



The Archaeological Journal

Book Reviews



STUDIES IN EARLY ANGLO-SAXON ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY: PAPERS IN HONOUR OF MARTIN G. WELCH. Edited by Stuart Brookes, Sue Harrington and Andrew Reynolds. Pp xi and 179, Illus 70. Archaeopress (British Archaeological Reports British Series, **527**), 2011. Price: £38.00. ISBN 978 1 407307 51 0.

Festschriften can be awkward academic media to write for and review, yet more so in this case: for, in the knowledge that Martin Welch was seriously ill, the volume was assembled in record time. Twenty short papers, together with an appreciation of Welch and a bibliography of his publications, are held together by concentrating on the archaeology of England between the fifth and seventh centuries AD, although a few papers extend to the eleventh century, reflecting the scope of Welch's own research and teaching. Long-standing themes, close to his heart, run through the volume: Anglo-Saxon migration and settlement, Romano-British continuities, connections between the Continent, Scandinavia and England, especially south of the Thames, and the fundamental role of data ('stuff'). This is *historical* archaeology, multidisciplinary and empirical.

Many contributors focus on evidence. Some present recent finds: a Norfolk B-bracteate (Behr) and early burials in Hampshire (Stoodley) and Kent (Marzinik). Others reconsider older evidence: swastika pottery stamps (Briscoe), the Sutton Hoo cloisonné belt suite (Adams), and the stratigraphy of East Wansdyke (Eagles and Allen). Yet others offer regional surveys: Frankish material in Sussex (Soulat), Tees Valley burials (Sherlock), Essex settlement (Tyler), and fish-traps on the Lower Thames (Cohen).

Also apparent, however, is the impact of thirty-five years or more of theoretical debate that now makes Anglo-Saxon archaeology a contextualized and reflective subject. Thus, the Portable Antiquities Scheme's record of metal-detector finds is yielding important implications for distribution-based interpretations (Geake). Accidental losses, which many finds are, provide a control for a subject hitherto built mainly on intentional burial or rubbish disposal. They also confirm real but diverse material cultural signatures, as in 'Jutish' Kent, but prompt a critique of what those mean (Richardson). The shift from functional to social explanations, with authors embracing concepts such as identity and agency, is exemplified by reprises of gendered burial (Härke) and of elite foreigners buried at proto-*wics* (Scull). If detecting the material-cultural signals of marriage (Harrington) is still largely theoretical, the emergence of Anglo-Saxon administrative territories through the contingencies of lordship, overlaid on environment and settlement, is much clarified by the multidisciplinary study of Sussex's county boundary (Gardiner) and the Kentish lathes (Brookes). Finally, the interlinking of text and archaeology is making ideological or religious explanations newly acceptable and innovative, as

The final version of this review will appear in *The Archaeological Journal* 169 for 2012.

exemplified by Behr's bracteate study, a preliminary review of non-funerary weaponry deposition (Reynolds and Semple) and, most interestingly, by the identification of 'workboxes' as reliquaries (Hills) and jewelled necklaces as symbolic apparel among high-born Christian women (Yorke). In the context of the Street House cemetery, covered by Sherlock, these last two bring important insights into the socio-religious construction of seventh-century culture.

So all credit is due to the editors and authors for producing this fitting and informative *festschrift*. The tragedy is that Martin Welch died just two days before it was to be presented to him.

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