

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by NEIL CHRISTIE

Ruralia XII: Settlement Change across Medieval Europe. Old Paradigms and New Vistas. Edited by Niall Brady & Claudia Theune. 21 x 28 cm. 444 pp, 186 colour and b&w pls and figs. Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2019. ISBN 978-90-8890-804-4; epub: 978-90-8890-808-8 (ISSN 2565-8883). Price: €65.00 pb.

The theme of this weighty and well-produced publication, the proceedings from the twelfth (biennial) international Ruralia conference held in Kilkenny, Ireland, in September 2017, is substantial and ambitious. Tackling ‘Transitions and transformations in the medieval and early modern countryside’ – but with a published title that rather hides the ‘transitions’ element – the editors sought papers that show how rural change is always happening, at different scales and in different forms, whether social, structural, material or economic, sometimes forced or prompted by external changes, whether demographic, military, economic or even climatic. While texts might guide on big events and key agents, the archaeology, in its diverse forms, is essential to see how the landscape and its workers evolved. Thirty-six contributions are gathered here, which duly reflect Ruralia’s wide geographical pull (speakers from 18 European countries presented at Kilkenny). Coverage runs from Scandinavia to Spain and from Ireland across to Croatia, and includes strong east European analyses, such as on sites and rural change in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic; and, temporally, studies run from post-Roman ex-villa landscapes in Italy to the growth of an isolated Silesian village in the later seventeenth century. This short review can merely skim the book’s contents and offer some (personal) highlights.

There are five parts to the volume, with the first and third of these containing the bulk of the contributions. Part One (ten papers) explores ‘Transformation of the Roman World’ and is heavily focussed on archaeologies in Italy and in the Iberian Peninsula (four papers each). The Italian papers (mainly concentrated on the Campania and Lazio regions, but with Carboni & Vermeulen covering Adriatic Le Marche) all tackle the end of Roman villa landscapes and then the progressive rise of villages, many on elevated ground, some perhaps directly linked to settlement by Lombards (as closely debated by Corsi). The Spanish and Portuguese papers suggest more varied early medieval landscapes: Prata cites dispersed farms around Castel de Vide in east-central Portugal; a mix of continuity in site location from Roman to Visigothic in the *Egitania* and Merida zones, but also with new hilltop foci (Cordero Ruiz); and Alegria-Tejedor *et al.* reveal both defensive sites and monastic foci in the Catalan Pyrenees.

In Part Two, four authors consider ‘Foundation and desertion: causes and effects’, centred primarily on the Black Death period: Brady (with two Irish case studies)

and Schreg (southern Germany) focus on deserted settlements, with Schreg lamenting the dearth of hard archaeological data; Lewis further champions her programmes of test-pitting in occupied villages to reveal insights into England’s emergent villages, their forms and shrinkages, arguing that the fourteenth century saw ‘sustained contraction [as] a near-universal phenomenon experienced by perhaps 90% of all settlements’; and Svensson directly debates the themes of risk and resilience, showing site endurance especially among intensive outland-using rural communities in western Sweden.

Fourteen papers cluster in Part Three’s ‘Transformation and transition through medieval times’. In the Netherlands, van Doesburg discusses settlement responding to peatland reclamation, with a sometimes shifting pattern of sites (isolating many churches); site relocations across the late twelfth to mid-fourteenth centuries occur in North-Brabant, away from the older foci of coversand ridges, as demand for new arable grew (Verspay). Such archaeologies reveal adjusted chronologies to assumed desertions, as seen also in Newman’s review of a Cumbrian landscape, revealing a busy farm-hamlet-fields panorama, which saw desertion more after the pacification of these borderlands, with seventeenth-century ‘improvement’ efforts. Irish contexts are examined in discussions of monastic (Cistercian and mendicant) foundations and their local landscape impacts (Lynch on Tintern Abbey; Lafaye on friars in counties Mayo and Sligo), and Doyle & O’Keeffe question the archaeological gaps for the deserted ‘rural borough’ of Newtown Jerpoint. Three other contributions to note are Legut-Pintal on lands in twelfth- to fourteenth-century southern Silesia (Poland), stressing how rural settlement changes must be understood alongside wider urban, military, political and religious policies and efforts; Nowotny highlights the value of assessing micro- (house form), meso- (village design) and macro-scales (landscapes, authorities) to see change in early to late medieval central Europe; and Ødegaard charts communal cooking -pits at assembly (*thing*) sites in Norway, which peaked in AD 200–400, but fell redundant after c. 600, even if various sites remained gathering points.

Part Four tackles colonisation, migrations and conquests/reconquests. Among its six contributions, three might be highlighted. Firstly, Rácz uses data from rescue archaeology linked to road-building in the Pest Plain to seek the roots of the Hungarian village system from the early tenth century, asking how far we might expect continuity of sites and material cultural forms or else dislocation with the Hungarian conquest; while evidence is still restricted, the image, though hazy, points more to continuities than a hiatus and then transformation. Changes in the aftermath of the Christian conquest of 1148 are explored for the Xerta

area of north-east Spain by Virgili & Kirchner: combining a rich textual and toponymic record and landscape archaeological data they map an altered, colonised landscape featuring diverse crop types, intensified cultivation, marsh and riverside reclamation, plus several watermills – the latter characteristic of Catalan feudal systems. Earlier, dramatic change affecting potential kin or local elite sites in late tenth-century central-northern Portugal is discussed by Tente: seemingly new, compact and wall-and-palisade defended bases containing 3 to 6 families, these lay in a largely independent ‘buffer zone’ between Christians and Muslims, but a majority saw destruction by fire and then abandonment (though Senhora do Barrocal saw revival, suggesting that its occupants managed to retain some authority in the zone), with destruction deposits offering many insights into site economies and contacts.

The volume is rounded off with the topical theme of the potential impacts of climate change on settlement and economics. The two papers tackle different periods: Solheim & Iversen exploit the block of 855 radiocarbon dates for 66 farms and houses in south-east Norway to question if declining numbers from the mid-sixth century relate to documented climate and plague events; and Theune addresses possible environmental impacts on both gold-mining activity (workers, supplies, transportation) and animal husbandry in late medieval and early modern Alpine Austria (Tauern region).

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Power & Place in Europe in the Early Middle Ages. (Proceedings of the British Academy 224). Edited by Jayne Carroll, Andrew Reynolds & Barbara Yorke. 16 x 24 cm. xxi + 506 pp, 123 b&w pls and figs, 13 tables. Oxford: Oxford University Press, for the British Academy, 2019. ISBN 978-0-19726658-8 (ISSN 0068-1202). Price: £105.00 hb.

With its roots in a conference held at UCL in 2011, itself part of a Leverhulme-Trust funded project (2010–21) on ‘*Landscapes of Governance: Assembly Sites in England, 5th–11th Centuries*’, this sizeable volume features a full 23 contributions across 20 papers (plus the editors’ valuable extended introduction and overview), including scholars not part of the 2011 event. There has been a time-lag in the publication coming out: a few authors note completion of their texts in 2012/13, and the Preface acknowledges how submissions saw revisions and updates during the gestation period. While a shame to have been delayed (and, sadly, one contributor, Lars Jørgensen, an expert on Danish elite sites, passed away in 2016), nonetheless, the publication forms an important gathering of case studies and insightful discussions on foci of assembly (for elites, authorities and commoners) and their written and archaeological traces across early medieval Europe.

This review cannot cover all the articles presented, but outlines the main contents and highlights some of the contributions on show. The volume’s Part I: ‘Assemblies, Meeting Places and Negotiation’ features nine papers, including four on Scandinavia. Among the latter, Halldis Hobæk shows how a combined analysis

of textual, toponymic and topographic evidence in western Norway magnifies numbers of known and presumed locations of major to local assembly or *thing* sites from a mere six to 83 examples (though with few bearing, as yet, archaeological guides). Intriguing are those recognised by cooking-pit assemblages, here discussed by Marie Ødegaard for the large farm sites of Lunde and Bommestad in south-east Norway in particular, although this mass-meal activity (Lunde has c. 1000 pits, many evidently reused), if with pre-Roman Iron-Age roots, does not generally extend beyond the fifth century AD. In Lunde’s case, the documented medieval *thing* site was likely relocated, perhaps to enhance its formal judiciary role. Importantly, other assembly-oriented chapters stress the diverse scales and status of these sites and events: Levi Roach (flagging how ‘Assemblies are very much “in”’ research-wise, especially on an interdisciplinary level) emphasises ‘regnal assemblies’ (or ‘meeting places of the *witan*’), such as those called by King Edgar at Bath and Chester in 973, for which texts offer insights into the players, stages/venues and audiences; John Baker highlights how some Anglo-Saxon meeting-place-names bear heroic, regal or even saintly connotations to emphasise authority and common bonds; and Stuart Brookes’ investigation of early Anglo-Saxon south-east England pinpoints meeting, execution and high-status burial foci often in topographically prominent and symbolic points, sometimes coinciding with prehistoric monuments and burial mounds, thereby tying past and present authorities and peoples together. In Norway (as elsewhere) crosses might be set up to ‘Christianise’ these sites; the Church’s role as convenor and arbiter is reflected in evidence from both Lombard Italy (paper by Alexandra Chavarria Arnau) and early medieval Castile (Julio Escalona), indicating spaces in front of rural churches used for village meetings and decision-making; indeed, in Italy, many notarial acts from the eighth century on were signed and witnessed at churches. Escalona notes, however, that for Castile, until the later eighth century, many rural sites lacked a church; did their communities necessarily gather elsewhere at a designated church or might their local cemetery have been used instead?

Part II turns to ‘Landscapes of Power’, featuring 11 papers and widening out discussion to see other built, spatial and material manifestations of authority (state/royal/lordly/monastic/ecclesiastical) and their impacts on aspects of social organisation, economic display and settlement design; there are also papers on the ‘language of justice’ and disputes by Wendy Davies for northern Iberia and on early medieval English mints, moneyers and outputs by Rory Naismith (stressing the *who* more than the *where*, but showing minting might happen where it was needed, not just at urban power-bases). Instructive are two papers on how monasteries could be active in politics (Ian Wood on Luxeuil in the Burgundian Kingdom) and land control and exploitation (Elizabeth Fentress & Caroline Goodson on Villa Magna in central Italy), while extended histories of control can be seen as exploited by diverse powers, such as in the Plain of Kosovo (Felix Teichner), but were more difficult to harness in south-east Wales, where early medieval kingship was weaker and less able to impose a coherent landscape of power (Andy Seaman). Stimulating are contributions that look at emergences of