

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

papers, with its heavy emphasis on archaeology, this volume only partially meets that objective.

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Land, People and Power in Early Medieval Wales. The cantref of Cemais in Comparative Perspective. (UCL Institute of Archaeology PhD Series, Volume 5. BAR British Series 659). By Rhiannon Comeau. 21 × 30 cm. xix + 363 pp, 97 colour and b&w pls and figs, 30 tables. Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2020. ISBN 978-1-4073-5712-6; ebook: 978-1-4073-5713-3. Price: £79.00 pb.

This excellent volume presents a detailed case study of Cemais in south-west Wales as a lens for addressing wider issues of estate formation, governance, seasonality and the nature of early medieval society. The author presents a holistic, multi-disciplinary narrative and a new model for addressing society and landscape in early medieval Wales. This will have resonance and relevance for analyses elsewhere in north-western Europe, particularly in British scholarship.

The difficulties facing any study of early medieval Wales are well known: an infamously exiguous archaeological record and documentary sources whose relevance and applicability to pre-Conquest society are debatable, make much uncertain. The dominance of Glanville Jones' multiple estate model as the explicatory framework structuring landscape-scale analyses occludes matters further. Rhiannon Comeau acknowledges such difficulties, but develops a positive outlook and interdisciplinary approach to address these fundamental issues head-on, presenting a methodology that is destined to generate similar future studies. Resisting the temptation to cherry-pick and generalise at a regional or even national scale, Comeau subjects the multiple estate model to justified critique, highlighting a 'confusion of scale, transposition of elements, and absence of [a focus on] assembly or trade' (p.173), to deliver a transformative and focused case study that poses many questions, and offers several new avenues. Exactly this focused local-level case study is the bedrock of any systematic understanding, but is so often neglected in favour of more generalising analyses; the use here is therefore refreshing and challenging. Readers are treated to an expert analysis of landscape evidence in GIS, combining archaeological, documentary and toponymic evidence, to paint a 'thick', multi-faceted analysis of social life.

The volume's Introduction and literature review provide an up-to-date critique of understandings of medieval Welsh landscape archaeology within its broader context. A north-west European focus here is particularly effective in contextualising the character of settlement, economy and documentary evidence in wider recent analyses of assemblies, central places or trade and exchange. Chapter 3 presents the interdisciplinary methodology, en route highlighting issues of scale and terminology necessary to engaging with this evidence, as well as detailing an *Annaliste* theoretical framework overtly situated within the *longue durée*. This approach

is effective, well-contextualised and suited to the nature of this Welsh evidence, but may leave some readers wondering about temporality and issues of change through time. The strongly illustrated Chapter 4 details the nature of the evidence which exists for Cemais, from later prehistoric archaeology to post-medieval documentary evidence; much discussion is built upon GIS analysis. Crucially, resisting the generalising tendencies of regional surveys, Comeau is careful to create models from documentary sources that are specific to the local context. This includes analysis of the core territorial and administrative structure, where one of the key findings is arguably very convincing evidence for the late genesis of structures like the *commote* during the Anglo-Norman conquest. Overall, her analysis is exceedingly rich and specific, if at times almost overwhelmingly detailed.

Chapter 5 thereafter details seasonal and habitual practices, and identifies elements of the settlement landscape indicative of focal zones; the case study of Carn Goedog is particularly effective at contextualising the complex nature of the settlement evidence and resultant analysis. Chapter 6 builds from this to present a novel methodology for identifying what Comeau views as 'focal zones' – core areas of activity and investment around which *cantref*-level activities articulated. Through this process, areas of assembly and royal and high-status sites are identified, while also being linked to ecclesiastical patterns of land-holding. The systematic identification and analysis of assembly places is, at least for this reviewer, a notable contribution to knowledge; this includes at least 23 potential places of assembly within the *cantref* of Cemais – perhaps an unusually high number, and while Comeau may be optimistic in some of these, at least six places of assembly are convincing and certainly share many hallmarks with medieval assembly landscapes elsewhere. The outcome here is scope to detail the interplay between nobility, freeholders and the Church, to a degree that has not been possible previously. The final summary analysis (Chapter 7) develops this, drawing all the evidence back into seasonal analysis, current interpretations and critiques of settlement and landscape in a European context. The result of this detailed, skilful and thorough analysis is a new model for landscape-scale analysis of early medieval Welsh society, sure to be formative and influential.

The monograph is excellently produced, well-illustrated and extremely accessible. Ultimately, the biggest issue one may take with this study is how reliable the later and post-medieval evidence is, and how applicable its analysis is for the seventh to eighth centuries, as opposed to the twelfth or thirteenth? Yet, this is not to fault Comeau, who recognises these difficulties and indeed is perhaps overly cautious in her analysis at times. Thus, this study serves to underline the need for systematic excavation and radiocarbon dating to follow up detailed local-level analyses like hers. On the whole, this is an extraordinarily detailed and exceptional piece of work by an author skilled in balancing a range of disciplines.

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