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*Revealing King Arthur: Swords, Stones and Digging for Camelot.* By Christopher Gidlow. 17 x 24 cm. 256 pp, 9 b&w maps. Stroud: The History Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-7524-5507-5. Price: £20.00 hb.

Gidlow's *Revealing King Arthur* aims to examine the archaeological evidence for the existence of a 'real' King Arthur, following his *Reign of Arthur*, which focused on the textual evidence. Along the way, Gidlow traces previous attempts to link archaeology to the legendary figure and examines the presentation of Arthurian sites. His investigation can be broadly broken up into three sections: Chapters 1-10 look at Arthurian themes, such as the Round Table, Camelot and Excalibur, alongside analyses of relevant historical texts, terminology and the contextualisation of sub-Roman Britain's socio-political state in which such iconography may or may not have existed. Chapters 11-16 examine the so-called 'Battle List' of King Arthur in the *Historia Brittonum*. The author suggests locations for these battles, and argues that, by pinpointing Arthur's Battle Sites to 'real' locations at specific times (the Appendix deals with Gidlow's dates and chronological methodology), we are able to get to a historically accurate and real Arthur. Chapter 17 goes on to consider current views of and approaches to Arthur, and the author suggests how some sites, such as Tintagel and Cadbury, might be presented in order to emphasise their connection with (a real) King Arthur.

The text itself is peppered with typographical errors, and although there appears to be an attempt to break up arguments into vague categories, the writing is inconsistent and illogical. The 9 black and white maps, on the whole, do not really add anything to the content of the book (they are not even referenced in-text); it would have been better to replace them with illustrations/photographs of relevant objects (the 'Arthur Stone' would be a prime example), or pictures of sites. The book contains no archaeological figures (illustrations/photographs/charts etc.) whatsoever – rather odd when the text supposedly sets out to examine the archaeological evidence.

In fact, Gidlow's aim of presenting and assessing the *archaeological* evidence falls wide of the mark; discussion centres on textual remains (predominantly Gildas), and emphasises that this type of evidence is of greater value than the archaeological data. The author makes a valid point in arguing that one should not totally reject written sources (16), but he would have benefitted from leafing through John Moreland's *Archaeology and Text* in order to gain an appreciation of how archaeologists might use the written record and how the two types of evidence are studied together. Gidlow obviously knows his historical texts very well, but is not very critical of them, and is familiar with some archaeological evidence at selected sites, but only finds this evidence useful if it can support or confirm the texts. In discussing each site, Gidlow references only one or two publications, and in general provides very few references for the statements he makes.

This book lacks a consideration of the contexts of historical texts being written and archaeological investigations and interpretations being undertaken. For example, whilst Gidlow remarks on the 'pro-Arthurian' stance of some archaeologists in the 1960s (9), he does not appear to see an obvious political motive behind this, where a heroic figure in sub-Roman Britain fights against the invasion of Germanic peoples poetically echoed in the recent war against Germany. Alarming, Gildas's *de Excidio Britanniae* is treated as infallible: "I use Gildas as the touchstone for any theory of the period. If an interpretation of archaeological remains is tenable with the evidence in Gildas, then it is worth considering. If it flies in the face of Gildas's contemporary testimony then I would argue it needs serious rethinking" (32). Gidlow appears to resent a more critical archaeology that developed in the latter part of the 20th century (and indeed has little understanding of the development of archaeological method and theory), since this marked an end to the 'search' for Arthur in traditional antiquarian fashion. Today, a 'historical Arthur' is frequently placed alongside pseudo-archaeological concepts such as extra-terrestrial influences and hyperdiffusionism, as the author points out and criticises (192), but in making his case, Gidlow comes dangerously

close to pseudo-archaeological rhetoric, with strong anti-archaeologist overtones and implications that archaeologists are engaged in conspiracies to ‘cover-up’ any supposed traces of Arthur discovered (14).

The author makes a legitimate and refreshing argument when he states that stories attributed to certain sites are just as important as interpretations archaeologists form from the data (194), but there is a difference between ‘presenting a story’ and ‘presenting a story as truth’. Archaeologists have the potential to engage with the public through popular stories, but are responsible for presenting the most accurate interpretation based on the available evidence. Further, Gidlow’s comments about the popular view of Arthur are unusual (116) and unfounded – he provides no evidence or has attempted no primary research into the public’s perceptions of Arthur, yet makes sweeping statements about the reactions of ‘lay’ readers (189).

The above criticisms are a select few of the many problems of this book, and although it has a place in the literature considering the concept and reality of King Arthur, its archaeological value is low. This book might have been a promising reassessment of arguments and a reintroduction of archaeology to the subject of King Arthur; as it stands, a valuable synthesis and critical analysis of the archaeology of Arthur has yet to be published, and this book aptly demonstrates that Arthurian debates still centre on issues of historicity.

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