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Book Reviews



THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF POST-MEDIEVAL RELIGION. Edited by Chris King and Duncan Sayer. Pp. xvi and 288, Illus 66. Boydell Press, 2011, Price: £30.00. ISBN 978 1 84383 693 3.

In a secular world it is easy to underestimate the significance of religion to people in the past. It has been pointed out that modern archaeologists are often happier dealing with political, economic, technological or sociological aspects of past experience than religious ones, but several publications on archaeology and religion in recent years have begun to rectify this situation. Nevertheless, King and Sayer's edited volume is the first general attempt to examine the wider archaeology of religion from a broadly British and post-medieval position, although Gaimster and Gilchrist's *The Archaeology of Reformation* (2001), which was also published as an SPMA monograph, was focused on the archaeological evidence of the Protestant Reformation during the long sixteenth century. This volume shares with other publications in the SPMA series a commendable commitment to including art-, architectural- and social-historians, as well as archaeologists. Most of the papers use a wide range of archaeological, landscape and historical sources with a sophistication marking the maturity of British historical archaeology. The volume is divided into three parts: with six chapters in 'Church and Society in the Early Modern World'; four in 'Nonconformity'; and five in 'Cemeteries'. The scope of the volume is mostly British (in fact mostly English), with single chapters considering evidence from France, Germany and America. Chronologically the chapters range from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The theme of religion is interpreted in a number of ways, but most chapters concentrate on worship and liturgy, particularly buildings, religious identity or mortuary practices. Most of the papers in the first two parts take much of their subject matter from a consideration of church and chapel buildings. Several authors — King, Parker, Lake, Mytum and Strachan — emphasize the landscape context of the buildings, a welcome recent development in early modern buildings archaeology. A second regular theme is the archaeology of religious identity. Sayer identifies the nub of the problem: 'how do you unpick the mixed identities, social groups, lifestyles and religious organizations that proliferated...?' (p. 199). What is religious identity and how does it differ from other types of community? Mytum's paper notes that dissenting congregations in Wales helped to protect and promote Welsh identity, and Strachan shows how class identity was buttressed by the community as well as the values of the chapel. King's contribution considers the role of religion in maintaining ethnic identity among Norwich's 'strangers'.

The final few papers look at death and burial. There is some useful material here, but some of the papers seem a little underdeveloped. The chapters by Powers and Miles and

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Morris, for example, both end with the broadest of generalizations and a deferral of interpretation to some future point. Caffell and Clarke's chapter does not seem to have anything to do with religion at all. Some bolder lines of interpretation are needed in this section, though the reviews of Sayer and Mahoney-Swales et al. are certainly valuable.

Overall this is a useful and sophisticated volume which represents the current state of scholarship. What I missed from the volume was a sense of how the beliefs and values of religious faith affect other areas of mundane practice, outside the liturgical setting of church, chapel and graveyard.

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