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James Graham Campbell with Magdalena Valor (eds.), *The Archaeology of Medieval Europe, Volume 1, Eighth to Twelfth Centuries AD*. Aarhus University Press, January 2008. Pp. 479. £50 (excl. VAT) hardback; £35 (excl. VAT) paperback). ISBN 978-87-7934-288-0 (Hbk); 978-87-7934-290-3 (Pbk).

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This is the first of two volumes published by the University of Aarhus Press which together comprise a complete account of Medieval archaeology across the Continent. It includes papers from forty-one academics based in fifteen countries and aims to provide a collaborative textbook on the medieval archaeology of Europe. The second volume will deal with the 12th to the 16th centuries, and is due for publication in 2009. The book is borne out of the European Symposium for Teachers of Medieval Archaeology (ESTMA), and each chapter is written by at least two specialists in contrasting areas. This approach is undeniably successful and has resulted in fifteen diverse, informative and extremely useful chapters.

The geographical scope of the two-volume survey is Latin Europe, which is defined in the book as 'that part of medieval Europe, or "Christendom", in which the majority religion became Roman Catholic, rather than Greek Orthodox' (p. 13). The chronology of the book is not constrained *per se*, but sits within the eighth to late twelfth centuries (as the title suggests). The eighth century was chosen as an era forming a turning point in the shaping of medieval Europe with increasing agriculture, urban growth, development in Church organisation and formation of the Carolingian Empire. Each of the chapters covers a different area of medieval life: people and environment, rural and urban settlement, housing, food, material culture, travel, trade, fortification, power and display, religion and, finally, life, death and memory. Within each chapter the reader learns of the major archaeological evidence set within a wide cultural and geographical context. Boxed-texts allow for greater detail on particular areas, such as bridges, wooden artefacts or fishing, and serve also to break up the main text with interesting insights. An up-to-date bibliography is given at the end of each chapter.

Some of the areas of major interest to me are those chapters covering material culture, trade, exchange and production (Chapters 7 to 10). The approach to the book means the reader can explore specific areas such as these easily, but within a much broader geographic scope than can be dealt with in more culturally or regionally biased volumes. Thus, the chapter on trade and exchange covers both the Mediterranean region (including Arabic influences) and the very contrasting story of Northern Europe. Chapter 7 on technology and craft offers a far more western European focus covering brief descriptions of textile production, tanning, bone, antler and horn working, iron working and pottery production. Slightly more geographically diverse are sections on watermills, salt production and glass production. The material culture of the period (Chapter 8) begins with a section on the political and economic background, discussing how objects and things can be read as reflections of socio-economic conditions. Despite this, the chapter is a little disappointing – a bit too short a discussion that only skims the surface of this central core of archaeological evidence. Whilst it must be remembered that each chapter can provide only an introduction to the expanse of data under each header, it remains surprising that material culture falls short by comparison with other chapters.

Throughout the book, reference is made to the major unanswered questions of the period, providing enough information to allow students to follow up with their own research. The volume is overtly positivist and leaves theoretical discussions outside the main text, although this is not so much a criticism but more a statement of fact. The book serves to collect all the major themes of the period under one roof in a manageable and enjoyable format, but it can only do so much without risk of becoming an impenetrable tome. To complement the text, there are plenty of colour and black-and-white images which give the reader a real sense of the evidence in both its recovered and reconstructed forms.

In short, this is an excellent text book and gives real credit to the diversity and richness of the archaeological evidence. The volume should (and I suspect will) become an invaluable source to both students and teachers of the medieval period, and hopefully not just those of the archaeological discipline. The second volume is eagerly awaited.