

BOOK REVIEWS

David Gaimster and Roberta Gilchrist (eds.), The Archaeology of Reformation 1480–1580. Society for Medieval Archaeology & Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology. Maney. Leeds 2003, 486 pp.

The historical phenomenon of the Reformation is relatively easy to pin down with sets of dichotomies. The most common of them is the distinction between destruction and survival, or discontinuity and continuity. Indeed, the Reformation is often viewed as a destruction of religious Catholic imagery, the plundering of churches and the transformation of monasteries into residences of the elite. A contrasting view, based nevertheless on the same distinction, emphasises the survival of Catholic practices and beliefs well into the early modern period. Another common distinction is made between the elite for which the Reformation was an opportunity to increase its power and the lower strata who were the stubborn subjects of the new imposed doctrine. Hence, common people met the Reformation with reluctance and resistance. Again, these same distinctions can lead to an alternative interpretation, where the Reformation is seen as a natural condition of lay people, something that cleansed the unpopular, artificial and alien from Catholic religious practices.

When archaeology, or rather material culture studies in general, approaches the Reformation and tries to discern what exactly the continuities and discontinuities were in both public and private spheres, it is faced with the given set of dichotomies. Can an archaeological attitude contribute more to study of the Reformation than simply a record of destruction or survival? This question was raised at a conference on the Archaeology of Reformation held at the British Museum in 2001. The current volume is a selection of papers given at the conference jointly organised by the Society for Medieval Archaeology and the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology. In addition to archaeologists, its contributors include historians as well as architectural and art historians. In addition to the

introduction, the collection comprises 30 papers spread across five themes.

The first theme focuses on public worship or churches as the key location of changes during the Reformation. In the first paper, Margaret Aston discusses the impact of iconoclasm on worshippers and church buildings, emphasising the loss of the sensory experience in liturgy. The importance of sight, hearing, and smell was decreased by the changes brought about by the Reformers, and these discontinuities of liturgical practice were acutely recognised by contemporaries. Iconoclasm and purified liturgy changed the visual topos, as church buildings were made lighter to conform to the new doctrine and reorganised to assist the new use of texts. The most extreme changes in ecclesiastical space and destruction of proscribed objects and images sometimes led worshippers to bury or hide artefacts considered at risk. Aston argues that although iconoclasm may seem like an erosion of the sacred, it should be conceived of more in terms of the relocation of holiness as it affected objects, places and forms of worship. However, it is possible to ask whether the holiness of the pre- and post-Reformation periods was the same. The concept of the holy was not a single category in medieval religion but more like a spectrum. In view of this diversity, questioning the meanings of holiness in the period of Reformation seems crucial. If an artefact maintained its sacredness through the Reformation, was it holy in the same way in both the pre- and post-Reformation periods? Similarly, it is even possible to question the distinction between continuity and discontinuity. If the Reformation was, as argued, a replacement of one religious paradigm with another, does it mean that previously normative practices now had a different denotation, an aspect of resistance, although appearing the same as before?

In his paper, Andrew Spicer argues that the remodelling of the existing Catholic churches in Scotland and the United Provinces by the Calvinists reflected their liturgical priorities centred on the preaching of the Word of God. It

was not so much a question of iconoclasm as a gradual adaptation of buildings and furnishings to the new doctrine. Also Elizabeth C. Tingle examines doctrinal changes or the effects of the Counter-Reformation on rural parish life and the church of Saint Thégonnec in France. At a broader level, Niall Oakey asks whether the surviving pre-Reformation ecclesiastical material culture could be used as an indicator of Reformation attitudes in Britain. Through a detailed statistical analysis of church furniture and fittings, he points out that artefacts not only tell about the attitudes of their medieval producers but also reveal the attitudes of later users. In another extensive study, Markus Hiekkänen has created a new chronology for *c.* 100 Finnish stone churches that came under construction during the Middle Ages (*c.* 1200–1560). His studies reveal that the third and last building generation of *c.* 50 stone churches contains only six completed churches. This unique situation was an outcome of the Reformation and the economic catastrophe that it brought upon the Church in Finland.

In his provocative article, Axel Bolvig examines the Reformation as presented by Danish ecclesiastical wall-paintings. He argues that medieval lay religiosity posed a sceptical attitude towards the Catholic faith visible in wall-paintings. They present a certain alternative understanding of conventional religious teaching which otherwise survives only through oral tradition. In this atmosphere, the Reformation could only have had a minor effect on lay practices and Catholic images were not destroyed or whitewashed. Bolvig interprets this lay attitude as a form of a particular Danish mentality and the Reformation as the ‘second Maastricht treaty’, the first being Christianisation. Like the modern Maastricht treaty, both were more or less rejected by lay forces. Despite its freshness, the idea of a certain rebellious Danish mentality has the flavour of Romanticism and the tint of the peculiar nationalism to which Scandinavian scholars are prone. In fact, the existence of a gap between the ecclesiastical elite and lower social strata is quite a common phenomenon throughout medieval Europe. Nevertheless, Bolvig’s article raises the important question of whose Reformation we are talking about when studying the past. Whose changing practices and conceptions are we interested in?

The second thematic group of the collection comprises studies on the relationship between private devotion and material culture. In an important article, Sarah Tarlow focuses on the adaptation of pre-Reformation artefacts into Reformed religious practices. Using archaeology as the illuminator of popular religious feelings, she is able to discover various strategies of concealment and transformation as crucial to the incorporation of popular and meaningful elements of Catholic practice in post-Reformation worship. Through these strategies, the meanings of crosses and relics were appropriated for post-Reformation needs. In a more domestic setting, David Gaimster studies change in the design and iconography of moulded ceramics such as pipe clay figurines and stove-tiles during the Reformation. Through refinements in the design and technology of moulded ceramics, their status and function were expanded from primarily utilitarian vessels into symbolic artefacts. Hence, the changing repertoire of moulded ceramics enables tracing the impact of Reformation in domestic utensils. Furthermore, Gaimster argues that the Hanseatic trade network had a pivotal role in the spread of these products propagating the Reformation. The archaeological study of moulded ceramics supports the assumption of historians that the Reformation was largely an urban phenomenon.

Hugo Blake and his colleagues have written a remarkable overview of the cult of the Holy Name in Reformation England revealing temporal fluctuations in its meanings and style. In an equally intriguing article, Beverley Nenck takes the first steps towards the archaeology of an immigrant crypto-Jewish community in Tudor London. A small community of Portuguese ‘conversos’ settled in England during the 16th century. They lived overtly as Christians, but are likely to have practised Judaism in private. Although Jewish households have been identified from urban contexts as having a distinctive material culture, it is much more difficult to trace the material culture typical of these Crypto-Jews. Not only portable objects but also buildings are being approached as artefacts changed by the Reformation. Paul Everson and David Stocker study the transformation of religious houses into secular residences in the Lincolnshire countryside, and Kirsty Rodwell the

building programme of Sir Nicholas Poyntz, a sympathiser of the Reformation, at Acton Court.

The third group of papers in the volume shares the theme of Dissolution landscapes and the expansion of secular powers within them. A crucial factor in the development of Reformation landscapes was the destruction and recycling of monastic spaces, and Maurice Howard discusses the chronology and character of the transformation of monastic buildings into residential mansions influenced by contemporary high-status courtyard houses. The distinctive character of the monastic fabric posed particular challenges, and often the initial solutions of their reuse had to be changed afterwards. In a methodologically innovative paper, Richard K. Morris explores the possibilities of recycled stonework as evidence for reconstructing monastic buildings abolished during the Reformation. Ann Hamlin and Nick Brannon examine the arrival of English Planters in Northern Ireland at the end of the 16th century and their impact on the ecclesiastical landscape.

The dissolution of monasteries had also severe consequences for the English townscape. This change, however, was not rapid and drastic but a matter of gradual evolution as Simon Ward argues in his study of landscape in Chester. Also Iain Soden concludes that in Coventry, the haphazard conversion of monastic buildings depended more on economic considerations than religious imperatives. The attitudes towards old buildings were so mixed that Soden describes their survival as a matter of happenstance which depended on individual elite men. However, instead of interpreting the situation either in terms of chance or the intentions of elite men, I would be more inclined to conceptualise the situation through socially and culturally conditioned patterns of survival and reuse even more than Soden does. Barney Sloane examines the nature and location of tenements in the precincts of religious houses in London, and Christopher Phillpotts focuses on the topography of power in the transformation of monastic buildings and episcopal mansions into residences of the nobility. In the last paper of the group, John Schofield studies the nature of the post-Reformation parish church in London and how it was achieved when monastic churches were adapted for parish use.

The fourth section of papers concentrates on

the fate of corporate charity during the Reformation. Kate Giles argues that the guildhalls of York provided a sense of continuity in a period of social dislocation. The practices and buildings of religious fraternities and craft guilds were adopted by trading companies and civic authorities after the Reformation. Giles, however, places these changes in the long-term perspective of socio-economic and ideological changes which already began in the 15th century. Simon Roffey examines chantries as catalysts for private and public piety, and their privatisation for the exclusive use of the elite in the post-Reformation period. In their individual contributions, David Sankey and Nick Bateman discuss the results of recent archaeological excavations at two sites of late medieval corporate charity in the City of London.

The last group of papers examines burial and commemoration during the Reformation. Vanessa Harding concludes in her paper that many traditional Catholic customs survived the Reformation because they served a real social and cultural need. The examination of burials uncovers the pattern of both change and compromise of Catholic burial practices in 16th-century London. Roberta Gilchrist points out the relative paucity of 16th-century burial evidence and addresses methodological problems in the identification and dating of 16th-century cemetery contexts. Jörn Staecker has taken a quantitative approach to grave slab design, language and iconography in 16th-century Denmark. Through grave slabs, he seeks to trace changes in beliefs and ideology among the elite. To demonstrate its new lifestyle in text and image, the elite projected its habitus onto the monuments of the dead. However, the habitus of the Reformation elite took time to root, and traditional Catholic elements survived well after the official Reformation until the next generation. Also examining the lifestyles of the elite, Jonathon Finch argues that the nature of commemoration changed profoundly in the transition from pre- to post-Reformation practices. In this process, the performative nature of Catholic commemoration was replaced by commemoration based on the construction of personal biographies expressed in monumental form. Finally, using the statistical analysis of memorial brasses in London parish churches,

Robert Hutchinson examines the impact of iconoclasm. He is able to show that ancient brasses were plundered and reused in the production of new memorials.

Given the place of the conference and its organisers, it is not surprising that the book has a heavy British orientation. Besides scholars from British Isles, the writers include only a few Scandinavian contributors. The situation might also be a symptom of the status of material culture studies in European Reformation research. For instance, the Finnish scholar Markus Hiekkänen's paper on the impact of Reformation on the construction of stone churches is a groundbreaking study in the context of Finnish historical archaeology. Although there are several earlier Finnish studies on changes in burial customs and church space during the 16th and 17th centuries, studies focusing explicitly on the impact of the Reformation, especially in the context of private devotion, are rare. Like medieval archaeology, the study of the Reformation would first need a thorough survey of materials and studies currently available before further research is possible. At present, the grounds for the archaeology of Reformation are still weak.

Although localisation is an important factor in Reformation studies, articles presenting broader theoretical or methodological

perspectives are more rewarding than papers concentrating strictly on case studies whether in Britain or elsewhere. Notwithstanding the British orientation, the collection on the archaeology of the Reformation shows what historical archaeology can be at its best when it combines the diverse methodological and theoretical perspectives of several disciplines. The main contribution of the collection as a whole is that it declines to give simple answers but, instead, reveals the complexity and messiness of the Reformation in both the public and private spheres. The papers show that material culture studies of Reformation do not involve a swing of the interpretative pendulum from one extreme to the other; quite the contrary, they provide different and ambiguous views on the Reformation. Indeed, through minute study, the simplifying dichotomies of assimilation and resistance or destruction and survival are exposed as inadequate.

Visa Immonen
School of Cultural Research / Archaeology
Henrikinkatu 2
FI-20014 University of Turku
Finland
E-mail: vialim@utu.fi