

Reviews

Edited by Duncan Wright

*Wearmouth and Jarrow:
Northumbrian Monasteries in an
Historic Landscape*

Turner, S, Semple, S and Turner, A,
2013

University of Hertfordshire Press,
Hatfield

ISBN 978 1 909291 13 3

Pb 244pp, colour and B&W
illustrations, maps and tables,
£20.00

Andrew Marriott

Members attracted to the archaeology of Benedict Biscop's twin monastic foundation of St Peter and St Paul at Wearmouth and Jarrow might naturally turn to the authors' inspiration for this book, the corpus of study led by Professor Rosemary Cramp over the past 30 years, and the history of these sites has already been the subject of intensive scholarly scrutiny. It is legitimate, therefore, to ask whether readers find anything new or engaging in another publication entering what is already well-explored territory. The answer is an emphatic yes: Sam Turner, Sarah Semple and Alex Turner present a book whose importance

is reinforced through its refreshing style, accessibility and highly effective use of illustrations.

A synthesis of previous work and new studies conducted by Newcastle and Durham Universities, the Wearmouth and Jarrow project took as its starting point Cramp's call for an examination of the impact of these religious houses on their environments and the societies within which they existed. This developed into the aim of understanding the relationships of St Peter and St Paul in a wider landscape context and across a full temporal spectrum. The book summarises the outcomes of a range of interdisciplinary approaches to the research question, presenting integrated data accessed through a range of innovative methodologies.

Those unfamiliar with the sites will find them effectively introduced in both their archaeological and historical contexts. The introduction also highlights the rationale for the project noting the influence and stimulus given by recent work on landscapes and the relationship between them and monuments such as churches. While the focus is on religious landscapes, the authors take a holistic approach to their

study, setting the scene for a novel exploration of settlement and land use between the Tyne and Wear valleys. Importantly, those requiring access to more detailed reports will be able to do so through the Archaeology Data Service.

Landscape and church archaeologists should find the retrospective examination of the sites and their environs particularly engaging. Beginning from the present, we are taken through a study of the palimpsest of the area: riverine, coastal, industrial, agricultural and unexploited land. Combining a range of modern techniques with archival and cartographic evidence, we are given access to the profiles of the region and sites back to the Anglo-Saxon period. Study of the recent past and the loss already of much of the area's industrial heritage invite a range of questions and comparisons with the monasteries at their foundation. Particularly interesting are the hierarchies of sites, religious and secular, over the past 14 centuries. Indeed, while the monasteries of Jarrow and Wearmouth are of international importance and are candidates for World Heritage Site status, a theme

which is stressed in the volume, many of the images and conclusions prompt questions as to why and how they could have been subsumed and submerged both physically and in the local consciousness.

The project has also embraced new archaeological avenues of research. There are valuable contributions to our understanding of earlier historical landscapes of power and the relationships between kings and monastic communities in the 7th and 8th centuries. A range of techniques, including palaeoenvironmental studies and new geophysical prospection of the sites address the dynamics of religious foundation and their symbiosis with royal villas and estates. Those with special interests in church fabric will find detailed study of the above-ground remains of the monasteries presenting new appraisals of the buildings, incorporating geological and petrological analysis, and the use of high resolution scanning technologies.

The book also addresses some important current themes: public perceptions of Wearmouth and Jarrow, how the monastic heritage is perceived and how it might best be managed. Clearly, there are tensions between established and contemporary approaches concerning heritage assets and their roles in the landscape. Presented in the context of 'Contemporary and Competing Vistas', debates about the traditions and appropriation of the roles of St Peter's and St Paul's monasteries arise. For example, how credible is the view that local institutions are maintaining the scholarly traditions of Bede or reprising ancient skills such as glass manufacture?

Given the Society of Church Archaeology's recent conference

forays into landscapes (Chichester, Cork, Gloucestershire and Chester), this book should have widespread appeal. The physical reduction of these sites within, especially latterly, aggressively developing and changing environments raises wider debates regarding the relative values attributed to various periods and physical remains within local and national heritage collections. The resilience of these buildings to emerge as iconic regional emblems is remarkable but also sits uncomfortably with the rapid loss of much of what has followed. Furthermore, the book is a pertinent reminder that the less glamorous and uncomfortable post-industrial areas are highly fruitful areas for investigation and excursion.

After a military career Andrew Marriott studied archaeology at the University of York. He is currently a PhD student at Newcastle University.

Beyond the Burghal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age

Baker, J and Brookes, S, 2013
Brill, Leiden/Boston
ISBN 978 9 004245 63 1
Hb, 480pp, 77 figs, 2 tables,
£141.00

Duncan Wright

Military and conflict archaeology is presently a discipline in vogue, with the study of 20th-century warfare in particular benefiting from a steadily growing public profile. Research of medieval conflict in England, however, has been heavily biased toward the later part of the period, as the greater corpus of documentary sources from the 11th century onward have proved consistently attractive to scholars across all fields. This volume helps to redress the current imbalance by demonstrating the great potential of pre-Conquest conflict archaeology, and the insights that can be gained by adopting a truly interdisciplinary approach. As the title suggests, the study of *burhs* has been dominated by documentary historians, who have analysed in minute detail the contents of the Burghal Hidage – a name first coined in 1897 by FW Maitland for two documents which provide a list of 33 fortified sites and the number of hides required for their successful maintenance. The significance of the Hidage, which was probably produced during the second decade of the 10th century, is without question but its study has partly been at the expense of other areas. Indeed, even archaeological approaches have been directed by the Hidage, as researchers have tended to focus on the major *burhs* named on the list and their role in the development of Late Saxon urbanism. With this in

mind, perhaps the most important contribution of *Beyond the Burghal Hidage* is the broad scope of analysis, exploring the multifaceted character of civil defence in southern England during the ‘First Viking Age’ (793–900) on a number of scales.

Following the lead of many preceding researchers, the authors emphasise the key role played by defence in the process of state formation. For Nicholas Brooks, for example, along with creating an effective and reliable communication network, the ability to develop a coherent system of defence embodied the establishment of the English state (Brooks 2000, xiii). Reflecting a broad agreement with this hypothesis, the second and third chapters of *Beyond the Burghal Hidage* are dedicated to fortifications and communications respectively, following an introductory chapter on the theory and historical context of Anglo-Saxon civil defence. John Baker and Stuart Brookes set out their stall early, arguing that the range of early medieval military phenomena is best understood as a part of a ‘grand strategy’ derived from the political motives of the kings of Wessex. The concept is borrowed from Edward Luttwak’s (1976) *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, a work which has been thoroughly critiqued to the extent that many scholars believe it discredited. The ‘grand strategy’ approach nevertheless provides a useful interpretive framework through which the diverse body of available data can be understood, although there remains a risk that evidence may be inappropriately shoe-horned into the predetermined model. Thankfully, this is largely avoided in this instance by comprehensive interdisciplinary research, as the archaeological material is skilfully contextualised

and corroborated with topographical and place-name evidence in particular. The study is successful in its aim of avoiding a hierarchy of sources, but instead represents a cohesive and hugely insightful narrative despite the integration of various datasets. That the work is so consumable despite the inclusion of specialised material is furthermore testament to the ability and thorough understanding brought to the subject by the UCL-based team.

Borrowing heavily from anthropology to understand the process of state building and early medieval kingship, the opening chapter also provides a useful orientation of the terminology of civil defence. Chapter 2 focusses on fortifications themselves, and includes a welcome summary of the evidence for pre-Viking military features. Middle Saxon defensive sites include substantial linear earthworks such as Offa’s Dyke and Wansdyke, features which indicate the existence of various strategic elements being used in the landscape by the 8th and 9th centuries. Crucial to the procurement of resources by kings of the period was the rooting of the military to land tenure – by tying land ownership and military service together, warfare became rooted in territory. This process is attested in the documentary record by the emergence of the much celebrated ‘common burdens’ of military duty, bridge building, and the defence of fortifications but is also detectable in the archaeological record. The 7th century witnesses a marked increase in the development of bounded space, such as enclosures surrounding settlements, which serve to emphasise the new concern with defining social and legal space (see Reynolds 2003). Middle Saxon settlements were nevertheless poorly defended and instead military power was focussed

in strategically located regional strongholds, although this reviewer believes that the evidence for a series of Mercian strongholds is slight and the case overstated.

The form which defensive systems took underwent considerable change between the 9th and 11th centuries, as significant strategies in military strategy become visible in the archaeological evidence. In this period we see for the first time a systematic approach to landscape organisation, based on central strongholds built to a common strategy and supported by a series of lesser works. Included in this hierarchy of lesser sites are fortified manors, which archaeologists have interpreted through the eyes of the Promotion Law or *Gepyncdo* – a document which details how a ceorl may elevate themselves to a thegn through possession of, amongst other elements, a *burh-geat*. The precise meaning of *burh-geat* remains uncertain, but has been linked to a number of edifices and earthworks including turriform churches. The purpose of these churches is likely to have been multiple, including serving as muster points for lords seeking to raise the *fyrd* (army). In this manner we see how the burgeoning thegnly classes integrated their personal aspirations with the overarching desire of kings to establish a coordinated military strategy. The maintenance of a network of roads and waterways was of paramount importance for the implantation of royal policy, as explored in Chapter 3. While large set piece military engagements are the most well-known military events in the documentary record, of equal importance were the far more mundane yet crucial features of military organisation. For example, the development of new naval strategies which sought to stem the

tide of seaborne Viking attacks relied on the successful deployment of lookouts and presumably beacons, which can often be detected through a combination of place-names and topographical analysis.

Moving away from the analysis of single sites, Chapters 4 to 6 comprise detailed case studies of regional landscape areas. Two river systems, the Kennet and the Thames, are examined in Chapters 4 and 5, and the coastline of Kent is investigated in Chapter 6. The isolated topographical position of Kent, separated from the heartland of Wessex by the upland Weald, may have led to a less effective implementation of defensive strategy; during the later 10th and early 11th century the region suffered regular destructive visits, including an attack on Canterbury itself in 1011. The final chapter of the volume addresses the wider relevance of the work, and presses home again the authors' belief that the military landscape of the Late Saxon period is best understood through the 'grand strategy; framework. Despite being a weighty and incredibly detailed piece of research, the reader is orientated throughout by excellent summaries at the end of each chapter. The illustrations too are clear and appropriately deployed; in addition to concise plans and viewshed models, the inclusion of photographs provides useful insight into the crucial landscape context of the discussed material. At close to £150, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage* is at the upper end of the price scale, yet the cost is certainly justified considering the quality and breadth of the scholarship contained within its pages.

Duncan Wright is Reviews editor of Church Archaeology, and a specialist in landscape, settlement and conflict archaeology. His work comprises a strong inter-disciplinary aspect, incorporating in particular documentary and topographic evidence to enhance archaeologically-orientated investigation. His book Middle Saxon Settlement and Society is now available through BAR.

Brooks, NP, 2000, *Communities and Warfare: 700–1400*, London

Luttwak, E, 1976, *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century ad to the Third*, Baltimore

Reynolds, AJ, 2003, 'Boundaries and Settlements in later 6th to 11th-century England', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 12, 97–139

La Grava: The Archaeology and History of the Royal Manor and Alien Priory of Fontevrault

Baker, E, 2013

Council for British Archaeology
Research Report 167, York
ISBN 978 1 902771 87 8
Hb, xxiii + 399 pages, 260 colour
and B&W illustrations, £50.00

Michael Fradley

This research report on the excavations at the site of Grove Priory in Bedfordshire provides a fascinating account of the fortunes of an alien priory of the Fontevrault order. The site was investigated primarily between 1973 and 1985 as a rescue operation ahead of its destruction via quarrying. This resulted in a dig covering 1.85ha out of a total site measuring 7.8ha, which included the priory complex and its nearby enclosures. The archaeological narrative of the site begins in the Mesolithic, but in terms of the story of the priory, begins in the 10th century with the foundation of a royal manor which was passed on to the Fontevrault order in 1164. The priory came into being in the early 13th century, but in the increasingly complex political situation of the 14th century it reverted to lay ownership, passing through other hands before finally being abandoned in the 16th century.

The rich archaeological and historical strands are neatly interwoven throughout, providing an engaging narrative of development. Although the excavations began over three decades ago, the results are set firmly within contemporary debates and discussions. This includes exploration of ideas of gridded planning within the layout of the complex as recently advocated

by John Blair in his study of mid-Saxon settlement plans (Blair 2013). Themes explored also include changes in the domestic and agricultural economies of the site, and the changing status of the priory throughout its history.

This volume is richly illustrated in terms of site plans, excavation photographs and colour images, while the text is clear and consistent with what is a large, complex dataset. If one was asked for improvements then a more detailed earthwork plan and analysis might be desirable in order to compare it with the wider catalogue of surveys undertaken by organisations such as English Heritage (now Historic England). That any plan at all was produced as part of a rescue investigation, however, is an admirable effort regardless. Greater detail of the conditions in which work progressed would also be useful along with the condition of the local landscape today. These are only very minor quibbles, and this extensive and absorbing report should be celebrated, and will be a useful source for anybody interested in the history and archaeology of the religious orders in England, as well as those with a broader interest in the development of late medieval settlement and landscape.

Michael Fradley is a landscape archaeologist with a specialism in archaeo-topographical survey. He is working on the Arcadia-funded 'Endangered Archaeology' project, which aims to identify sites in the Middle East and North Africa using satellite imagery and assess areas threatened by human activity and environmental change.

Blair, J, 2013, 'Grid planning in Anglo-Saxon settlements: the short perch and the four-perch module', *Anglo-Saxon Archaeology and History* 18, 18–61

The Marvellous and the Monstrous in the Sculpture of Twelfth-Century Europe

Ambrose, K, 2013

The Boydell Press, Woodbridge
ISBN 978 184383 831 9
Hb, xiv + 186pp, 40 B&W
illustrations, £50.00

Nancy Edwards

For readers of this journal, it should be stated at the outset that this book is not concerned with archaeology except in the sense that it is examining Romanesque stone sculpture in ecclesiastical and monastic settings. Rather, it is a work of art history which also makes use of 12th-century written sources. These are deployed alongside art-historical discussion to explore the context and meanings of sculptural depictions of a range of monsters, including centaurs, sirens and griffins, and to try and determine how such carvings were perceived by contemporary patrons and audiences. The aim of the author is to expand '*scholarly discourse on the monstrous by suggesting that medieval representations of monsters could sometimes service ideals, including intellectual, political, religious, and social, even as they simultaneously articulated fears*' (p13). The book is composed of a series of linked essays, each of which focusses largely on a specific piece of sculpture incorporating fantastic beasts within the iconography in order to analyse a specific theme. The examples chosen are taken from Romanesque capitals and tympana, mainly from France – the Auvergne, Burgundy and the Lyonnais, though the final case-study is from Portugal.

The first chapter is concerned with an elegantly carved

representation on the tympanum of the south entrance to the church of St-Paul-de-Varax, which is located between Bourg-en-Bresse and Lyon. This depicts an episode in the Life of St Paul by St Jerome which tells of St Anthony's encounter with a faun on his journey through the wild desert to meet the hermit, who is not himself shown. It can be dated to the second quarter of the 12th century. Kirk Ambrose interprets the image of the saint and the monster, which is showing him the way and therefore has something to teach the saint, as one which might help a medieval audience to imagine a pure religious faith espoused by 12th-century church reformers. He also suggests that it demonstrates '*the importance of encountering another self in the advancement of the spiritual life*' (p37) as well as illuminating the significance of journeys and pilgrimages.

The next theme to be examined is that of attitudes to antique and medieval nudes with particular reference to a nave capital in the abbey church of St-Pierre, Mozac in the Auvergne, probably dated to the 1130s. This is carved with two centaurs catching hold of acanthus-like vegetation. It is argued that, although centaurs are sometimes seen as symbols of vice, they should not be seen as purely negative images, but that we should regard them with an open mind since, for example, nudity might be considered closer to the divine.

The third essay approaches different ways of reading both medieval texts and images by examining a capital from the monastery of Moutiers-St-Jean in Burgundy. The image, which has been dated to the second quarter of the 12th century, shows the sacrifice of Cain and Abel with the unique addition of a two-headed

eagle, most likely derived from an early medieval silk; the adjacent face depicts a man struggling with a scaly leonine monster. It is possible to see these images as the triumph of good over evil but Ambrose asks us to consider whether these curious juxtapositions were intended to signal the sculptor's struggle with the limitations imposed by the sculptural medium. Furthermore, we are encouraged to question the concept of coherent programmes of sculpture within a given space.

The fourth essay moves away from the use of monstrous images with long histories and instead considers how artists invented new types of monsters; artistic creativity; and reactions by patrons and audiences to this. The case-study used to explore this is a capital from the nave of La Madeleine at Vézelay in Burgundy which shows various monsters made up of a mixture of body parts battling with each other. Ambrose is of the opinion that these monstrous mixtures may have offered a means to negotiate relations between the clerics and the laity in a public space, and the writings of Julian of Vézelay (d1165) and poetic themes are used to try and shed light on attitudes to the visual at this time.

In the final chapter the focus switches to Portugal where the Romanesque sculpture is much less well known than that in eastern France. The aim is to examine a carved tympanum in the church at Rio Mau which seems to have been largely built around 1200, though the style of carving was consciously archaic. The panel depicts a bishop in the act of blessing with an ecclesiastic on either side, a bird, and a siren. Ambrose wonders whether the bishop might represent St Augustine or St Christopher and whether the image represents the

cosmos with the bird, the air, the men, earth, and the siren, water. What does seem relevant is that this foundation was Augustinian and was proclaiming its identity at a time of complex church-state relations, when diocesan boundaries were changing and this foundation was threatened by the rise of new orders, such as the Cistercians. For me this tympanum also brought to mind Irish 12th-century stone crosses, which to some extent also looked back to the past, but were carved with images of bishops that were likewise chosen to assert identity during a period of rapid diocesan and monastic reform.

In a book of this kind images are all important. For the most part, the illustrations of the French material, though small, are of good quality, but those of the Portuguese carvings are sometimes poor. The book would undoubtedly have benefitted from a couple of maps showing places mentioned in the text. Overall the book is carefully crafted and elegantly written. Though the concentration on individual case-studies means that it is rather narrowly conceived, it also raises some interesting questions, but in the end many of these remain almost impossible to answer.

*Nancy Edwards is Professor of Medieval Archaeology at Bangor University. She has a particular interest in the early medieval church in Britain and Ireland and has published widely on early medieval sculpture. The final regional volume of *A Corpus of Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales* was published in 2013.*

The Sacred Architecture of Byzantium: Art, Liturgy and Symbolism in Early Christian Churches

Patricios, Nicholas N, 2014

Tauris, New York

ISBN 978 1 78076 2 913

Hb, xv + 446 pp, 40 colour and B&W illustrations, £45.00

Nikolaos D Karydis

In *The Sacred Architecture of Byzantium*, Nicholas N Patricios has embarked on a particularly challenging project. The study of Byzantine church architecture is fraught with many difficulties, chief among which are the variety of Byzantine churches and their vast geographical and chronological span. The author proposes to tackle these challenges with a new system of typological classification for the hundreds of different Byzantine churches built from the 4th to the 15th century. His examination of the design of these churches is combined with the study of their mosaic and fresco decoration and its relationship with the overall architectural programme. This study is not only concerned with the description of the material aspect of these churches: it aims to interpret church forms by referring to the development of worship practices. This multifaceted approach to the monuments, both typological and functional, increases the potential interest of this project.

Books like this one invite comparisons with previous surveys of Byzantine architecture, such as the ones published by academics Richard Krautheimer, Cyril Mango, and Hans Buchwald. Given the high quality and broad audience of these textbooks, not to mention the recent advances in Byzantine scholarship,

both scholars and non-specialists are entitled to expect a lot from new offerings in this field. This review takes this into account as it discusses the degree to which the book satisfies the ambitious goals it sets out in its introduction, and, in particular, the ones associated with the new typological classification and description of Byzantine churches. But, before going on to discuss these points further, a few words are necessary to describe the structure that the author has chosen to do justice to this challenging topic.

Following a prologue that underlines the influence of worship rituals on the experience of sacred space, the first chapter of the book provides an overview of the historical background under which Byzantine church architecture and liturgy developed. The two following chapters are devoted to the design of churches. Chapter 2 investigates the question of typology and proposes a new way of classifying the monuments. Chapter 3 provides a detailed catalogue of 'splendid churches' built in the most important Byzantine centres of architectural production, such as Rome, Constantinople, Thessaloniki, Ravenna and the Holy Land. These two chapters put emphasis on the description of forms; the study of construction technology and urban setting are somewhat overlooked. The following two chapters (4 and 5) are devoted to the decorative programmes. They analyse the use of mosaics, wall paintings, and icons to adorn the interior spaces of Byzantine churches. The book closes with two chapters that investigate the development of the liturgy and the symbolic meaning of the spaces of Byzantine churches. These explain the influence of Christian

rituals, such as the processions and the offerings associated with the Eucharist, on the design of Byzantine churches. They also explore the symbolic meaning of the spaces and layouts encountered in these churches. Finishing this book, one wonders whether it provides a convincing '*survey of the nexus between buildings, art and, worship*'. Although the book refers to both art and architecture, these topics could have been synthesised further. Despite certain interesting conclusions regarding the associations between form and liturgy, as well as between architectural framework and decorative programme, the main structure of the book reflects a clear tendency to address these as separate and independent aspects.

The author's new approach to the architectural typology of Byzantine churches is one of the key parts of the book. This approach is based on the identification of seven architectural types: the basilica, the domed basilica, the cross-in-square, the centralised, the cruciform, and the Athonite church, as well as the converted temple. The same designations have been used in the past, but most previous authors attribute them to different buildings. This may confuse teachers and students using this book, especially as they challenge the current consensus regarding the typology of Byzantine church architecture. Take, for example, the church of the Koimesis at Nicaea. Patricios considers this as a cross-in-square church. On the other hand, both Krautheimer (1986, 292) and Mango (1978, 96) describe this as a cross-domed church, a type that develops in the so-called 'Transitional Period' (7th to 9th century) and is very different from the cross-in-square

church, which develops later. This crucial distinction is absent from Patricios' book, making it very difficult for the reader to understand the architectural development of the Transitional Period. The way in which types and individual examples are presented in this book also raises some questions. There is an emphasis on the grouping of churches by type at the expense of a broader chronological narrative, making it difficult for the reader to understand the development of church architecture during the Byzantine period.

Establishing the development of Byzantine architectural types is very difficult, of course. The use of up-to-date, specialised scholarship, alongside an ability to distinguish between facts and hypotheses is crucial in achieving this. Unfortunately, this is not one of the strengths of this book. The presentation of certain buildings tends to overlook recent findings and to present hypotheses as facts. For instance, there is hardly any conclusive evidence for the author's claim that the Pre-Justinian church of St John at Ephesus was built by Theodosius II. The absence of bibliographic references makes it even more difficult for the reader to review the current state of knowledge about the buildings mentioned, raising doubts about the potential of the book to serve as an academic resource for students of Byzantine architecture.

The points mentioned above should not detract us from the merits of this book, however. The parts devoted to the relationship between architecture and liturgy are very interesting and help to establish the symbolic meaning of Byzantine churches. The study of building design and decorative patterns avoids the sclerotic distinction

between decorative and architectural programmes and demonstrates the potential value of a holistic approach to Byzantine art and architecture.

Dr Nikolaos Karydis is a practising architect and lecturer in architecture at the University of Kent. His current work looks at urban development in Early Modern Rome, and investigates the ways in which specific building projects of the 16th and the 17th centuries conditioned urban renewal.

Krautheimer, R, 1986, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (4th Edition), Yale

Mango, CA, 1978, *Byzantine Architecture*, Milan

Hidden Treasures of Ethiopia: A guide to the Remote Churches of an Ancient Land

Friedlander, M-J and Friedlander, B, 2015

Tauris, London and New York
ISBN 9781780768168

Hb, xxiii + 322pp, 176 colour illustrations + diagrams and maps, £25.00

Joshua J Schwieso

Shama Books first issued this beautifully illustrated volume in 2007. It begins with a description of the architecture of Ethiopian churches, moves on to a review of Christian iconography in Ethiopia from the 4th to the 17th century, briefly describes the period when the country came under European Jesuit influence, and then provides a detailed account of the paintings of 17 churches in three areas; Tigray, Gondar, and Lalibela. It makes no claim to be a comprehensive architectural survey. Although the architecture of the churches is covered, about 70% of the book is about wall and ceiling paintings in the selected churches. Hence none of the famous churches at Lalibela are described, presumably because their paintings are relatively poor. Other churches were omitted because the Friedlanders simply couldn't get in!

The preface gives valuable information about travelling to, and getting into, the churches. They are often located in inaccessible places that can sometimes only be reached by climbing. Even if one gets there, gaining entrance can be very difficult. Before setting out one has to obtain advance official approval for every church one wants to see and then persuade the relevant priest to let you in (generous financial donations seem to be *de rigueur*).

The Friedlanders were sometimes unable to find a custodian or were even denied access by a somewhat inebriated cleric. It all makes even the frostiest Anglican vicar seem positively welcoming.

Next comes a chapter on church architecture. Between the 3rd century BC and the 8th century AD, modern Ethiopia was part of the kingdom of Aksum, whose centre was in north of modern Ethiopia. Aksum became Christian following the conversion of the king in 331, making it the second nation to adopt Christianity as its official religion. The first Ethiopian churches seem to have been box-like basilicas, sometimes with a semicircular apse, a form developed in Aksumite kingdom from the 4th century onwards. The Aksumite architectural style used alternating courses of stone and wood, with projecting beams at the corners ('monkey heads') as well as blind arcades. The famous rock-cut churches are similarly rectangular but were created either by cutting a deep church-shaped outline trench into the solid rock and then hollowing out the interior of the block thus liberated (the 'monolithic' type), or by cutting doors and windows into a cliff face and then excavating the interior. This form of church building is largely restricted to Ethiopia, although the remains of an early medieval church partially constructed from the living rock can be seen at Bobastro in southern Spain.

Rock-cut churches can have formed only a fraction of the churches of medieval Ethiopia but their importance is accentuated by the fact that they are the main survivors of a destructive Islamic invasion in the 1530s, and another by the Mahidists in 1881 (the same group that killed General Gordon at Khartoum). The most famous is the collection of 13 churches around the

town of Lalibela, whose construction from the 13th century onwards seems to have been a response to the conquest of Christian Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187.

Following the destruction of the 1530s, Ethiopia came under the influence of the Jesuits until they were expelled in the 1630s (Portugal had helped expel the Muslims). Following this, Ethiopian church plans seem to have become simpler. Many were circular, perhaps modelled on the indigenous round houses. Others are relatively simple rectangles. Both kinds may have external covered arcades, making them somewhat resemble Gallo-Roman temples.

The book then moves on to the iconography of the wall paintings. The Ethiopian church is a branch of the Coptic (monophysite) Orthodox church which meant that, apart from the apostles, St George, and the Virgin Mary, the saints of medieval Ethiopian Christianity are largely unknown in the west. They have highly colourful hagiographies, sometimes derived from the non-canonical gospels, that are extensively depicted in colourful, if somewhat naïve, detail in many churches. Although the Jesuits were expelled in the 17th century, subsequent Ethiopian church decoration shows the influence of European religious art. So, for example, paintings of Christ's raising of Adam and Eve from hell, which appear only from the 17th century onwards, appear to derive from the work of Nicolo Brancalion who worked in Ethiopia in the 1480s.

The first group of churches described are situated in the province of Tigray. They comprise seven churches in the Geralta Mountains, and another four in the Tsaeda Amba hills. All are wholly or partially rock hewn, though

none are monolithic. The interiors of the buildings are lime plastered. The churches are dated to the 13th or 14th centuries but the paintings, of which there are a great variety, are 17th-century or later. The 19th-century paintings employ a base of whitewash and cotton cloth, glued to the plastered walls. The authors are not certain whether the older paintings, which are painted upon a thin layer of lime plaster, are true frescoes or fresco secco. It should be said that the dating of both buildings and paintings is somewhat speculative.

The second group of churches is around Gondar, south from Tigray, which became the capital in the 17th century. Two are circular and one rectangular, all with external open ambulatories. Two of the churches are dated to the early 19th century and the third, though said to be early 14th-century, is more likely to be later as it is circular, a style favoured after the Islamic incursion of the 1530s. Once again the focus is upon the fine wall and ceiling decoration.

The final three churches, situated east from Gondar and south of Lalibela, are arguably the most interesting architecturally. All three buildings, together with their paintings, are medieval. Two of them shelter within the overhangs of huge caves, which may account for their excellent preservation. One is a wood and timber basilica in the Aksumite style, the other similar but with the wood courses replaced by red tufa. The third is a true monolithic church, with a low-pitched roof of rock carved on the outside with arcades containing crosses. Unsurprisingly, the paintings are less striking than those in the churches of Tigray and Gondar. Nevertheless, they are still far better preserved than their contemporaries in Britain.

The book is well produced and has a bibliography and a decent index. The reviewer learned a lot about Ethiopian Christianity, its practices and its artefacts from it. It would be a very good, albeit rather bulky, companion to visiting the buildings. It is not an academic volume on the churches of Ethiopia – but nor does it claim to be. It is truly a guide to some of the remote churches of an ancient land.

Josh Schwieso is Membership Secretary for the Society for Church Archaeology, and his doctorate is in the Sociology of Religion. His current research interests focus upon rood lofts and rood stairs.