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Book Reviews



WODEN'S WARRIORS: WARRIORS AND WARFARE IN THE 6TH TO 7TH CENTURY NORTHERN EUROPE. By Paul Mortimer with Nigel Amos and Stephen Pollington. Pp. 297, Illus 265. Anglo-Saxon Books, 2011. Price: £45.00. ISBN 978 1 898281 60 3.

This large, lavishly illustrated book is written by an active re-enactor for a popular, but informed, audience. As a product of *Anglo-Saxon Books*, whose outputs fill the shelves of heritage sites like West Stow, the publication is far more attractive to view and handle than most of the products of academic presses on this period. It deserves attention because it will become a readily available access point to many into the world of early medieval warfare and its archaeological evidence.

The book explores the history and archaeology of warfare from the perspective of the warrior in sixth- and seventh-century northern Europe. The author is up-to-date with much of the archaeology of the period, with an inevitable British focus, particularly on the evidence from Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo. Mortimer also draws upon important recent historical overviews of early medieval society and warfare. The book is arranged in two parts. Part I is a survey of arms and armour by typology: helmets, swords, shields, spears, seaxes, missile weapons, armour and (briefly) ships and naval warfare. Part II is a discussion of society and religion relating to the warrior, exploring the mead hall, warriors and warfare, religion, burial, kingship and animal symbolism.

The coverage and citations are uneven and sporadic, and there is a clear sense that the book is 'cobbled', in that Mortimer has to draw sources from a wide span of time, from the first to the thirteenth centuries AD, in order to present a vision of the warrior in ideal and reality, and in military and in socio-religious terms, during the sixth and seventh centuries. I remain sceptical at times of his vision of the pagan warrior and his view on pagan kingship. Still, his vision of early medieval pagan and early Christian warriors mirror the approach taken to Viking warfare by Neil Price, whose book *The Viking Way* (2002) surprisingly escapes attention.

Mortimer is not insensitive to the complexities and challenges of the evidence and perhaps the biggest contribution of this book comes from his account of personal experiences and experiments, undertaken by himself and other enthusiasts. For this reason, his critical comments regarding the archaeological interpretations of artefacts, such as the whetstone sceptre, iron stand and great gold buckle from Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo, deserve serious scholarly attention. What are also valuable are the illustrations of artefacts by Lindsay Kerr, as well as the photographs of modern replicas of arms and

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armour. Given its quality of paper, size and many colour photographs, the cover-price is very reasonable.

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