

The Material Culture of the Built Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World. Volume II of the Material Culture of Daily Living in the Anglo-Saxon World. (Exeter Studies in Medieval Europe). Edited by Maren Clegg Hyer & Gale R Owen-Crocker. 18 x 25 cm. xix + 295 pp, 64 b&w pls and figs, 2 tables. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-78138-65-3. Price: £75.00 hb.

Through churches and halls, roads and dykes, sculptures and beacons, as well as cemeteries and towns, this collection explores the potentials and constraints of the built environment in Anglo-Saxon England. Along the way we see pre-existing structures and infrastructures appropriated through reuse, demolition or adaptation, and ‘inventions’ of the era evolving in the shape of, for instance, nascent medieval towns, churches and new mortuary environments.

After a brief introduction by one of the editors (Owen-Crocker), Grocock uses the Old English poem *The Ruin* as inspiration for an exploration of Roman ruins in the Anglo-Saxon landscape and mind-set. Next Hindle retraces roadways in Anglo-Saxon England and the kinds of travellers using them. Leahy and Lewis then contribute on domestic dwellings and workshops, followed by Tyler’s suppositional consideration of the environments in which Anglo-Saxon kings may have convened. In terms of religious aspects, Shapland offers an insightful account of the architectural development of early churches, demonstrating the diverse traditions from which these buildings borrowed; Coatsworth gives a detailed case study of sculpture in the West Riding of Yorkshire; and Semple and Williams provide a stimulating account of the prevalent relationships of the dead with the built environment of the living. For landscape chapters, Worthington Hill and Grigg debate divisions in the Anglo-Saxon landscape, focusing on dykes and field systems; Haslam presents a typically forthright interpretation of the rise of defended settlements (*burhs*), viewing them as deliberate and successful instruments of royal authority; and finally, Baker and Brookes convincingly posit the existence of a network of beacons and lookouts dotting the landscape of Anglo-Saxon England.

There is refreshing insight here into the dynamic and creative manner that Anglo-Saxons simultaneously inherited and invented their built environment, and the consideration of the whole period as a single entity is more novel than it should be. For sure, some chapters tend to stray into stolid description of the physical details, albeit in a highly scholarly manner, but many contributions do grapple with fundamental issues of theory and method and will surely inspire further debate. In this regard, Shapland’s chapter on the architectural borrowings of churches stands out in particular, as does Haslam’s on the rise of urbanism. Other chapters (notably Baker and Brookes, Grocock and Tyler) find their strengths in their innovative approaches to otherwise ephemeral subjects. Overall, this book provides a thoroughly recommended handling of a diverse and imaginative range of subjects intelligently brought together.

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