Reviews


This volume of 28 papers derives from a conference hosted by the Society for Medieval Archaeology at the University of Cardiff in July 2001 entitled 'Viking-period Settlement in Britain and Ireland'. Despite the avowed geographical focus, the conference included papers on Viking-age settlements across northern Europe as does the ensuing publication, which is unfortunately now rather obscurely entitled (and which sounds more like a progressive rock album!). Aside from this minor inconvenience, anyone researching or teaching the Viking Age and medieval settlement archaeology will be richly rewarded by the wide-ranging and interdisciplinary focus of the volume. For an English-language readership the papers in the first section of the volume on settlement in Scandinavia and Russia are especially valuable in ensuring the wider dissemination of research previously published in other languages, including Jens Ulriksen’s study of coastal landing-places and Viking-period trade in Denmark, and studies by Jon Anders Risvaag and Axel Christophersen of urban development in Norway, and by Michael Müller-Wille and Astrid Tummuscheit of recent excavations at Hedeby, Ribe and the German site of Groß Strömkendorf, thought to be the location of the trading centre at Reric destroyed by the Danish king Godfred in 808.

The nine papers in the section entitled ‘The Atlantic Provinces’ are actually largely about western Britain, with the exception of Ian Wyatt’s study of landscape descriptions in Icelandic sagas. The most theoretically sophisticated papers are to be found in this section, with many exploring cultural interaction between Scandinavian settlers and indigenous populations. Especially rewarding are the papers by David Griffiths (on north-western England), Mark Redknap (on the excavations at Llanbedrgoch on Anglesey), John Sheehan (on hoards in Ireland) and James Barrett (on Scotland), which serve as models of the most exciting research currently being conducted in the field, both through the application of new analytical approaches to familiar data sets and the acquisition of new data through extensive excavation of individual sites, regional surveys and, increasingly, the results of metal-detecting. Several of the papers in this section highlight the importance of examining the Scandinavian impact in its appropriate context, noting that while much research is conducted within modern administrative boundaries, the Scandinavian impact can often best be understood within other socio-economic settings, such as the Irish Sea basin as both Mark Redknap and David Griffiths effectively demonstrate.

The final section of the volume, focusing on England, includes valuable up-dates on fieldwork at Sedgeford by Sophie Cabot et al., Siny Folds by the late Denis Coggins, the upland landscapes of Craven Dale by Alan King, and York by Richard Hall. Lesley Abrams and David Parsons contribute a lengthy and very valuable review of the utilization of place-name evidence in the study of the Scandinavian impact on England, which will be essential reading for scholars of this period.

The very broad chronological coverage of several papers (e.g. those by Nikolaj Makarov on rural settlements in Russia, and by Mike Parker Pearson et al. on Cille
Pheadair in the Outer Hebrides) permits a long-term perspective on settlement development. However, in such broad-ranging papers the Scandinavian impact is rather lost. Indeed, it is notable that while the remit of some of the authors seems to have been to discuss the Scandinavian impact on their region, other contributions have more to offer students of medieval settlement archaeology in general than to those specifically concerned with the Scandinavian impact on various parts of Europe. Nonetheless, the papers by Mark Gardiner and Stephen Rippon, in particular, which examine developments in rural settlements that were occurring independently of Scandinavian influence, are extremely useful as they contextualize the struggle of some of their fellow contributors to associate archaeological evidence for settlement change with Scandinavian influence. While cemeteries were clearly not a major focus of the volume, several papers would have been enhanced by more extensive discussion of associated cemetery evidence. For example, Müller-Wille and Tummuscheit suggest that the cemetery associated with Groß Strömken-dorf reveals different Scandinavian and Saxon/Frisian cultural influences and it would have been informative to have expanded upon this observation; indeed, the following paper by Tamara Pushkina demonstrates how effectively settlement and cemetery evidence can be combined in her discussion of pre-urban settlements in Russia. Several of the papers reveal the significant contribution, like it or not, of metal-detectorists to the study of the Viking Age. This is true, in particular, of Jan Besteman’s examination of the ways in which coin hoards on the island of Wieringen (The Netherlands) illuminate Danish-Frisian interaction in the late 9th century, although he does identify certain types of find, such as silver ingots and unminted hacksilver, that many metal-detectorists have not yet learned to identify, and this is an important point of wider significance given the diagnostic value of such finds for identifying specifically Scandinavian activity. It is to the credit of the editors that a volume drawn from conference submissions should reach publication so swiftly. The volume is well-edited and nicely illustrated, and will undoubtedly become essential reading both for medieval settlement archaeologists and also students of the Viking Age.

DAWN M. HADLEY


One of the more interesting developments in the study of medieval Europe to emerge in recent years is a growing interest in assemblies. This is the second volume of edited papers on this subject to come out in as many years (the other being Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages, edited by P. S. Barnwell and M. Mostert, in Brepols’s series Studies in the Early Middle Ages) in addition to a steadily growing trickle of journal and conference papers. The study of assemblies is by no means a new subject — indeed, it is among the oldest issues of European medievalia — but it has been largely neglected for the best part of a century. This neglect has been due in part by the absence of an acceptable theoretical framework — earlier frameworks being too nationalistic or racial (or both) for modern sensibilities — and in part by the lack of a suitable methodology which could liberate assembly studies from the morbid clutches of antiquarianism.

These obstacles have by no means evaporated, but as the present volume bears witness there is a sizeable — and growing — group of determined scholars who are working hard to resurrect assemblies as a subject worthy of study. This is an important task because assemblies — in the widest sense of places/occasions for the regular congregation of people for a variety of purposes — are vital for our understanding of the structure of pre-industrial societies and the development of social and political hierarchies. Assembly, the meeting of people, is a form of structured interaction between people who are not
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(necessarily) related or economically interdependent on each other and in many cases represents the earliest or simplest form of political structure. For students of the origins and functions of all types of polities, assemblies are essential pieces of the puzzle. It is, however, also important to remember that the variety in assembly functions is great, ranging from strictly judicial and formally political to religious, ceremonial, recreational and economic. Assemblies can specialize in a single function and they can include a range of functions. Assemblies can be site-specific, but they do not have to be and they can also be peripatetic. One of the gratifying aspects of the present volume is that while in the Introduction the editors place their subject clearly in the context of traditional parliamentary assemblies, they have in the choice of papers cast their net much wider, to include considerations of judicial meetings, inauguration meetings and ceremonial, possibly commemorative, meetings. While some of the authors could be criticized for seeing religious meetings as mere appendages, side-shows, to the ‘real’ meetings — and for not considering a range of other possible motives for meeting — they have nevertheless given a concerted push to dislodge the assembly wagon from the parliamentary rut.

Collectively this is the most important contribution of the papers in this book: taken as a whole they show that assembly studies is a wide, complex and fascinating field with enormous potential. Taken individually the papers are all fairly narrow in scope, limited to particular places or types of sites/assemblies. They are all concerned primarily with problems of definition and identification — which is no wonder, considering the difficult past of this field. They fall roughly into three groups according to subject matter: four papers discuss the location and nature of historically known assemblies; Irish royal inauguration mounds, Scone in Scotland and Tynwald Hill in the Isle of Man; four papers discuss archaeological signatures for assemblies, ranging from fairly unequivocal assembly places in late prehistoric Sweden and Late Anglo-Saxon England to more conjectural assemblies associated with non-typical cemeteries in Early Anglo-Saxon England; and three papers consider vocabulary for assemblies based on Anglo-Saxon, Frankish and Welsh sources. Of all the papers, Brink’s piece is the most optimistic, reflecting perhaps the greater — but misplaced? — confidence of the Scandinavian tradition in this field.

Barnwell’s paper on the Frankish mallus is the only explicitly historical contribution and the only one to try and describe the workings of a particular type of assembly. In his paper on Tynwald Hill Timothy Darvill presents new results on the dating and development of this important site, and uniquely in this collection, places the site in a wider landscape and administrative setting — thus setting an important methodological example. An important theme, shared by a number of the papers, is that of continuity, with considerations of both the appropriation of ancient ‘ritual landscapes’ and the dislocation of assembly sites by new regimes.

Many of the papers in this book bear witness to the methodological quagmire in which assembly studies have been stuck. The efforts of the authors to make them unstuck, while heroic, are often painfully erudite and only enlightening to the most committed reader. This does not detract from the importance of this book which makes a significant contribution to the rehabilitation of assemblies as a central issue in the study of medieval Europe.

ORRI VÉSTEINSSON


This stimulating book tackles complex questions as to the scale and character of Byzantine influence upon the post-Roman West. Anthea Harris states at the beginning that her book ‘is not a complete survey of all those categories of material that may point to
East–West contact’ (8). The bulk of the study is, nonetheless, made up of quite broad survey chapters concerning the Byzantine conception of the world in terms of diplomatic contacts (Ch. 2: ‘Constructing the Oikouméné’), East–West trade (Ch. 3: ‘Trading and Exchange between the Byzantine Empire and the West’), and Byzantine imagery in Western court culture (Ch. 4: ‘Royal Tombs, Textiles and Gold Coinage’), and there is an attempt to cover the widest range of potential evidence. Harris rightly questions the assumption that all archaeologically-indicated contacts represent purely commercial travel or exchange, and explores the possibility that diplomacy, espionage, royal marriage and evangelism could all have been causal factors in economic and cultural links between East and West. For those, such as the reviewer, who believe that archaeological evidence can bear critical weight in the writing of political as well as social history, there is a refreshing self-confidence about Harris’s general approach — though her central thesis, that Byzantine finds in the West may represent an ‘archaeology of diplomacy’ (10, and e.g. 152), will require a more detailed exposition to really carry conviction. In Harris’s approach, in common with that of Kenneth Dark, the romanitas which is seen to persist in the West becomes a somewhat amorphous conception; the Byzantine influence that builds upon it is presented almost as a hyper-diffusionist model. Harris is at her best in identifying some of the oversights involved in the archaeological models deriving from the Pirenne Thesis. She provides many interesting comments on the scale of excavation in different countries and upon the representative character, or otherwise, of the resulting evidence. Despite her statement that the ‘principal focus of this book is Britain’ (19), Harris is mostly content to survey the background to Byzantine interest in Britain rather than attempt to use thoroughly the British case as a paradigm for quantifying and assessing Byzantine interest in the West — though she provides some indicators of how the work of Reynolds and Campbell might be used to this end (47–52; 146–51). If anything, the British material itself ends up being rather rushed through at the end, occupying only about 50 out of 224 pages of a book ostensibly focused on Britain. There are many original reflections on the questions raised by Kentish external relations in the 5th and 6th century and the imported ceramic material is also tackled imaginatively (43–60). But typical, perhaps, is the statement ‘it is not out of the question, therefore, that the examples [of Byzantine buckets] from Britain may have been used in Byzantine diplomacy with British kingdoms, although more work is necessary before this hypothesis can be advanced’ (180). One is left to feel that some of the questions thus identified could have been followed up in greater detail by Harris herself. More perhaps might have been said in detail on questions such as what was really going on when a Byzantine merchant sat down with the agent of a Dumnonian ruler to share a meal, preliminary to the exchange of goods — as appears to have occurred at Bantham in the 6th century. Rather less time might have been spent on discussing the material aspects of eremitical sites (131–4), or upon brief, but contentious, judgements on Celtic Christianity (155), and Britain itself as a possible desertum (160). In these respects Harris perhaps tries to cover too much in too few pages and there are some serious omissions, such as any adequate assessment of the contribution of John Cassian to western monasticism (130–1). By virtue of her very breadth of approach, however, Harris presents an enjoyable and informative ramble through problems such as Gregory of Tours’s references to ‘Syrians’ (62–4), what the acceptance of Byzantine political offices actually meant to Western rulers (26–34), and how much Frankish Gaul really was closed to Byzantine influence in the 6th century (139–43).

Further recent finds of eastern material from such sites as Bantham and Tintagel, as well as the discoveries from Southend, serve to show that Byzantine contacts were a very significant element in the culture of 6th-century Britain. Harris’s study, while not the last word on many points, is a timely and welcome contribution that should serve to stimulate a wider debate concerning this connection.

Jonathan M. Wooding

Honed and refined, with the lovingly acknowledged assistance of his late wife, Elizabeth, this major contribution to the protohistoric archaeology of northern Britain represents a substantial expansion of the masterly but unpublished series of Rhind lectures delivered by Leslie Alcock, first Professor of Archaeology in the University of Glasgow. These were initially presented at the end of the 1980s to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and focused on war and society in northern Britain. Only in one major dimension is the scope altered: the start date has been pushed back from the mid-5th century; the by-product of the author’s sanguine reflection on the debatable reliability of the evidence for the period before c. a.d. 550. These are of course themes on which Alcock has already made major contributions.

Towards the end of his career, he set out to provide ‘an introduction to the present state of study’, intended for both specialist and generalist, on the evidence from the north of Britain, excluding only the Outer Hebrides and the Northern Isles, judged, reasonably enough, to be marked by evidence of a rather distinctive character. In these terms, this book must be assessed as a very considerable success, for it represents a wide-ranging distillation of the state of knowledge on topics extending from the evidence of archaeological sites and artefacts to the iconography of art objects and the contributions that can be gleaned from textual sources, here extending beyond annalistic and historical sources to the poetry of the age. It thus brilliantly summarizes and critically appraises the 20th-century achievement in terms of the study of the Early Historic period, in so doing reinvigorating and reappraising the links between archaeology, place-names and history through a detailed examination of the evidence and a willingness readily to go beyond the geographical confines (drawn north of the Tees) when the argument being rehearsed requires it. In this latter regard, it is true that Alcock is clearly both happier and more prepared to look southward for comparison and insight to the Anglo-Saxon world than across the North Channel into Ireland, reflecting his own intellectual journey and scholarly influences — the latter also fully acknowledged in this work. In this, as in the extensive introductory sections and valedictory envoi, there is a testamentary flavour to the writing which adds to its appeal and, it may cogently be argued, to its longer-term value as a landmark in 1st millennium a.d. studies. Equally felicitous, to this reviewer’s mind, is Alcock’s willingness to engage fully with the mentalités of the time — particularly the central triad of his concerns: warfare, kingship and religion. From the consideration of the conduct of individual kings to asides about his dealings with his editor, this is in a quiet, understated way a very humane account.

All this is blended with the author’s insights into the significance of the records furnished by archaeology, including those provided by the sustained campaign of small-scale interventions that he and Elizabeth conducted at a wide range of key places. Here is a man who embarked on his northern-British fieldwork with his Glasgow students at the age of nearly 50, and was still excavating a decade later, on often physically-demanding sites all of which are fully published; further testimony to a level of commitment to his field which the volume fully echoes.

This detailed text (encyclopaedic in some regards!) is thus anything but ‘armchair’ archaeology. Given the scope of the volume, and the brief that Alcock devised for himself, it would be unreasonable to criticize the book on the grounds that its author does not explicitly point the way forward, setting agendas for his successors. That remains for others to do, but here they have a detailed and mature overview that furnishes an excellent platform from which to develop new work. An extensive bibliography and full (if occasionally uneven) illustrations complement the text, and the substantial hardback
volume represents good value for its price. Almost an apologia pro vita sua by one of the most significant post-war archaeologists working on Britain in the Early Historic period, Kings and Warriors... deserves to be read beyond those with a specialist interest in the field, not least for its perspectives on the maturing of the discipline of archaeology in the second half of the last century.

IAN RALSTON


According to the written sources the Asian nomadic Avars arrived in Hungary in 568, then inhabited by a number of populations, among them Germanic peoples. As a consequence, Langobards and Gepids left for Italy, while those who stayed were oppressed by the Avars, who ruled until c. 800. This suggests that almost all the Germanic population left Hungary at the Avar invasion. However, through archaeology, especially the many cemeteries, it has become clear that the picture is more diverse. Early Avar cemeteries, especially those including Germanic burials, are particularly important for clarifying the cultural and social development of each group in the region, but as the burial tradition for both the Avars and the Gepids is inhumation, it is primarily the material culture used as grave goods that may allow us to distinguish between ethnic groups. Unfortunately the (absolute) chronological framework is still very dependent on historical dates, which may blur the picture and easily lead to circular arguments when discussing ethnicity. And, as for a number of other areas of Migration period Europe, the question of ethnic identification is crucial. Furthermore, there remains the problem of the huge amount of unpublished excavated cemetery excavations.

It is, therefore, very pleasant to see a new publication of some very important archaeological finds from the Avar Period, not least when the finds are presented in both drawings and photographs of high quality, some in colour. Attila Kiss's monograph on the cemetery of Kölked-Feketekapu B has been published posthumously, as Kiss died unexpectedly in late 1999, and the publication was subsequently edited by Éva Garam and Tivadar Vida, the series editors. Concurrently, with the same editors, Avar and Germanic cemeteries from Hungary are being published, the first volume on Germanic cemeteries being the Gepidic cemeteries of the Tisza area.

There are two volumes: first the text, second photographs and drawings of the graves and their contents. Chapter I presents the site and its excavation, between 1972–99, and Chapter II a description of all the graves. The longest chapter (III) analyses the grave plots: the cemetery is divided into seventeen grave plots of various sizes, most of them separate cemeteries, for each of which burial custom and various types of grave goods are presented and analysed. The following chapters discuss social (Chapter IV) and religious conditions (Chapter V) as well as chronology and ethnicity (Chapter VI). The final chapters discuss the importance of the site within the early Avar Period (late 6th–early 7th century) in eastern Pannonia (Chapter VII), and very briefly the late Avar cemeteries and the settlement development in the Baranya area during the 9th–11th centuries (Chapter VIII). Lastly come notes, a comprehensive bibliography and abbreviations.

Cemetery B at Kölked-Feketekapu comprises 663 grave groups, of which 564 are Avar. The nearby cemetery A, which is probably part of the same complex, was published separately by Kiss in 1996 and comprises 695 (Gepidic) graves from the early Avar Period. Most of the grave plots at Cemetery B contain burials which can be exclusively ascribed to the Avars, but a few of the plots contain Germanic/Gepidic burials from the early phase.
Kiss, however, sets out to disprove wholesale Langobard and Germanic emigration; asserting that a functioning Germanic society with an elite was still left, although parts of the (Gepid) population had been displaced (Chapter IV and VI). And whereas traditionally in Hungarian archaeology ethnic identification has been linked to the historical sources, Kiss tries to argue for an ethnic identification via the material culture (Chapter VI), based on whole sets of artefacts, in order to identify ethnic groups more independent of their precise appearance in historical sources.

Kölked-Feketekapu, situated in a previously Langobardic area, is a key cemetery for Kiss’s theories. He identified some Gepidic grave plots, but later than 568, and which also include élite graves. Kiss focuses very much on the rich graves 85 and 119 from plot IX. For the dating of grave 85 the shield-on-tongue buckle with oval plate and rectangular mount, decorated with Style II animals (not Style I as stated by Kiss) and a swordsman (interpreted as Tyr), is important, since in the Frankish area this type, to which it belongs, is dated to the mid-6th century (in recent German chronologies, however, after c. 565), but the grave also contains a number of other types datable to the late 6th century. Furthermore, the Frankish buckle, together with a number of other local objects, indicates a high social status for this grave. The heavy, solid gold jewellery of grave 119 by contrast is locally produced, but because of its Style II decoration and accompanying coins Kiss dates the grave to the early 7th century. This (robbed!) Gepidic grave is also the richest female grave ever found from the Hungarian early Avar Period. This must be seen against the background of the enormous affluence in gold in the surrounding Avar society, coming from the large gold payments from Byzantium. According to Kiss this Gepidic cemetery was, thus, established after the Avar invasion in a ‘foreign’ (previously Langobardic) area, the Gepidic population brought there from another area, the very rich female graves proving the existence of a Germanic/Gepidic élite under Avar supremacy.

Within Hungarian research there are certain interpretational disagreements, and the discussion here starts from arguments presented elsewhere by C. Bálint, who mainly points out that Kiss takes the ethnic interpretations too far — of course a risk when linking material culture and ethnicity. To some extent Bálint’s critique is relevant. The relationship between material culture and ethnic identity has been much debated in western archaeology for more decades without reaching a final conclusion. On the other hand Kiss’s approach, where dependence on written sources is reduced and the focus is directed to analysis of structure (time, space, context) within the material culture, opens up a more broadminded view of the processes taking place, and Kiss is well aware of some of the pitfalls in his method. However, a much more precise analysis of the finds from a number of cemeteries (also from the period just before the Avar invasion), and even more detached from written sources, is needed to make the theory really plausible. Nonetheless, Kiss’s presentation of his theory and the discussion with Bálint in translation opens the questions to debate, not just within Hungarian archaeology, where the next generation of Hungarian archaeologists are now left to carry it forward, but also by scholars working with Migration Period finds from all over Europe, who face the same questions about ethnic identification and the impact of political actions on material culture and traditions.

The chapters here were rendered incomplete by Kiss’s premature death. Nevertheless this is an important publication; a presentation of a huge cemetery from the Avar period which makes a contribution to the debate about ethnic identity and the situation of the Germanic people under Avar rule.

The acceptance by officialdom during the 1990s that the whole of the British Landscape was intrinsically archaeological and historical, rather than just some ‘well-preserved’ remnants of it, possibly counts as one of the greatest shifts ever in political thinking in the world of archaeology and planning (increasingly now subsumed into the concept of the Historic Environment). However, the presence of 60 million ‘consumers’ means that the entire landmass of Britain cannot simply be preserved in situ as one huge ancient monument, so the need to discriminate in detail among myriad landscape types and features remains. ‘Characterization’ has therefore become a widespread concept. In a large step towards universality of coverage from traditional Sites and Monuments Records, it is essentially the abstract division of the space which we inhabit into segments (originally on paper maps but now almost exclusively using GIS), based on a long list of identifying factors connected to environment and historical development.

This change has set landscape studies in a new light. ‘Past-oriented’ analysis (gathering new knowledge of, and about, the past — i.e. what most landscape archaeologists and historians try to do), finds itself newly defined alongside ‘future-oriented’ activity, which seeks to develop ways and means of making that knowledge useful, viable and influential in planning and development. These sound complementary, but may in practice not always be easily combined. The former, the province largely of academics and amateurs, depends on the creative need to challenge and re-define accepted understandings of the landscape, seeing new theory, data and practice as ends in themselves. The latter is the remit of heritage bureaucracies, where efficient process counts above all, and which depends on precepts which may not be entirely at ease with the more free-thinking nature of original research.

Stephen Rippon seeks to define analytical techniques of landscape research for ‘future-oriented’ planning practice by going beyond standard characterization practice to achieve a more informed basis upon which judgements about landscape character are made. The book takes as its premise the well-understood notion that the landscape is a palimpsest, the components of which are ultimately decipherable and understandable. A useful distinction is made between ‘historic’ landscape types which continue to exert influence on present-day activity, and ‘relict’ landscapes (often prehistoric) which have a presence in archaeological terms but are otherwise superseded as a modifying factor in current geography. There is a coherent account of the rise of characterization, set against the wider picture of the development of medieval/historical landscape studies in the later 20th century. Policies, techniques and habits as practised by bureaucracies in England, Wales and Scotland are contrasted (these are, in fact, surprisingly divergent).

Termed a ‘practical handbook’, it is exclusively concerned with documentary, archive, or otherwise ‘desk-top’ analysis. Despite an exhortation (83) for the detail of landscape characterizations to be tested by fieldwork, there is little guidance to field practice. Although shiny and Barbour-pocket sized, it is not a field manual (raising the question, if it is essentially a desk-top manual, as to why it could not have been A4-size, offering more space for the maps?), but the lack of a route to finding out about practical field techniques is an omission, and could have been provided by adding in references to publications on this subject, e.g. Mark Bowden’s Unravelling the Landscape (Tempus, 1999).

‘Top-down’ techniques of characterization based on expert judgment are contrasted with ‘bottom-up’ techniques which depend on compiling data onto 1:25,000 scale maps and modelling thereafter. The latter is explicitly favoured, and much of the book is occupied with a series of case-studies which illustrate the huge variety of landscape types in Britain, from the Severn Levels in Gwent and Somerset, to the Cornish moors, upland valleys in Wales, industrial Lancashire and the Essex coast. The techniques of ‘bottom-up’
characterization are broadly explained: map regression; observation and recognition of characteristic patterns and features; application of typological criteria; division of landscape into character segments. A study of the uses to which the results can be put is provided by Jo Clark (112–14).

The book is dense with bullet-pointed textual clarity and detailed maps (made necessarily small by its diminutive size). The case studies presented are all exciting and illuminating. Rippon’s own expertise shines through, particularly in his superlative knowledge of wetland and coastal marginal landscapes. Therein, however, sounds a potentially dissonant note. This is a ‘practical handbook’, but how completely would it match the immediate practical needs of somebody embarking on a serious piece of landscape analysis (located away from any of the examples provided), and help them make the sort of skilled inductive judgments about the complex detail of landscape which Rippon displays? One is left feeling that ‘practical handbook’ is something of a misnomer, and does not adequately express the value and potential role of the book. It is in fact a discursive, and to a great extent theoretical, treatise on a major current theme in UK heritage management. Coupled with the sort of in-depth training in landscape studies available in taught postgraduate courses at a number of universities, this will be an important and thought-provoking contribution of an essentially educative, rather than practical nature.

David Griffiths


Despite having admired Tom Williamson’s work for many years, I read with some foreboding the publisher’s summary. This promised a radical reassessment of the reasons underlying the contrasts between different types of medieval landscape, based upon the thesis that ‘the overriding determinants . . . were agricultural and environmental . . . subtle differences in soils and climate shaped not only the diverse landscapes of medieval England, but the very structures of the societies that occupied them. This is a book which puts the environment back where it belongs — at the centre of the historical stage’. This sounded ominously like a relapse towards the doctrines of environmental determinism which dominated geographical studies during the earlier part of last century, which had been discarded by historical geographers long since. Surely the author could not have fallen into that trap?

I need not have worried. Williamson’s arguments are far more subtle than the simplistic cause-and-effect explanations of crude determinism. In his first chapter he reiterates the distinction between the champion or ‘planned’ countryside of the midlands, characterized in the Middle Ages by large villages with extensive open fields, and the zones of ‘ancient’ countryside to the west and east, with more woodland, scattered hamlets and less communal forms of agriculture. That same chapter provides a succinct review of successive ideas about the origins of field systems, concluding that none of the models based upon cultural factors, such as ethnicity, or geographical variations in population pressure, strength of lordship or tenurial custom, provide a wholly satisfactory explanation for those fundamental landscape contrasts.

Williamson also makes clear from the outset that the distribution of each type of countryside ‘is not related to any very obvious aspects of the natural environment, such as climate, geography or soils’. Nor is it possible to trace evidence for the contrasts in the medieval landscape through from prehistoric or Romano-British times. Instead, the distinction emerged during the Anglo-Saxon period, reaching its greatest intensity by the 13th century. Why, then, did the midland clays became the heartland of open-field arable
farming despite their limited suitability for cereal cultivation (as evidenced by the later drift to pasture accompanied by settlement contraction and desertion), whereas the clay districts of East Anglia and Essex, climatically better suited to cereals, developed along very different lines? The puzzle is teased out through a series of elegant and complex arguments which lead towards the conclusion that the tendency of the midland clays towards coldness, puddling and compaction provided more limited windows of opportunity for ploughing. This encouraged more communally organized forms of farming, in which maximum effort could be exerted at critical times. In such areas the adoption of the heavy plough also encouraged strip farming. Further east, by contrast, lower rainfall, higher transpiration and other factors extended the time-frame for cultivation and reduced the need for communal co-operation. Many other aspects are discussed, including local variations within both champion and woodland landscapes, the origins of their contrasting settlement patterns, and different environments and uses for wood-pasture, grazing commons and meadow.

The book is attractively produced, with a good range of maps and photographs, a valuable bibliography and a useful index. There are relatively few typographic errors, though the inadvertent substitution of ‘acerbic’ for ‘aceramic’ (29) produced one puzzling sentence. However, the title and subtitle fail to reveal that this is not a countrywide survey. Williamson’s study area comprises East Anglia, the east Midlands and the northern Home Counties. In many respects this is a strength rather than a weakness, since the conviction of his arguments is based upon a sound, first-hand understanding of local conditions; but it does beg the question of how well some aspects of his model would stand up in more westerly or northerly regions. While finding many of his arguments more convincing than I had anticipated, I still have reservations about environmental factors as a primary explanation for differing patterns of human activity. Numerous social, economic and technological factors also enter into the equation. Human responses to the challenges of survival are not always met in ways which are consistent, logical, or based upon the most efficient and beneficial use of resources; that certainly isn’t the case now, and I doubt whether it was in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, this book is a timely reminder that ultimately all human activity depends upon what the earth can provide. I cannot quarrel with the message in Williamson’s concluding paragraph: ‘... the character of fields and settlement patterns cannot be understood in isolation from the practice of farming, and ... farming can only be understood in the context of the environment. The fact that any other approach is acceptable to historians merely highlights the extent to which modern urban, industrial society has become dangerously divorced from the realities of food production and the natural world.’

James Bond


Anthony Quiney’s _Town Houses of Medieval Britain_ is probably the first study of this subject to have been published. Chapters and papers on town houses have been published in many places, but an entire book devoted specifically to town houses in medieval Britain has not previously been produced. In some respects this is surprising. So many books have now been published on so many diverse areas of architectural history. One might have imagined this to be a subject to have been written about periodically. Reading this volume and noting the wide range of sources consulted, one might be less surprised. The reading and research necessary to cover this subject is extensive and daunting.
It will be particularly welcome that this study has been published by the Yale University Press. Yale has established a reputation in the field of architectural history for a superlative standard of production, especially in page layout and the reproduction of illustrations. This volume continues that tradition. Photographs and drawings are reproduced with clarity and at appropriate scales.

The plan of the volume is at first sight opaque. The reader might surmise from the introduction that the author’s intention was to write a general study of the subject, rather than to advance a particular argument or set of ideas. An introductory chapter, ‘In the Beginning was the Word’, reviews the importance of the Church in medieval civilization and urban life, touches briefly on the extent of urbanism in medieval Britain, but does not set out the rationale behind the organization of the study to follow. This is for the reader to establish. The two main parts of the study are entitled ‘And the Word was Made Flesh’ and ‘A House Appointed for Living’. The reader will discover that the first seeks to establish the context of the medieval town house, and is more about the medieval town in general than the town house specifically. The volume as a whole might perhaps have been more appropriately entitled ‘Towns and Town Houses in Medieval Britain’.

The first chapters of this first part provide a historical background to the town house, from Roman and then through Anglo-Saxon times (Ch. 1), and in Norman and Angevin England (Ch. 2). A further chapter provides a summary of urban development in medieval Wales and Scotland (Ch. 3). Three chapters look at aspects of urban life in the late Middle Ages, commerce (Ch. 4), society (Ch. 5), plague and late medieval urban decline (Ch. 6) and regulation (Ch. 7). Two chapters on construction, stone (Ch. 8) or timber (Ch. 9), then complete this first part of the volume. In these chapters the author draws on a wide range of sources and provides a rounded summary; but there are inevitably omissions. In the chapter on regulation it would have been useful to see more maps showing the layout of planned towns.

The last two chapters of this first part of the volume, on stone and timber construction, sit less comfortably within this more general survey of the medieval town in England, Scotland and Wales. Some of the areas discussed very briefly in these two chapters would have benefited from a more extensive treatment. The transition in the later 12th and earlier 13th century from the use of post in the ground buildings to the use of those utilizing timber frames supported on ground sills should certainly have been discussed at greater length, here and in the following chapter on ‘impermanent houses’. This transition is a phenomenon recorded across northern Europe, in northern France, the Netherlands and Germany as well as in Britain. It permitted timber framed buildings to be constructed which in a few instances have survived until today. It was also a transition of relevance to the discussion and debate on the impermanent architecture adopted in the southern North American colonies in the 17th century. Survival and impermanence both merited greater discussion.

In the second of these two chapters the author also floats the concept of a grammar of carpentry — ‘a set of rules tantamount to a complete grammar’. The reader unfamiliar with the theoretical literature on this subject might be deluded into thinking that this was a new concept. A more extended discussion of this notion, its debt to Henry Glassie1 and in an English context Matthew Johnson,2 would have been very useful.

In these chapters the absence of cross references to houses illustrated elsewhere in the volume is also especially frustrating. The reviewer was at first surprised (96–7) that no plan or photograph was included of the remarkable cob-walled house buried in the later 11th-century construction of Wallingford Castle; in fact the building is illustrated, later in the

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volume. An equally dramatic archaeological discovery was that of the 12th-century stone house at St Martin-at-Palace Plain in Norwich. Again no reference is made (99) to the photograph and reconstruction illustrated elsewhere in the book.

The second main part of the volume, ‘A House Appointed for Living’, is a review of town-house types — in terms of both construction and function. In this second part of the book the author provides the best overview currently available of the town house in medieval England, drawing on a wide range of sources, including his own fieldwork. The arrangement of chapters is eclectic, reflecting in part the author’s organization of the source material: impermanent houses, undercrofts, elite houses, merchants’ and Jews’ houses, the houses of royalty and wealthy merchants, institutional dwellings, small town houses of the later middle ages, terrace houses and the town house in Scotland. All these areas have been well researched by the author, often touching on recent areas of debate, though scarcely ever highlighted as such: for instance, in his acceptance of the small unheated town house, with food cooked in a nearby cookshop, and in according a largely symbolic function to the late medieval hall. Perhaps the least satisfactory part of this second section is that on ‘terrace’ houses. The reviewer would have preferred to have seen these described by the contemporary term ‘row’. Applied to the rows of medieval York and elsewhere the term ‘terrace’ is an anachronism and totally unnecessary.

What, then, might be missing from this wide-ranging study? The major omissions are any explicit consideration of why and how town houses have been studied to date, and what directions such studies might take in the future. The author draws extensively on the work of scholars from the 19th century to the present; an introductory discussion of the development of this area of study would have been useful. Chapter 5 gives some clues as to where future directions might lead: ‘wealth isolated the richest from the poorest’, but ‘a rich man’s house . . . was surrounded by the houses of all conditions of men’. The extreme polarizations of wealth implicit in the range of urban housing in cities such as London, Bristol and York, from the largest town houses to the single room unheated house, invite further research and discussion.

ROGER LEECH


Thumbing through my copy of Archaeology, Economy and Society recently, I was reminded of an editorial apologia in which David Hinton states: ‘I should like to think that inside this rather thin book there is a fat one wildly signalling to be let out.’ That some eighteen years later the mooted work should finally emerge as a book on personal possessions (chiefly jewellery, dress accessories, drinking vessels, and tableware) should occasion no surprise given the author’s long-standing scholarly interest in medieval artefacts, particularly jewellery.

The current book certainly displays several of the hallmarks of its forbear. The chronological structure is the same; covering a long millennium between the end of Roman Britain and the 16th century, divided up into roughly 200-year chunks. Those aware of the author’s earlier work will also recognize the assured handling of a wide range of archaeological and historical evidence to chart broad social and economic developments across the medieval period. But here the subject matter is perhaps to be accorded especial significance for, as Hinton reminds his readers, ‘artefacts and attitudes towards their acquisition, ownership, and disposal . . . have been underestimated as a motivating factor for social change’ (6).

The one important divergence is that his recent publication extends the geographical scope beyond the borders of England to take in Wales and Scotland in order to explore the
role material culture can play 'in shaping differences between different regions or in creating integration' (2). As one would expect, this theme receives greatest attention in early chapters which explore a range of case studies at the heart of current debates on ethnicity and cultural identity in early medieval Britain. Students wishing to gain an appreciation of the challenges and limitations of using artefacts in this sphere would do well to read his nuanced discussion.

Issues of identity as a fluid and often idealized social construct also come to the fore in Hinton's observations on the emergence of a seemingly unified dress fashion in the 7th century as a replacement to the strongly regionalized artefact styles of the Migration period. A similar level of homogeneity is tracked through into the Mid Anglo-Saxon period, by which time we hear that most metalwork 'shows no sign of regional variation' (92). While it is certainly true to say that some artefacts — particularly the more ubiquitous categories of strap-end, hooked-tag and pin — enjoyed universal popularity at this period, it can be argued that this evaluation underplays the evidence for regional sub-categories identified on the basis of provincial stylistic mannerisms. To what extent such features relate purely to patterns of localized production or continuing expressions of regional identity remains to be explored in greater detail, but we can surely expect the level of diversity within the artistic mainstream of the 8th and 9th centuries to increase as new, detailed analyses are undertaken on the rapidly expanding corpus of metal-detector finds.

Also brought into focus by the chronological sweep of the book is the heightened use of personal ornaments for ostentatious display, a theme which Hinton explores in relation to a variety of social and economic triggers. We are used to seeing such discussions framed in the context of early medieval society, as for example the remarkable acts of consumption of gold and exotics witnessed by elite burials of the 7th century. However, in the final three chapters Hinton usefully extends his social examination to the ritualized gift-exchanges and strictly codified costume culture of the high and later medieval periods invoking — as previously in the pages of this Journal — closure theory to provide a deeper explanatory framework. Just as interesting, though perhaps more controversial, are his explanations for contrasting periods when the production of precious metalwork appears to fall into steep decline. One such era is the 10th and 11th centuries when Hinton argues that falling output of silver jewellery has less to do with the economics of supply (in this instance punitive Danegeld levies) and more to do with overt displays of wealth becoming outmoded as financial investment was increasingly directed at the church, the acquisition of land and the aggrandisement of estate residences.

Given the ground covered by Hinton's analysis it is only to be expected that there will be disagreement over a number of his specific attributions. On the preponderance of examples derived from 10th-century levels at towns such as York and Ipswich, the disc-brooch bearing a backward-looking animal design shown in Fig. 3.5 would be more at home in a late 9th-10th- as opposed to a 7th–9th-century miscellany. More of an oversight is his statement that an openwork strap-end from Middle Harling, Norfolk, is the sole personal ornament certainly attesting to 10th- to 11th-century activity at that site (164): what of the diagnostic disc-brooches and stirrup-strap mounts (both three apiece), not to mention the mount bearing enamelled interlace ornament?

Such minor quibbles should not detract from what is otherwise an important scholarly contribution to medieval artefact studies, one which provides a much-needed synthetic companion to the steady stream of medieval finds corpora which have made it into print over the past 20 years. The book includes detailed and expansive notes covering some 100 pages. While some of the black and white photographs are on the dark side, the selection of plates and illustrations is judicious with internal consistency provided by Nick Griffiths's excellent line drawings and the decision to reproduce the objects (unless impracticable) lifesize; the reader is also afforded views of objects outside the public domain courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme. The last word should go to the series editors who are to
be commended for promoting artefact research as a vibrant strand within multi-disciplinary studies on medieval culture and society.

GABOR THOMAS


Although there are eleven contributions to the twelfth volume in the ASSAH series, the first nine take up fewer than 100 of the 217 pages. It is not, therefore, a standard conference volume, though several of the papers result from a Theoretical Archaeology Group session that discussed boundaries both physical and metaphysical. So Paul Barnwell can cover identity issues and the boundary between being 'Germanic' and 'Celtic', and how this may have been an issue of military status rather than race, whereas Nathalie Cohen can review the lower reaches of the River Thames and its tributaries with a useful gazetteer of sites and churches, and show the fluidity of its use and non-use at different times as any sort of frontier between *regiones*, kingdoms, dioceses or estates.

The other shorter contributions range no less widely; Duncan Brown argues that pottery's low status in the Anglo-Saxon period meant that it did not cross many boundaries, with Leigh Symonds pointing out that tolls may already have been a disincentive to such movement, before discussing territories in Lincolnshire and liminal zones like fenland. Aliki Pantos shows that hundred meeting-places tended to be near parish boundaries and on common ground, and Turner suggests that enclosed church sites were an influence on enclosed settlements, demonstrating property rights. Pitt and Semple both study aspects of Wiltshire, the former trying to find minster *parochiae*, which he points out cannot be assumed to be reflected directly in the boundaries of the hundreds, the latter trying to identify shifting political power in prominent 7th-century burials and taking up O'Brien's concept of 'sentinels' in a transitional world of the dead, a theme pursued in the only historical contribution, by Victoria Thompson, on the stages of dying in Christian thought.

The much longer paper by Andrew Reynolds is a review of the evidence for settlement topography from the 5th to the 14th century, arguing that enough sites have now been excavated for a coherent sequence to be seen, progressing from open sites with no obvious distinctions between different units or properties, through a phase where high-status elements were emphasized by greater rectilinearity and enclosure, into manorial sites with appended settlements, ending with population expanding and pushing over the boundaries. This model is stronger in some parts than others, as dating is often within wide ranges, the key sites of Chalton and Wicken Bonhunt remain unpublished 30 years after their excavation, and, although there are now more sites of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries than 20 years ago, they are still under-represented. Nevertheless, archaeology is showing that there are new ways of addressing issues such as nucleation and the development of manorial systems.

The report on an excavation of a large gravel-terrace site outside Godmanchester occupies more than a third of the volume, and could have been edited down (the most interesting individual artefact, an iron balance-arm, gets discussed twice, on pp. 184 and 189; but it was fragmentary and might be residual Roman, like a number of other things) and have achieved greater consistency (after the animal bones have been shown to have a particularly high ratio of elderly sheep, implying emphasis on wool production, 197, which could account for the balance-arm and the high proportion of weaving implements compared to other artefacts, the final conclusion stresses self-sufficiency, 214 — so why the abnormal ratios compared to other sites?). The earliest feature on the site is an enclosure,
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credibly interpreted as a corral for stock as it seems not to have had buildings inside it, at least in the excavated part, but was soon followed by a second enclosure, in which five Sunken-Featured Buildings were excavated. As the site is attributed to the 6th and 7th centuries, with some of the pottery allowing a start-date back in the 5th (183), the enclosures seem a little early to conform fully with Reynolds’s model. It seems to be more different from the norm than is fully allowed for in the discussion.

DAVID A. HINTON


The famous excavations on the island of Helgö, in the Mälaren area of central Sweden, began over 50 years ago and were concluded in 1964, with some further work in 1981. Since the beginning of the 1960s, there has been relatively steady publication of the results in a series of reports: primary excavation reports were followed by two volumes on the workshop area, the features that had attracted international interest to the site, followed by a number of more specialized volumes variously on the landscape and specific classes of finds since the 1980s. 1988, however, saw the publication of a separate volume, Thirteen Studies on Helgö, a collection of essays, but the first book to face, head on, the increasingly fraught problem of defining the character and significance of the site. Some contributions, indeed, explicitly challenged Helgö’s special status: ‘an ordinary farmstead’, as Torun Zachrisson here summarizes that view. Looking back, that date seems in fact to have coincided with a loss of pace in the Excavations at Helgö series. The new volume, Exotic and Sacral Finds, is an attempt to reposition Helgö one more time, again as a leading site, now in relation to a yet newer current of archaeological thought.

The finds discussed here include a copper-alloy Buddha statuette and an enamelled copper-alloy Insular crozier-head. The Buddha is identified as of Indian manufacture, probably in the 6th century, but probably arrived on Helgö and was deposited in the 8th century. Although in a poor state of repair, it had not been used for scrap. The crozier-head is dated around a.d. 800 and was deposited towards the middle of the 9th century. Endorsed in Torun Zachrisson’s concluding essay to this volume is a view first proposed by Wilhelm Holmqvist in the 1960s that its presence here can be linked to the known establishment of a small Christian community in the area by Ansgar in the 830s.

These finds count, in different ways, as both exotic and sacral, being foreign and rare as well as of originally religious character. More familiar Scandinavian types of object for which a sacral character is implied include two 6th-century gold bracteate-fragments and 26 gold-foil figures, commonly known by the Danish term guldgubber, here dated principally to the period around a.d. 700. The bulk of the present volume is in fact occupied by a comprehensive and detailed review of this artefact-type in Sweden by Jan Peder Lamm: a most useful survey in light of the increasing quantity of corresponding studies from Denmark, inspired above all by the huge quantities found in the 1980s at Sorte Muld on Bornholm. Along with a thorough review of past discussions and interpretations of such figures, there is an illustrated catalogue of the finds from Sweden and a review of all fourteen find-places. Together with the bracteate-fragments, all the foil figures at Helgö were found in the central Building Group 2, and most around one structure, Foundation 1. Other Swedish sites from which larger collections of foil figures are known include the Eketorp fort on Öland, Sölinge in Halland, and Uppåkra in Skåne. Three looped and unusually thick silhouette figures from part of the substantial gold hoard of the early 7th century found at Hög Edsten, Bohuslän.
Among the important details in the catalogue of these objects are weights for most of them, in some cases down to a tenth of a milligram. These pieces of foil are small, thin and extremely light. Consistently larger examples are typical of some of the sites (Eketorp, Sloinge and Hog Edsten), but the majority, like nearly all the finds from Helgö, weigh less than 100 mg, with a median weight as low as 50–60 mg. Full comparative data from the Danish sites have yet to be assembled, but the data from Sweden would appear to be entirely in line with the weights that have been reported from there. Even with a median weight of 100 mg, the whole known corpus of just under 3,000 foil figures will therefore represent less than a 300 grammes of gold — of varying fineness, as the present volume shows. These data throw into sharp focus the acute shortage of gold in Scandinavia in the two centuries preceding the historical beginning of the Viking Period; at the same time, the iconographic peculiarity of the foil figures demonstrates the continuing symbolic value of the metal.

Torun Zachrisson’s reflective concluding essay discusses the finds in relation to the sites on Helgö under the title of ‘The Holiness of Helgö’ (Helgö means ‘Holy Island’). She discusses how ritual activities over a period of several centuries may be represented archaeologically, making particularly strong use of the topographical peculiarities of the location: the building groups on the shaded northern side of a high point and immediately adjacent to a large bare rock. There are certainly some curious finds here, such as the unusually large amounts of carbonized bread from the late Roman Period, and amuletic miniatures and what may be medical implements from the Viking Period. In some places, though, the persistence of a mystical character is only rather vaguely asserted, as when we are simply told that ‘smithing and casting had great ideological significance’ in Migration-period Scandinavia.

There is certainly enough here to make the point that Helgö was, after all, a site of central importance in this region from the 3rd to the 9th centuries. Enough, too, to open even sceptical eyes to the fact that routine productive activities may equally provide direct evidence of the roles of ritual and religion. A sanctuary can allow practical skills to flourish within the framework of social power and ideology. Zachrisson argues, implicitly, that the importation of a religion known to us, Christianity, denied and broke a centuries-long continuity of holiness of topography and location here and so ushered in the loss of regional pre-eminence. It is, however, difficult to see quite that continuity without the eye of a different sort of faith. Christianity did come into this area early, but did so only temporarily, and as a token and harbinger of profound economic and political changes in Scandinavia’s relationships with the wider world: not least the powerful Moslem states. What really grounds the renewed religious characterization of Helgö is the series of recent discoveries at comparable religious centres — at Gudme, Tisso and Upplåker in particular. Helgö has here been shown to have a religious character we can explore, but the case that the site’s history can be adequately explained primarily in sacral terms has yet to be made. Rather than interpretations of Helgö being a cipher of changes in archaeological fashion over the past half-century, it is perhaps fairest to say that emphases on different aspects of what has been found at this enigmatic site have developed in light of both more sophisticated general ideas and richer comparative evidence since found elsewhere. One wonders what more we have still to discover both from and about this site.

JOHN HINES


It may come as something of a surprise that David Hill and Margaret Worthington’s *Offa’s Dyke: History and Guide* is the first major book about this remarkable 8th-century linear
earthwork — one of the most impressive archaeological monuments in Britain — since the collected publication of Sir Cyril Fox’s pre-war survey work in 1935, Hill and Worthington quickly strike the sort of consciously revisionist tone which might be expected after such a time gap, with their analysis based on the evidence provided by their own 30-year-long programme of Offa’s Dyke excavation and survey.

For a start, they peremptorily reject the established ‘sea to sea’ view of the extent of the dyke. According to Hill and Worthington, only the 64 miles of more or less unbroken earthwork in the central Marches is really Offa’s Dyke, with other supposed isolated sections to the north and south re-interpreted as unrelated structures. In addition, they offer a no less definitive explanation of its purpose — that the dyke was built as a defensible (if not heavily defended) earthwork specifically erected by Offa’s Mercia against a belligerent 8th-century kingdom of Powys. The book even suggests how the dyke might have ‘worked’ in this way, with associated chains of beacons, fortified settlements and mobile patrols all looking eminently plausible in the elegant storyboard style narrative drawings which anchor the ‘How and Why’ explanatory chapter.

The forceful clarity of these findings does engender some degree of initial tolerance of the book’s superficial shortcomings. Perhaps one might forgive it for never quite being either the ‘history’ or the ‘guide’ of the subtitle (it has little to say about the story of the monument after the 8th century, and would be of limited use as a field handbook). Likewise, other immediate complaints — the absence of a reading list, the slightly uneasy mix of popular and academic strands, and the ‘grey’ presentation without colour photographs — could also be dismissed as relatively trivial flaws.

However, it is harder similarly to excuse more significant errors and omissions. To take one of the more glaring examples, Offa’s Dyke ‘proper’ is unequivocally presented (and mapped) in this book as a uniformly designed structure always having a western ditch. Yet, as Fox accurately recorded 70 years ago, there are significant sections of the dyke in Radnorshire and south Shropshire where the surviving earthwork clearly appears to have an eastern ditch. Whatever explanatory significance may or may not be attached to such patterns, it is mystifying that Hill and Worthington overlook this sort of basic detail.

Once the confident rhetoric of factual observation is questioned, the whole edifice begins to look rather shaky. Hill and Worthington’s rejection of the traditionally recognized southern end of Offa’s Dyke in Gloucestershire as no more than a slight, intermittent and scarcely visible feature bears little apparent relation to the often massive, mostly continuous and generally impressive earthwork which any visitor will see in the Lower Wye valley. There are significant problems of both accuracy and consistency here; there is nothing especially anomalous about the low and eastern ditched sections of Offa’s Dyke on St Briavel’s Common (Gloucestershire) if the similar lengths on Hawthorn Hill (Radnorshire) or Panpunton Hill (Shropshire) are also correctly described in the same terms.

Ultimately, the problem is that the particular focus of the evidence from Hill and Worthington’s numerous small scale excavations is not, at the next level, enough to support the grand ‘we’ve solved Offa’s Dyke in entirety’ claim they are straining to promote. Not only does their analytical perspective consequently lack the strength of consistent overview which Fox achieved (whether or not all his observations and interpretations now seem valid), but ironically, Hill and Worthington also lay themselves open to much the same critique they aggressively level at Fox — namely that of allowing preconceptions to influence ‘primary’ description of the data.

This gradual unravelling of Hill and Worthington’s revisionist agenda extends to their ideas about the function of the dyke. The fact that their ‘defensible’ model is, by their own admission, entirely unsupported by archaeological evidence, is presented as a necessary concession to extracting any story at all from a ‘dead’ structure such as Offa’s Dyke. Yet this need to resort to unashamed make-believe is largely self-inflicted. Their attempt to make a critical virtue of effectively simplifying the dyke and its form only really succeeds in
erasing exactly the kind of contextual details and contrasts from which more sophisticated and substantive archaeological explanation could have grown. 

Offa’s Dyke: History and Guide is a long overdue re-evaluation of this extraordinary structure, and is important for the collected overview of Hill and Worthington’s research evidence which it presents. However, if less critical general readers may well find the result mostly fulfilling, those hoping for a more academically rigorous insight will probably conclude that this book leaves Offa’s Dyke all too firmly in the Dark Ages.

IAN BAPTY


Villard de Honnecourt was a remarkable man, who was born in northern France at the beginning of the 13th century, and made a notebook of drawings between about 1225 and 1250 (a unique survival). Like Leonardo da Vinci’s later notebooks, they contain everything from doodles to internal and external elevation drawings of several bays of Reims Cathedral at the time it was being built. There are also a lot of annotated drawings of machines, and sketches of how to do things in masonry, for example ‘how to cut the mould of a great arch in a space of 3 feet’ or ‘how to make an apse with 12 windows’. It also contains some very interesting plans, for example of the Cistercian abbey at Vaucelles between Villard’s home and Cambrai, and a series of drawings of artistic and costumed figures. The original manuscript is in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, but various complete facsimile editions have been published over the last century and a half. The best English edition, in my opinion, is still Robert Willis’s Facsimile of the Sketch-Book of Wilars de Honcort, which he translated, edited and studied in a now-scarce book, published in 1859.

Seven hundred years after Villard, another remarkable Frenchman (with an English mother!), Jean Gimpel (1918–96), wrote about Villard, and many other aspects of medieval technology, most famously in his books The Cathedral Builders and The Medieval Machine. He also helped publish a new edition of Villard’s notebook, and founded an ‘Association Villard de Honneecourt’. This was joined in 1985, to an American body as the ‘Association Villard de Honneecourt for the Interdisciplinary Study of Medieval Technology, Science and Art’ (AVISTA), and it is this body which has published this book in Jean Gimpel’s memory.

After a brief introduction, there is a useful obituary of Gimpel (by Carl F. Barnes), a select bibliography of his work, and an essay on ‘Jean Gimpel and the Legacy of Medieval Technology’ by Charles Stegeman. There is also a portfolio of selected folios from Villard’s notebook. After this is the main book with fourteen chapters divided into two parts, ‘Art and Architecture’ and ‘Science and Technology’. The wide variety of subjects covered show Gimpel’s many interests. In the first part, among others, are essays on ‘Architectural Geometry and the Portfolio’ (Nigel Hiscock), ‘Reims Cathedral and the Portfolio’ (William W. Clark), ‘Villard and Masons’ Marks’ (Jenny Alexander) and ‘The use of Tufa Webbing and Wattle centering in English Vaults’ (Malcom Thurlby). This last article, which is well illustrated, should be of particular interest to readers of this journal, as will perhaps, the first paper in Part II, ‘The Medieval Horse Harness: Revolution or Evolution? A Case Study in Technological Change’, by Paul J. Gans, a chemistry professor from New York University. The later chapters in this part are also most stimulating (though sometimes a bit obscure to this reviewer!), but are perhaps of lesser interest to readers of Medieval Archaeology. They include papers on ‘Astronomy, Time and Churches in the Early Middle Ages’ (Stephen C. McClusky), ‘The Art of Radically Coherent Geometry’ (Robert
D. Stevick) and ‘Euclidean Geometry in the Early Middle Ages’ (Wesley M. Stevens). There is also a paper on ‘Technological Innovation and Control at the Medieval Venetian Mint’ (Alan M. Stahl), and to complete the volume, one on ‘Diagram and Thought in Medieval Science’ (John North). All in all, a real pot-pourri, which does some justice to Jean Gimpel’s remarkable life.

In the end, however, this is a rather unsatisfactory book, and it is perhaps now time for a new English edition of Villard’s notebook to be published. One could do no better than produce an updated version of Robert Willis’s Facsimile of 1859, with a new introduction and bibliography, and dedicated to the memory of Jean Gimpel, ‘Iconoclaste du XXe siècle’, as he wanted to be called on his tombstone.

TIM TATTON-BROWN


It is hardly surprising that the Reformers had difficulties with the veneration of saintly images. How could the Mosaic prescription against the worship of ‘graven images’ be reconciled with the kinds of activity to be seen in any English parish church in the late Middle Ages: tapers lit before statues or wall paintings; prayers manifestly addressed to, rather than through, representations of saints; the bestowing of ornaments and jewellery? Some Marian images sported as many changes of costume as a Barbie doll. Richard Marks’s magisterial survey of Late-medieval images in England — both statuary and wall-paintings — charts this forgotten territory and much more besides. He rightly contends that ‘it is impossible to understand the physical and social fabric of the medieval parish church without reference to the devotional image’.

The huge loss of English art caused by the reformers has been brought home in recent years by several exhibitions: the wide-ranging *Gothic Art* and, more idiosyncratic in its approach, the exhibition *Image and Idol* (Tate Gallery, September 2001–March 2002), resulting from a collaboration between the artist Richard Deacon and the art historian Phillip Lindley. These forcibly emphasized how little survived the Reformation, and Marks’s descriptions reinforce the point. The survivals are all the more precious: smaller alabaster images could be smuggled away, sometimes abroad; others might be judiciously concealed, such as the superb *Assumption* from Sandford-upon-Thames, perhaps originally from Abingdon Abbey, which was recycled (upside-down) as a step; Charles Tracy’s 2003 paper failed to make the bibliography. Others, like the stunning image of St Margaret from Fingringhoe, were walled up. Marks is perhaps over-modest when he claims that ‘this is a book about images without images’; for if the objects themselves have so often vanished, he succeeds in recreating by illustration, contemporary quotations, and vivid description not only the images themselves, but the people who venerated them.

Marks adopts a thematic treatment: the ‘definition of the devotional image in the public space of the church’; Marian images; patronal images; local ‘saintly helpers’; devotional practice, both private and public; the production of images; their destruction. The vast field is brought into closer focus by concentrating on two specific areas: Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and Kent (though this is emphatically not just a regional study). The evidence of wills provides interesting insight into the more ‘private’ attitudes of individual faithful towards local devotional images; discussion of fraternities illustrates the role that images played in formal, ‘public’ devotion in the late Middle Ages.

The reviewer came to this book from the standpoint of a long interest in local relic cults. The activities inspired by devotional images were similar to those hitherto pursued at shrines — kissing, the deposition of ex-votos, monetary payments — activities which
continued at major cult centres, notably cathedral and monastery churches. With the growth in the thirteenth century of the parish church, lacking cults of local saints, images provided an alternative focus of saintly veneration. An image was capable of arousing a more personal, affective response than a mere reliquary containing a fragmentary relic. Furthermore, the popular saints of Western Christendom could acquire a 'local' significance through their images in a way that tiny fragments were unlikely to achieve. In particular the emergent cult of the Virgin (who, having left no corporeal relics, was particularly well served by image cults), lent itself to localization; the possessive adjective in the phrase 'Our Lady' acquired a new, restricted sense when combined with a place-name — thus 'Our Lady of Woolpit' and 'Our Lady of Ipswich' could be regarded as separate, undoubtedly local, even rival saints — a point that was not lost on the reformers. A volume of this sort deserves the best possible illustrations, and here there are some disappointments, no doubt resulting mainly from economic considerations. The professionally taken photographs and the half-tone adaptations of colour slides are too easily distinguished; some images could manifestly have been improved after scanning, and some are reproduced larger than their quality permits. The text, however, is mercifully free of typographical errors, apart from the usual crop of mis-spellings in foreign languages, an endemic failure with English editors. Thus an accent is missing in the opening quote; *vierge* acquires a spurious grave accent throughout the book, including quoted titles (presumably introduced by some sub-editor with a spell-checker); *aujourd'hui* bears an un-Gallic hyphen. A few minor errors of fact might be rectified in subsequent editions: St Swithun (d. 862) could not have been Dunstan’s co-reformer (69); James, son of Alphaeus is surely always, albeit ungrammatically, known as ‘St James the Less’ (not ‘Lesser’) (220); Christ Church Canterbury was a cathedral priory, not an abbey church (190); Ashingdon church (Essex) is portrayed from the NE on page 226 rather than ‘from the south’. Finally, I cannot be the only reader to detest end-notes, requiring the permanent insertion of an increasingly numb finger. Even running heads indicating the relevant chapter or page-span would have helped. Ideally, though, the commendably short notes could just as well have been user-friendly footnotes. These are minor quibbles: Richard Marks has written an exciting and definitive study of a fascinating aspect of late medieval ecclesiastical life. The prose is elegant, spiced on occasion with humour and gentle irony. The book deserves a place on the bookshelves of any student of English medieval history.

JOHN CROOK


This edited volume brings to press the results and main finds of a series of excavations undertaken at the cathedral baptistery of Mantua in central north Italy by the Lombardy Soprintendenza in the mid-1980s; publication of this archive material, overseen by the highly productive Prof. Brogiolo, fortunately coincided with the 1200th anniversary of the discovery of the reliquary of the ‘Most Precious Blood of Christ’. The origins of the baptistery had been assumed to be late 5th or early 6th century in date on the basis of an extant mosaic; however, the excavations and related finds now suggest construction as late as the 7th century and thus in the period of Lombard control of Mantua. As Brogiolo highlights in his Introduction, Mantua was a focal point of Byzantine/imperial resistance against Lombards in the later 6th century, succumbing only in A.D. 602–3. A key question has been how ‘urban’ the centre remained across these conflicts; extensive work in Brescia and Milan has provided disputed images of decayed towns with haphazard settlement in
the 6th and 7th centuries and the detailed re-analysis of the Mantua data offer useful new insights.

The excavations focused on an area of 100 sq m north of the baptistery. The surrounding area had in fact suffered badly in 1958 when, to build a new episcopal seminary, a section of late antique town wall and the Romanesque church of S. Paolo were cleared away; insertion of a boiler room in 1969 and rebuilding work on the Casa dei Canonici in 1981 did further damage, but with better awareness and recovery of the archaeology. However, only in 1984–7 were systematic excavations undertaken in the zone to clarify the seat of the ancient cathedral complex (11). Key is the octagonal baptistery which, in the 11th century, was incorporated as the apse to an enlarged church of S. Paolo; however, the absence of a central font has raised the possibility that the building was a mausoleum in origin. At least five ‘privileged’ burials gathered around the north of the building from the mid-seventh century: two tombs had painted plaster, one was in a reused sarcophagus, two others in built chambers. From the 9th century, to the west, earth-cut burials appear, with a majority (63%) of young infants and a preponderance of young female adults (22–36). Predating the privileged burials was a walled building which underwent decay and then demolition in c. A.D. 600; a sequence of two timber huts followed, each associated with Lombard ceramics. Isolated stratigraphies make the relationships between baptistery, houses, mosaic and later church problematic, but one interpretation offered by Brogiolo is that the baptistery and burials in fact belong to an Arian Lombard funerary or episcopal church (to be related to a documented church of S. Speciosa — 21–2). Only in the 8th century would this have been rededicated as a Catholic church, followed by an expansion and redecoration of the structures in the 9th century (44–5).

The volume features thirteen articles and reports; seven are concerned with finds such as the terra sigillata (89–93), the transport amphorae (99–104) and the Lombard ceramics (95–8), while others detail the skeletal material (Gandioli, 47–56, with an excellent palaeobiological analysis) and related grave finds (Rottoli, 129–32, on the gold thread from tomb 1266; Possenti on the metal and bone-work, 117–23, but also with a discussion on and appendix of other gold thread finds in Italy: 119–21, 124–8); Ibsen (133–40) reviews some of the early medieval art from the tombs (such as painted crosses) and from the baptistery site (notably the ambo panels) and Baggio reconsiders the mosaic, first revealed in 1970 and viewed as belonging to a corridor linking episcopal church and baptistery (57–61). The above papers are framed by Brogiolo’s detailed summary of the actual excavations (11–40) and a review by Menotti and Manicardi of the scattered and fragmentary data for late antique and early medieval Mantua and its environs (141–59, noting especially the traces of circuit walls).

This is a compact and well presented volume, supported by a good range of black and white images (though it would have benefited from a few colour photographs of the mosaic, artwork, and tombs). Creating a coherent and informative analysis of these important but long unpublished excavations is to be commended; one might also applaud the involvement of at least two doctorate students in contributing articles here, reflecting yet more new blood being injected into what has become a strong early medieval archaeology in Italy.

NEIL CHRISTIE


After a long wait, it is good to have more of the results of the excavations carried out in 8th-century layers at Ribe in Jutland in the years 1970–6 published. The previous four
reviews

Volumes came out from 1981 to 1990. This is the second volume of analyses and discussions of individual categories of finds. Volume 3 had a series of reports on organic and mineral items. Largely as a consequence of disruption to the publication plans, the new volume is more miscellaneous, although dealing reasonably consistently with various aspects of metalwork, plus glass and ceramics, alongside fragments of human bone, one of which bore a runic inscription of huge importance, and a brief report on the botanical identification of wood fragments.

The pause in the process of publication has in fact given Mogens Bencard, the director of work in Ribe in the 1960s and 70s, a valuable opportunity to reassess the site, taking account of subsequent excavations in the area directed by the late Stig Jensen and others. His introduction shows some frustration at both the delay in completing the report upon his work and the surprisingly antagonistic relationships between the different excavators and their representations of Ribe’s earliest history. However this short chapter now contains a crucial new chronological scheme for the archaeological phasing of 8th-century Ribe which synthesizes Jensen’s results from Sankt Nikolajgade 8 and the Post Office site with Bencard’s from Dommerhaven and Kunstmuseets have (i.e. ‘the garden of the Art Museum’) in an altogether more satisfactory way. The earliest phase of ‘urban’ character, with demarcated plots, datable wooden structures, and craft-production, is now dated c. 704–25. Phase 2, represented by a thick organic layer, extends from c. 725–60; Phase 3, with the accumulation of seasonal workshop layers, including late sceattas and the famous Berdal brooch-moulds, c. 760–800; and abandonment (Phase 4) from around the year 800 onwards. The hotly debated Phase 3 is now chronologically much more closely in line with the evidence from other Scandinavian towns, including Staraja Ladoga, and the historical Viking Period. This creates a new problem, though, of what on earth was going on at or around Ribe for something like 30–40 years between Bencard’s Phases 1 and 3: a period in which some had inferred that a newly established Danish kingship was flourishing, not least through its control of profitable centres such as Ribe.

The detailed reports in the current volume complement what has already been published in a predictable and solid way. Helge Brinch Madsen revisits the dating of the bronze-casting workshop in Kunstmuseets kælder (the cellar of the Art Museum) on the basis of the new chronology. Especially helpful is the fully illustrated conspectus of the pottery, plus clearly organized and practical information on both the ironwork and the non-ferrous metal artefacts. Here too is a discussion of anchors of this period, not hitherto available in English. There is a helpful discussion of glass-bead manufacture and even a report that manages to make something meaningful of the burnt daub fragments. The most important single item here, though, is the inscribed human skull fragment. This is a unique find of great importance to the study of both literacy and religion on the eve of the Viking Period in Scandinavia. The runes are transitional in form between the older and younger futharks. Marie Stoklund provides a detailed discussion of the text, which invokes the god Oðinn along with two other characters, one apparently called Úlf (wolf) and the other ‘High-Tîr’, in a protective charm, ð[ím]A uiArki (against this pain). Erling Benner Larsen provides a close technical study of the cutting of the runes, concluding that the inscription was added to a softened, damp cranial fragment, probably already disturbed from an earlier burial ground along with pieces of two further human skulls identified by Pia Bennike. Whether or not the person who inscribed even realized it was from a human skull can be doubted. Benner Larsen also concludes that the hole bored in the skull was not used to suspend it as a worn amulet.

This should not be the last volume in the series of reports on the excavations of 1970–6 in Ribe. A full report and discussion of the glassmaking evidence is still looked for. Not only would this properly complement the long-available report on the bronze-casting workshop and so round off the publication of these sites, but it would make important data available relating to a subject of burgeoning international research interest. It is to be
hoped that the publication of the current volume will help to see that satisfactory conclusion
to the scholarly presentation of these discoveries in Ribe achieved.

JOHN HINES

Il castello e l’uliveto. Insieme a trasformazioni del paesaggio dalle indagini archeologiche a Massa in
Valdinievole. Edited by Marco Milanese and Monica Baldassarri. 22 × 30 cm. 387 pp.,
550 monochrome & colour figs. and pls. San Giovanni Valdarno: Comune di Massa e

This volume explores the history, architecture, landscape and archaeology of the joint
Comune of Massa and Cozzile, two linked hilltop townships which lie in the Valdinievole
region of the province of Pistoia, Tuscany. Both can be viewed as typical medieval hilltop
centres, but with Massa the oldest unit, being recorded as the seat of a parish in the late 9th
century and by the mid- to late 13th century endowed with castle and attendant settlement
or borgo. It lay in an area disputed between the bishops of Lucca and the seigneurial ‘da
Buggiano’ family but its fairly late fortification may relate to local independent social
forces. In the early 14th century the young Comune was active in creating Massa’s
defences, and building the civic Palace, the main Fontana gate, and the church of
S. Michele. Various components of the medieval fabric of Massa survive, including the
street plan whose dominant feature is the ridge road. Cozzile, less than a kilometre distant,
originated as a dependent watchtower which had attracted a small community by c. 1300;
it gained walls and a church of San Iacopo soon after. While neither site is of major historic
or intrinsic architectural significance, close analysis of plans, buildings, documents,
archaeology and setting offers scope to draw coherent biographies of evolving communities
from their origins to modern times. A specific emphasis in the compilation of this volume
was to interrogate all periods and accordingly equal weighting is given to physical and
material aspects of the post-medieval and early modern sites and landscapes.

The volume is divided into two parts. Part I (15–97) comprises five papers which
consider the documents, the built habitat and the landscape setting of Massa in the last
millennium (Cozzile receives fairly limited discussion); Part II (99–373) is the extended
report on the survey and the two excavation seasons in the autumns of 1997–9 on the site
of the castle or rocca of Massa, locally known as Il Catrio. The volume editors, from Pisa
University, are the main authors throughout, alongside specialist excavation/finds reports
and local historical contributions on Massa. Andreazzoli’s very clear discussion of the
architecture (75–92) in particular identifies how documentary data report work on the
town walls in the early 14th century, yet do so only incidentally, noting properties
demolished or householders relocated. Thus the architectural survey aids in identifying a
likely single-phase construction programme to the grey sandstone circuit (87–91), extant
in segments, notably near the town’s highest ground, the Il Catrio. Excavation here thus
sought to verify the walls’ chronology, to trace any earlier defensive features to Massa and
to chart the decay of the walls and castle. The site lacks extant structures and so surface
survey and examination of the built terraces of a recently redundant olive grove was also
undertaken to observe especially aspects of reuse of stonework from the defunct curtain
wall. Key was the excavation of the angle tower in the highest corner, assignable to c. A.D.
1300, but shown to have been ruinous by the mid-15th century (110–23). Occasional
postholes relating to earlier timber occupational activity were revealed, but without any
secure associated and dateable finds — potentially this could denote early medieval
settlement of 9th–11th century date as recognized in other Italian upland seats and as
supported at Massa by the later 9th-century reference to a church (144–5, 110, 115–16).
Possible troop lodgings lay to the south of the tower, but these were largely burnt down at
the start of the 15th century and partly used as a dump subsequently (185). As a result of
the extensive agricultural reworking of the site almost nothing can be said of the medieval presence in terms of its society and economy; although the generally residual ceramic evidence offers indications of contacts and local productions, virtually no metalwork and no animal bones were associated with the lifetime of the tower and lodgings (see Milanese’s excellent review on the medieval and post-medieval ceramics recovered (these detailed individually in the excavation phasing discussions): 335–55. Baldassarri offers a tentative historico-archaeological interpretation of medieval Massa based on the findings: 44–9). A major strength of the excavations was the very close attention paid to the post-medieval phases, recognizing episodes of stone robbing and collapse of the medieval units (195–9), likely wholesale site disuse for the 17th–18th centuries, and the creation of an olive plantation in the early 19th century with levelling, drystone terraces and channels, enduring with some changes into the later 20th century. Milanese highlights the value of studying post-medieval Massa and its environs in Part I of the volume (53–73), when he examines the Valdinievole landscape in the 18th–19th centuries, noting especially late 18th-century acts of marshland reclamation, encouraging fuller cultivation of the surrounding plains and hillslopes, but prompting also a first serious depopulation of the hilltop seats. Former castle spaces at Buggiano, Uzzano and Massa were cleared and transformed in this new economic burst, which peaked in the valley by the mid-19th century.

While there is much interesting information presented in this attractive volume, arguably there are imbalances: the excavations are very fully reported in Part II, with much detail on the post-medieval phases, whereas Part I concentrates more on the medieval periods. The papers by Baldassarri (27–51) and Milanese (53–73) on medieval Massa and on the post-medieval landscape context respectively are both extremely useful in detailing the documentary data, but summarize also the excavation results; these interpretations might have been better presented in a separate Part III. One might also query the lack of discussion on the churches for the habitats in terms of their histories, architecture and art. Thus this volume brings together useful data to document a comune, and one township in particular; whilst the historical picture is enhanced by the architectural surveys, it is not greatly enhanced by the medieval archaeology of Il Catrio; what the studies do offer, however, is much on the break-up of a medieval habitat and its landscape.

Neil Christie


This volume brings together the substantial results of archaeological investigations carried out on the site of the Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire. This is primarily a report of excavations and ground surveys carried out by Oxford Archaeology between 1989 and 1992 in the inner ward and outer court of the medieval abbey with a synthesis of earlier work carried out at the site.

Despite the fact that this may have been one of the country’s wealthiest monasteries, documentary records are fragmentary and only five potential references survive from before the Conquest. The excavations only uncovered a fraction of the site. Yet despite this, detailed analysis of the surviving records coupled with the amount of evidence retrieved from both excavations and surveys, has provided a unique insight into an otherwise little known site. What emerges from the synthesis of the detailed documentary and archaeological analysis is a picture of the changing fortunes, throughout the medieval period, of a key monastic site. The first phases of the site are represented by a sequence of timber buildings superseded by a more organized pattern of timber halls and boundary
ditches. This possibly reflects the early monastery hinted at in the charter of King Burgred of Mercia of 864. Evidence then suggests a general decline in the monastery’s fortunes before it becomes subject to a substantial rebuilding programme in the first few decades of the 11th century. Of particular importance is evidence for well-defined plan form at this period including a possible walkway and a hall or refectory type structure. Evidence for such ‘claustral’ arrangements is particularly rare for this period and may be related to the concept of a formal cloister hinted at in the roughly contemporary Regularis Concordia composed by the reforming bishop, Aethelwold of Winchester, c. 970. Significantly, this phase also coincides with the appointment of the homilist and translator, Aelfric, who interestingly refers to a ‘refectory’ in his Letter to the Monks of Eynsham. Such major changes and the connection with such a widely regarded and influential figure as Aelfric have led the writers to suggest that Eynsham at this time may have been a major cultural centre within England. It is also possible that the pre-Conquest plan of Aelfric’s abbey may be reflected in the later medieval arrangement. If this is the case, it is suggested, the minster church itself may be contained, or lie directly below its later-medieval counterpart.

Evidence suggests that immediately after the Norman Conquest Eynsham appears to have adopted a low profile until its refoundation in the first decade of the 12th century. Despite fragmentary documentary sources for this period the archaeological evidence suggests significant rebuilding and a possible time of relative prosperity until its formal dissolution in December 1538. After this period it appears that there was some activity on the site, possibly related to the residence of the Stanley family, who may have had their lodgings in the former Abbot’s quarters. Of particular interest is the evidence for three post-Dissolution burials around the area of the former refectory. It is possible that these burials may be of recusants, likely servants of the notably Catholic-sympathizing Stanley family.

On the whole, the report is well structured throughout presenting the results in five clearly defined sections. Part One provides a background and survey of the limited documentary sources. Part Two presents the results of the excavations and is largely chronologically based, discussing the archaeological evidence from the Saxon period up until the post-Dissolution and later use of the site. Part Three presents the numerous finds reports. These are informative and detailed, presenting the results in a largely conventional way, structured by largely by material rather than function. The more noteworthy artefacts include a selection of musical instruments, writing equipment and various devotional objects. Part Four includes reports of earthwork and geophysical investigations within the monastic precinct. Finally, Part Five provides a broad discussion of the archaeological sequences of the Abbey’s development. Detailed appendices present the results of the archaeometric dating, an analysis of the archaeobotanical data and of the medieval window glass. It also sets the earlier development of the site in its local context with a discussion of neighbouring settlements. The illustrations are generally excellent with good use of colour to indicate clearly the phasing of each part of the site. This is a beautifully produced and comprehensive volume clearly laid out on good-quality paper and provides a significant contribution to our knowledge of medieval monasticism and provides an insight into what may have been one of England’s more important pre-Conquest ecclesiastical and cultural institutions.

Simon Roffey


This is a welcome and interesting book by two leaders in the field. There is plenty of evidence, and there are good quality colour plates and many black and white pictures (not
always of such good quality), mainly from the authors’ collection. Together this assemblage makes a useful contribution to our understanding of medieval urban defences. There is wide coverage: the focus is England and Wales, reference is made to the few fortified Scottish towns, notably Edinburgh, Perth and Stirling with some useful material on fortified Irish towns and occasional references to French and other European town defences. Clearly the authors have travelled far and wide to look at the defences they describe. There is a most helpful ‘Gazetteer of Surviving Remains’ at the end. There are six chapters which attempt, as the authors state, to ‘strike a balance between a chronological and thematic treatment’ of the topic. Chapter 1 (concepts and defences before c. 1050 A.D.); Chapter 2 (development of British and Irish towns to c. 1500 which ends rather abruptly on p. 118); Chapter 3 (sources and approaches); Chapter 4 explains military requirements, symbolism and economic necessity; Chapter 5 (town walls up to the present); Chapter 6 (reflections on central themes — but only two pages long). There is a great deal of material to manage and overall the authors do well to keep a geographical balance, although this reader found the chronology suffered at the expense of the themes, the text on occasion giving the impression that there was little dynamic change between 1050 and 1650. Some parts are especially good, for example the lively discussion of the post-medieval experience of town walls in Chapter 5. There are very nicely drawn comparisons, for example, Norwich’s Cow Tower and Southampton’s God’s House Tower as early artillery fortifications (114–5) among many others.

Some quite fundamental questions remain unanswered, for example who was the enemy against which town wall were constructed? Why, for example, was Southampton fortified on its landward side for a century and more before defences were erected (after the sack of 1338) on the seaward side? Dates of foundation are often given as opposed to dates of fortification. There is no in-depth discussion of geology: how the presence of town wall relates to local stone supplies across the countries. Were there differences between resourcing of episcopal, seigneurial and royal town defences? But these remain for another study, or another edition. The captions to figures are a great disappointment. They have been used to much greater effect, and much space is wasted. We are often told only what the picture shows in the most broad sense and the relationship to the text is not always clear (fig. 117, Chester wall-walk, is for some reason attached to a discussion of York, for example) and we are scarcely ever given a date for what is shown (see fig. 92 for an example and the pictures on p. 112). While we are spared large numbers of impenetrable archaeological drawings, some of those used (e.g. of Coventry, fig. 63) are reproduced so small that the text is illegible. The careful assembly of work on town defences from this journal’s Medieval Britain and Ireland section 1956–2001, is very interesting (though the caption says 1057), but the discussion seems in conflict with the data. There are the inevitable slips and snags which lie in wait for the unwitting generalist: punctuation of Richard’s Castle and St Andrew’s (sic) is variable, as is spelling of Winchcomb(e), etc.

It is easy to find fault in this large and detailed discussion of a fascinating topic, and this should not detract from the book’s patent merits. The authors are to be congratulated on their dedication and revival of a long-neglected topic, and especially on the range of defences discussed.

TOM BEAUMONT JAMES


Addressing his theme via an extraordinary wealth of documentary sources, Stoyle introduces a \textit{pot pourri} of information that will interest a wide range of academic and
non-specialist audiences. The main components of Part I, ‘The History of the City Walls’, are five thematic or chronological overviews. ‘The Nature of the City Defences’ gives a summary introduction to the various components; ‘Purpose and Function’ outlines not only the defensive but also the symbolic significance of the walls, and it also reveals other civic uses for the walls and their immediate environs. Some of these uses were official, such as the location of cages for the incarceration of wrong-doers, sited near the gates, but others were unofficial, such as pig-keeping in intra-mural gardens, or drying washing from the battlements. ‘Maintenance and Repair’ describes the annual civic ritual perambulation, the ‘murally walk’, which identified what remedial work was required; it goes on to summarize how such work was initiated, and how it was undertaken. This embraces issues such as organization and wages, provision of materials, etc. Chapters Four and Five consist of a chronological review of the city defences in, respectively, the Tudor and Early Stuart periods. Exeter was exceptionally closely associated with the Tudors, flourishing in particular under Henry VII. A century later, as the city disputed extra-mural lands with the crown, it asserted its rights of access linked to repair; it also had a vitriolic dispute with the Cathedral, alleging that the Cathedral Close compromised the city’s defensive security. In his ‘Conclusions’, Stoyle suggests that a round of repairs at the Restoration demonstrated Exeter’s Royalist credentials. By then, however, the defences were obsolete, and subsequently suffered periodic demolition — thus freeing the citizens from what had been their most expensive burden, albeit one that was normally discharged through renovation rather than wholesale renewal. ‘Suggestions for Further Reading’ is notable for the omission of references to archaeological studies of Exeter’s walls. A section of 26 plates, intruded at 30–1, includes reproductions of twelve maps and plans of Exeter from 1499 up to c. 1638; each is accompanied by a helpful orientation plan and a paragraph of comment. The remaining sixteen plates include late 18th- and 19th-century topographical prints, modern reconstruction drawings, and photos of the defences as they appear today.

Part II, ‘Documents Relating to the City Walls’ (109–204), consists of a short introduction on ‘The Exeter Receivers and their Accounts’ as a preface to a comprehensive series of extracts from these Accounts covering the period 1485–1660. These, and other documents, are translated into English where necessary. Other documents include expenses relating to repelling Perkin Warbeck in 1497, to civic ordnance in 1545, 1556, and 1643; to the ‘Commotion’ of 1549; and Instructions for the Defence of the City in 1643. Understanding of all this is helped by a useful Glossary and the work is underpinned by Notes and Indices. This documentary collection should prove a mine of information which future researchers can quarry.

Presented in a readily accessible form, enlivened by the quotation by historical anecdotes that are often amusing, and enhanced with the historical maps and plans, this should have an appeal, principally in Exeter but also elsewhere, that extends beyond the academic readership. Underpinned by a critical apparatus and providing a valuable compendium of documents, this is also a valuable contribution to continuing research. Whether it is presented in the best way to reach these various audiences is another matter, for a more popularly priced production that embraced much of Part I, plus the plates, would perhaps have introduced many more readers to this material. A searchable, web-based publication of Part II, The Documents, would have served academic interests just as well. What is missing, however, is the archaeological evidence to which all this relates.
This volume is a compilation of excavation interims and related studies published previously in a variety of venues, either conference proceedings or national or local journals. As the editor highlights, the volume serves as a 'working review' of the ten seasons of field study at Geridu in advance of the final research monograph. The papers — reproduced in their original published format — are largely organized chronologically, with the first 70 pages made up of the preliminary report on the 1995–6 excavations first published in Archeologia Medievale, whilst the final 35 pages offer a documentary analysis of the history and population of the site and its wider context. This discussion by Meloni argues that the north Sardinian village of Geridu, first documented in the early 15th century, was probably abandoned around the start of the 15th century, as one of a number of villages in the zone which struggled in the 14th century, in part due to the spread of the Black Death and part also to fiscal demands from urban Sassari to the south, prompting the relocation of remaining residents to the villages of Sennori and Sorso to the north. The church of S. Andrea alone persisted until its demolition in 1840. Texts overall show that of 800 villages documented for the early 14th century, fewer than half remained active by the late 15th (10–11, 82).

The Geridu field project (with a team drawn from Sassari, Genoa and Siena Universities and in collaboration with the regional Soprintendenza) sought to provide a first detailed image of a deserted medieval village in Sardinia in terms of format, extent, material culture and contacts; the question of origins was also important, since surface finds and material recovered in medieval deposits hint strongly of a Roman and late antique farm in this location (108). Surface survey indicated a medieval settlement area of c. 10–14 hectares, with outlying units. This extension, combined with the documentary data which suggest a population at its height of over 1,000 persons, makes Geridu more a borgo or township than a village. Whilst areas have been badly damaged or lost through modern ploughing and other farm activity and through stone robbing (this perhaps in fact or township than a village. Whilst areas have been badly damaged or lost through vegetation cover, excavations have been able to examine over fifteen houses, a sizeable courtyard complex, a ‘palazzo’ close to the church, and part of the cemetery (all features best reviewed in the 1997–9 interim, 103–12. The church was examined by the Soprintendenza in 1984 and 1986 — pp. 65–71). The medieval houses (some with space for animal stalling) appear ordered in rows in many areas, with narrow passages between; construction is in rough local limestone with clay bonding (only the church and ‘palazzo’ feature mortar) and tiled roofs. Internally rooms had beaten earth floors, fireplaces set near the doors, plus storage spaces/pits, and mobile furniture. The ceramic repertoire indicated good contacts with local and urban markets which accessed 13th- and 14th-century glazed and maiolica imports from Liguria, Tuscany and also Spain; the local manufactures comprised the main unglazed, functional house and cooking wares (see detailed summary on 113–21, updating earlier summaries on 48–61). The relative absence of 15th-century finds supports the documentary image of general village abandonment by then, and so far only residual finds suggest 12th-century occupation and origins. In fact, a number of the houses examined showed destruction or serious decay already in the first half of the 14th century (one house contained a deposit with abandoned tools and some weapons also, suggestive of military actions against the community — 86, 91, 106. Documents indeed indicate episodes of violence in the village and zone: 142–5). Decay of other structures is evident from the mid-14th century, but with signs of some later ‘squatter’ and robbing activity.

All told, this is an interesting site, aided by a useful local documentary record, and thus publication of these Miscellanea is of value. But whilst the idea of combining articles in
a single volume is a useful one, where dealing with archaeological fieldwork interims it inevitably leads to a level of duplication. Most problematic is the inclusion of the second paper (81–98) which features often verbatim copies of the first interim’s text (for example the conclusions of pp. 94–6 match those of 73–6); even the third piece, from a Sardinian journal, is a short synthesis of the first. Far better to have omitted these and provided a fuller introduction or to have commissioned a further paper, perhaps identifying the current levels of research on villages elsewhere on the island. Nonetheless, the volume does at least bring to our attention the Geridu project, to highlight its value and perhaps to stimulate sources of funding (the editor identifies a limited financial base — 103). As importantly, the project has provided a prompt to establishing at Sorso a Museo dei Villaggi Abbandonati della Sardegna and a research group at Sassari University (7–8, 111) to broaden the very restricted understanding of medieval Sardinia.

Neil Christie


As one drives out of Oxford along the A40 towards Witney and Cheltenham it is impossible not to notice a huge area of flooded gravel pits lining the road between Yarnton and Cassington. Fortunately for archaeology the excavation was preceded by an investigative project, which extended over seven years and several miles of grand terrace and Thames floodplain, covering not only individual Saxon settlements but also the broader environment and changing land use patterns associated with them. This report is the result; its first to fourth chapters concentrate on the synthesis and overview of the Saxon (there is not much Medieval) evidence followed by the archaeological investigations themselves, to which it is fully cross-referenced.

Comparatively little is known about Saxon settlements as compared with burial practice. Their detection has been made difficult by the ephemeral remains of Saxon occupation, the sparse amount of material culture, allied to the difficulty of locating sites from the air (often the masking effects of alluviation) and the friability of the pottery. It is all the more exciting that Gill Hey has revealed in her excavations a great area of Anglo-Saxon landscape over a long period from the 5th to the 12th centuries. Yarnton has produced a large number of sunken featured buildings, dispersed and loosely structured dating from the 5th century, and in general, farming areas previously settled by Romano-British farmers. A more formally organized landscape with four or five timber halls and other post built structures dating from the 7th-8th centuries lying within ditched enclosures followed the early Saxon settlement. It has to be admitted that the information about the structures at Yarnton is much less detailed than that gained from Millett’s excavations at Cowdery’s Down, Hampshire (Arch J., 149, 151–279), and Hinchcliffe’s at Cowage Farm (Arch J., 143, 240–59). None of the floors of the buildings have survived ploughing. The fact that the post holes were not dug opposite to one another suggested that there must have been continuous wall plates to take roof timbers (60). The status of these hall-like structures was uncertain, but the paucity of finds made it unlikely that they were of high status. The presence of halls recalls the tradition of multipurpose hall-like barns found in North Germany, rather than the halls of heroes recalled in Beowulf.

More important, perhaps, than the structural evidence is the considerable information assembled about the development of the landscape between the 5th and 12th centuries. Field walking, pollen analysis and a study of insect and plant remains give information about the area under cultivation at different times, and the extent of manuring. There was no regeneration of woodland following the breakdown of the late Roman economy but
there was a decline in arable cultivation, which was reversed in the late Saxon period. Some areas of the floodplain were brought under cultivation in the medieval period, but deep double-ditched boundaries separate the hay meadow from the arable fields, clearly designed to keep grazing animals out.

Turning to agricultural production, it would appear that barley was the chief crop in the early period but hulled wheats (emmer and spelt), are also found up to the 9th century. Rye and free-threshing wheats later predominate, and oats also appeared. The discovery of a bundle of flax shows that flax retting was practised, a technique already noticed in Oxford (Dodd, ed., 2003). The excavators surmise that the Yarnton peasants were not a self-sufficient community; they sold their grain surpluses to the inhabitants of Oxford and other local towns (56). They also took part in a local exchange network in south-east England, as the imports of Ipswich ware shows. Some indication of where the Saxon inhabitants of Yarnton ended up is seen in the small family group burials without grave goods found in the fields near the settlements; keeping one’s ancestors nearby, guarding the territory, is a custom still followed around Xian in Central China.

One feature, which emerges from the series of well-drawn (and frequently coloured) maps is the shifting nature of settlement from west to east, and then to north-east. This meant that the early enclosures associated with the village tended to obliterate the open field landscape. The ridge and furrow was best preserved in areas least used for arable cultivation. Fig. 11–1 shows areas of open fields: it would have been more helpful if the actual number of ridges had been plotted onto it.

Since so much has been wrung out of so little, more could have been made of the admittedly exiguous documentary record. The text of Domesday is quoted in extenso, but there is no commentary linking it to the rest of the story (216–7). There is, however, an admirably full account of the lot meadows, a practice of dividing up valuable hay meadows, which lasted up to the 20th century.

JOHN STEANE


The volume fittingly opens with heartfelt recollections from five members of the Wharram team about the special influence of John Hurst on their own life experiences, both at Wharram Percy and later in their careers. Publication of the results of the Wharram project continues here with the report on excavations of the north manor area and the north-west enclosure, largely between 1976–90. While Philip Rahtz and Lorna Watts are the principal authors, the volume includes the work of 36 other contributors, including Hurst himself on the excavation of Sites 13 and 83 (with Steve Roskams).

Apart from revealing medieval archaeology, the excavations recorded a variety of features of Iron Age and Roman date and their importance lies in the degree of determining influence that these early elements have had in shaping the form of later occupation. In particular, the holloway bounding the southern side of the North Manor follows the line of Late Iron Age or Early Roman farms are the first clear evidence for permanent settlement. Occupation continued into the Late Roman period, with a series of other finds from across Wharram Percy as a whole and including two villas and other sites in the wider landscape.

The ‘transition’ from ‘Roman’ to ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is considered in several ways. Terminal late Roman decline is one possible model. The nature of the Late Roman finds across the North Manor area, however, is collectively indicative of a high-status Roman
building. Although such has not yet been found, Rahtz et al. reasonably argue the close proximity of such a structure, or at least its ancillary buildings, and that their apparent wrecking may well have occurred after their final occupation in the late 4th or early 5th century. Bailie’s volcanic/impact hypothesis for an earlier 6th-century environmental catastrophe is raised as a possible factor when considering the 6th century at Wharram. The major issue is that concrete evidence for early medieval settlement comes in the form of the two Sunken Featured Buildings from Site 60 about which there has much debate with regard to their dating. Tipper and others have argued that fills of SFBs should be used with caution regarding dating and function, in that they are most likely derived from elsewhere. Thus the four SFBs from Wharram can be variously dated to between the 5th–9th centuries. Although there are strong arguments that they centre on the 7th and 8th centuries, there is no good reason why certain earlier finds are not either residual or heirlooms rather than contemporary with the earliest use of these buildings.

The 9th to 12th centuries are characterized by timber buildings, hearths, ovens and other features. A suggested 10th- or 11th-century phase of timber buildings is interpreted in contrasting ways, either as peasant houses or as part of a ‘proto-manorial’ complex. Wide dating margins for ceramics and the many ambiguities of field archaeology of this kind facilitate such discussion. The 13th-century North Manor, a building of some pretension utilizing dressed stone and painted plaster, may have succeeded a timber phase as noted above, while the South Manor is a short-lived 12th-century development probably succeeded by the Percy family’s North Manor. Dating the end of the North Manor sequence presents interesting methodological issues. Documents describe the decay of the manor during the later 14th century from its heyday in the earlier part of that century. By 1367 only the barn was apparently of value, the house seemingly derelict. Excavation, by contrast, revealed much 14th–15th-century domestic pottery, including Staxton Ware and later jugs.

Overall, excavation on the earthworks of the North Manor Area has provided a classic case study of a site left posing many questions. Investigation of the North Manor buildings was on relatively small scale and they remain difficult to interpret. The prehistoric features excavated in the North-West Enclosure contained medieval material in their uppermost fills and further indicate that the medieval inhabitants of Wharram Percy continually negotiated the remains of their predecessors.

In conclusion, this is a substantial publication, containing a wealth of evidence to support the text, and which is accompanied by straightforward specialist reports. Rahtz’s plans and sections contribute to the pleasing look and feel of the book, which follows the sturdy hardback format of Wharram VIII by Stamper and Croft. The volume is rightfully tentative in its broader interpretations, but these must await publication of the remaining Wharram volumes.

ANDREW REYNOLDS


Borg (the place-name means an elevated fortified site) is situated within a green and fertile bowl of land, amidst the otherwise steep topography of Vestvågøy in the Lofoten islands, within the North Norwegian sub-Arctic region once known as Hålogaland — the homeland of Ottar (Ohthere), a 9th-century visitor to King Alfred. The area is rich in later Prehistoric and Viking-age Archaeology, including numerous grave mounds and large boat-nausts, and it was long suspected that the Borg district had probably supported an Iron Age chieftain centre. In 1981, on a low ridge just west of the parish church, the
farmer ploughed up charcoal and burnt stone, and Tromsø Museum was alerted. Initial surveys and trial excavation developed into a major excavation project lasting throughout the 1980s, and involving many international participants, and has culminated in this report.

Three excavation areas, Borg I–III, produced evidence of occupation in the 1st millennium A.D., covering the earlier and later Iron Ages. The method of excavation is not described in detail in the book, but involved shovelling of general layers and hand excavation of individual features. Dating was by means of stratified artefact association in conjunction with radiocarbon determinations, all carried out by a single laboratory (Trondheim). Borg I, the site of the original discovery, received the most sustained treatment. Excavation gradually revealed two immense long houses, both remarkably complete in plan. The earlier version, Borg I:1b, measured 64 m × 8 m, had been built over part of an existing group of burials; its construction was dated to late 5th/early 6th century.

In the 7th century Borg I:1b was demolished and overbuilt by an even larger structure (Borg I:1a) which was up to 83 m in length (almost as long as the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim!) and 9 m in width (c. 600 sq m in area), divided length-wise into at least four separate chambers including a byre, and which lasted until demolition in the later 10th century. The walls were of stone and turf, with wooden superstructures. The upper layers had been damaged by recent ploughing episodes, so any upstanding elements were gone, and occupation layers were incomplete, but cut and sunken features, especially post-holes and hearths, were mostly intact. Finds from these included gold foil plaques (gullgubber) cobalt reticella glass bowls and clawed beakers which may be from England, and gold-foil decorated imported glass beakers from the Rhineland; polychrome glass, amber and jet beads, banded schist pendant whetstones, and a range of more utilitarian items in stone, bone, iron, and soapstone. Smithy slag and soapstone off-cuts suggest a considerable amount of iron and soapstone working going on. The environmental programme was selective (no systematic sampling strategy is outlined), but did produce important botanical evidence of hulled barley and wild fruits, suggesting a mixed agrarian and gathered diet, together with rushes and club mosses which probably had non-culinary uses for comfort and hygiene. By contrast, there is no independent analysis of faunal remains, which, while evidently not extensive, did appear as fragments in numerous contexts. This is a strange and disappointing lacuna given the large size of the byres, the local proximity of immense marine resources, and the likelihood that the buildings could have been used for ceremonial feasting amongst other functions.

Phosphate and magnetic susceptibility soil sampling within buildings I:1a and I:1b helped to distinguish domestic, ceremonial and animal-related functions. The analysis of internal use of space is convincing, suggesting that in House I:1a, in the eastern end there was a domestic room (A) separated by an entrance vestibule (B) from a 'hall' (Room C) with a ceremonial or even ritual function, marked by a concentration of high-status finds against its western partition wall, whereas to the western end was a storeroom (D) and byre (E). There are several chapters towards the end of the report dealing with the political and social context, including considerations of pagan practice.

Borg II and III produced evidence of later buildings which appear to confirm a sequence of occupation stretching from the end of Borg I:1a through to the High Middle Ages. Although it seems to have lost its more excessively high-status elements after Borg I, the excavation has confirmed the site as a significant focus in the Iron Age and Early Medieval geography of power in north Norway. A museum and reconstruction of Borg I:1a now stand at the site. This report achieves a reasonable balance between data and interpretation, and manages to do so within a relatively slim and handy volume. Several of the contributors died before it was published. However, the untimely death of Olav Sverre Johansen in early 2005 removed one of the leading inspirations of the Borg project. In
reviews 507


This volume represents the published version of Dr Anna Gannon’s Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, a pioneering study of the iconography of the Anglo-Saxon coinage from its initiation in the 6th century through its period of greatest originality and quality during the 7th and 8th centuries. It makes few concessions to the general student of the Anglo-Saxon period, other than providing a short introductory survey, ‘Part I: Numismatic Background’, which is to be highly commended for its scope and clarity of presentation.

The rest of the volume, ‘Part II: Iconography’, divides the coinage into four groups: The Bust; Human Figures; Animal Iconography; and Reverses with Crosses, Standards/Saltires and Porcupines. This is dense matter, but written with the authority of one who has immersed herself thoroughly in the 7th and 8th centuries, but there is an unfortunate tendency for interpretation to be presented as ‘fact’. For instance, a portrayal of Offa with a slightly tilted head is said to be indicative that he was given to ‘mystical heaven-gazing’ (33); the iconography of a lozenge-shaped mount (found in a Viking grave in Norway), ‘four lion heads, with prominent tongues, in the arms of a cruciform design, suggests a representation of the Creator-Logos from whom derive the Gospels, and ideas of quadripartite harmony and the spreading of salvation to the four corners of the world’ (133, n. 174), when there are in fact five (indeterminate) animal heads incorporated into the design. Some interpretations have not been fully thought through: on the one hand, we are told that plant-scrolls with ‘berries’ are not to be considered as stylized vines with ‘grape-bunches’, but as native vegetation such as ‘brambles’ (117–20, esp. n. 69), when this observation is made in the course of a discussion of what are interpreted as ‘Birds in Vine-Scrolls’ (cf. 163, which returns to vine-scrolls and ‘a eucharistic reading’). Other editorial revisions might also have been expected before OUP publication: a reference to an illustration in a popular book on the Vikings is hardly to be considered an adequate basis for (mistakenly) dating Swedish Valkyrie pendants to the 6th century (49, n. 179)?

The numerous footnotes are not consistently indexed, although they contain much information. This often takes the form of broadening out the discussion, but it rapidly becomes evident that, as soon as she moves outside her specialist field, Gannon is on somewhat shaky ground, although the reader might not notice this at first glance. For example, she states categorically that the reason why the East Anglian ‘animal’ brooches are ‘totally unrelated to the sources of our coins’ is that there ‘must be a difference in patronage’ (186, n. 34), whereas it is a simple matter of a couple of centuries difference in date. Likewise, it is thought ‘interesting to note that coins do not seem to take native brooches as models’, but hers is a period when the prestige disc-brooch was eclipsed in fashion by dress-pins (ibid.). Why should one accept her statement that the 9th-century Æthelwulf finger-ring, usually described as being ornamented with peacocks, ‘shows griffin-hybrids’ (122, n. 101), without any discussion of the stylistic conventions of the newly fashionable Trewhiddle style?

It is curious that the ten-page general ‘Conclusion’ was not separated off from ‘Iconography’, but then there is a degree of overlap because it introduces a discussion of the iconography of the late 9th-century Fuller Brooch, with its well-known depiction of the Five Senses, by interestingly relating the grouped figures to those that appear individually (as busts) on five silver pennies belonging to ‘Series K’ (187–8, fig. 6.1). Overall, whatever...
reservations one may have on detail, Gannon’s argument that minsters had a role in coin production, given that ‘religion was the pre-occupation of the age’, with the designs on the coins being ‘religiously charged’ (186–90), is a convincing one, when combined with the 8th-century development of a ‘clearly royal’ coinage, and the ‘dramatic change in iconography’ to seen in the ‘inventive and attractive coinage’ of Offa (192–3). Above all, there is no doubt that she has achieved her ambition ‘to fire the imagination, and encourage further research’ (3).

JAMES GRAHAM-CAMPBELL


Publication of the late Jean M. Cook’s Corpus of *Early Anglo-Saxon Buckets* is an event that has been eagerly anticipated by scholars of that period. This volume brings together, for the first time, the available evidence for the craft of cooperage in pagan Saxon England, spanning the period from approximately A.D. 400 to 700. The 329 objects catalogued have been recovered from 152 sites scattered across the country, in excavations spanning the 18th to 20th centuries. The author visited more than 40 museums and collections to catalogue the data required for this corpus, during a study that spanned five decades of her life. It is only to be regretted that the availability of the results of this important research to the wider academic community comes after the death of the author (however, Jean Cook’s obituary by Tom Hassall is reprinted among the extensive introductory notes).

Wooden vessels of all types were ubiquitous throughout the Middle Ages. Their importance in their own context should not be underestimated simply because wood does not survive in archaeological context as well as other materials. Stave-built vessels are complex composite artefacts, assembled from a number of wooden elements, which are artefacts in their own right. This is not, however, a book about wooden artefacts. The wooden elements of stave-built vessels rarely survive, restricting detailed scrutiny of the artefacts in the holistic sense. Questions of wood species selection, conversion and wood-working technology cannot be addressed from the evidence presented here, a compromise that must have irked Jean Cook, especially given her botanical background.

This book, in essence, is about the metal fittings that were applied to stave-built wooden vessels. The corpus specifically excludes other classes of container, such as turned or carved wooden vessels and horns, many of which also featured metal fittings. Many fittings were functional, such as binding hoops and handles, though others were probably purely ornamental appliqués. To familiarize the reader with this topic, extensive, detailed and well-illustrated introductory notes explain the terminology and construction of Anglo-Saxon buckets. Furthermore, a simplified approach to the dating of Anglo-Saxon material culture from funerary contexts benefits those of us without an intimate knowledge of this complex and still-contentious area of research. The suggested tri-partite, phased-by-gender chronology is intended only to give a ‘rough idea’ (41). Similarly, cursory notes on the complex issues surrounding the pagan Anglo-Saxon burial context are not meant to be definitive.

The purpose of this volume is to present the results of Jean Cook’s life’s work as a corpus of the reliably identified bucket burials in England. In this it succeeds admirably on several levels, primarily because of the editorial approach adopted. The work is refreshingly free from the speculative interpretative exercises that often dominate archaeological publications. This is a corpus in the strict sense of the word. Birte Brugmann’s editorial style differentiates clearly between Cook’s original text and her own editing; Brugmann’s
light touch thus conveys the sensibilities and, perhaps more importantly, something of the spirit of Cook’s commitment to this class of container.

The corpus is presented in alphabetical order, by county and site. The location of each site, and the relative numbers of finds from each, are charted on three maps to accompany the gazetteer in the general introduction. Individual entries for each vessel in the catalogue include: the date of the finds; the current location and museum accession details; a bibliography; usually an extract from the original finders’ notes; Jean Cook’s first-hand observations of the vessel; followed by brief details of the burial context, including sex/gender, associated grave goods and chronological phase. Re-examination of the buckets was not attempted by the editor, so Cook’s notes, transcribed directly from her personal archive, are subject to the refinements of perception that inevitably result from research carried out over so long a period. Cook herself recognized this inconsistency and had intended to re-visit a number of the vessels prior to her death. Descriptions are comprehensive and detailed, essential given the considerable variability present in the corpus. Nevertheless, conveying an understanding of archaeological objects through the written word alone is often not possible, and images of the complex architecture of these vessels are a vital explanatory tool. It has to be said that this volume is not lavishly illustrated.

While the corpus might be regarded as weak in pictorial content, one of its strengths is actually to be found beyond the hard-bound covers. The published corpus is related to an on-line database (http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/archives/asbuckets), explained by Debi Harlan in the introductory notes (30). Whereas the order and format of the published material are fixed, the on-line database can be searched and used to order data in whatever way the user desires. Only those grave goods relevant to gender and date are included in the published corpus; the on-line corpus is more complete in this respect. The two elements, paper and electronic, are presented as a single entity, a powerful educational tool, of which the editor and her colleagues hope that Jean Cook, a teacher for most of her life, would have approved.

Cook’s own introductory notes raise questions about the technology, distribution, typology and function of these buckets (19), and she recognized that archaeological association is essential to place them in social context. The wide variation of size evident in the corpus indicates a variety of functions, though there is remarkably scant evidence for contents. Relatively little has been included in this volume by the editor in terms of chronological development, regional trends or status-related associations. Cook’s own observations on evolutionary typology are not presented. Instead, readers are invited to conduct their own research into these matters, through use of the on-line corpus, a novel and intriguing concept.

**Martin Comey**


The ‘classic’ book on medieval building is L. F. Salzman’s *Building in England Down to 1540*, first published in 1952. It is subtitled ‘a documentary history’, and gathers together a mass of documentary material in a series of chapters ranging from ‘masons and architects’, ‘wages’, ‘organization’, etc., to ‘masonry’, ‘stone; quarries’, ‘timber’, ‘tools’ and ‘carriage’. In addition, it has long appendices on building contracts, etc., and is illustrated with an important collection of mainly medieval manuscript illustrations showing building work taking place. This magnificent book is still, after more than half a century, the only one of
its kind, and it is time for a revised edition to be issued, perhaps with more diagrams and illustrations, including some in colour.

Gunther Binding’s book, first published in Germany in the 1970s, is a fine collection of over 700 line drawings, culled mostly from medieval manuscripts made in Western Europe before c. 1500. Some of the pictures are shown as black-and-white photos, and a few other items are sketched, like the depiction of masons on grave slabs. Unfortunately, they are just reproduced as a catalogue in alphabetical order of where the manuscripts (or objects) are now housed, so No. 1 is a drawing of tower construction from the 12th-century ‘Dish of St. Ursula’ in Aachen Museum, and No. 651 is a manuscript illumination of the building of the Tower of Babel in the Zurich Central Library. There is then a ‘supplement’ of around 20 more illustrations, and in the main text various ‘as’ and ‘bs’ have been added. There are also entries for Malibu, California (the Getty Museum), New York, Waddesdon Manor (Rothschild Collection), etc., but for the purpose of showing ‘medieval building techniques’, this is not very helpful. Most of the illustrations are of the late Middle Ages, but a few are of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries, and it would have been more useful to have the illustrations grouped together chronologically (the 13th-century drawings would be particularly useful), as well as regionally. There is an index (mainly of tools shown in the manuscripts), but no bibliography, only a ‘list of reference works abbreviated in the text’. These are mostly in German (even some books first written in English are quoted in their French or German titles), and Salzman is not mentioned.

This book is, therefore, quite a useful collection of contemporary pictures showing building work, and men and their tools, between the 9th and early 16th centuries and will, no doubt, be of use to ‘reconstruction artists’ and ‘re-enactment’ societies. Sadly it will be of little use to medieval archaeologists and architectural historians, who will get much more information by returning to Salzman’s great book, where a good selection of the key illustrations can already be found.

Tim Tatton-Brown


John Hines explores the relationship between English Literature and Archaeology through six case studies stretching chronologically from Old English poetry to the Victorian novel. He argues that as cultural products artefacts and literature share a deep affinity, and offer unrecognized potential for scholastic integration. His approach is informed by literary historicism, which explores the historical milieu in which texts operated, but he places greater emphasis on the role of material culture in forming the essential semantic context for the text. He stresses the need to comprehend fully the physical setting for the text as speech-act or performance, for instance how the actual spaces of the Shakespearean theatre served to reunite the realms of art and utility that had been disassociated by the text-centred culture of the Protestant Reformation.

Each case study is self-contained, with no prior knowledge required of the literature or archaeological context. Therefore every chapter opens with pithy scene-setting, to convey the historical, social and archaeological context in which the selected literary texts were produced. The scope of this approach is ambitious, but has created two weaknesses. The massive range of sources and archaeological contexts are deftly handled and densely footnoted, but the need to provide a sound material framework stretching over a millennium has left little room for discussion of the key interfaces between material culture and text. Such connections might have been drawn out more convincingly if the case studies had been confined to a narrower chronological bracket.
The second issue concerns the privileging of literary over archaeological theory. Hines presents a largely processual view of archaeological thought, with material culture viewed principally as functional and reflective, and texts holding the interpretative potential to unlock human agency and intention. For example, discussion of Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* is preceded by ten pages on the significance of the Great Exhibition of 1851, discerning the link between home and family and its physical expression. Hines concludes that the organization of the Victorian home expressed moral order, with novels such as *Bleak House* set up around the dichotomy of public versus personal/domestic. The separation of home and work under industrialization is a well known theme in historical (post-medieval) archaeology, yet Hines fails to engage with the large corpus of archaeological theory addressing the public: private dichotomy and the material elaboration of the home in the 19th century. In contrast, a later medieval case study benefits from theoretical perspectives from both literature and archaeology. In his discussion of the use of space in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, Hines asserts that he is not looking for direct realism in the poem. He examines the use of locale and furniture in the central dramatic spaces of the poem, observing that within the hall a bench or window seat can create a relatively private space for the lovers’ conversations. He concludes that the drama illuminates ‘two fundamental “scales of modality” in medieval domestic architecture’: the opposition between public and private, and the range of access between the restricted and the open. This example demonstrates the author’s central message — literary texts are not sources to be mined for direct material evidence, but when closely read in their material context can yield new insights to historical mentalities. The interdisciplinary approach of many medieval archaeologists will attract them to such perspectives, but the real challenge remains to convince literary scholars that archaeology is not merely the accumulation of factual details to be mined for illustration, but is an essential component to more rounded, interdisciplinary understanding of the past.

ROBERTA GILCHRIST


Remarkably the history and archaeology of medieval bridges is a completely neglected subject. Until this book was written, there was no scholarly account of English bridges before the 18th century. This excellent volume now plugs the gap, and gives an important new account of the development of bridges between the Anglo-Saxon period and the late 18th century. It shows how a completely new post-Roman road system was created in the later Anglo-Saxon period with some important new bridges, made with timber roadways on stone piers. This continued after the Conquest with vaulted stone bridges being made from the 12th century (most famously, London Bridge). By about 1250 almost all bridges were made entirely of stone (though oddly, many of the bridges over the Thames remained in timber), and most of these fine structures continued in use to the late 18th century. Only after this were most of them replaced with new bridges of the Industrial Revolution. Despite this, over 200 medieval bridges have survived to this day, and incredibly very few of them have been recorded and analysed by archaeologists or architectural historians. Before the last war, however, an excellent series of pocket-sized volumes was published on the ancient bridges of England by Edwin Jervoise (under the auspices of S.P.A.B.), and these have certainly helped in their preservation in the later 20th century.

David Harrison’s fine new book now looks at how the extensive network of bridges was established alongside the new, post-Roman road system. He also outlines the major developments in design and construction of the bridges, using documented sources, and