

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by NEIL CHRISTIE

Ecclesiastical Landscapes in Medieval Europe. An Archaeological Perspective. Edited by José C. Sánchez-Pardo, Emmet H. Marron & Maria Crîngaci Țiplic. 21 × 29 cm. ii + 240 pp, 127 colour and b&w pls and figs, 6 tables. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2020. ISBN 978-1-78969-541-0; epub: 978-1-78969-542-7. Price: £40.00 pb.

This volume offers a valuable, wide-ranging set of papers offering many new insights into the construction, form and landscape context and exploitation of churches and monasteries across diverse parts of early to later medieval Europe. Geographically, coverage runs from Ireland across to Romania and southwards into both Spain and Italy; particular attention goes to Transylvania, explored in four papers. Thematically, contributions include discussions on natural resources and wildernesses, architectural ‘interferences’, connectivity and, particularly, the varied processes of ‘Christianisation’. There are two parts to the volume – ‘Ecclesiastical Topographies’ and ‘Monastic Landscapes’ – and each features eight papers, although aspects of one overlap with the other. Contributions look primarily to rural contexts, although some of the Transylvanian articles (e.g. Țiplic & Crîngaci Țiplic surveying the delayed interest in the archaeological study of churches in Romania and questions raised by much recent restoration of medieval complexes boosted by EU funding) draw on urban examples, while Hall recounts the excavations of the Carmelite Whitefriars, set 1 km from the west gate at the Scottish burgh of Perth.

For Transylvania the processes of Christianisation and the emergence of a ‘parish’ network belong to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but with changes in burial ritual and cemetery form/location commencing earlier; notable is the mass settlement of Germans/Saxons from the mid-twelfth century, these later drawing in also monastic orders (Crîngaci Țiplic; the end paper by Bencze discusses Benedictine and Cistercian examples at Cluj-Mănăștur and Cârța). Plans and interiors of the Romanesque to Gothic churches show the influences of Orthodox and Catholic, Byzantine and western (Marcu Istrate; Țiplic & Crîngaci Țiplic). Slightly earlier is the spread of churches in Bohemia and Čechura addresses both textual and archaeological evidence to explore burial changes and to question whether ducal foundations at their strongholds denoted a first stimulus to the parish network; the latter only properly emerged in the twelfth century.

Other papers in the first part discuss agency in both Christianisation and in church building. Using as case studies the well-studied and well-preserved

early medieval landscapes of the Iveragh and Dingle peninsulas in south-west Ireland, Ó Carragáin assesses small churches in relation to raths, forts, standing stones and other features to reveal connections with kin-groups and communities of diverse size. These lesser churches seemingly reflect diffuse lower/middling elite power structures in the pre-AD 800 period; in time, some churches failed as the catchments of others grew, but chronologies of loss and/or growth need further investigation. Castiglia *et al.* likewise look to relationships between early churches, elite landowners and bishops in Tuscany in central Italy, challenging older views of delayed rural Christianisation, before tackling the placement and catchments of eighth- to eleventh-century monasteries. Royalty and high elites, meanwhile, play a notable role in ecclesiastical foundations in the territory of the Visigothic capital of Toledo in central Spain: Sánchez Ramos and Morín de Pablos focus on the fascinating archaeology of a sixth- and seventh-century complex at Los Hitos which features a ‘privileged funerary monument’ plus a church ‘embracing other prestigious graves’; can we see some interplay between Arians and Catholics here?

Regarding the volume’s monastic contributions, besides Bond’s interesting paper on monastic gardens, authors especially discuss landscape exploitation and manipulation. Thus, for Transylvania, Bencze compares two monasteries and their harnessing and management of water resources; in north England Horsfield neatly questions royal donor motivations in giving ‘waste’ land to the new Cistercian complex at Rievaulx, while also showing pre-monastic efforts to reclaim such lands; similarly, Panato considers the concept of ‘wildernesses’, including marshland and forests, in northern Italy, notably the Veronese region, with the author keen to stress links with local peasant communities; while Hüglin and Cassitti investigate the traditions of stone use in sites in Alpine Switzerland as a backdrop to the installation in the 770s of the large, likely Charlemagne-sponsored monastery of Münstair, highlighting also church (and fort) presences in the fifth–eighth centuries. Sánchez-Pardo and García Quintela use two case study sites (Samos; Augas Santas) in Galicia, north-west Spain, first to consider early medieval monastic landscape productivity and impacts, and then, using anthropological models, to question mental choices for cult foci, and how some were drawn to past (or pagan) foci, natural features and spaces linked to martyrs and saints.

Finally, the two papers examining the Isle of Man both deal with mapping: Davey uses a thirteenth-century perambulation and later rent books to chart Rushen abbey’s Malew estate bounds and contents, while

Johnson puts various chapels in a local – topographic, natural and ritual – landscape, thinking also of the basics of access and visibility.

While a few format, grammatical and spelling slips occur here and there (e.g. AD given as Ad in the title on p. 123 and in the Contents) and some images are rather fuzzy (as on pp. 76, 159, 177), production quality is high and the whole volume very tidily presented and well-illustrated, with the English text translations overall very good. Readers will learn much from the wide coverage and diverse approaches on offer and will no doubt make many connections (or draw contrasts) with sites, sequences and contexts discussed.

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Archaeology and History of Peasantries 1. From the Late Prehistory to the Middle Ages. (Documentos de Arqueología Medieval, 14). Edited by Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo. 21 × 30 cm. 209 pp, 61 b&w pls, figs and tables. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco/ehu press, 2020. ISBN 978-94-1319-252-9. Price: €20.00 pb.

This volume is the first in a new series that will examine pre-industrial peasant communities across Europe, with a particular focus on the Iberian Peninsula. Despite its title, we are informed that this volume ‘deals with peasantry... from a preferably archaeological perspective’, although the reason for this largely monodisciplinary approach is not made clear. The volume consists of nine papers arranged in chronological order, alongside introductory and concluding chapters; they range in date from the Iberian Copper Age (3200–2200 BC) to the later Middle Ages. Eight of the papers are in English, and three in Spanish including the conclusion (chapters 7 and 10 have English abstracts).

The opening chapter, written by the editor, asks us to consider whether we need an archaeology of the peasantry. Quirós Castillo rightly argues that there is still more to learn on this subject, that the study of the ‘social landscape’ should be considered a priority, and that scholars should consider peasant communities diachronically, rather than in discrete periods. Since readers of *MSR* will largely be interested in those papers focusing on the Middle Ages, the rest of this review will concentrate on a selection of these.

Rueda and Allepuz consider a mountainous region of Spain between the fifth and ninth centuries where they suggest that settlement situated at a height of 1200m was free from external influence for centuries. Their analysis of Revenga in the Upper Arlanza Basin demonstrates that Christianity was not evident until at least the seventh century. The settlement pattern then changed, reflecting a more hierarchical arrangement as dwellings and sites of production were moved away from sacred spaces. Reading their paper, I wondered whether further analysis of this restructuring might offer a more nuanced picture of the settlement’s social hierarchy? How did this change influence considerations of peasant status, for example? Castro *et al.* focus on charter evidence to examine collective action in north-

western Iberia between the ninth and eleventh centuries, during which hierarchical social structures first emerged. This occurred, they suggest, in three distinct phases: in the first, peasant communities organised their own space and production; a second ‘clash’ phase in which community structures were disassembled or redefined; and a final phase in which communities became subject to feudalism. Their research demonstrates the fluidity of peasant groups – drawn from local and supralocal contexts in conflict resolution.

McKerracher offers a thought-provoking paper on peasant agency and risk in Anglo-Saxon farming in England. He focuses on the Middle Saxon period, which saw a significant increase in productivity in arable agriculture, alongside the introduction of a more diverse range of cereal crops. This, he had previously argued, was linked with high-status sites. Here he assesses the case for peasant innovation, making the point that the link between expensive infrastructure (grain ovens, barns, etc.) and high-status settlements may simply be due to the affordability of such technologies, and/or a focus on processing. Assessment of the archaeobotanical record, drawn from settlements across the status spectrum, reveals patterns that suggest regional diversity and local specialisation; despite this, at the local level, peasant farmers maintained some diversity as a strategy of risk aversion. These ‘tailored cropping strategies’, McKerracher suggests, demonstrate increased peasant confidence, and he hints that the current narrative favouring elite innovation is likely to have been more nuanced. This is very interesting research, which offers scope for future multidisciplinary work, not least on how this sits against the place-name evidence for agricultural compound terms (as considered by Richard Coates, for instance).

Finally, Ros *et al.* also use archaeobotanical evidence in their study of northern Catalonia (in the Pyrénées-Orientales in modern France) between the eighth and fourteenth centuries. Like McKerracher, they assess the importance of this material as evidence of the development of arable agriculture, and consider it alongside contemporary documentary material. Focusing on economic and demographic growth between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, they suggest that, hitherto, attempts have only been made to understand this using the documentary record. They analyse fifteen sites, from which they demonstrate stability in crop choice across this period until the introduction of new plants in the thirteenth century (despite the emergence of network of new farms between the ninth/tenth centuries). While interesting, there is no critical analysis of the documentary material (ranging over 600 years), which includes ‘commercial archives’. Without understanding the context, the reader is unaware, for instance, if these relate to local marketing and if they guide on the likely origins of the crops mentioned. Furthermore, these sources are not mapped onto the figures that date the archaeobotanical remains, meaning we have no way of knowing which crops were documented in each period, and whether this corresponds with the archaeology.

At the beginning of the volume, we learn that the aim of this series is to examine ‘new theoretical and methodological approaches... [to] historical and archaeological studies of pre-industrial peasantries developed in recent years’. Despite some very interesting