

EMASS 2015: A BRIEF REPORT

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In April 2015, the ninth Early Medieval Archaeology Student Symposium (EMASS 2015) was hosted at the University of Oxford in the Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies and the Institute of Archaeology, made possible by a grant from the MSRSG. A total of 58 delegates attended the conference, from 26 institutions across the UK, Europe and the USA. Some 23 papers and seven posters were presented; they touched on many aspects on medieval settlement studies and showed the breadth of medieval archaeology research being undertaken by these young scholars. The conference was a three-day event, with the final day including a field trip to Dorchester and Wallingford.

The presentations were organised across eight sessions convened by experts across the fields, as well as the conference organisers. The conveners were Dr Andy Seaman, Dr Letty Ten Harkel, Sarah Mallet, Dr Clifford Sofield, Dr Toby Martin, Andreas Duering, Dr Abi Tompkins and Victoria Sainsbury.

During the four sessions on the first day, our speakers discussed trade, religious landscapes, and presented research from regions that have often been overlooked in the early medieval period. Tiago Pinheiro Ramos' paper, for instance, highlighted similarities between Portugal and Britain in the sub-Roman period. The last session of the day addressed questions of landscape use and

settlement patterns, especially how new data could be used to help us explore old questions, such as why and where did settlements shift in the early medieval period.

For the second day, the focus was on material culture and mortuary archaeology, with sessions on the power of place and objects, identity in the grave and the grave as a construct, and the persistence of Roman ideas through the early medieval period at different scales such as landscape and objects. Two papers by Margaret Williams and Andrew Welton looked at the role of iron artefacts – one considering apotropaic powers of iron through ethnographical and mythological studies and the other focusing on the metallurgical processes and skills required to produce complex suites of iron artefacts. Other papers addressed how social identity and mobility can be expressed through burial assemblages and one used spatial analysis of material deposition to suggest how much may have been lost from said assemblages.

The day was concluded by a panel discussion, by a wonderful panel of experts who kindly donated their time: Prof H. Hamerow, Dr Ine Jacobs, Dr Javier Martinez Jiménez, Dr John Naylor, Dr Andy Seaman, Dr Efthymios Rizos, and Dr George Speake (Fig. 1). Many topics were covered, such as where 'Early Medieval' fits in modern archaeology, how it relates to other terms



Figure 1 Our panellists, answering questions from our delegates. From right to left: Dr Ine Jacobs, Dr Efthymios Rizos, Prof Helena Hamerow, Dr George Speake, Dr Javier Martinez Jiménez, Dr John Naylor, and Dr Andy Seaman. Photo: EMASS Organising Committee.

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Figure 2 Edward Peveler and Abigail Tompkins addressing the delegates on the site of the Discovering Dorchester excavations. Photo: Victoria Sainsbury.



Figure 3 Dr Neil Christie, on the site of Wallingford Castle, explaining the site's significance. Photo: Victoria Sainsbury.

such as 'Byzantine' and whether our discipline may be too insular. The discussion was especially focused on whether periodization leads to an isolation of early medieval studies and disconnected them from the 'bigger picture' of what came before and after. The panel and the delegates exchanged concerns and ideas. It was particularly fruitful due to the wide range of experience of all our participants and discussants, and allowed us to compare the 'early medieval experience' in a variety of different international contexts. The modern links between the early medieval period and contemporary nationalism were also explored.

The final day was dedicated to a field trip to two important medieval sites in Oxfordshire: Wallingford

and Dorchester-on-Thames. In Dorchester, Edward Peveler, then the Assistant Director of the Discovering Dorchester project, kindly led a tour to the site of the excavation of the Roman town and updated us on the post-Roman material that has been discovered, while Victoria Sainsbury talked to us about Dorchester Abbey (Fig. 2). Dorchester Abbey was originally founded around AD 635, and while it has been heavily remodelled, a good deal of Saxon material from the twelfth century is apparent in the standing brickwork in the nave. The abbey also contains a beautifully preserved lead font, cast c. 1170, and apparently the only lead monastic church font to have survived the iconoclasm of the Reformation.

After Dorchester, Dr Neil Christie of the University of Leicester led the conference around Wallingford, exploring the medieval settlement site (Fig. 3). We explored the medieval house remains in the Kinecroft, as well as Wallingford Castle, established in the eleventh century. We both started and ended the tour at the old fords, giving us a full view of Wallingford as a strategic medieval city.

The organising committee (Abi Tompkins, Victoria Sainsbury, Sarah Mallet and Andreas Duering) are particularly grateful to the panel members for taking part in EMASS 2015 and showing such support to a student symposium. We would also like to thank our sponsors, such as the MSRG and the Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity, without whom it would not have been possible to organise such a successful conference. Our especial thanks must be extended to Dr Neil Christie, who very

generously led a fascinating tour of Wallingford on the Saturday, and Edward Peveler both for his time showing us around Dorchester and his work 'behind the scenes', which was extremely helpful. Finally, we would like to thank Dr Letty Ten Harkel and Dr Toby Martin, both of whom are EMASS alumni, who kindly spared time to share their EMASS expertise with us.

We would also like to extend our congratulations to James Taylor, of the University of Durham, who was awarded a prize for the best paper of the conference for his presentation on *'The Desert a City': An examination of the factors that influenced the choice of location for the ascetic life in fourth century Egypt*. Helen Greetham, also of Durham, won best poster for her work on *Light and Liminality at Wearmouth and Jarrow*. Finally, a warm thank you to all of those who attended EMASS 2015 and helped make it such a success.