5.00 from Planning Dept, Globe House, New Street, Chelmsford CM1 1LF.


The report of the Faculty Jurisdiction Commission appointed by the General Synod of the Church of England to examine church law with regard to secular planning procedures. The Commission recommends that churches in use should remain exempt from listed building control but there is a dissenting minority report by Marcus Binney.


