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Book Reviews



ACROSS THE NORTHERN SEA: LATER HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN BRITAIN AND DENMARK, C. 1500-2000 AD. Edited by Henrik Harnow, David Cranstone, Paul Belford and Lene Høst-Madsen. Pp. 344 and Illus 96. University Press of Southern Denmark, 2012. Price: 398.00 DK. ISBN 978 877674 658 2.

This edited volume in part comes from a conference in which British post-medieval archaeologists joined their Danish colleagues to explore the commonalities and differences both in their material pasts and their approaches to defining, managing and researching this resource. The result is a volume formed of some synthetic papers (Section 1 and parts of Section 2) and case studies (elements of Section 2 and Sections 3 and 4). Given the space limitations of the review, greater attention is paid here to the synthetic and review elements, and to the patterns of research revealed in the range and approaches applied to the case studies. The latter inevitably reflect only a fraction of the work in each country — and a somewhat eclectic fraction at that — though some more topics were covered in the conference itself.

The multi-author first chapter provides useful summaries of the geography, history and post-medieval archaeology of each country. Here, the key changes in political independence and unity, the varied effects of the Reformation, and socio-economic and technological developments are briefly outlined, thus revealing from the beginning some common experiences but also varied responses across these regions. This is followed by two chapters with similar titles (Belford for Britain, Høst-Madsen and Harnow for Denmark), with inevitably personal views of the state of the discipline in each country. Both chapters consider legislation and professional practice, and how this relates to universities and museums. The differences in current frameworks in each country, and the scale and traditions of working in the post-medieval period, provide the context to understand why some of the case studies are the way they are. Gaimster then places Britain and Denmark in a wider northern and central European context.

Thus far, the volume sets up the context for the material to come, and these are probably the papers that will be most frequently consulted for their concise overviews. Other review papers are more specific. For Britain, these include: historic landscape/seascape characterization (Hooley); marine heritage management and protection (Dunkley); and excavation of urban industrial landscapes (Meddens, Moore and Coleman). In the case of Denmark, the reviews cover approaches to: material culture (Myrtue); buildings archaeology, including that in Sweden (Hædersdall); rural heritage research and management (Møller), complemented by a review of farm studies (Kristiansen). Each chapter is valuable in its way, but the topics covered reveal an underlying weakness in the volume for comparative purposes. For example, the section on Britain has a chapter on

maritime archaeology but not on buildings archaeology, despite its vibrant place in British post-medieval archaeology, and a maritime chapter is missing for the section on Denmark, despite its place in that country's archaeological traditions. So, in terms of the simple 'compare and contrast' exercises, for students or indeed professionals wishing to gain alternative views and experiences, the volume will not offer an easy structure. Hidden deep in the case studies which form the rest of the volume, some of the different approaches and attitudes, research emphases, and data types can be discerned, but probably only by those with enough wider, contextual information to 'read' them in this way.

This is a well-produced volume, with some unexpected aspects amongst the diverse range of contributions. One hopes that some of the fascinating case studies are not lost in this volume, and that those interested in, say, mortuary culture, clay pipes, merchant cultures, and industrial archaeology realize what gems lie within. Several of the chapters will find places in my student reading lists, but I am sure that they would otherwise never find them. The nature of our changing times means that some of the legislative and organizational frameworks described here in a 2012 publication are already no longer so, but even as a historical snapshot they will have continuing value. As a sign of a developing awareness of the European dimension to British post-medieval archaeology, this is one of the most explicit to date, and it should be welcomed.

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