

al-Muqaddasi's comment about sugar cane, both of which suggest production in the tenth and eleventh centuries, antecedent to Crusader activities.

The chapter by Jutta Haser provides a brief overview of urban settlements based upon Walmsley's research and discusses the site of Tall Zira'a (near Gadara). She gives plans of two excavations (areas I and II), each showing near identical late Byzantine and Umayyad phases. Never has there been more startling proof of settlement continuity over this oft-considered dramatic political break.

The final chapter is an appreciation of Khirbat al-Minya by Franziska Bloch, in which she gives a masterful history of the excavations, with a description and map of other desert castles (*qasur*). She mentions 22 similar complexes, although this number is far from complete and likely to remain so, as long as Genequand (2014) may be active in this field. The dating of Khirbat al-Minya is compared to other similar sites, with a brief mention of the ceramic evidence that she discusses elsewhere (Bloch 2006). With the end of this chapter, the fund of archaeological information is suddenly and sadly curtailed. One is left with a desire for more publications, such as Ritter (2016), and indeed with great hopes that this German initiative will lead to a fuller understanding of this important monument in the context of its historical landscapes.

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BRIAN AYERS. *The German Ocean. Medieval Europe around the North Sea*. 2016. xv+268 pages, 93 colour and b&w illustrations. Sheffield & Bristol (CT): Equinox; 978-1-904768-49-4 hardback £75.



This book provides a comprehensive survey of the archaeology of the regions bordering the North Sea and the Baltic between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries AD. While leaving the writing of broad

political narratives to others, the author skilfully uses documentary evidence to help with the interpretation of sites and finds, and to identify problems with our current understanding of the archaeological record. Ayers draws on a myriad of published and grey-literature sources, supplemented with a wealth of information gained from the author's site visits, attendance at colloquia and trips to collections. It is clearly the product of several decades of active engagement with the material, with its emphasis on East Anglian archaeology reflecting the locus of the author's professional experience.

The structure of the volume follows a chronological narrative, but within each chapter there are sections dealing with the most relevant themes: geo-environment, climate, social organisation, the relationship between towns and their hinterlands, developments in material culture and technology and so on, as appropriate. As a means of organising a huge body of densely interconnected material, this provides both a coherent framework for the story and the flexibility to concentrate on the most significant issues, leaving the reader feeling secure in their grasp of the issues being discussed. Merchant-driven trade, the underlying leitmotif of the book, gets its own chapter, as though it were too important to be constrained by the century chapter headings of the rest of the volume. The narrative is told in a way that illuminates and explains the broader development of society and culture in the later Middle Ages, as ideas about how to live, work and, increasingly, accumulate and consume spark backwards and forwards across

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the many coastlines that constitute the North Sea province.

The early period, starting around AD 1100, sets the scene by describing the major drivers of change in the coming centuries. These include the growth in population, particularly in urban centres, the various pressures of climate change, technological innovation and the agencies of institutional power. The results of all of the major research projects in the study area are deployed, as are the discoveries from the multitude of archaeological excavations and building surveys undertaken over the last 50 years in advance of the regeneration of the historic trading centres that form the main foci of interest. A number of the most important centres—Amsterdam, Antwerp, Bergen, Bruges, Great Yarmouth, Hull, London, Lübeck, Norwich, Ribe and Trondheim—are re-visited throughout the chapters, as different excavations illustrate different themes over the centuries. The encyclopaedic coverage is astonishing.

Two aspects deserve honourable mentions in despatches: the attention given to developments in archaeological science and the recognition of the importance of the underlying conceptual frameworks that archaeologists work within but rarely explicitly discuss. An examination of fish-bone assemblages opens the book, and then the story takes in climate change (effects on fishing and the Little Ice Age); vulcanology (the eruption of Mount Rinjani in Indonesia); gas chromatography-mass spectrography (for identifying wine residues on barrels and vessels); stable isotopes (population movement and, innovatively, to track the mobility of disease); DNA studies from teeth of the Charterhouse cemetery burials to isolate the *Yersinia pestis* bacteria (a plague vector) and at St Catherine's cemetery, Eindhoven, harvesting ancient genetic sources to develop gene therapies in the creation of new drugs to combat HIV; geo-technical analysis to provenance ballast from King's Lynn and Wismar, and the stone used in Flemish churches, limestone ledger stones and Tournai 'marble' grave markers; the list goes on.

In the theoretical sphere, following a nod to Henri Pirenne, we get Robert Liddiard on elite landscapes, David Barraclough on cognitive mapping, John Steane on the heavenly town, Christopher Dyer and John Schofield on urban space and mentality, Peter Spufford and Jennifer Kermod on the uptake of coinage, Frans Verhaeghe's critique of ceramics as indicators of trade, David Gaimster and Natasha

Mehler on Hanseatic cultural signatures, depositional theory by Thomas Spitzers, Kelly Green on the symbolism of gloves, John Cherry on seals, Roberta Gilchrist and Stephania Perring on sacred space, imagery and the Reformation and, bringing us back to Pirenne, Joakim Thomasson on capital and society. Again, the range and depth of scholarship is deeply impressive.

Elsewhere in this smorgasbord the reader learns of the brick latrine used by Chaucer, red squirrel pelts at York, where also is found the first depiction of spectacles (c. AD 1410, on a figure in a stained glass window), ferreting for rabbits, the Ruisdael painting of an Amsterdam manor-house with subsidence problems caused by land-reclamation, known as the Dutch vernacular equivalent of 'The Money Pit', and, to whet the whistle, a detailed archaeology of beer and brewing.

With such a wide-ranging volume, there will be occasional errors. A couple of very minor points are offered here as corrections for the inevitable second edition: the residents of Hartlepool will not like their relocation to Yorkshire, and the author is misled by his secondary source in describing the timber-framed buildings on the Close, Newcastle, as having undercrofts and being dated to AD 1400, statements flatly contradicted in the published building recording. A final note of constructive criticism to the publisher of the otherwise excellent 'Studies in the Archaeology of Medieval Europe' series: there is no point in having end-notes if the note itself is just a bibliographic reference, causing the reader to have to turn immediately to the bibliography to find out what the reference relates to. The end-notes take up 22 pages, space that could have been used to make the dense blocks of text easier to read by employing a larger font.

In summary, this marvellous book is a definitive text that is all the more significant because the subject, the interconnectedness of the nations around the German Ocean, although of the greatest importance, has not previously been covered in any depth. Packed with archaeological evidence, very fully referenced and clearly illustrated, the book is an essential source for any researcher, field archaeologist or historian working on the medieval period from the western coast of Russia to the English Channel. Particularly at the present political juncture, I can only echo the author's concluding sentiments: "the sea binds communities together rather than dividing them" (p. 198).

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JOHN NORMAN MIKSIC & GEOK YIAN GOH. *Ancient Southeast Asia*. 2016. xxi+632 pages, numerous b&w illustrations. Abingdon & New York: Routledge; 978-0-415-73554-4 paperback £29.99.



Ancient Southeast Asia is one of the world's most important and archaeologically obscure regions. Innumerable human groups have traversed its seascapes and settled

its landscapes for nearly two million years to produce fossils that confound palaeoanthropologists; histories of plant and animal domestication that attract international interest; and ancient civilisations that offer rich comparative histories for studying state formation. Despite more than half a century of hard work by Southeast Asian archaeologists, few practitioners outside of the Asian region know the place or its ancient history today. One reason is that we need more regional syntheses to communicate Southeast Asian archaeology to students and comparativist archaeologists.

Why have so few archaeologists dared to synthesise Southeast Asia's past? The region's immense geographic scope (more than 4.5 million square kilometres), its demographic scale (more than 623 million inhabitants today) and its cultural diversity (all the major world religions and more than 170 languages in mainland Southeast Asia alone) pose major obstacles—as do the region's myriad and divergent archaeological traditions. Characterising millennia of colonisation and migration, technological innovation and cultural transmission, and stasis and change across montane, coastal and maritime landscapes is certainly not for the faint-hearted. We should all thank John Norman Miksic and Geok Yian Goh for their labours in producing this volume, which is a welcome effort to understanding Southeast Asia's past.

*Ancient Southeast Asia* is organised into eight chapters. The first two frame the authors' approach by merging processual archaeological and historical approaches to assert that: a) Southeast Asia is

a meaningful region to study, despite its nearly continuous interaction with neighbouring areas; b) blending multiple macro-regional frameworks (e.g. World Systems theory, globalisation, cultural evolution) helps us to comprehend the region's long-term history; and c) we can only understand the critical two-millennium period before the Early Modern Era (i.e. 500 BC to AD 1500) by plumbing the region's 'prehistoric' past. This last notion is critical to understanding the logic that structures *Ancient Southeast Asia*, whose ambitious scope reflects a deep knowledge of pan-regional dynamics during these millennia that the authors periodise using New World archaeology as their inspiration.

Chapter 3, 'Prehistory: two million to 2,000 years ago', starts by reviewing the history of research on Southeast Asia's Palaeolithic period and the major themes raised in previous studies, such as the utility of the Three Age system and culture-history notions of diffusion and migration. Their nine-page review of Pleistocene developments focuses primarily on Indonesia, and forms the weakest component of this very useful synthesis. Alfred Russel Wallace first alerted scholars to the importance of Southeast Asia for understanding human evolution, and Southeast Asia's Pleistocene sequence has garnered the most international recognition for this region, which has turned heads since Eugene Dubois' early twentieth-century announcements regarding *Pithecanthropus erectus* through to the more recent and utterly mystifying *Homo floresiensis*, which palaeoanthropologists fondly describe as the Hobbit. Readers are advised to consult other sources to understand Southeast Asia's Pleistocene and early to mid Holocene (i.e. Hoabinhian) periods. Subsequent discussions of the Early Metal Age and moated sites are marginally more useful, but it is the latter section of this chapter (beginning with 'The growth of trade') in which this synthesis becomes deeply useful to non-specialists and Southeast Asian archaeologists alike. No previous work has discussed the full constellation of coastal (and possibly trade-based) sites along mainland Southeast Asia's coasts and in Island Southeast Asia's eastern archipelago by the second century BC. The authors' interaction sphere model is a useful starting point for discussion.

Chapters 4–7 (the 'Protoclassic' through to the 'Late Classic') fill a significant gap by synthesising pan-regional developments over a 1400-year period. The strongest sections of these chapters weave together threads from archaeology, epigraphy and art-history

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