

Reviews

Edited by Martin Huggon

Places of Worship in Britain and Ireland, 300-950

Edited by Barnwell, PS, 2015
Rewley House Studies in the
Historic Environment vol. 4. Shaun
Tyas, Donnington
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Hb 240 pp, £40

Michael Shapland

The aim of this volume is to summarise the present state of research into early medieval churches across all regions of the British Isles, driven by archaeology and buildings as much as by historical narratives. As much weight is given to Scotland, Wales and Ireland as it is to England, with the explicit understanding that later nationalist boundaries would be anachronistic if applied to (for example) the 7th-century Kingdom of Northumbria, and that it was often easier to cross the sea than it was to travel around one's own land-mass. Note also the decision to frame these essays with a date-range starting in AD 300, rather than the arrival of St Augustine into Kent in 597 that is so pivotal to the world-view of established chronologies

founded upon the writings of the Venerable Bede.

One of the attractions for the reader is the ability to trace common threads running throughout the book, many of which are adeptly summarised in Paul Barnwell's thoughtful conclusion. Hence, Martin Henig's chapter on 'The Origins of Christian Britain' and Barbara Yorke's introduction, are alive to the realisation that Christianity operated alongside established pagan religions, and spread by adopting local practices. Nancy Edwards similarly emphasises continuity with the prehistoric past in her study of the early medieval Church in Wales, and Richard Morris makes excellent use of what he sees as the long-established ritual landscapes around the cult-centres of the Kingdom of Deira. These were structured by standing stones, earthworks, and Roman remains, but particularly arresting is Morris' notion that the concentration of ironstone deposits near the monastery of Lastingham meant that it would have attracted an unusual frequency of lightning strikes, rendering it a 'place both of visions and of divine gestures', a reminder that natural as well as

artificial phenomena can be imbued with considerable meaning.

Another consistent theme is that of materiality: whether churches were constructed from timber or stone or Roman masonry, and why this can be such an interesting question to pursue. Tomás Ó Carragain discusses the traditionalism of Irish churches, with the conservatism of their architecture and their curvilinear enclosures, and the paucity of foundations dated to after *c.* 800 (in direct contrast to England). Originally of timber, their widespread rebuilding in stone during the 10th and 11th centuries was executed in skeuomorphic fashion, retaining the archaic form of the originals in reverence for early churchmen such as St Patrick. Sally Foster similarly considers the conscious – and meaningful – decisions to adopt stone or timber in Scottish churches, with the valuable assertion that timber architecture could be no less complex or wondrous than stone. Rosemary Cramp pursues the attempt to employ building materials to imbue the Northumbrian kingdoms with the authority of Rome, as do Meg Boulton and Jane Hawkes in their

survey of the Kentish hegemony, whose churches are held to be meaningfully-imbued material culture with lives outside of their place in historical narratives of conversion.

It is nevertheless inevitable that a portmanteau book of this type will leave gaps, due to the differing interests and approaches of the many authors involved. The kingdoms of Northumbria and Kent are well covered, but David Parsons' and Michael Hare's careful summaries of recent research on the important churches of Brixworth and Deerhurst made me feel the lack of a synthetic essay on Mercia, whilst the kingdom of Wessex does not even merit an entry in the index. But these gaps are to miss the book's stated intentions, and are more than outweighed by the taking of the often fragmentary and difficult evidence for each region across the British Isles on its own merits, rather than always seeking comparisons with familiar and well-preserved churches from lowland England and the Continent. Should I not instead be seeking a chapter on Cornwall, Cumbria, or the Isle of Man, and then where should my carping at these gaps sensibly end? It is enough to say what a very fine book this is, and what a testament to how early medieval church archaeology has become leavened with ideas that transcend what can be a narrowly classificatory discipline. At £40 it is not expensive for a well-illustrated academic hardback, and I am thoroughly looking forward to getting hold of subsequent volumes in the series, which will cover the mid-10th century and beyond.

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Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture. XII: Nottinghamshire

Everson, P, & Stocker, D, 2016
British Academy and Oxford
University Press, Oxford
ISBN 9780197265956
Hb pp. 353, 230 figs and maps, £80

Norma Oldfield

The second most recent volume in the notable Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture series, Volume XII focuses solely on the county of Nottinghamshire and is a high-quality piece that suitably conveys the distinct identity of the county during the pre-Conquest period. It is the second publication for authors Paul Everson and David Stocker in this series, following Volume V: Lincolnshire (1999), and clearly exemplifies their continued wealth of knowledge concerning the Midlands region. Following the overall structure of former CASSS volumes, this volume contains introductory chapters on earlier scholarship, historical county background, regional geology, style and ornament, and monumental groupings.

In total, this volume discusses 99 stones from 54 sites, with the main catalogue containing 32 stones from 22 sites and the remainder in the appendices - a clear reflection of the extensive fieldwork undertaken by the authors. These stones range from free-standing crosses to grave-covers to grave-markers. The authors do an excellent job of stepping outside of the CASSS modern county boundaries to recognise Nottinghamshire's wider connection to the Midlands, especially Lincolnshire, but still ensure that they come full circle to argue for the distinctness of the county.

The authors importantly acknowledge that there are a number

of inherent challenges presented by the dataset (pp. 67, 73), including the lack of pre-Viking sculptural decoration in Nottinghamshire churches and the fact that the corpus of sculpture here is highly individualistic. Despite this, the authors are able to utilise a variety of stone sculpture to present several fundamental reinterpretations of their role in understanding both the pre-Viking and Anglo-Scandinavian period in Nottinghamshire. For instance, new dates are proposed for stone sculpture at a number of sites, including Granby 1, Shelford 1, and South Leverton 1 and 2, to argue that they instead indicate the presence of Anglo-Saxon monasteries. In addition to sculpture of ecclesiastical importance during this period, two particular monuments (Stapleford 1 and South Muskham) are also argued to have functioned as boundary markers near river crossings, a tradition thought to have then continued into the Anglo-Scandinavian period. It is also during this period that grave-covers such as Shelton 1 and Hickling 1 lend themselves as evidence of both political stability and the existence of churchyards (pp. 82-83). The authors use varied discussions in the concluding chapter to carefully tie the function of various different pieces of stone sculpture across the county to circumstances of local, regional and national power.

The text is supported by a wide range of visual and written aides, including a handful of maps and a number of appendices. These appendices include a main catalogue, a list of stones incorrectly associated with the pre-Conquest period, lost stones, sundials, overlapping architectural sculpture, and more - all of which lend themselves to a better understanding of how difficult it is to narrow down

the wide range of sculpture to be featured in the Corpus. Figure 1, which is the main map meant to display sites with sculpture, had production issues that resulted in large blocks obscuring many place names. Even without this drawback, this particular figure would have been enhanced by featuring each instance of stone sculpture with different symbols to denote their classifications, as well as the addition of more place names for those less familiar with the county. The extensive catalogue, as well as black and white photographs and sketches of each piece of stone, form the greatest basis for assessing each piece of stone sculpture. Rather than providing a written description of the scaled reductions for each photograph (pp. 262), it would have benefitted more to instead have featured a scale ruler in each photograph to compliment the dimensions detailed in the catalogue.

Ultimately, however, this book is a testament to the strong scholarship and effort that goes into the production of each CASSS volume. David Stocker and Paul Everson have once again produced an indispensable reference for the continued study of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture. Perhaps most importantly, they have demonstrated the need for continued research into this overlooked historical period for both Nottinghamshire and the Midlands.

Norma received her MA in Medieval Archaeology from the University of York. She was previously employed at Trent and Peak Archaeology and now works at the Nottingham Geospatial Institute.

Into the Ocean: Vikings, Irish, and Environmental Change in Iceland and the North

Ahronson, K, 2015

University of Toronto Press

ISBN 978-1442646179

Hb, pp. xvi + 245, 79 figs and 14 tables, £59.99

Brian Ayers

Readers of Church Archaeology could be forgiven for looking at the title of this volume and deciding it was not relevant to their interests. However, sight of both the front and back covers would disabuse them, these being illustrated by an incised cross from an Icelandic cave in both photographic and drawn reproduction. This usage of different illustrative approaches to the same cultural evidence is also indicative of the approach adopted by this fascinating book - a questioning, interdisciplinary assessment of a wide range of evidence in order to explore early settlement in Iceland and the North with inevitable discussion of early Christian influence.

The volume is strong on methodological approaches as it has to be when dealing with a period and locations for which traditional historical sources are sparse to non-existent and, where they do survive, can often be pejorative in their assessments. A good example of the latter is that of Adam of Bremen, writing in the 11th century and describing the inhabitants of Iceland who 'live in underground caves, glad to have a roof and food and bed in common with their cattle'. The caves to which he referred are nonetheless central to the argument advanced here.

That argument proposes that there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the traditional

narrative of the Norse arrival in Iceland c.840 to an 'empty' land is misconceived. Ahronson is not ploughing an unknown furrow here; he acknowledges that a range of scholars from the early 20th century onward has suggested pre-Norse settlement on the island but that evidence for this has been lacking. This book sets out to provide that evidence.

It does so in a measured manner. The intellectual, methodological and analytical approach is mirrored by the structure of each chapter. Initially Ahronson is careful to contextualise his study, in terms of both historiography and theoretical concepts. He undertakes a review of 'Nineteenth-Century Legacies', making a good case that the formative work of early scholars such as Eugène Beauvois helps to provide a solid basis upon which to build a critical edifice, notwithstanding that this productive scholar's reputation has suffered because of some 'wild ideas, such as settlement of early Christian Gaels in Canada' (p.13). Ahronson's second chapter explores inter-disciplinary dialogue, notably advancing ideas of Karl Popper in the light of an extended quotation from Popper's 1994 work *The Myth of the Framework: In Defence of Science and Rationality*. Ahronson is anxious to ensure that his own interdisciplinary approach has an intellectual underpinning that frees him from charges of 'privileging' one form of evidence over another or one interpretative approach over another.

These chapters establish Ahronson's own framework for the discussion of evidence that follows. They also establish the chapter structure that he will use, itself an example of the overarching theoretical approach adopted: introduction; problem and context; hypothesis; method; results and

discussion; conclusions and further problems. The subheadings recur throughout, with successive discussion of pap-names (Chapter 3), Seljaland and its artificial caves in Iceland (Chapter 4), dating (Chapter 5), environmental change (Chapter 6); and crosses (Chapter 7).

These chapters form the core of the book and build systematically to suggest the strong possibility both of pre-Norse settlement in Iceland and of the likely role of early Christian communities in that settlement. The methodology adopted is careful to contextualise where necessary, notably in Chapter 7, which wrestles with the difficult problem of the iconography and dating of crosses incised upon walls of artificial caves, drawing upon an inventory of crosses in western Scotland in particular. Significantly, the Icelandic images do not benefit from any form of consistent inventory and Ahronson proposes a method of recording for such crosses (pp. 168-9), a necessary prerequisite for any objective assessment.

The detailed analysis of the incised crosses in Chapter 7 will inevitably lead many to concentrate on this section of the book to the detriment of the rest. This would be unfortunate, partly because the analytical technique utilised itself builds upon previously-discussed data but also because the importance of the work on the crosses can only be recognised fully following previous discussion of contextual evidence. It is perhaps enough to reference the conclusion of Chapter 5 on dating with its 'bold idea ... that these [Icelandic] cave sites were built by early Christian communities as a *dísart* or "desert place in the Ocean" - potentially comparable to settlements ... in Atlantic Scotland and Ireland' (p. 129). However, the

subsequent chapter which builds on tephrochronological dating (using volcanic ash deposits) to discuss the application of the technique of tephra contouring (which provides an arguably more quantifiable and representative assessment of landscape) then provides further context. Without reiterating the possible influence of early Christian communities, its conclusion on environmental change suggests 'early- to mid-9th-century clearing of woodland at Seljaland to create an open grassland environment (suitable for grazing) and potentially identified non-indigenous herbivores by ca. 870. Unexpectedly, land use at Seljaland appears to have changed by ca. 920, with the growth of a young woodland with lush understorey; if sustained by later work, this change might relate to the area's abandonment during the Norse landnám [settlement] period or to a change in land management strategies at that time' (p.146). The implication, only subsequently endorsed by the work on crosses, is of pre-Norse Christian impact upon southern Iceland.

This book therefore is a careful building-block enterprise, the author fully aware that he is dealing with evidence that, in whichever discipline it presents itself, yields information sparingly. However, by adopting a clear theoretical and scientific approach, Ahrendson goes a long way to convincing his reader that it is possible to extract data to support his hypotheses. He remains cautious throughout and is keen to emphasise the need for further research but his volume has much to offer those interested in north European settlement, innovative methodologies, and the likely role of early Christian communities. The lack of an index is unfortunate and occasional references appear almost

as asides (an annoying example is that to Papius Holm near Duffus in Moray; the implication of this 'stray' pap-name is not followed up nor is a reference given for the poorly-reproduced estate map (Fig. 3.1) which appears to mention it; its relevance to the text is thus unclear). The book as a whole, however, is a thought-provoking analysis which ought to stimulate work by scholars in a range of fields.

Brian Ayers is Chairman of the Society for Church Archaeology. He is currently working on the project The Medieval Churches of Norwich: City, Community and Architecture at the University of East Anglia, and has recently published a book entitled The German Ocean: Medieval Europe around the North Sea.

Crusader Archaeology: The Material Culture of the Latin East (2nd Edition)

Boas, A 2017

Routledge, Abingdon

ISBN: 978-1-138-90025-7

xxiii + 279 pp, 2 maps, 24 figures, and 84 b/w photos, £96

Martin Huggon

Whilst the first edition of Adrian Boas' *Crusader Archaeology* was published in 1999, the choice of releasing a second edition now feels very fitting and timely. Recent conflict and tension, especially in Syria, has drastically increased the threat to the archaeology of this period and region, as Boas himself frequently points out (especially around the particularly famous site of Crac de Chevaliers). A comprehensive and updated overview of how Crusader archaeology stood as a whole before the violence will certainly be important when archaeologists can finally return to many of these areas and assess the damage and losses.

Concentrating on the Latin East as a whole, but with particular focus on the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish occupation of Cyprus, the book sets out a clear and engaging account of the archaeological evidence for this pivotal period. Whilst much has been written about the historical narrative of this Frankish occupation (1098-1374) and of the resonance this period has had on Middle Eastern politics and Western perceptions of its own past and the region as a whole, the archaeology has long been seen as a lesser component of this discussion. With the 1999 edition Boas provided a much-needed corrective, highlighting the wealth and value

of the archaeological remains. The 2017 edition reasserts this position, drawing together excavations and analysis that has been undertaken in the past two decades.

The book begins with a brief but comprehensive discussion on the background of the Crusades and the Frankish region that came to be known as Outremer, detailing key historical points and the various human players that impacted this development. A key point made is the distinction between the mass of those who went on Crusade or pilgrimage during this period and those who stayed, transplanting themselves into these new kingdoms and principalities. Much of the finer historical detail is left to other works, frequently referenced to throughout, and the rest of the book serves as a vehicle for setting out the current state of Crusader archaeology in the Near East. The chapters that follow have all been updated to reflect the latest work, such as investigations at the Castle of Montfort or the large range of recent excavations at Akko (the Crusader city of Acre). These chapters cover urban life, the rural landscape, defence, ecclesiastical architecture, crafts and minor arts, fine arts, building technology and materials, and burials, as well as two new chapters on the archaeological evidence of health and medicine, and the domestic architecture of the Franks, both areas that have seen considerable work in recent years.

The book continues to act as a vital reference work for the region and period, drawing together extensive material and summarising key developments through brief subsections that include a wealth of references. Virtually all sections of society are discussed in some manner, particularly the material signature of those men who stayed

to occupy and defend the land either as lords, soldiers, farmers, and craftsmen or as members of the new Military Orders that formed after the First Crusade. Pivotal archaeological sites for unpicking the material signature of the period are frequently mentioned, such as the Red Tower, Vadum Jacob, and Har Hozevim, and discussion of the archaeology of the Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic Knights frequently appear throughout. The pivotal role they played in the defence of Outremer is seen in the chapter on defence, where most of the key castles came to be controlled by these orders, such as Margat, Belvoir, and 'Atlit. Women, children, and to a slightly lesser extent the family unit are significantly under-represented, and some of the discussion about the interaction between the various religious and cultural groupings active is somewhat muted; both these issues are caused by a relative lack of coherent or clear evidence, and due to ongoing debates about the material and the underlying theoretical framework within which they can be interpreted.

That being said, whilst the book on its own is an excellent introduction to the archaeology of the period, and would be of interest to a wide-ranged audience, it is the way the book engages the extensive bibliography of the topic throughout that makes this work virtually essential to any who are interested in the period. The encyclopaedic nature of the work, covering a huge range of material, situations, and geographical locations, does not lend itself to digressing into the more theoretical debates, such as the nature of colonial action on the part of the Crusaders. Throughout the book is clear and recurring evidence for how a population

comprised of members of diverse kingdoms and regions across western and central Europe and the Near East, and following multiple strands of the Abrahamic religions, combined or held apart within these new Frankish Kingdoms. In particular, the discussion on domestic architecture, defences, and the rural landscape (especially the continued production of sugar and the introduction of vineyards and pig farming) hint at the complex weave of Frankish life in Outremer. Rather than distinctly western or Near Eastern, there is a clear hybridisation that indicates the challenges and opportunities offered by this region.

The work is very accessible, clearly written, and well supported throughout by wider academic works. There are a number of excellent plans and drawings that aid the argument, and a host of black and white photographs. Unfortunately, many of the drawings lack scale bars, and the photographs are often of a low resolution, making them fuzzy and less clear than desired. Sometimes the lack of theoretical engagement also leaves certain sections feeling slightly too descriptive, but given the very obvious remit of the work, these are very minor issues when placed against the work as a whole. Taking on the mammoth task of synthesising and covering such an extensive range of material, this book serves as an excellent reminder of the need for such wide-ranging studies. It also highlights continuing areas for further work, especially the need for more specific investigation on human, animal, and plant remains.

This book will appeal to all who have an interest in the Crusades, and helps to provide a framework for other important studies of Crusader archaeology

and architecture. Easy to follow but covering a wide range of complex material, Crusader Archaeology is also important to those interested in the material signature of western Christians during this period more widely. The impact of the complex connections and choices made in Outremer can be seen across the rest of Christendom in the later medieval period, such as the widespread use of the iconography of Crusade, the construction of circular churches, or the rising use of sugar in food and medicine. This book comprehensively shows the current understanding of Christian material culture in the Crusader period and provides extensive food for thought on where investigation needs to go next.

Martin Huggon is the editor for Church Archaeology and an Associate Tutor in Archaeology and Heritage at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, having recently completed his doctoral thesis on the archaeology of later medieval hospitals in England and Wales.