

## REVIEW

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*Archaeology, Economy, and Society: England from the fifth to the fifteenth century.* By DAVID A HINTON. New edition. 232 mm. Pp viii + 357, 47 figs. Routledge Archaeology of Northern Europe. Routledge, London, 2022. ISBN 9780367440824. £36.99 (pbk).

Here's an admission. I had never read the first edition of this book, published in 1990. I had opened it countless times, read and referred to many of its sections and chapters and set it as essential reading for students studying medieval archaeology. But only when asked to review this revised edition have I had occasion to read it from cover to cover. To do so underlines the qualities of thoroughness and practical good sense in interpretation that it offers, with an ability to encompass abundant and precise detail and yet remain succinct, and showing where and how views differ in an even-handed manner. In the latter respect, indeed, one might occasionally upbraid the author for being too habitually non-committal; nonetheless at the heart of this monograph lies the principle that it is the evidence that is fundamental, and which eventually will settle debates, if ever at all. It is salutary that these revisions were completed just before the publication of the new aDNA data (Gretzinger *et al* 2022) that have transformed the basis on which the model of an *adventus Saxonum* has to stand. Arguably the most important general point about the archaeology of England in the long Middle Ages from the end of Roman rule just post-AD 400 to AD 1500 surveyed by Hinton is how substantially and significantly this field continues to grow through new discoveries.

After a very short 'Introduction', really a preface to the second edition, this volume proceeds chronologically, with a chapter per century. As the title implies, evidence of economic and material life is typically treated as central,

usually preceding social topics, and with little inclination to go far into ideological interpretations of the archaeological record. Discussing fifteenth-century churches, for instance, the first point made (p 250) is that urban parish church closures of that time reflect the shrinkage of most towns. A following section (pp 262–4) does present the evidence for changes in religious attitudes, lay piety and investment in rebuilding in this century, but with no suggestion that this anticipates the Reformation. The approach could not be clearer than where the book ends (p 273): this was the dawn of the Tudor period, but Hinton stresses that no one in 1500 knew that. They would not, he says, have foreseen the coming changes in the organisation of domestic space, or productive improvements in land-management; they could not have imagined a schism in the Church and something called Protestantism. 'They would probably not have placed their money on a Tudor still ruling England [a century later], let alone a queen.' These statements are narrowly true, but long-term changes, the cultural shifts we call the Renaissance and the birth of the modern era, were both surely and visibly under way.

One point needs to be made about production standards. The quality and clarity of most of the illustrations is dreadful, and the publishers owe it to their customers to make better efforts to achieve satisfactory resolution and contrast in greyscale figures. With the continuing supply of new information, we may yet see a third edition, even with the author now in well-earned retirement. If so, I hope he will also regain the confidence to employ the shift key and write 'Christianity' and 'Anglo-Saxon' in the conventional manner for proper nouns and their associated attributive adjectives rather than ostentatiously demoting them by decapitalisation (see p 2). Whatever or whoever directed that unconvincing gesture, it not only gives rise to myriad inconsistencies but has itself already passed its best-before date. Oxygenating recently

contrived terminological anxieties adds nothing to understanding of or interest in the period in question, but thankfully is so completely superficial in this case as not to detract from the second edition's real qualities as a genuinely good overview of a rich and long period of England's past.

Gretzinger, J., *et al* 2022. 'The Anglo-Saxon migration and the formation of the early English gene pool', *Nature* **610** (September), 112–19

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