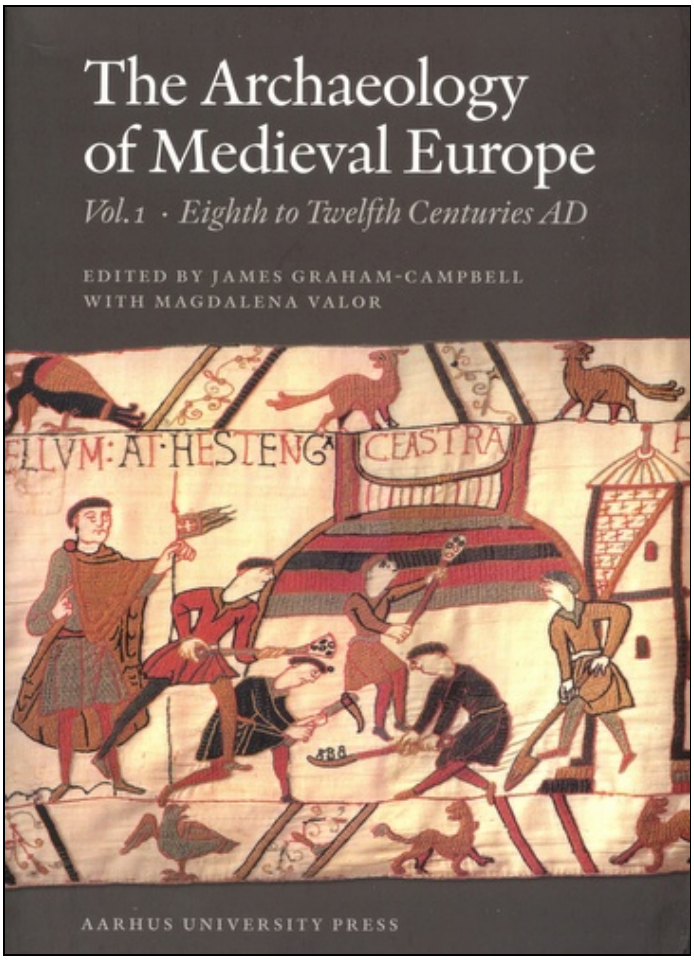
Medieval Europe

The Archaeology of Medieval Europe

Vol. 1 - Eighth to Twelfth Centuries AD



The Archaeology of Medieval Europe. Vol. 1. Eight to Twelfth Centuries AD (Acta Jutlandica, 83:1; Humanities Series, 79). Edited by James Graham-Campbell & Magdalena Valor. 479 p., softbound, ill., 2008

This ground-breaking set,

which is divided chronologically (Vol 1 extending from the Eighth to Twelfth Centuries AD, and Vol 2 from the Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries), will enable readers to track the development of different cultures and regional characteristics, throughout what was to become medieval Catholic Europe. In addition to revealing the gradual process of Europeanisation, with shared contexts and common technological developments, the complete work will provide the opportunity for demonstrating the differences that were inevitably present across the Continent - from Iceland to Italy, and from Portugal to Finland - and to study why such existed.
The two volumes of The Archaeology of Medieval Europe will together comprise the first complete account of Medieval Archaeology across the Continent.

Archaeologists from academic institutions in fifteen countries have collaborated to produce the first of these two books comprising fifteen thematic chapters. In addition, every chapter features a number of " box-texts", by specialist contributors, highlighting sites or themes of particular importance. Both books are comprehensively illustrated throughout, in both colour ab b/w, including line drawings and maps.

MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY at the Outset of the Third Millennium: Research and Teaching

Different Countries: Different Medieval Archaeologies

Medieval archaeology developed late as a university discipline. Nevertheless, medieval archaeology has been in existence at least since the nineteenth century in many coun−tries and, as we shall see later, this means that the discipline has been defined in differing ways in different countries. Chronologically, it depends on the various definitions of the Middle Ages that are to be found in different parts of Europe: from southern Europe, where the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century AD marks the beginning of the Middle Ages, to Scandinavia where the transition to the Middle Ages is dated to ca. 1050. It means that what is still prehistory in the north is already the medieval period in the south. Another important factor, which has influenced medieval archaeology, is from (or within) which discipline it developed: prehistory, art-history or history. This has inevitably influenced the particular character of the discipline in different countries.

Although that situation still exists, medieval archaeologists from different traditions agree on the main tasks of `medieval archaeology': the study of a period in the past with a variery of sources, making use not only of material remains, but also of documentary and pictorial evidence. The archaeologist must of course lay stress on the physical mate−rial, but needs also to work to integrate this evidence with the other source material. This has consequences for the theory, methods and teaching of medieval archaeology. This situation is common ground for all historical archaeologies, which work together with text and objects (Andrén 1998). Many deparnnents today are extending their study ofmedieval archaeology into later periods-and so the name may be changed, for exarn−ple, into `historical archaeology'. This means that the traditional termination of the Middle Ages, at the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century, sig−nifies less for archaeologists than it did before. This has to do with the new themes that are engaging researchers. Many of them, including urbanisation, landscape archaeology, industrial atchaeology and the archaeology of religion, cannot be restricted to certain periods. Also of importance are discussions of general human problems, in which medi−eval archaeologists can participate with essential data and can then, on their part, gain inspiration from others. Even if the discipline of medieval archaeology is not an exten−sive one, there exists a broad context within which to work.

The Development of Medieval Archaeology

The History of medieval archaeology is difficult to encapsulate. Whereas prehistoric archaeology was well defined and established as an independent discipline by the turn of the twentieth century, no such development took place for medieval archaeology much before the 1960s or 1970s. This is not to say, however, that there had been no substan−tial professional archaeological studies of medieval material before this period; indeed, lively activity tnay be identified as early as the 1800s, but this was broadly dependent on a general rise in interest in the Middle Ages. There are also significant differences in the discipline's emergence and growth in various parts of Europe. In the Mediterranean countries, classical archaeology long dominated, and it was only after the Second World War (1939-45) that medieval archaeology came into its own, in many cases with acad−emic influence from Britain. In Eastern Europe the situation was divided. Given the role that the Slavs

played in shaping early medieval society, research emphasis was placed on a 'Slavic archaeology'. In part for political reasons, therefore, the later Middle Ages did not receive the same attention. During the last few decades, however, the later medieval period has been incorporared into archaeological research programmes and, in general, more pan-European historical developments have attracted greater interest in Eastern Europe. In contrast, in Spain and Portugal, archaeology has been strongly influenced by the fact that these countries were, in large part, incorporated into the Muslim world for much of the Middle Ages.

It is in Western and Northern Europe that the different approaches to medieval archaeology have had the longest developrnent (cf. van Regteren Altena 1990). One may recognise nuanced variations between those areas that had forrned part of the Roman Empire and those that were beyond its borders. Nevertheless, there was a common ground to the emergence of medieval archaeology with rhe rise of Romanticism in the early 1800s, when there occurred a strong growth in interest in the Middle Ages. From a purely archaeological point of view, the nineteenth-century excavations of Merovingian graves in southern Germany represent a key development. Another manifestation of the growing interest in the Middle Ages involved the restoration and reconstruction of buildings, including both churches and castles. These helped to give rise to `buildings archaeology' as a well-defined sub-discipline. Examples of this may be found in France, England and Scandinavia, as well as other areas. It is important to note that these ini–tial developments were also influenced by a romantic interest in monuments, a focus that was to affect medieval archaeology for a long time. It is also worth observing that, before medieval archaeology achieved academic status as a discipline in its own right, other areas of study- including art-history, architecture and history- had been setting the agenda and organising archaeological investigations.

The development that took off after the Second World War was initiated by set–tlement studies, both archaeological and historical. These concerned the countryside as well as towns, with somewhat different emphases being evident once again in the research traditions of different countries. Urban archaeology certainly existed from the beginning of the twentieth century, and even somewhat earlier. In Lund, south–ern Sweden, there was actually a late nineteenth-century excavation programme that focused on the medieval town. During 1915-18, parts of Nya Lödöse were discovered and excavated within the borders of modern-day Gothenburg in western Sweden. This exca–vation is significant because it was a professional academic study of an historic late medi–eval town, carried out with what were then advanced methods. While a few other isolat–ed medieval archaeological studies were carried out before World War II, it remains true that the major development of the discipline occurred post-war. Among the pioneering work, which immediately followed the war, was W Neugebauer's excavation of the par–tially destroyed Lübeck and, for example, similar studies were carried out in Hamburg, as also by WF Grimes in London (Neugebauer 1980; Schindler 1957; Grimes 1968). The excavation of medieval Novgorod by AV Artsikhovsky began in the 1930s; after the war, work was re-started by BA Kolchin, with open-area excavation being carried out on a large-scale from 1951-62, with the discovery of well-preserved wooden streets, log-–constructed buildings and a vast quantiry of artefacts, including letters written on birch bark (see Thompson 1967, for an English summary); work continues (cf. Yanin et al 1992), but this material lies outside the scope of this book. (...)

(excerpt from Hans Andersson, Barbara Scholkmann and Mette Svart Kristiansen: MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY at the Outset of the Third Millennium: Research and Teaching, ibid., p. 19-21)

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