

REVIEWS

ESSAI SUR LES ORIGINES DE LA MINIATURE DITE IRLANDAISE. By F. MASAI.
10½ x 8 in.; 146 pp., 64 plates. Brussels: Les Éditions 'Erasmus'. 1947. Price:
(sewn) 450, (bound) 500 Belgian francs.

The author's foreword, which is dated August 1st, 1944, indicates that his work is entitled an 'Essay' only, as it does not pretend to be the long-awaited work on Irish illuminated manuscripts, it having been written at a time when access was not possible to the originals, and at a time, furthermore, when the author had no opportunity of consulting certain English publications material to his purpose. These include, for example, the Sutton Hoo boat-burial, which would have strongly supported his main thesis. In spite, however, of such, then unavoidable, gaps in the evidence, the 'Essay' remains a contribution to the study of the subject and a summing up of the evidence, which the author holds to be completely destructive of the traditional view of the origins of Irish Christian Art.

It may be said at once that M. Masai's presentation of the subject is not as unfamiliar to English as it is to Continental readers; most of his arguments have already been put forward by others, and the author has adopted them, extended their application, and set out in black and white the logical conclusions to be drawn from the facts which he considers to have been thus established. The author, furthermore, has this advantage, that he cannot be accused of partiality towards one side or other of the controversy, an argument which, owing to racial predilections, might have been urged, rightly or wrongly, against most of the earlier and insular writers on the subject.

The first two chapters are introductory, and take the form of an exposition of the general background of the subject—the prevalence of purely decorative as against representational motifs, and the underlying causes of this choice.

Chapter III deals with the long-established doctrine of the Irish origins of the books of Durrow and Kells and their descendants, the gradual edging forward of their date in more recent years, and the widening cracks which soon appeared in the ancient structure of this belief. The author points out very clearly the essential difference between the learning and art of the native Irish and those of the 'dispersal', and the insecurity, as he thinks, of the evidence that Irish Christian art emanated from Ireland itself before as advanced a period as the end of the eighth century. He further summarizes the very strong evidence for Anglo-Saxon art and learning in England at a much earlier period, the age in fact of Theodore of Tarsus and Abbot Adrian, and consequently the inherent historical improbability of the older theories of Ireland's predominant part in this regard.

The next chapter deals shortly with the written attributions contained within the covers of certain manuscripts and decides on the entire unreliability of that in the Durrow book and the authenticity of the Lindisfarne colophon. Chapter V examines the theory of the age-long evolution of Irish illumination and rejects it as completely unnecessary and unsupported, substituting for it the evidence for the direct copying of pages of ornament from the enriched metal-work of contemporary book-covers, which would allow this manuscript-art to spring to life fully formed.

The core of the work is contained in VI and the two following chapters. In Chapter VI is discussed the evidence of the origins of the various motifs derived from other media which form the bases of the manuscript-art. Here the conclusion, if we accept the author's data, and there is little opportunity of avoiding some of them, is devastating to any theory of Irish origins. Not only can the predominant motifs be shown to have existed more or less profusely in England throughout the seventh century, but the exact reverse is generally the case in regard to Ireland. As the author puts it (p. 90): 'Ainsi donc le fait paraît bien avéré, au VII^e siècle l'Irlande s'exprimait encore en une langue étrangère, elle parlait visigothique ou copte, alors que la Northumbrie discourait déjà en parfait "irlandais".'

Chapter VII deals with the origins of the book of Durrow. It has already been suggested by more than one English authority that the origin of this book is definitely Northumbrian, and recent discoveries have strongly re-enforced this conclusion. M. Masai sets out the whole problem and presents a reasoned case for the book being Northumbrian and of round about the year 700.

The following chapter deals generally with the later stages of the art and more particularly with the Book of Kells, now generally assigned to about 800 or a little later. The author holds that the book is predominantly in the metal technique and consequently, by descent at any rate, Northumbrian; some portions, however, present 'bizarre and eccentric elements very much in

the Irish taste'. This leads to the theory that the book came to Kells from Iona and that it may have been executed there, Iona having by that time abandoned its exclusively Irish rites and come under Northumbrian influence. If this be so, then the more admirable elements in design of this last great manuscript must, so the author thinks, be subtracted from the Irish contribution to manuscript-art, leaving only in this field a somewhat pitiful residue of inferior, maladroit and semi-barbarous examples.

In his final summing up M. Masai makes it perfectly clear that, in his view of the evidence, Irish manuscript artists have for a century lived on an entirely false reputation, and that so far as Ireland itself is concerned the Irish miniature serves only 'to reveal to us a profound barbarism trying to imitate, as well as might be, its more civilized neighbours'.

The book thus puts the extremist case for jettisoning, in its entirety, the Irish evolutionary theory and substituting for it an alternative one assigning the whole of the creative impulse to Northumbria, and basing this conclusion on a judicial survey of the recorded facts as the author knew them. In certain particulars his argument is incomplete, and his acquaintance with the manuscript originals relating to his subject may well be proved insufficient; but there can be little doubt, in our opinion, that many of his main conclusions are justified, and that something substantial has been done to disperse the fog which has so long obscured the issue. M. Masai's presentation of the subject is a provocative one and will, we hope, call forth a rejoinder from those still holding the older view. Such rejoinder is likely, however, to take the form of toning down and restricting the universality of his conclusions, for the established facts are, we think, too strong to allow of any general rebuttal of the major proposition.

A. W. CLAPHAM.

GOTHIC ENGLAND. By JOHN HARVEY. $8\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ m.; xiv + 242 pp., 176 plates. London: B. T. Batsford, 1947. Price 21s. net.

Mr. Harvey here presents a survey of English Architecture and culture of the period between the Black Death and the Reformation, and the book in some sort forms a complement to the same author's earlier work on Henry Yevele (*Arch. Journ.*, ci, 136). It may be said at once that the book aims at giving a general impression of the art-background of the period, rather than a closely documented statement of exactly ascertained facts. The author himself gives (p. viii) his reasons for collecting his references at the end of the volume; but these references are neither so detailed nor so all-embracing as to enable the reader to test the authority of any particular statement. Thus (p. 81) the details of Robert Playser's work on the tower of Hedon church cannot be traced in the author's references to Boyle's *History of Hedon*, which fully establishes them. This documentation is the more important in that statements in a book, likely to be as widely read as *Gothic England*, will inevitably be cited elsewhere as of equal authority, whether they be the personal judgement of the author or based upon contemporary evidence.

Mr. Harvey has a great many of the essentials necessary for the acceptable presentation of such a subject. He has, obviously, an intimate knowledge of the printed and of many of the manuscript sources of his period; he has a gift of clear and vivid portrayal, and finally he has a burning enthusiasm for his subject, some sparks of which cannot fail to communicate themselves to his readers. This enthusiasm leads him occasionally, we think, into overstatements and exaggerated judgements; yet these are the perhaps inevitable defects of very real qualities, and the reader can, if he will, discount such statements as that his countrymen have been 'relatively indifferent to all forms of art during the past four centuries', or that Richard II was the presiding genius of a Golden Age.

The book deals with its subject under five main periods: the late fourteenth century, the 'slump' of the early Lancastrian kings, the 'Indian Summer' of Henry VI, the winter of the civil wars and the 'frozen Spring' of the early Tudors. In each case the main buildings are dealt with and an attempt is made to identify the masons responsible for the work. Many of these names are, of course, firmly established, others must await confirmation or rebuttal. Throughout the book the main current is accompanied by a running commentary on contemporary painting, poetry and music.

As a result, we have a broad picture of the culture of the age, which, open as it may well be to criticism in detail, is none the less an attractive and convincing reconstruction, the broad lines of which are both humanly and pictorially justified and are welcome as an eminently readable introduction to a hitherto neglected age.

One or two quite small matters may here be mentioned. Though touched upon on pp. 122 and 127, more emphasis might well have been placed upon the common medieval practice of directly copying from the design of an existing structure, as in the recorded case of the crosses at Abingdon and Coventry. This could well be done without employing the original designer,

in both cases, and there was no law of copyright. On p. 119 the author cites the employment of the Fleming Cornelis de Aeltre at Melrose; he might also have referred in the same connexion to Jean Moreau of Paris, mason of St. Andrews, Glasgow, Melrose and Paisley in the fifteenth century. Finally on p. 126 are some interesting reflections on the effect of wine and beer drinking on the arts; this might be carried even further as the division between the two, marks sufficiently nearly the bounds between the old and the reformed churches.

The book is admirably produced and the illustrations are both excellent in themselves and well-chosen. Of those in colour the painted tester of Edward the Black Prince is admirably produced and, we believe, for the first time.

The appendices include an interesting collection of literary references to building, a collection of wills of craftsmen, and a classified bibliography.

A. W. CLAPHAM.

PEINTURES ROMANES, VESTIGES GALLO-ROMAINS À SAINT-PLANCARD. By JEAN LAFFARGUE ET GEORGES FOUET. 10½ × 8½ in., 117 pp., 60 plates. Toulouse: E. Privat, 1948.

This short volume gives a detailed description firstly of the mural paintings in the derelict chapel of S. Jean, discovered in 1945 and since uncovered, and secondly of the Roman remains incorporated in the walls of the chapel. Saint-Plancard is a village in the Comminges district of the Haute-Garonne, and the chapel is an eleventh-century structure, apsidal at both ends. The paintings are in the main eastern apse and in that of the south chapel, and display certain executive differences which indicate different artists rather than a different date. This date like that of the chapel itself, is considered to be the eleventh century. The paintings are thus of primary importance in the evolution of French wall-painting, which could be studied recently in London in the admirable exhibition of reproductions at the Institut français. The figure-drawing in the main apse has a certain rude vigour which transcends the more sophisticated work in the chapel. The three kings in the Adoration of the Magi wear distinctive Byzantine crowns.

Many Roman remains have recently been brought to light in the neighbourhood, but only those found actually in the structure of the chapel are here dealt with. Four of the inscribed stones give evidence of the cult of a local god Sutugius, equated by the Romans with Mars. These and other altars and memorials and architectural fragments are here fully described and illustrated.

A. W. CLAPHAM.

THE ROMAN ROAD FROM CAERLEON TO SILCHESTER: *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti* — *Iter Britanniarum*, Iter XIII. By A. D. PASSMORE. Pamphlet of 6 pages: Twitche & Co., Victoria Road, Swindon, 1948. Price 1s.

This pamphlet draws particular attention to the considerable Roman site at Wanborough (the author's home) near Swindon, its earthworks and many finds of coins, pottery, etc., and its position at the fork of the Roman road from Caerleon to Silchester and to Winchester. The former is the route of the Antonine Iter XIII, passing by way of Gloucester (*Glevum*) and Cirencester; and the author shows that if *Corinium*, the independently-known Roman name of Cirencester, is restored where one would expect it in the text directly after *Glevum*, then (1) the Iter's total length can be corrected by the required 19 Roman miles from the 90 of the text to the true figure (roughly) of 109; and (2) the next name in the text, *Durocornovium*, then falls into place as that of the Wanborough site. *Durocornovium* has often been thought an alternative name for Cirencester; but Mr. Passmore's theory is undeniably attractive, and should be seriously considered.

C. F. C. HAWKES.

COUNCIL FOR BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGY: NOTES FOR THE GUIDANCE OF ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN REGARD TO EXPERT EVIDENCE. Pamphlet of 8 pages (1947). Price 3d. per copy (4d. post free), from the Secretary of the C.B.A., c/o The Institute of Archaeology, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London, N.W.1. Per dozen, 2s. 9d. (2s. 6d. if more than three dozen are ordered at a time), if ordered through Conveners of Regional Groups or Secretaries of Constituent Organizations of the C.B.A. (of which the Royal Archaeological Institute is one).

The Natural Sciences Committee of the Council for British Archaeology have done a really useful thing in compiling these notes. An archaeologist in the field to-day simply must know how to engage the co-operation of natural scientists.

I say *how*, because we all know that we 'ought' to, but what these notes do is to tell us the right occasions, the right means of approach, and the right names and addresses which,

we are glad to be told, will periodically be brought up to date. And the pamphlet is written in just the right way—businesslike, but straightforwardly pleasant and friendly—to disarm the reader of any lingering suspicion that scientists are aloof or 'difficult', and to leave him fully and happily seized of the truth, which is of course that they are willing and companionable allies all along the line. The pamphlet's chief sections are on Geology and Petrology, Soil Science, Botany (which includes Pollen-Analysis), Zoology (which covers the whole business of animal bones, and also that of snails and other molluscs), Physical Anthropology, Metallurgy, and Miscellaneous. I shall not try to summarize it, because everyone ought to possess it. It is an open secret that most of the work of compiling and drafting it was done by Dr. Kenneth Oakley, of the British Museum (Natural History). All archaeologists will be grateful to him, and to all his scientific colleagues. Let us show our gratitude by playing the game, now that they have given us the 'book of words', in the way it should be played.

C. F. C. HAWKES.