

Reviews

Edited by Scott Chaussée

Glastonbury Abbey: Archaeological Investigations 1904–79

Gilchrist, R and Green, C 2015
The Society of Antiquaries of
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tables, £45

Duncan Wright

In 1191, the monks of Glastonbury Abbey undertook what still stands as arguably the most impressive and long-lasting publicity stunt in English history. Only seven years earlier a devastating fire had destroyed the ancient church (*vetusa ecclesia*) and other buildings, and the monastery had experienced a significant and prolonged dip in patronage. A place already furnished with ancient tradition, most notably by William of Malmesbury in his c1129–30 work *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesie*, was soon to be given an Arthurian connection which continues to act as a significant pull for tourists even today. Excavating beneath two enigmatic ‘pyramids’ and behind a makeshift screen in the monastic cemetery, the monks recovered the

alleged remains of King Arthur and his queen Guinevere, together with numerous objects including a lead cross with an inscription that helpfully identified the interred. There are echoes throughout this whole episode of Dunstan’s exhumation in 1070 by the clerics of Canterbury, and ownership of the archbishop’s earthly remains had been contested by the two houses. Dunstan’s corpse had likewise been uncovered beneath a ‘pyramid’, and there can be little doubt that the authorities of Glastonbury Abbey were aware of these events, and their subsequent success in attracting patronage and pilgrims.

The fact that Arthur is mentioned in the first sentence of the summary of the current volume demonstrates the success of the 12th-century coup – the mythical leader remains at the forefront of academic and public consciousness – but thankfully further references are fleeting and instead this work is dedicated to understanding the fortunes of one of the most powerful and influential monasteries in medieval Europe. In spite of this importance Glastonbury Abbey has been ‘ill-served’ by historians and archaeologists, and while 36 seasons of excavation were undertaken on the

site up to 1979, nothing but interim reports have been made available until now. The clear need for redress was recognised as early as 1977 by Mick Aston and Roger Leech, but has only recently been made possible thanks to the direction of Roberta Gilchrist and the principal funding of the AHRC. Bringing the excavation archives together has proved no mean feat, inhibited by a limited and often biased record from eight different directors. These difficulties have unfortunately meant that a thematic approach has not been possible, and the work has been arranged by chronological development with specialist reports standing distinct from stratigraphic analysis. In spite of these clearly significant challenges, the effort headed by Gilchrist and Cheryl Green and supported by a group of 31 specialists, together provides a compelling account of the Glastonbury excavations and highlights their value for understanding the evolving fortunes of the house over the medieval period.

The monograph opens with a mercifully succinct overview of the excavation campaigns, crucially supported by colour plans detailing the location and extent of interventions. The piecemeal nature

of the excavations conducted over the course of the 20th century, and the root of many interpretive difficulties, is immediately apparent and serves only to amplify the challenge faced by the authors. More detail of the archive available, its potential and limitations are explored in the succeeding section, which also provides the results of new geophysical surveys commissioned under the project. The contribution of the magnetic and resistance survey and ground penetrating radar is somewhat limited, although this is perhaps not surprising given the level of ground disturbance that the abbey has encountered over centuries of use. Indeed, we learn that Glastonbury has been a busy landscape long before the establishment of the abbey, with finds from the excavations providing evidence for an early Mesolithic and early Neolithic presence in the area and significant Iron Age activity. While clearly distinguishing itself from the mythical and legendary associations of Glastonbury, the project does show that at least one post-Roman (dated c450–550) timber structure has been located through excavation. Such a feature cannot of course be confidently associated with a religious community, but does support the idea of at least continued occupation on the site in the earliest medieval centuries.

Perhaps the most impressive assemblage of artefacts recovered from the interventions is the Anglo-Saxon glasswork, which remains the most important evidence for such industry in early medieval England. The glass, and the furnaces in which it was found, is comprehensively explored by Hugh Willmott and Kate Welham. Evidence for glassworking has been identified in three separate

areas of the later medieval cloister, with remains of furnaces in two of these. Intriguingly, the dating of the glass is most reliably dated to the 680s, a period associated with the patronage of King Ine at a time of nascent West Saxon rule in formerly British areas of Devon, Somerset and Wiltshire. Such a reanalysis conforms to an increasingly clear pattern of glass production by the Middle Saxon Church, and demonstrates a level of skill and sophistication previously associated with the ninth and tenth centuries. Among the other many highlights contained within the finds section of this volume is reanalysis of Roman tile, pottery and small finds, as well as medieval window glass, wall plaster and post-medieval clay pipe. The medieval worked stone assemblages is afforded its own chapter, compiled by Ron Baxter and Jerry Sampson. Baxter delivers a fascinating insight into the design of Henry of Blois' arcade, brother of King Stephen and Abbot of Glastonbury from 1126. The blue lias carving dated to Henry's patronage bear close comparison with those at Wolvesey Palace, Winchester, suggesting curation of a distinct sculptural brand under controlled production at his workshops.

The sections on Anglo-Saxon glasswork and medieval stone assemblage go some way in revealing the great depth of analyses and scholarly skill embedded across this volume, and it is a testament to Gilchrist and Green that the work remains equally accessible yet thorough. This achievement has been enabled by shifting much of the finds catalogue and appendices into an online archive, where a digital version of the book can also be accessed completely free of charge. The Society of Antiquaries are to be

commended for making the work so widely available through Open Access, and have funded a similarly generous piece by Peter White and Alan Cook investigating Old Sherborne Castle. In spite of this, at £45 there is little doubt that the printed version of the Glastonbury Abbey investigations offers extremely good value for money. Gilchrist and Green's work certainly helps counter the former neglect of the monastery by the archaeological community and offers much for both the specialist and generalist alike. It is hoped that this effort now provides a suitable platform for all scholars so that even further understanding can be reached of a quite remarkable monastic institution.

Duncan Wright is Senior Lecturer in Archaeology and Heritage at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, and Editor of Church Archaeology. His recent volume Anarchy: War and Status in Twelfth-century Landscapes of Conflict, co-authored with Oliver Creighton, is available through Liverpool University Press.

Churches and Social Power in Early Medieval Europe: Integrating Archaeological and Historical Approaches (Studies in the Early Middle Ages)

Edited by Sánchez-Pardo, J and Shapland, M 2015

Brepols, Turnhout

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Scott Chaussée

Churches and Social Power was devised to redress the lack of attention, as per the editor's introduction, to churches from "comparative historical and archaeological perspectives across the continent" (2). The 16 chapters span over 550 pages (including a useful index of people, places, and subjects), so the early medievalist may consider this topic well and truly broached. Indeed, the contributions cover a breadth of European geography that has gone heretofore unaddressed in a similar way, but tied firmly together by the central theme of the effect on or of social power and its intersection with the church at a variety of scales.

Each paper contributes significantly to this theme of intersection, but at multiple social and spatial scales across the early medieval period. Following an introductory chapter which effectively presents a useful historiography within the explicit European context, the volume is divided into four thematic 'parts' the first examining churches as channels for power relations. Juan Antonio Quirós and Igor Santos creatively explore the 'ownership' of churches in the Álava region of northern Spain. Alexandra Chavarría and Tomás Ó Carragáin

in their respective chapters contextualise local churches in their social and spatial contexts in northern Italy (Chavarría) and the Kingdom of Fir Maige in Ireland (Ó Carragáin). Farinelli's novel attempt at characterising the relationship between churches and social elites in the eighth-century diocese of Lucca, Italy using quantitative-statistical methods shows the clear interdisciplinary effort that *Churches and Social Power* has been able to harness. Part II explores the role of churches in the transition of power. Aleksandra McClain begins the section by examining the impact of the Norman Conquest on the patronage of churches and their organisation in the North Riding of Yorkshire, northern England, deftly combining material culture 'trappings' of lordship with analysis of the documentary evidence of parochial networks. José Carlos Sánchez-Pardo similarly weaves both physical and documentary evidence for power strategies used by churches and elites in early medieval Galicia, northern Spain. Christofer Zwanzig follows by comparing 'monastic remembrance' of the Anglo-Saxon mission in southern Germany and the 'Mozarabic resettlement' of northern Spain. Part II is closed with David Petts laying out the evidence for pre-Viking Christianity and the changing fortunes of the church in western Normandy, AD 800–1200, utilising particularly effective analysis of church fabric.

Part III addresses the church in landscapes of power. While the authors of the chapters comprising the first two parts of this volume fluidly moved between the scales of the local to the regional, the 'zooming out' of scales in Part III moves from the traditionally bounded entities of historic

kingdoms to broader supra-regional considerations. Anne Nissen begins with a comparative study of rural elites and patterns of church building in Northern France and Southern Scandinavia. Duncan Wright makes a compelling case for the church in early medieval England as an engine of social change in a system shifting from authority by exacting tribute to that of agricultural exploitation. Luís Fontes moves our focus from northern Europe again to Atlantic Iberia in his consideration of powers, territories and architecture in north-west Portugal in the fifth to eleventh centuries; his use of digital models, annotated and other photographs, and excavation plans all contribute to an excellent survey of an under-appreciated area. Christine Delaplace caps off part III with an excellent survey of early medieval churches in Gaul and finishes with a reassessment of the relationships between Christianisation and settlement in Late Antique south-eastern Gaul. In the culmination of the volume, part IV returns to the physical fabric of the church as expressions of elite identity in the early medieval world. For the return to a 'local' view of churches and social power, Gian Pietro Brogiolo specifically looks at the strategies of the Lombard kings to use the church as explicit representations of their power; particularly illustrated by the Church of San Salvatore at Brescia. Andreas Schaub and Tanja Kohlberger-Schaub shoulder the terrific burden of relating the results of recent excavations at the tremendously important Carolingian site of Aachen Cathedral; results which are more closely dated to the earliest years of Charlemagne's reign. While Schaub and Kohlberger-Schaub explore the practice of kingship and the choice to build one church, Michael Shapland examines Christianity in the practice

of kingship in Anglo-Saxon England. Particularly interesting is his echoing the assertion that the “rigidity of ‘monastery’ versus ‘palace’ is unhelpful”, and that inflexible terminology masks complex sites which may change function over time. The final contribution to part IV and the volume as a whole is an excellent case study which incorporates the scales and themes presented throughout the book: Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir’s examination of the development of the Church and church centres in Iceland with particular reference to eight phases of church building at Reykholt.

There is unequivocally something for everyone in this vastly important book; whether historian or archaeologist, or wherever you work in western Europe, this volume is a must-have. Illustrated throughout with competence but restraint, the quality of contributions advance significantly our understanding of interactions among early medieval people via the medium of the church.

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Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

Edited by Wescoat, BD and Ousterhout, RG 2014
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
ISBN 978 1 107 00823 6
416pp, 151 b/w illus., £65

Emilie Hayter

This volume is product of two key colloquia, 'Ritual and Sacred Space in Pre-Modern Architecture' in 2005 and 'Circular Space and Performance' in 2006. Wescoat and Ousterhout are professors researching ancient Greek sacred architecture and Byzantine art and architecture respectively. Their edited volume aims to delve into the complicated interplay of architecture, ritual and experience. The main objectives of the papers are to move beyond seeing architecture as a passive backdrop and re-establish it as an active agent that does not simply frame, but shape ritual activity and human experience. This is achieved using an integrated approach that examines archaeological and architectural studies of different rituals, religions and sites to understand how architecture creates and influences sacred spaces and vice versa. The strength of this volume is its wide ranging geographical coverage of the eastern Mediterranean and the varied chronological and diachronic analyses of the chosen case studies. After an initial theoretical introduction, the overall structure of the book is planned roughly according to temporal trajectory of the case studies, the first half dealing with ancient Greek and Roman and the latter with Jewish, early Christian and Byzantine.

Elsner presents the theoretical background for the volume, tackling ritual theory and its complicated relationship to material culture. His discussion, however, would have been more relevant if he had chosen to identify/treat architecture as a different and distinct component of material culture, therefore realising the need to adapt his theoretical basis. Architectural theory has lagged behind studies of other material culture and its relationship to ritual and experience (long cemented in the culture-historic approach of defining architectural typologies), a key reason why this volume was created. Elsner agrees that architectural material function is essentially disparate to the function of ritual artefacts but apparently not when exploring general issues of methodology. There is a need to reassert the unique role that architecture plays within ritual theory rather than integrating it into other material frameworks. It is a different and complex part of ritual, incomparable yet invariably entwined with ritual objects.

Along with issues of cognitive archaeological approaches and the impact of biased modern ritual observation, Elsner also proposes the optimistic viewing of ritual (positive view of ritual as a category and meanings for understanding a society), versus the pessimistic (cautious attitude when attributing archaeological evidence to ritualised behaviour), the latter where Elsner settles. Firstly, the categorisation of approaches to ritual into two opposing viewpoints seems a parochial attitude to take. The volume editors both side with the opposite viewpoint to Elsner and indeed the papers generally attach themselves to the optimistic side. Elsner warns that architecture of a ritual context "may offer no

clues at all" in relation to liturgical practice, yet this statement in itself isolates built structures and their effect on human action and experience. Marinis argues that academics often deal with belief, ritual and architecture as separate subjects rather than seeing them as intrinsically interdependent. The act of building and shaping sacred space is inherently intertwined with our cultural engagement and experience of that built environment.

Despite a collective structure, there does not appear to be a sufficient attempt at cohesion between the individual papers. This was disadvantageous especially considering this volume frames religious structures from pagan polytheism to early Christianity and distinct architectural arrangements eg temple complex and church. Instead, the brief afterword by Wescoat and Ousterhout outlines specific recurring themes rather than overarching aspects of continuity or change in the definition and use of sacred or sanctified space and experience across multiple religions, time and locations. The collective picture that emerges from the papers is persistent durability and reiteration of tradition within ritualised spaces yet also specific appropriation between cult forerunners and religious institutions. Examples include a discussion by Miles on the development of Propylon, integral to the Eleusinian Mysteries from Ancient Greek and its purposeful continued reiteration during the Roman period. Similarly, how architecture was used to shape sacred topography and solidify collective memory with Homeric heritage in Ilion, Athens and Rome, presented by Rose. Alternatively an example by Čurčić whereby the 'radiant frieze' motif (representing

divine light in Early Christian or Byzantine art and architecture) is appropriated by Islamic believers and used in the disparate context of Ottoman religious architecture.

Overall, this volume offers wide-ranging views and a comprehensive approach to architectural research and its relationship with ritual and religion through a multiplicity of relevant case studies. Ultimately, the diversity of approaches incorporated within this volume remains one of its strengths, however a contextualisation of these individual studies to strengthen our understanding of sacred space across multiple religious traditions would have been advantageous. An introduction underlining the major themes within this volume would have been an appreciated addition, helping to clarify ingrained connections and contradictions. Those investigating the key issues and themes of architecture, ritual and experience through which the papers revolve would benefit by considering this volume as a whole. Despite its individual research avenues, the papers provide the reader with wide-ranging and diachronic studies of the creation of sacred space throughout the Mediterranean. The key aim of establishing architecture as an active entity invoking a significant effect on ritual activity and human experience rather than portrayed as a static backdrop has been successfully accomplished.

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The King's Body, Burial and Succession in Late Anglo-Saxon England

Marafioti, N, 2014
University of Toronto Press,
Toronto/Buffalo/London
ISBN 978-1442647589
Hb, 300pp + xviii
£44.95

Duncan Wright

In 978 King Edward “the Martyr” was assassinated while visiting the royal residence at Corfe in Dorset, in what was one of the most scandalous and shocking events in Anglo-Saxon political history. Almost certainly murdered by supporters of Æthelred, a rival claimant to the throne, Edward’s body was apparently hastily disposed of in a makeshift grave; the young victim denied the ceremonial practices of interment which would have normally followed the death of an anointed ruler. The attempt of those loyal to Æthelred to suppress the memory of his immediate successor backfired, however, as the period between the regicide and appropriate burial prolonged the feeling of interregnum, and sustained the factionalism in royal support that had emerged in the wake of Edgar’s death in 975. Edward’s body was eventually transferred to Shaftesbury Abbey and buried with full Christian honours, but the eleven-month interlude between the internments provided a window during which debate raged over the way the late king should be remembered. In this stimulating and engaging volume exploring the treatment of royal bodies in ninth to eleventh-century England, Nicole Marafioti argues that this limbo created a prolonged focus on Edward’s missing corpse

and was ultimately key in forming his status as martyr king.

Spanning the death of Alfred in 899 until the ascension of William the Conqueror, Marafioti constructs a convincing case that the bodies of dead kings, as was the case with Edward, were powerful political devices the treatment of which had to be carefully managed by nascent regimes. The opening chapter of the volume focusses on the construction of royal mausolea at New Minster, Winchester and Westminster following the death of Edward the Elder through the ascension of his great-grandson, Edward the Martyr. We learn that, not only did dead kings exert relatively little power over the location of their interment, but that royal burials conformed to expected contemporary social mores despite their broad geographical spread in the middle decades of the tenth century. Indeed, Marafioti explains that the topographic fluidity of grave sites was the outcome of malleable political circumstances; the curation of mausolea in more westerly parts of England for example, can be seen as part of political unification of Wessex and Mercia. This is clearly the case in the burial of Æthelstan in Malmesbury, a pre-existing monastery which lay at the traditional interface between the two kingdoms and whose ownership was fiercely disputed by the royal houses. If the argument in this chapter that the Roman road network made these locations more accessible to Mercian authorities seems rather tenuous, more compelling is the evidence that these westerly burials were carefully placed at establishments with a widely recognised depth of history. While scholars have debated the veracity of Glastonbury’s dubious early charters and Malmesbury’s foundation

story, whereby an Irish monk established a monastery within a pre-existing ‘city’ during the 7th century, both claims have received a degree of supporting evidence from archaeological analysis. The recent work led by Roberta Gilchrist (see review in this volume) has confirmed the presence of a likely high-status focus at Glastonbury as early as the fifth century, and in Malmesbury excavation along the line of the medieval town wall has demonstrated that it developed within the circuit of an Iron Age promontory fort (Longman 2006; Gilchrist and Green 2015). The heritage of these sites, and the legitimacy that their use for royal burial bestowed, must therefore have appeared compelling to West Saxon authorities, although the author is correct to point out that neither place would have attracted such investment if they had been located in peripheral parts of the kingdom.

The succeeding chapter examines the treatment of the royal body itself, and the convergence of elite funerals and other ceremonies in the five decades before 1066. Marafioti illustrates that the bodies of deceased kings were perhaps the primary metonymic symbol of their reign, which could be manipulated by survivors to propel themselves into positions of power. Contrastingly, the mistreatment of anointed remains could compromise the image of successors as explored in Chapter 4. Royal bodies were expected to be offered a certain degree of respect even by incoming rivals, and when Harold and Harthacnut mutilated and desecrated their antagonists, it was used by contemporary chroniclers to cast them as bad leaders. The following chapter provides a detailed study of the missing corpse

of Edward the Martyr and pursues in particular the theme of burial and memory, an avenue that in Anglo-Saxon studies has been impressively led by the work of Howard Williams. It is to the author's credit that such archaeologically-orientated research is incorporated so successfully, an approach which broadens the relevance of the *The King's Body* beyond the Late Saxon period. The volume is concluded with a succinct commentary on William of Normandy, flowing naturally from the penultimate chapter focussing on bodies of conquest.

In summary, this is a comprehensive analysis of the significance of royal burial in Anglo-Saxon England and demonstrates with sophistication and clarity how central a component it was to the broader political process. Particularly welcome for readers of this journal is the incorporation of the material evidence, and Marafioti is the last in a line of historians such as John Blair, Robin Fleming and Helen Gittos who successfully weave archaeology with documentary sources to provide genuinely fresh insights into religious practice in early medieval England. Perhaps the only truly disappointing omission for those with an interest in the material world is the complete absence of maps, plans or illustrations, especially given the prominence of space and place to the overall narrative. Largely the result of traditions of scholarship, historians still seem loathe to use imagery to support their work, but in this case accompanying plans would have proved especially helpful to orientate the reader. This should not detract from a very impressive piece of scholarship, however, and *The King's Body* will no doubt provide a useful account for studies

both within and beyond the realm of Anglo-Saxon England.

Duncan Wright is Senior Lecturer in Archaeology and Heritage at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, and Editor of Church Archaeology. His recent volume Anarchy: War and Status in Twelfth-century Landscapes of Conflict, co-authored with Oliver Creighton, is available through Liverpool University Press.

Gilchrist, R, and Green, C, 2015, *Glastonbury Abbey: Archaeological Excavations 1904–1979*, London

Longman, T, 2006, 'Iron Age and Later Defences at Malmesbury: Excavations 1998–2000', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 99, 104–64

Stepney Green: Moated Manor House to City Farm

Sankey, D, 2015

MOLA, London

ISBN 978 1 907586 31 6

Pb 100pp, colour and B&W illustrations, £10.00

Murray Andrews

Forty minutes' walk east of the City of London lies the Stepney City Farm, a small oasis of urban agriculture deep in the heart of the East End. A community initiative founded in 1979 atop the bombed remains of a nineteenth century Congregationalist meeting house, the City Farm is one of several locations recently subjected to archaeological investigation in advance of the Crossrail development. Written in an engaging popular style, this slim volume sketches an archaeological and historical narrative of the site and its environs from later prehistory to the present day.

Following an introductory survey in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 presents the evidence for a substantial late 15th or early 16th-century moated brick mansion known later as Worcester House after its owner, the recusant Royalist Henry Somerset, 5th Earl of Worcester (1577–1646). High status medieval and post-medieval occupation is reflected in grandiose structural remains and a rich assemblage of artefactual and environmental evidence, including glazed Flemish tiles, Venetian glass vessels, imported spices and ornamental plants, and a lengthy consideration of textual sources convincingly identifies the early property with the 'Great Place' owned by the 15th-century London fishmonger and merchant

John Fenne. In Chapter 3 the site's 17th-century associations with the prominent Stepney Puritans are examined, although the archaeological evidence for documented links are slim; most significantly, the meeting house built in the grounds of Worcester House in 1674 is shown to have been wholly destroyed by 19th-century quarrying. Chapter 4 examines the early 19th-century demolition of the Tudor mansion and the 1810 adaption of its gatehouse frontage as a college for the London Baptist Education Society. Three years after its 1855 relocation to Regents Park the old college and gatehouse at Stepney were demolished, with a chapel built on the site in 1830 being subsequently acquired by Congregationalists and, in 1875, the Unitarians. Later 19th and early 20th-century developments are addressed in Chapter 5, where a combination of extant plans, upstanding walls and excavated foundations are used to reconstruct the now-levelled 1862-3 Gothic Revival Stepney Meeting House, and oral testimonies are introduced in Chapter 6 to trace local developments into the present day.

Generously illustrated with an array of full-colour photographs, plans, and drawings, this book provides ample testimony to Stepney Green's cultural and religious influence on the social history of the capital. While the archaeological signatures of nonconformism at Stepney are elusive, readers of *Church Archaeology* will appreciate the author's painstaking efforts to connect material and textual evidence in documenting the place of Worcester House and its occupants in the story of English Protestantism in the post-medieval period. An entertaining and enlivening read,

this publication will be appreciated by the wide audience it will doubtlessly receive.

Murray Andrews is a research student at University College London researching coin boards in medieval England and Wales, c. AD 973–1544.