market for industrial products such as bloomery iron, soapstone and tar developed, requiring communities to increase the scale of production. Influenced through urban trading networks, this in turn led to innovations in vernacular dwellings, also leading to more hierarchical, status-driven communities. A downturn in the thirteenth century meant that peasant communities adapted their outlands back toward an agrarian focus, explaining the unusual pollen results.

Despite evidence of editorial errors (or lack of careful checks) throughout, this is an interesting volume, containing some extremely good scholarship on medieval rural settlement and landscape and covering an interesting range of case study areas and sites.

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Peasant Perceptions of Landscape. Ewelme Hundred, South Oxfordshire, 500–1650. By Stephen Mileson and Stuart Brookes. 19 × 25 cm. xx + 363 pp, 93 b&w and colour figs, 11 tables. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. ISBN 978-0-19-289489-2. Price: £85.00 hb.

In recent decades, peasants have gradually emerged from the historical shadows to take their place in the forefront of our perceptions of the past – a growing visibility that has been accompanied by an increased emphasis on mentalities. This word, or at least its French equivalent, is firmly associated with Emmanual Le Roy Ladurie, notably his inspirational study of Montaillou, a work showcased in the introduction to Mileson and Brookes' engaging book on Ewelme Hundred. Together with Susan Kilby's publications, peasants' engagement with, and sense of, their surroundings has become a key feature of recent research. These refreshing evocations of landscapes and their meaning reflect the richness of the archaeological and documentary record and the meticulous yet innovative ways in which these forms of evidence are being analysed and combined.

The two introductory chapters explore the book's themes, its chronological and geographical focus, and the evidence on which the work is based. For readers of this journal, the thematic emphasis on the layout of settlements and their agrarian resources, and on deciphering how the use of space affected interactions between inhabitants, will be particularly rewarding. So, too, will the long perspective that is offered: subsequent chapters cover two Anglo-Saxon periods (500–1100), two medieval periods (1100–1530) and an early modern chapter that takes the story up to 1650. The region, Ewelme hundred, spans clay vale to the north and west, dominated by villages and fields, and the Chilterns to the south and east, characterised by woodland, early enclosure and dispersed settlement. This region is well-served by archaeological, architectural and historical evidence, providing – apart from anything else – an abundance of place-names, field names and bynames.

Each chapter is divided into 'Structures and structural change' and 'Perceptions', the latter including 'social space', 'making meaning in the landscape' and 'belonging'. In the Anglo-Saxon chapters, structures that are discerned include trading contacts that are visible in the spread of pottery and emerging distinctions between lowland and upland villages and their fields. In terms of perceptions, discussion in these chapters includes the significance of commemorative landscapes, with features such as 'Ceolwulf's tree', 'hostage's ridge' and 'victory dene', and the importance of routeways, meeting places and lookouts.

For me, the pivotal chapter is that covering the years 1100 to 1350: a significant increase in documentary evidence in this period brings greater detail and clarity to the analysis. Differing daily routines are distinguished in different settlements, against a backdrop in the vale of the abandonment of isolated Anglo-Saxon sites, the infilling of settlements, the amalgamation of strips and the expansion of demesnes. An impressive aspect of the book is the sensitivity to language, enabling the building up of 'a richer picture of the way village social relations were embodied and expressed in settlement plans' (p.199). Areas such as 'bovetown' seem to have been occupied by free tenants, while the middling sort inhabited more regularly laid-out plots, leaving comparatively marginal spaces for poorer peasants. Field names are also used to bring meaning to the landscape in fascinating ways, some with historical and supernatural overtones, generating a much sharper sense of peasants creating 'what geographers would call a cultural landscape' (p.229).

The final two chapters assess how the Black Death and the Reformation changed peasant perceptions of landscape. The growing seclusion of housing and the developing fixity of names for homesteads are highlighted, as well as more familiar themes such as increasing farm size. Social space is usefully analysed in terms of the orientation of houses: most were originally broadside on to the road, encouraging access rather than privacy; but, increasingly, houses were set back and built gable-end on, aping the status and privacy sought by higher social classes. Another intriguing layer in the analysis is the use of church bells to develop a medieval and early modern soundscape for each settlement.

Many further examples could be highlighted that, together, reveal the landscape of Ewelme hundred as a 'collectively understood mosaic' (p.318). The examples I have picked out are those that carry particular meaning for me in the landscape in which I am situated. As this suggests, this thought-provoking book encourages you to examine documents, maps and artefacts afresh and to perceive the landscape with renewed attention. In the introduction, the authors express the hope that the book will 'stand as a model for future research in different regions and landscapes' (p.9). They have succeeded admirably in this aim, combining painstaking research with inventive means of exploring the landscape forged by, and in turn influencing, the peasants of Ewelme hundred.

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