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Book Reviews



LITURGY, ARCHITECTURE, AND SACRED PLACES IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND. By Helen Gittos. Pp. xix and 350, Illus 87. Oxford University Press, 2013. Price: £65.00. ISBN 978 019927 090 3.

This book is a brave and important attempt to coalesce Anglo-Saxon architecture with the corpus of (largely Late Saxon) liturgical manuscripts, in order better to comprehend sacred places. Each chapter takes a different theme, beginning with the creation of sacred places (Chapter 2), the grouping of Anglo-Saxon churches (Chapter 3), and open-air processions (Chapter 4), before narrowing the focus down to churches, their form and function (Chapter 5) and the rites for their dedications (Chapter 6). A final theme considers churches as ‘Machines for Thinking’ (Chapter 7). The themes are developed throughout from a liturgical viewpoint, with the Continental background firmly in mind at all times, and with its adaptation into the Insular world and the multifarious changes of the Late Saxon period accurately documented. This enables churches and their surroundings to be seen from a different perspective and sheds new light on areas of the accompanying landscape. Thus, there is a useful section on the peculiar Anglo-Saxon consecration rites for cemeteries and their relationship to the enclosure of churchyards, and the introduction of tiled pavements from the mid-tenth century onwards is skilfully related to an *ordo* from Canterbury for the blessing of a pavement that had been re-laid (Chapter 6).

In general, the historical, archaeological and art historical evidence is intelligently marshalled in each chapter, a prerequisite of the important series to which the volume belongs. There are phrases that archaeologists will certainly appreciate, as with the note that ‘Late Anglo-Saxon bishops seems to have been especially interested in demarcating boundaries’ (p. 231), a phrase that evokes the current interest in the significance of boundaries in Anglo-Saxon settlements, both secular and sacred. The chapter on Anglo-Saxon churches is a useful summary of current debates surrounding the architectural features and dating of a number of notable buildings (Chapter 5). It is almost entirely restricted to stone structures, however, and does not consider buildings of wood, aside from Yeavinger. Wooden church building recurs later in the chapter, in terms of simple buildings of the tenth and eleventh centuries, but there is no critical examination of earlier structures and Gittos argues that they seem not to have been present as early as the seventh and eighth centuries (p. 180) — although Brandon is briefly mentioned in a footnote to this page — the possible churches at *Hamwic* and elsewhere are ignored. This is just a minor hiccup, however, within an otherwise impressive review of the evidence, supplemented with numerous references, all kept commendably up-to-date.

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Tomás Ó Carragáin suffers a little in the book. His authoritative volume on early Irish churches (T. Ó Carragáin: *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland: Architecture, Ritual and Memory*, 2010) is seldom referenced or utilized, although it occurs in the bibliography, and whilst he is mentioned on page 200, his book is not, and an appropriate reference seems to have gone astray there. His earlier work on The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Relics in Early Medieval Ireland (*J. Royal Soc. Antiq. Ir.*, **133**, 130–76, 2005) is relevant also to parts of this volume, but has not been utilized. The last thematic chapter, ‘Machines for Thinking’, is just slightly disappointing, after the high standard set in earlier chapters. It largely reiterates texts and ideas gathered together in the chapter on processions and, unusually for this volume, it does not quite keep pace with archaeological theory and fails to acknowledge concepts of remembrance and memory theory, now well-ingrained in both anthropological and archaeological thought.

The real strength of this volume, however, is the impressive marshalling of liturgical evidence and the significant arguments that flow when it is combined with the evidence on the ground, in what can only be viewed as an excellent attempt to visualize how sacred places worked and how liturgy affected the individual. A few spelling mistakes (Athcham on figure 20; Archicantor (p. 107) and Morecombe Bay (figure 23)) and a few omissions of cross referencing (p. 179, note 105; p. 214, note 7) do not detract from a deeply thoughtful and important volume that brings together divergent and disparate sources, and combines them into a persuasive and well-argued whole. It is not intended to be a definitive work, but it is certainly a masterful introduction to the subject, adding an important new perspective to the Anglo-Saxon sacred place. It is of great value to historians and archaeologists alike.

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