Richard Hoggett and Neil Faulkner (eds.) (2025) The Anglo-Saxon Agricultural Revolution in Norfolk. Oxford: Archaeopress, £40. ISBN 978-1-80583-072-6.

The Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project (SHARP) is remarkable in several ways, not least its longevity. It celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with a virtual conference in 2020 (this volume presents the proceedings), and at the time of writing, SHARP has now passed 30 years. Remarkable too is the project's ethos as an experiment (not uncontroversial) in 'democratic archaeology'; visitors become well aware of the resulting *esprit de corps*. The third remarkable thing about SHARP is the breadth and importance of its discoveries: above all, the landscape, cemetery, settlement activity centring on the seventh to ninth centuries. This independent research project in a north-west Norfolk village thus rather punches above its weight and well deserves this celebratory volume. The figures are plentiful and colourful, and the production quality is generally high.

The volume is dedicated to the memory of Neil Faulkner, SHARP founder and co-editor of this book, who sadly died before its completion. There is a collection of tributes: touching but also invigorating, recounting such an active, radical and intense career. Those of us who met Dr Faulkner will instantly recognise references to 'Faulknerian energy' and his challenging but encouraging style of engagement.

The rest of the book focuses on the socio-economic transformations evident in 'Middle Anglo-Saxon' archaeology (*c.* 650–850). Many such developments have been identified at Sedgeford, as summarised in Hoggett's helpful introduction, and then explored in commendable detail by Jolleys *et al.*, including: settlement shift, extensive grid planning, heavy ploughing, canal development, and the bulk processing of large agricultural surpluses in watermills and a purpose-built malting complex (the last a unique Sedgeford discovery, whose structural and archaeobotanical evidence is expertly analysed in Blakelock and Caroe's opening chapter). Certain elements of Sedgeford's 'agricultural revolution' may be questioned: the watermills, for instance, seem to rest on largely circumstantial grounds; and the dating is not precise enough to tell us whether all the developments constituted a revolutionary package, or rather a coherent but piecemeal series of innovations over a century or two. Nonetheless, the overall narrative of agricultural transformation is clear, and chimes with work from other sites and regional studies.

Later, Hamerow and Holmes take up the agricultural theme at a national scale with a high-level analysis of zooarchaeological data, presenting a narrative of evolutionary rather than revolutionary change over a longer period (*c.* 550–900). Emerging patterns include an emphasis on sheep husbandry at monastic sites, and a restricted range of animal produce delivered to the Middle Saxon wics (which, according to the map, appears to include Oxford and Portchester). Discussion of the latter point echoes earlier work, such as Bourdillon's analysis of Hamwic's animal remains, placing the wics within elite-controlled economic systems.

The question of how far the Middle Anglo-Saxon 'revolution(s)' were instigated by elites – secular and/or ecclesiastical – surfaces throughout the volume. It is deemed likely in the Sedgeford chapters, and the influence of 'continental elites' is mooted in Anderson's discussion of the origins of Ipswich ware. This latter chapter, though non-agricultural, is an excellent and much-needed up-to-date review of Ipswich ware, its nature, production, distribution, chronology and usage – invaluable for anyone working on 'Middle Anglo-Saxon' archaeology. Davies meanwhile, focusing on various kinds of evidence from West Norfolk, takes a different tack. He cautions against an over-emphasis on farming as a factor in the settlement dynamics of period, and bids us consider a wider range of locations and actors – not just landed elites but also 'mercantile classes and specialist producers'.

In stark contrast, the closing chapter by Faulkner is having none of that, relegating the very notion of trade to near-irrelevance. Disdaining modern economic theories in favour of socio-economic

frameworks, this paper's intellectual pugnacity (or Faulknerian energy) urges you to rise to debate. It's a roller-coaster ride of punchy disputation, assembling diverse arrays of evidence and quotations (some selected, perhaps questionably, 'at random') and making assertions which, to put it mildly, would stimulate debate. Concepts of trade and capital are dismissed as '(neo)classical' and anachronistic, but 'class conflict' and a 'permanent war economy' play key roles. The emergent model, forcefully and eloquently expressed, centres on elite dominance of food-flows: the Middle Anglo-Saxon lord is described as a 'food mountain'. Faulkner encourages the model to be challenged, and so it should be: for instance, by arguments against 'strong' lordship in this period (e.g. by Williamson), or for the importance of medieval peasant initiative (e.g. by Dyer), or for the massive scale of early medieval coin use (e.g. by Metcalf). Nonetheless, this paper is a powerful rejoinder to any of us who have blithely bandied about economic terms and concepts, and so – like the volume as a whole – this argument will no doubt have a lasting and provocative influence.

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