

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Neil Christie

Medieval Rural Settlement in Marginal Landscapes. Ruralia VII. 8th–14th September 2007, Cardiff, Wales, U.K. Edited by Jan Klápště & Petr Sommer. 21 x 30 cm. vi + 446 pp, 270 b&w pls and figs, 16 tables. Turnhout: Brepols, 2009. ISBN 978-2-503-527746-8. Price: €75,00 pb.

This attractive, weighty and highly informative volume is the most recent in the now well established and regular *Ruralia* conference series, this comprising a full 32 papers from the 2007 Cardiff colloquium on the theme of marginality and medieval rural settlement and exploitation. A beautiful cover photo of the fields and pasture of the slopes of Glyn Tarell near Brecon (with reassuringly blue skies) immediately flags a perceived emphasis, namely uplands, sheep and pasture. But this volume does far more than explore human usage of hill- and mountain-tops and sides and moors, since it considers also coastal (sand, dune and estuarine) and forest contexts, human impacts on soils and the impacts of the land on the humans themselves. The geographical range is substantial and truly European – we run from images of village lanes with parked cars in Appleton-le-Moors (p.79) to bleak sand drifts in Dutch Veluwe (p.154) to Swiss Alpine dairy huts (p.309) and a frontier castle at Tirieza in Murcia, Spain (p.258). The chronological coverage is equally wide – from prehistoric to medieval archaeobotanical data for the Black Forest (Rösch, pp.335–343), Roman to early medieval in the Swiss Jura (Marti, pp.291–307), to post-medieval and early modern colonisers and travellers (Holm, pp.109–115 on the 17th-century Forest Finns; Lindholm, pp.125–131 on the 19th- and 20th-century travellers' village at Snarsmon, west Sweden; Svensson, pp.133–142 on lost Swedish 19th-centurycrofting populations) – these 'late' contributions in fact of much value for understanding the people of some of the other contributors' medieval settlement sites. A few other papers touch on the use of ethnoarchaeology (e.g. Gutscher, pp.309–313, on huts and herders in Alpine Canton Berne).

Interestingly, not all authors define 'marginality' in their papers, while others want to stress how unmarginal their study zones are – thus Rendu et al. (pp.235–251) in an excellent discussion of pastoral presences in the eastern Pyrenean slopes, stress how 'these margins played a major part in the social and territorial dynamics of the mountain communities' (cf. Buccio, pp.219–225, on 'busy' use of the zones of the French Alps). Others meanwhile identify marginality as far too broad a label: Dixon (p.27) calculates that, effectively, 75% of Scotland is marginal. But generally marginality is defined from political, social or, chiefly, economic criteria: border territory, forested space, non-urban and uncultivated, low in productivity, and distant. (Further, Herring neatly notes, there can be academic criteria, with, for example, transhumance 'dismissed as of marginal interest' – p.55). The short introductory essay by Svensson & Gardiner (pp.21–25) and the extended paper on moors in eastern

Netherlands by Groenewoudt (pp.149–180) are the best discussions on this meaty archaeological issue, each stressing the variable perceptions by scholars now and workers then. Papers in the volume duly consider examples of settlement in various guises in various marginal contexts. To flag just a few that impressed this reviewer: Eiroa Rodríguez (pp.253–261) examines (if a bit too concisely) the 13th- to 14th-century frontier zone between Christian Murcia and the Arab Nasrid kingdom in Granada, tracing forts and religious structures (including a synagogue and rural mosque); Herring (pp.47–56) seeks to piece together the fragmentary traces of early medieval transhumance in Cornwall (even if lacking any secure dating support); van Doesburg (pp.181–204) provides a rewarding survey of medieval sites in the Netherlands hit by or lost to cover-/driftsand (this in part a result of human exploitation of woodland, peat, pasture) and outlines the efforts made to preserve lands and habitats; and Kenzler (pp.379–392) offers a fascinating overview of the processes of early medieval and medieval colonisation in the Ore Mountains (at the German-Czech Republic border), observing villages, castles, mining towns and related field and water systems, charting progressive seigneurial interventions (but with little monastic involvement, it seems) and desertions from the 14th century (though more work is needed to clarify dates, site ownerships, scales of mining, site relationships and material contacts).

As noted above, this is a well produced volume, with clear illustrations throughout (though some colour would have been appreciated to go with the nice cover). Papers are chiefly in English, but with some French and German contributions too. There are inconsistencies in some papers providing end summaries: most German articles have English and French summaries, but only three papers in English provide French or German ones (well done Niall Brady for both French and German!). Given that the Foreword appears in all three languages, it is perhaps a shame that the Introduction was not similarly treated.

A final note: the volume is dedicated to the highly respected Johnny De Meulemeester, one of the founder members of *Ruralia* and latterly its President, who sadly died in early 2009. As the tribute by André Matthys highlights, his expertise and his wide contacts gathered through excavations and conferences were crucial in making *Ruralia* a truly international forum.

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Where Rivers Meet. The Archaeology of Catholme and the Trent-Tame Confluence. (CBA Research Report 161). By Simon Buteux & Henry Chapman. 19 x 25 cm. xii + 180 pp, 84 colour and b&w pls and figs, 2 tables. York: Council for British Archaeology, 2009. ISBN 978-1-902771-78-6. Price: £15.00 pb.