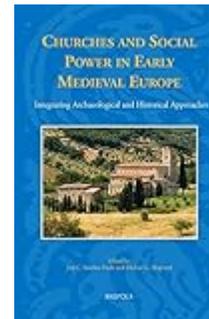


**José Sánchez-Pardo, Michael Shapland.** *Churches and Social Power in Early Medieval Europe: Integrating Archaeological and Historical Approaches.* Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2015. XVI, 553 S. \$163.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-2-503-54555-4.



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## J. Sánchez-Pardo u.a. (Hrsg.): Churches and Social Power

The volume to be presented here brings together case studies by sixteen authors from ten European countries. It is the result of a conference hosted by the University College London during November 2010. The aim according to the organisers and editors José Carlos Sánchez-Pardo and Michael Shapland (pp. 1-32) was: 'to provide new insights into the strategies by which churches were founded and bound to the service of social power in early medieval Western Europe' (p. 2). The editors were successful in reminding their authors to describe 'trends and processes rather than discrete historiographies, [...] to offer [...] studies that allow comparison of the ways in which social power was embodied in churches in different parts of early medieval Europe.' (p. 15) Different research traditions and terminologies often tend to produce superficial diversity where similar developments could be observed and on the other hand inhibit deeper reflection on genuine heterogeneity. As an achievement in itself can be seen, that here archaeology and documentary history from different countries are presented together in the same format and language. Another uniting gesture of this volume is the way it shows the connection between the spheres of politics, economy and religion:

not the Christian faith, but its architectural materialization - the churches have been used from the beginning as an imperial instrument in the contest for social status and political power by the ecclesiastical and secular elites likewise.

The volume unites studies from 'central' previously Romanized and 'peripheral' non-Romanized areas, seeing churches as a pan-European phenomenon of the Early Middle Ages. Beyond this the regions discussed are different for example with respect to the materiality of construction: timber in Ireland and post-Roman Britain, the use of *spolia* with Anglo-Saxon churches and brick, marble and quarried stone in Italy and Southern France. But several thematic strands keep recurring throughout the early medieval 'landscape of churches' and they have been used to subdivide the volume.

The first part discusses churches as instruments for power relations: on the one hand between bishops and kings, but also amongst minor and major elites. Juan Antonio Quirós and Igor Santos (pp. 35-68) look at the monumentalization of memory in Northern Spain. Alexandra Chavarría (pp. 69-97) compares local

churches in Northern Italy, while Tomás Carragáin (pp. 99–155) does it in Ireland. For Tuscany finally, Roberto Farinelli (pp. 157–181) draws in his quantitative-statistical approach on the unparalleled abundance of sources from the episcopal archive of Lucca.

The second part looks at churches in times of political reorganization. The impact of the Norman Conquest on Anglo-Saxon England is Aleksandra McClain's topic (pp. 185–225) while José Sánchez-Pardo (pp. 227–268) looks at Galicia between the Visigothic Kingdom following the Arab conquest and the Asturian Kingdom. Christofer Zwanzig (pp. 269–295) compares the Mozarabic Resettlement of Northern Spain with the Anglo-Saxon mission in Southern Germany. Finally, David Petts (pp. 297–328) studies the evolution of the parochial network in Western Normandy.

The wider landscape context and rhythms of church foundations are the theme of the third section. Anne Nissen (pp. 331–365) compares church building in Northern France and Southern Scandinavia while Duncan W. Wright (pp. 367–386) gives a comprehensive overview on England. Luís Fontes (pp. 387–417) contribution on north-west Portugal is followed by Christine Delaplace's (pp. 419–447) overarching description of Gaul with examples from the South-East of France.

The fourth part finally discusses the choice of place against other factors: how churches became or occupied existing centres of ideological and economic power. Here Gian Pietro Brogiolo (pp. 451–472) tackles Northern Italy between the Lombard Kingdom and the Carolingian Empire. Andreas Schaub and Tanja Kohlberger-Schaub (pp. 473–494) discuss Charlemagne's choice of Aachen. Michael Shapland (pp. 495–522) again studies the evidence of chapels at Anglo-Saxon royal palaces. Finally Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir (pp. 523–540) describes the development of the church in Iceland.

Representative of all contributions only a few overarching aspects can be touched upon here. There is the principal problem – which is not really discussed in depth in this volume: to archaeologically identify a church and to discriminate it from a secular building. This certainly is more virulent with poorly preserved remains in the peripheral regions with more timber architecture and less historical sources to draw on. But just because remains of a building lie underneath a later church is not grounds enough to declare it without further evidence as ecclesiastical in function too. Secular or ecclesiastical – how quickly an interpretation can be turned around has been shown by John Blair. John Blair, Palaces or

minsters? Northampton and Cheddar reconsidered, in: *Anglo-Saxon England* 25 (1996), pp. 97–121; John Blair, Grid-planning in Anglo-Saxon Settlements, in: *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 18 (2013), pp. 18–61. Duncan W. Wright revives the discussion in this volume when he argues to interpret the excavation site of Cowage Farm near the minster of Malmesbury in Southern England as a semi-monastic cell instead of a royal centre (pp. 376–377). One of his main arguments is the grid planning of the settlement, which is indicative of punctual ecclesiastical centuriation of Early Medieval Anglo-Saxon England with techniques derived from the Roman *agrimensores*.

Alexandra Chavarría for Northern Italy (p. 82) and Christine Delaplace for France (p. 422) struggle on a higher level to identify functions of early church buildings. How to find out whether they were places of Christian assembly, used for pastoral care, as funerary chapel or for a saint's cult? Not only each church could have had a variety of functions, but these could also have changed over time. Liturgical elements like the baptistery may have been made from perishable materials and left no trace once they were removed.

For Juan Antonio Quirós and Igor Santos churches are the assets in a contest they compare with a political game in which [the] the possession of churches was the sine qua non in order to be able to play [the] (p. 64) With a very recent example from Northern Spain – where a bishop and a small community went to court over the ownership of a church – they demonstrate the actuality of the topic (p. 35).

The struggle to maintain ownership and at the same time the physicality of churches in the long term reminds of Aleksandra McClain's 12th century examples from the North of England. There great religious houses as major landowners were criticised to neglect many of the churches in their care. One of the solutions found was a kind of negotiated public-private partnership that allowed secular patrons to preserve an element of control over a church and made them likely to invest in funerary monuments or private chapels – of which they might claim some level of ownership (pp. 205–206).

Not clear enough in all contributions are the weak grounds on which the dating of early churches is often based. Lacking historically dateable features and direct correlations to written sources many more independent dates for building phases and stratigraphies would be needed. Rarely any of the churches is tied in historically as well by dendrochronology as for example the Convent

St. John at M<sup>A</sup>¼stair, Switzerland, pointed out by Gian Pietro Brogiolo (p. 468). Only in one instance mortar is mentioned as the source of an independent date (p. 57, footnote 74). But it would need another volume like this to describe the development of scientific methods to date mortar and the potential impact this could have on our view on early medieval stone building.

Fascinating about this collection is the comparative ease with which one can indulge in each region. The contributions are just long enough to allow the authors to present telling examples from key sites, to introduce theoretical background and current debates connected.

At the same time they are short enough to quicken the reader's appetite to a desire which can easily be appeased with the help of ample footnotes and references. The book takes a comparatively wide geographical approach with a rather long-term perspective to draw our view especially to local churches as manifestations of social power in the landscape. It encourages interdisciplinarity and comparative approaches beyond the studies presented and is successful in creating the necessary mindset and terminology. Building on this, a pan-European or even global perspective on the societal implications of church building can be attempted which would still have to include later periods.

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