

of the cemetery evidence suggests that some burials could date to the early to mid fifth century. It is widely, although by no means universally, believed that Roman pottery ceased to be produced or to circulate to any degree within a decade or so of AD 400 in Britain. If the earlier to mid fifth-century date is upheld for the start of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, this implies continued production and circulation of some categories of Roman pottery rather later than has hitherto been commonly thought. An alternative interpretation, and the one favoured on balance by the authors, is that the Anglo-Saxon occupation actually started in the late fourth century when Roman pottery would have been more plentiful, which carries with it wider implications about the context of the 'Anglo-Saxon' settlement. The Mucking evidence makes an important contribution to the renewed debate concerning how long Roman pottery production continued into the fifth century, and will surely be widely discussed and critiqued in this context.

This volume ably demonstrates the value of not giving up on important excavations that have remained unpublished for decades. While such investigations inevitably show their age in certain respects, most commonly in the approaches to environmental archaeology, reports such as this demonstrate that important evidence endures and deserves to be properly disseminated and debated. The authors have done us a great service by bringing this final volume on the excavations at Mucking to such an excellent conclusion.

References

- GOSDEN, C. 2017. Review of 'Christopher Evans, Grahame Appleby & Sam Lucy. *Lives in land—Mucking excavations by Margaret and Tom Jones 1965–78. Prehistory context and summary*. 2015. xvii+566 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Oxford; Havertown (PA): Oxbow; 978-1-78570-148-1 hardback £40'. *Antiquity* 91: 265–68. <https://doi.org/doi:10.15184/aqy.2016.243>.
- NEIL HOLBROOK
Cotswold Archaeology, Cirencester, UK
(Email: neil.holbrook@cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk)
-
- PATRICK F. WALLACE. 2016. *Viking Dublin: the Wood Quay excavations*. 592 pages; 550 colour and b&w illustrations. Newbridge: Irish Academic; 978-0-7165-3314-6 hardback €70.

© Antiquity Publications Ltd, 2017



The massive excavations undertaken between 1974 and 1981 by the National Museum of Ireland in the area of Wood Quay, Dublin, at the heart of one of northern Europe's most intriguing early medieval towns, are a cornerstone of Viking Age archae-

ology. The extensive excavated area comprised substantial parts of at least 14 urban plots ('yards') in a densely built-up area with a well-preserved, 3m-deep stratigraphy with evidence for about 600 buildings distributed across 14 chronological levels from the early tenth to the twelfth centuries AD. The extraordinary evidence for house plans and areas, combined with the remarkable preservation of organic materials and a rich environmental archive, and with a wealth of artefacts of every kind, from toy boats to artisans' trial pieces, and with a finely meshed stratigraphy, has allowed researchers to follow the development of Ireland's first urban community in high-definition detail. The results are documented in the fascicules of the series *Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962–81*, and have been reviewed in a host of books and papers.

The volume under review presents a synthesis by the researcher who directed the excavations as well as the subsequent decade-long research programme. According to the subtitle, the book concerns the Wood Quay excavations, but it is in fact based on a larger group of some 20 major area excavations undertaken at Wood Quay, Fishamble Street and St John's Lane. The author also seeks to incorporate evidence from subsequent excavations of early Dublin.

Despite its inviting format and a wealth of attractive illustrations, this is far from a coffee-table book. Nor is it a book written for a general archaeological audience. From the first page of the opening chapter, it assumes firm knowledge of the topography and streetscape of modern Dublin; of Irish medieval history and the vocabulary that goes with its study; of the personnel and sites of Dublin's archaeological research history; of the technicalities of urban archaeology; and of the general study of the Viking Age (which, for Dublin, is considered to continue up to AD 1169, p. xiii).

Once acclimatised to these expectations, one can join a fascinating journey of almost 500 pages through town layout, buildings, defences and harbour facilities (Chapters 1–5), environmental evidence (Chapter 6) and a wealth and diversity of finds (Chapter 7–11). Two concluding chapters analyse the wider historical (Chapter 12) and archaeological (Chapter 13) context of the discoveries. The book is supplied with an extensive apparatus, including a glossary of technical and vernacular terms, and a detailed index of places, names and subjects.

The text is engaging and allows many opportunities to note the author's thorough combination of written sources with excavated evidence, marking this study as a truly integrated effort. For an account written by one of the key participants in the excavations, it is remarkable to note that Wallace has chosen not to focus on the process of discovery. Even if sometimes written as a first-person narrative, and occasionally panegyric about the significance of the excavations, there are few biographical elements in the book; only occasionally are the problems and surprise revelations of the research process highlighted (as, for example, when discussing the unexpected results of recent entomological studies by Reilly); and perhaps most remarkably, there is hardly an anecdote about the excavations, or the animated political process that surrounded them, as chronicled in books by Bradley (1984) and Hefferman (1988).

Instead, we are offered a thorough and conscientious review of the wide range of outcomes from the project, headed by the author, with detailed readings into the many lines of research opened up by the Wood Quay excavations. This certainly goes (and is intended) to emphasise the impressive scale and complexity of this particular enterprise; but it also serves to showcase more generally the huge potential and rewards of urban archaeology as a singularly rich archaeological resource for the study of complex societies. It makes apparent how much more is still to be done. Surprisingly, for example, the complex task of analysing the finds contextually in relation to features—the precondition for assigning function and social meaning to this unique archive of early medieval buildings and the wider townscape—is largely left for “future workers” (p. 55).

Wallace's analysis of the archaeology of early Dublin confirms the evidence of the written sources that present the settlement as an essentially alien (Scandinavian) maritime trading place on Irish ground. This view is argued in particular with reference

to the settlement layout and building traditions, both of which are seen to have more convincing roots in continental north-western Europe and in Scandinavia than in Ireland. An older view that Dublin was founded on the experience of English towns by an Irish-Norse army returning to Ireland in AD 917 lingers in the text, but is effectively dismissed on the basis of new chronological evidence. That leaves Scandinavian towns, in particular Kaupang in Norway, as the most obvious candidates for the origin of early Dublin's distinctive mode of urbanity. This striking long-distance link between nodes in the maritime urban network is another key finding that deserves further exploration, including in relation to Kaupang's sister cities in Ribe (Denmark), Birka (Sweden) and Hedeby (Germany).

For a book of this scope and thoroughness, it is disappointing to note the typos and repetitions that could have been easy targets for a meticulous proofreader. A more serious editorial issue is the fact that the main text provides no reference to the illustrations. This is an inexplicable impairment to a work concerned with such complex visual issues as site layout, house plans, details of building constructions and artefact typologies. The reader is left to search across the book in order to identify the intricate web of sites, areas, levels, yards and buildings that form the matrix of the discussion. Eventually, one may discover that the numbers of yards in some levels can be gleaned from fig. 2.7 (p. 39) or fig. 2.22 (p. 51); or that a table of the associations of buildings with yards and levels is given as fig. 2.38 (p. 74). But what is the reader to make of the instruction that sites are mapped “numbering the sites for reference in groups within notional adjoining segments of the overall settlement” (p. 69), when no corresponding map can be found? By a process of search and elimination, a reasoned guess is that the numbers are those identified on fig. 1.1 (p. 3), which, however, does not identify any segments, and no key is provided to match the numbers with the site names that are more frequently used to refer to the individual sites in the text. Lacking such basic cross-referencing frustrates attempts to follow discussions in Chapters 2–5 in particular, and lets down the efforts of the reader and author alike.

These limitations should not dissuade students from tackling what is certainly a very important contribution to the study of the Viking Age, of early medieval Ireland and of urban archaeology. A newcomer to the archaeology of Dublin may

be advised to come armed with a map and some amount of patience, but the rewards will merit the effort. The excavation of Dublin's extraordinary early medieval remains at Wood Quay, and the associated sites, was a landmark achievement of north European archaeology. The first-hand synthesis of these excavations in a book of impressive detail, keen observation and insightful discussion is another major accomplishment, the result of decades of scholarship and endeavour. The work of an astute copy-editor would have been a comparatively small additional investment and is greatly missed. It is rare these days even for key scholarly monographs to appear in revised editions; one hopes that the enduring interest in the archaeology of Dublin will make this book an exception.

References

BRADLEY, J. 1984. *Viking Dublin exposed: the Wood Quay saga*. Dublin: O'Brien.

HEFFERMAN, T.F. 1988. *Wood Quay: the clash over Dublin's Viking past*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

SØREN M. SINDBÆK

School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University,
Aarhus, Denmark (Email: farksms@cas.au.dk)

MARTIN CARVER, JUSTIN GARNER-LAHIRES & CECILY SPALL. *Portmahomack on Tarbet Ness: changing ideologies in north-east Scotland, sixth to sixteenth century AD*. 2016. 552 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Edinburgh: Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland; 978-1-190833-209-7 hardback £30.



Pictish archaeology is currently experiencing a resurgence thanks to a new generation of bold and ambitious excavations that are helping to demythologise this most enigmatic of early medieval peoples. Martin Carver's ten-year programme of excavations at Portmahomack—the first large-scale investigation of an early medieval monastery in the kingdom of the Picts—has been in the vanguard of this research, and the publication of the culminating monograph

represents a major landmark in Pictish studies. Parts of the narrative presented in this beautifully packaged and affordably priced volume will be familiar from previous interim statements, of which there has been a steady stream since the termination of the final excavation campaign in 2007. But this in no way diminishes the impact of the final publication, which presents several new and revised conclusions fuelled by a combination of critical reflection and the results of a comprehensive programme of post-excavation analysis undertaken by a large team of specialists.

While Portmahomack is best known for its Pictish archaeology, this period stands at the head of a long continuum of activity extending down into the sixteenth century. The passing of these subsequent centuries is embodied in the complex structural evolution of St Colman's chapel (now fully restored as an on-site museum), the unravelling of which formed the centrepiece of the original excavations. One of the hallmarks of the report is the fluency with which it turns the bones of this archaeological sequence into a colourful and compelling narrative of Portmahomack's evolution over the *longue durée*. This fluency is achieved by providing the reader with a clear sense of the overarching chronological framework for the site at an early stage (Chapter 3), before the archaeology of its constituent phases is presented in detail (Chapters 4–7), and by skilfully weaving insights drawn from the artefacts, environmental data and the human population into the main fabric of the narrative. This latter structural device generally works very effectively, save for a few instances (relating to the interpretation of stable isotope evidence for Pictish burials of Period 1) where there is an inconsistency between what is said in the main text and in the analytical reports situated at the end of the volume.

The authors describe Portmahomack as “a sequence of settlements of different character in the same place” (p. 10), portrayed successively as an early Pictish estate centre, a Pictish monastery, a Scotto-Norse trading farm and a medieval township. One of the great strengths of the volume, redolent of the growing self-confidence of medieval archaeologists to embrace interpretive possibilities lying beyond conventional historical narratives is its subtle extrapolation of changes in settlement character. This is particularly pertinent to the early medieval sequence, a period during which Portmahomack is entirely unattested in the documentary sources. While the settlement was manifestly a monastery for some of this period (i.e. Period 2: the ‘long eighth century’), the