

Richard Hoggett, *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion* (2010) Anglo-Saxon Studies 15. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 221 pages, 48 illustrations, ISBN 978184383560, £50 hb.

Published with support from the Ann Ashard Webb bequest, which funds accessible scholarship pertaining to the history of Suffolk, Richard Hoggett's multi-disciplinary *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion* is well written and well structured, providing a detailed multi-disciplinary discussion of conversion-period East Anglia. The author is comprehensive in his summary and discussion of the data, requiring no previous knowledge of the subject on the reader's part to follow the argument, yet at the same time his approach is refreshingly theoretical, tackling ideas and interpretative frameworks – such as cognitive archaeology – that early medievalists all too often still shy away from.

The book, based on the author's PhD research, is divided into 5 chapters, flanked by a brief Introduction and Conclusion, setting out the structure of the book and summarising the main points. Chapter 1 ('The Archaeology of Religious Conversion') consists of a discussion of the various theoretical approaches that have characterised the archaeological discipline. Hoggett concludes that neither processual nor post-processual archaeologies have managed to deal adequately with the subject of conversion, and presents cognitive approaches as a viable alternative. Progressing naturally from broader to more specific issues, this chapter also provides an overview of the conversion process, ending with a justification of its regional focus based on the regionally and historically specific nature of the transition towards Christianity.

The remaining chapters deal with a number of different datasets. Chapter 2 discusses historical sources. Hoggett's summaries of the information contained within Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the main documentary source detailing the East Anglian conversion, are concise yet comprehensive, removing the need to refer to the primary source material itself and therefore adding significantly to the accessibility of the study. The author's explicit linkage to the theoretical notions explored in the preceding chapter creates a degree of coherence, although it is so explicit that it also betrays the origins of the book as a PhD thesis. Chapter 3 attempts to identify missionary stations in the archaeological record, contrasting both practical and more ideological reasons for the re-use of Roman and prehistoric sites. Regrettably, any reference to the cognitive framework presented in the introduction is largely absent in this context, leaving the reader to wonder whether this chapter really is more than old-fashioned attempt to fit archaeology into existing historical frameworks.

The final two chapters, focusing on 'Burial and Belief' and 'The Landscape of Conversion', will undoubtedly cause some raised eyebrows amongst the academic community as well. Chapter 4 is largely concerned with changes in burial rites, being far less dismissive of the influence of religion on these practices than seems currently fashionable, and falling short of fully appreciating the inter-relatedness of religious, political and social factors that characterised Anglo-Saxon society. Finally, chapter 5 is mostly concerned with the changing relationship between cemeteries and settlements. It usefully includes discussion of surface finds from churchyard environs as an indication of the potential antiquity of sites that cannot be easily excavated due to their continued use into the present day, but tends towards a slightly over-simplistic and broad-brush explanation for the changes in the relationship between cemeteries and settlements.

In sum, Hoggett provides a compelling argument that the conversion of East Anglia occurred rapidly and permeated all levels of society. The problem with his argument, however, lies with the fact that he tries to fit the data presented into a prescriptive interpretative framework that presupposes the conversion as the driving force behind all change. His case for regionally specific approaches would be stronger if he had actually contrasted two or more regions with different conversion trajectories, allowing the data to reach this conclusion rather than basing his regional selection on another assumption.

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T. C. Smout, *Exploring Environmental History: Selected Essays* (2009) Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 248 pages, 13 illustrations, ISBN 9780748635139, £75.00 hb; ISBN 9780748645619, £19.99 pb.

Professor Christopher Smout is Emeritus Professor of Scottish History at St. Andrews University, but his career and interests stretch beyond the expected bounds of Scottish history. He is an authority, with a strong but not exclusive focus on Scotland, on landscape, soil history and woodland history, the development of the countryside in the last few hundred years, the evolution of environmental politics and the wider history of environment. As an example of his broad area of knowledge, he was until recently the chair of the SCAPE Trust which promotes awareness of Scotland's coastal cultural heritage.

This collection of essays comprises thirteen chapters dealing with aspects of the history of landscape exploitation in Scotland (forests, bogs, mechanised agriculture) and other northern European countries (such as Denmark and Iceland). The first chapter describes the origins of the discipline of environmental history; the final thought-provoking chapter looks at the evolution of an environmental consciousness in the UK and beyond, and the behavioural obligations that it requires. Between these two prospects, *Exploring Environmental History* is partly the biography of a career, partly a biography of a discipline and partly a heartfelt polemic that civilisation must have a consciousness for environmental conservation, over and above what '...occurs ... as an accidental consequence of humanity's other preoccupations' (quoting the final chapter).

How do we understand nature? How do we understand society's interaction with its environment? How does the individual hold a dialogue with nature? These three questions constantly emerge through the essays, echoing central themes in many other disciplines, and providing plenty of surprises to sustain the reader (for example the influence of Scotland's hydro-power schemes on the politics of nature conservancy). Smout is also retelling his own journey towards an understanding of these issues and the evolution of his discipline's body of thought.

The sense that we have inherited a dynamic but vulnerable landscape that is the accidental result of economic use and not the fruit of wise ideology is supported by essays on the human use of the landscape, of well-intentioned breaks from tradition and unforeseen – but seldom unforeseeable – consequences. Using mostly Scottish or northern European examples Smout rehearses how the land – its grasslands, forests and bogs – from the seventeenth century to the present has been and is being used and