January 2010

Review: ALAN HARDY, ANNE DODD, GRAHAM D. KEEVILL, et al., Aelfric's Abbey: Excavations at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire, 1989-92.

Bailey K. Young
Eastern Illinois University, bkyoung@eiu.edu

in the texts as reflecting what would have been common knowledge, forty days of service in crusading armies as reflecting the standard obligation to a feudal lord, the deliberate use of inaccuracy as a moral and psychological device). More time could have been spent on highlighting what is original to this study and on developing new angles for analysis. I would have liked, for example, to see more on how knightly training was psychologically as well as physically trying; how the young knights produced and were trained to replicate or even instantiate ideological structures; who, other than the church, had what to gain from these changes; more on how the narrator could manipulate his audience; how some genres manipulate more easily than others; how gender and class difference influenced interpretation; how truth was constructed in relation to community norms; how ethnicity as well as religious difference colored the codes of war; how a postcolonial reading of this material might come to different conclusions, etc.; and finally, an admission that a reconstruction of the narrator and his audience's concept of chivalry, Hanley's stated aim, is only one of the facets of what interests us in these texts. Historical insight has at some point to be coupled with what an audience of today might see in these texts as well.

That said, this is a very useful, very complete, and trustworthy account of the topic, admirably inclusive and challenging, and a source that I will be referring to for years to come. I will also be assigning it immediately to the students I teach this year, both beginning undergraduates and seasoned veterans, and that is the final test of quality.

WILLIAM E. BURGWINKLE, King's College, Cambridge

ALAN HARDY, ANNE DODD, GRAHAM D. KEEVILL, et al., *Ælfric's Abbey: Excavations at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire, 1989–92.* Illustrations by Lisa Padilla, Ros Smith, Amanda Patton, and Mel Costello. (Oxford Archaeology, Thames Valley Landscapes, 16.) Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, for Oxford Archaeology, 2003. Pp. xxv, 636; many black-and-white and color figures (1 foldout), black-and-white and color plates, and tables.

Between 1989 and 1992 Oxford Archaeology conducted a rescue excavation of eighteen hundred square meters of land slated to be incorporated into parish graveyards in Eynsham, a town a few miles west of Oxford that had been the site of a major medieval Benedictine abbey. The excavated area lay within the inner court of the abbey, and this publication (which incorporates the results of a half-dozen minor trial excavations made elsewhere in the precinct since 1962) is the first archaeological study devoted to it. The authors note (p. 17) important historical studies (some very recent) of the abbey and seek to integrate with their interpretations of archaeological data arguments deriving from the written documents.

Eynsham Abbey was briefly famous under Abbot Ælfric, translator and homilist, brought in to reform the house in 1005 by the nobleman Æthelmaer. The surviving charter of refoundation by King Æthelred II is one of five Anglo-Saxon texts discussed by John Blair, a leading authority on early minsters, in the opening chapter. These support the view, for him, that a monastery was established here at an early date (the eighth century or earlier) with a generous endowment (three hundred hides are cited in a document of 821), which was considerably whittled down subsequently (thirty hides in 1005). At the Norman Conquest the abbey was devastated and abandoned, according to the twelfth-century biographer of St. Hugh; in 1109 it was refounded with a royal charter, with considerable endowments. In 1538 it was secularized and passed into the hands of the Stanley family, which had Catholic sympathies. In 1649 their estate became forfeit; in 1657 a local antiquarian made a sketch of the ruined west end of the abbey church, demolished a few years later, along with other upstanding remains, by the new owner. Much of the old precinct became

part of a working farm, and local memory sometimes confused the vanished abbey with a castle. The building of a new Roman Catholic church in the 1930s eventually led to the excavations of 1989–92 (when the cooperative priest was a grandson of J. R. R. Tolkien).

The excavation revealed some Bronze Age features (published elsewhere) but no Iron Age or Romano-British development. Five sunken-feature buildings constitute the earliest settlement (Phase 2a), dated to the sixth century, and thought by the authors to indicate an ordinary farming settlement, like others known from early Saxon times in the region (evidence summarized by Anne Dodd in appendix 6). This was replaced, ca. 650, by a settlement of relatively high status, attested by three substantial hearths and a deep rubbish pit filled with layers of deliberately deposited food, butchery waste, and settlement debris; this could correspond to the kind of royal or monastic estate whose existence Blair regards as plausible from the written sources (Phase 2b). The next phase, dated ca. 750–ca. 900, offers the first clear evidence for the formal organization of space on the site: an alignment of nineteen intercutting pits, later replaced by a fence, with evidence of a timber-post building (Phase 2c). The authors associate this with the evidence of a royal charter from 864 attesting the existence of a minster church on the site: Eynsham had become a monastic site by this time, if not earlier. The tenth century (Phase 2d) was marked by continuity and an intensification of activity on the site, in marked contrast with similar mid-Saxon sites, which then experienced a phase of at least temporary abandonment (linked to Viking-era disorders). The excavated area was dominated by a posthole building with plastered walls within a ditched enclosure; the finds include some "conspicuous as indicators of trade" (p. 486) or other contact with faraway places, items such as oyster shells, fig and grape seeds, lava querns, and a copper-alloy buckle-plate with Christian decor of a type associated with Ireland or the Irish Sea. Phases 2e and 2f are assigned to the eleventh century, the great era of the reformed abbey that began with Ælfric. Phase 2e, characterized chiefly by a huge latrine pit that was later sealed under a building, was ephemeral. But Alan Hardy, who signs the section on the last Saxon phase as well as the chapters describing the medieval and postmedieval sequences (the preface terms him the principal supervisor of the research project), stresses both the extent of rebuilding during this time (all preexisting structures were cleared away) and a respect for the alignments deriving from the earlier period. Only one complete building stood within the excavated area, a rectangular hall about twenty-two by seven meters, but mortar residues help prove it was stone built (all the stone was robbed out); it may have been the refectory, connecting with the southwestern corner of a cloister gallery (fig. 14.3). Artifacts associated with this phase are both scarcer and less remarkable than in earlier contexts, evidence, for Hardy, not of lesser wealth but of stricter ideology, a more rational organization of space and activity, and perhaps a shorter period of use.

The archaeology clearly shows that Eynsham Abbey was never totally abandoned after the conquest (contrary to the impression given by key written sources), for a kitchen was built over a ruined Saxon structure before 1100 (Phase 3a, qualified as "transitional"). The major rebuilding of the inner ward during the twelfth century (Phase 3b) is represented within the excavated area by the southern part of the great cloister, including a *lavatorium* in the southwest corner of the cloister garth; parts of the refectory; a kitchen with a court-yard to the south of this (replacing the transitional kitchen, which was demolished); and a domestic range still farther south including a cellar, latrine pits, and an enigmatic building, possibly two stories, which might have been a guest hall. By about 1200 the major recon-struction was done; only minor structural changes took place over the remaining three and a quarter centuries of the abbey's life (Phases 3c–e). A water-management system, with tiled drains and lead pipe wrapped in a jacket of puddled clay, was installed first in the late twelfth century and revised during the fourteenth; this advanced technology (Bernard of Clairvaux famously evoked the spiritual and practical role of flowing water in a monastic

community) occurred along with the development of a series of monastic fishponds (outside the excavated area, but known from previously studied documentary sources and from a survey of their physical remains conducted in conjunction with the excavation and discussed in chapter 15 of this volume). Six burials dating from this period were found under the cloister walkway—all males and mostly young (only one was over thirty); they were doubtless monks who enjoyed a relatively privileged burial spot. The archaeology also shows that all occupation of the inner ward did not end with the Dissolution in 1538. Although religious buildings such as the refectory and cloister were deroofed and stripped of such valuable materials as glass or lead piping, the kitchen was used into the seventeenth century (Phase 4a), and three coffined burials were dug into the "footprint of what may have been a semi-derelict refectory" (p. 519). These are plausibly identified as "recusants": still-Catholic members of the Stanley family who were refused burial in the Protestant churchyard. After the family lost the estate in 1649, the systematic obliteration of the former abbey soon proceeded (Phase 4b), though happily not before Anthony Wood (whose family had served the Stanleys and who was himself a known sympathizer with the old faith) had drawn a sketch of the west front of the abbey church, which is the only surviving visual record (plate 1.2).

This is a meticulously written and edited book, but daunting. The stratigraphic evidence of structural changes is presented in exhaustive detail in part 2, with abundant, carefully conceived illustration; to make sense of it, though, the reader is advised to turn at once to the discussion at the end (chapters 14 and 15) and refer back to follow the detail of a particular argument. About half of the book is taken up with the specialist reports on the finds (chapters 7–12). These provide much information that will interest economic and environmental historians, among others, and the authors rightly highlight the import of archaeology for these aspects of Eynsham's history. This is a work of record that any library with a serious medieval collection should possess. A reader interested in how archaeological methods can meet historical reasoning, and who is prepared to work hard at it, may come away astonished by how much may be inferred from such fugitive, fragile, and often ambiguous evidence deriving from such a limited and arbitrarily defined sector of a long-vanished abbey precinct. Anyone lacking the time and courage for this might get the conclusions from a companion booklet published by Oxford Archaeology (www.oxfordarch .co.uk), referenced on the copyright page.

<div align="center">BAILEY K. YOUNG, Eastern Illinois University</div>

SIMON HOROBIN, *The Language of the Chaucer Tradition.* (Chaucer Studies, 32.) Wood-
  bridge, Eng., and Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell and Brewer, 2003. Pp. x, 179; tables. $75.

In this valuable and well-researched study, Simon Horobin offers a synthesis and critique of the work of his predecessors and mentors—M. L. Samuels, N. F. Blake, J. J. Smith, and the editors of the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English (LALME)*—as well as evidence from his own researches, and comes to some important and far-reaching conclusions. Much of his new work is based on the facsimiles of the Hengwrt (Hg) and Ellesmere (El) manuscripts of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and on the fully searchable CD-ROM of the Wife of Bath's Prologue edited by P. M. W. Robinson as part of the Canterbury Tales Project. His argument throughout is that the study of the language of Chaucer and the Chaucer tradition must pay proper attention to the spellings of the individual manuscripts and not rely upon eclectic editions such as the *Riverside Chaucer* nor even upon the Chaucer Society Six-Text transcriptions. Spelling, so long considered unreliable by historical phonologists because of its apparently indiscriminate variableness, is a vital source of information, not only for the history of the written language, but also for the provenance and date of man-