— even down to the millennium, century and decade — a point of obvious modern relevance. Much of the reconstruction is on a grander scale here, relating to the CLIMAP project. In this context it is good to see our old friend deep-sea core V28-238 still performing sterling service. Part IV deals with geomorphological processes, landforms and coastal and shallow ocean sediments, illustrated by changes in sea level and landform around ancient Troy in the last four millennia. The next case-study for this section is the reconstruction of landforms at Laetoli in Tanzania, in which a diversity of investigations have produced a plausible landscape as a background to the first human steps. Part V considers sediments and soils, and the formation of archaeological matrices by wind, water and other agencies. The accumulation of sediments at different sorts of sites are explained.

The history of vegetation is largely the concern of Part VI, beginning with the preservation and taphonomy of the different plant materials, giving useful instances from the American literature that may be less well known than is deserved. The section gives due weight to sampling strategies, and to sampling methods, distinguishing those techniques that are routinely employed during excavation (sieving, flotation) and those likely to be done with occasional visiting by those who will study the pollen, molluscs or whatever. Pollen data get due treatment, and here regional scales are attributed to levels of interpretation. The case-study here is — bravely — the palaeoecology of the elm decline (and see also pp. 181–91). Part VII is given over to fauna, both invertebrate and vertebrate, touching on the uncertainties of taphonomic process and counts of species representation — not the least by faunal analysts with their 'minimum number of individuals' and so on. The examples include isotopic studies on diet, ancient DNA investigations, the ageing and sexing of mammal skeletons and then a detailed review of environmental reconstruction by means of fauna. The section continues with a brief consideration of domestication and animals as food.

The final and rather short section illustrates that hoped-for ideal of integrating the results. Her example is a little surprising for a book with such wide-ranging interests — Mingies Ditch in Oxfordshire, though this offers — perhaps through a well-directed research strategy — more environmental and economic evidence than do the majority of sites, which is illustrative itself of an important point! The advantage of case-studies is in showing not what can be done, but what can usefully be done.

Overall, Dincauze has produced a wide-ranging, practical and useful text, if one that could have been a little condensed. Of the two books, I prefer Dincauze's, which I find to be more organized and better focused, with a broader approach. Having grown up on Karl Butzer's textbooks, I find this a worthy successor. Both books cover a vast amount of information, and touch on a wide range of sites. Yet such books are an introduction to a huge subject and their value for the student (and the practising 'specialist' too, whether in excavation techniques or the study of animal bones) is to show what others are up to, and what they can reasonably do towards the understanding of a site. In this, both books succeed, though in different ways, and my learning was refreshed.

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Book reviews

PEREGRINE HORDEN & NICHOLAS PURCELL. *The corrupting sea: a study of Mediterranean history*. xiv+761 pages, 1 figure, 36 maps, 6 tables. 2000. Oxford & Malden (MA): Blackwell; 0-631-13666-5 hardback £70 & $74.95, 0-631-21890-4 paperback £24.99 & $34.95.

The corrupting sea, as the blurb on the back says, 'is a history of the relationship between people and their environments in the Mediterranean region over some 3000 years'. The starting point of the project for the two authors was their observation that, whilst Fernand Braudel in his magisterial study of *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (first published in French in 1949, and in English in 1972) had embedded his study in the concept of the enduring unity and particularity of the countries of the Mediterranean basin, he had actually restricted his focus to the 16th century. Could his concept of a *longue durée* in fact be upheld by a consideration of a genuinely long-term history? Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell were at that time

both Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford, and they embarked on a joint seminar series looking at a series of themes in Mediterranean history from Classical antiquity to the Modern era, the papers of which formed the basis of the eventual chapters of this volume. It proved a huge enterprise, and the final result is a book of over 750 pages, my (paperback) copy weighing in at well over a kilo and a half.

The book has 12 chapters organized into five sections: Part One, chapters I & II, deals with introductory themes; Part Two, chapters III–V, discusses landscapes and communications; Part Three, chapters VI–IX, addresses issues of agricultural production, technology, and trade, and the pace of environmental and technological change; Part Four, chapter X, covers the geography of religion; and Part Five, chapters XI & XII, looks at the extent to which we can use the present to explain the past, and whether, at the end of their long review, the authors can identify any validity in *longue durée* concepts of 'unchanging Mediterranean societies'. All of this amounts to some 525 pages, with a further 100+ pages of 'biographical essays' (extended endnotes) and almost 100 pages of bibliography. And a second volume is promised, which will explore a series of cross-cutting themes including, we are told, climate, disease, demography and relations between the Mediterranean region and the wider world. As Peter Brown comments on the back cover of *The corrupting sea*, the project is indeed 'one of the most relentless intellectual reassessments to have been undertaken in recent times of the history of the pre-industrial Mediterranean', a study that necessarily integrates the widest range of documentary and archaeological sources.

The first chapters introduce what is probably the dominant theme of the book, the Mediterranean region's unity yet fragmentation, and Part Two further develops the theme of the Mediterranean as interconnected local places. The authors adopt Biot's phrase of *la trame du monde*, the weave of the world's surface, to encapsulate their thesis of a web of microenvironments 'in which political and ecological change can be bound up with each other', the study of which is the necessary underpinning of any understanding of Mediterranean history (p. 88). Chapter III takes four micro-regions as case-studies, each well studied variously by historians, archaeologists and historical geographers. Chapter IV discusses cities, towns, roads, and communications, arguing that, in many respects, urban places in the Mediterranean can be thought of like mountains, as 'loci of contact or overlap between different ecologies' (p. 100), their hinterlands an accumulation of individual small places connected by short distances. The scale of interaction is gradually enlarged in the ensuing chapter on 'connectivity', chapters IV and V consciously mirroring Braudel's focus first on *villes* and then on *routes*; but the authors' model is of a mesh of connected micro-regions with a multitude of different kinds of linkage, rather than of Braudel's 'regions' connected by 'trade routes'. Mountains are rightly seen as much as places of interaction linking shared cultures as boundaries dividing lowland populations.

I greatly enjoyed the central chapters on farming, where the authors rightly point out that we must not think of ancient Mediterranean farmers as either self-sufficient or market-driven: every agricultural system had to come to terms with the constraints and opportunities of the landscape and its demands on farmers to diversify, store and redistribute its products; and there are thoughtful essays on the role of such processes in inducing economic stability or, in some circumstances, instability and intensification. The complexity of interactions between the Mediterranean environment and its inhabitants is particularly well explored in chapter VII's measured treatment of the Vita-Finzi alluviation debate, and there is an excellent discussion, in chapter IX, of the evidence throughout Mediterranean history for recurrent mobility, not just of goods, but of people. The latter leads to a conclusion picked up in the final section, that the 'immobility' of Mediterranean peasantry that has been concluded from many ethnographic studies (usually by the archaeologists and historians using them, rather than by the ethnographers themselves!) has never been common amongst Mediterranean rural populations: 'local continuities over many generations of rural life are not to be expected' (p. 400). The essay on religion is also very thought-provoking, painting a rich and multi-layered canvas of spiritual places and occasions, and more besides, a religion, as the authors conclude, of boundaries and belongings.

So, at the end of their forbidding enterprise, can the authors detect underlying themes, a Braudelian history of interlocking historical processes operating at different timescales amidst this rich and mostly shifting mosaic of peoples and places? They rightly point to the fallacies of taking particular Mediterranean societies today or in the recent past, none of them isolated from their contemporary worlds, as frozen-in-aspic 'lifeways of antiquity', the kind of arcadian wishful thinking about peasant life described so evocatively by Carlo Levi in *Christ stopped at Eboli*. Indeed, the one constant of the Mediterranean agricultural economy, they conclude, has been farmers' readiness to shift along a spectrum of possibilities. But they conclude the book with a stimulating cross-cultural study of the notion of honour and shame amongst Mediterranean societies from Classical antiquity to the present day, to see if the alternative and variegated history they have assembled does, after all, contain cross-cutting processes peculiar to this region. After reviewing honour behav-

iours and languages from Portugal to Japan, they decide that they can: 'a case —- inevitably patchy and incomplete — can be made for there having been a non-aristocratic honour (in the Mediterranean region) . . . its history can be traced over a number of centuries, if not into Braudel's "mists of time", then certainly into the later Middle Ages and possibly into Antiquity' (p. 522).

At its best, *The corrupting sea* is a book of magisterial synthesis and scholarship — a huge multidisciplinary literature turned into a narrative that is at once comprehensive, enjoyable, quirky and thought-provoking. The authors are more at ease with historical than archaeological data, but there is much there for archaeologists to learn from. The authors comment that the second instalment they promise will allow them an opportunity to respond to criticisms of the first, in the interests of the debate that they wish to promote. My major criticism, though, is of style, not content. At its worst, *The corrupting sea* is a linguistic quagmire, and pretentiously so: if good historical writing is about communicating simple or complicated ideas clearly, as Braudel did so brilliantly, then how about 'the past is worth dilating on' (p. 157), 'the inexorable logic of an aleatory environment' (p. 272), 'let us asseverate once more' (p. 273), 'its original oxymoronic piquancy' (p. 299), 'to apostrophize the populace of metropolitan Athens' (p. 399) and 'this congeries of changes' (p. 470)? It meant that this reader was put off time and time again from finishing the book: I lugged *The corrupting sea* with me on a series of long-haul flights and each time ended up either falling asleep or putting it down in exasperation and watching the in-flight movie. It is a great pity, for this is an ambitious and exciting project that deserves a wide readership and to become a milestone in Mediterranean studies. Let us all asseverate together: please sort out the language for Volume Two!

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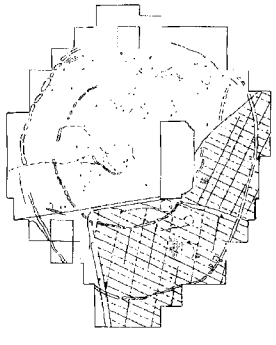
ALASDAIR WHITTLE, JOSHUA POLLARD & CAROLINE GRIGSON. *The harmony of symbols: the Windmill Hill causewayed enclosure.* xii+404 pages, 227 figures, 204 tables. 1999. Oxford: Oxbow; 1-900188-89-9 hardback £60.



The main meat of the report is the excavations of 1988. I can fully understand why those excavations were perforce limited in size, but I hope that soon the authors — or another team — will be allowed to attempt something slightly more ambitious in scale. There is a matter of principle at stake here: sites like Windmill Hill were constructed and used as a large open-area arena — for spectacle — and it makes little sense to study them through a keyhole. Sometimes our obsession with conservation is merely conserving our state of ignorance. We need new knowledge if we are properly to understand what it is that we are attempting to protect for posterity. Perhaps we need to re-acquire some of the robust self-confidence of men like Alexander Keiller.

After a short introduction, with some splendid photos of the Keiller excavations of 1925–29, we are given an excellent account of the site in its setting, which includes a long-overdue magnetometer survey by the Ancient Monuments Laboratory. I was struck by the extent of ferrous 'contamination' in the backfilled Keiller trenches and I wonder whether more attention should be given to 'hygiene' in the conditions attached to future Scheduled Monument Consents. Indeed I would go further: the various excavated contexts should be replaced in more or less the same place and order as that in which they were first found; otherwise I fail to see how a scholar in, say, the 25th century could attempt to reconstruct a general picture of a complex site.

Chapter 3, by Joshua Pollard, is a detailed re-assessment of the original Keiller excavations. It includes many new photographs and some all-important plans of finds distributions within primary and secondary ditch silts. Chapter 4 is a very thorough description of the 1988 excavation and it is followed by chapters on radiocarbon dating and environmental evidence, animal bone and a remarkable pottery report (by Zienkiewicz & Hamilton) which treated the occurrence of pottery with the same thoroughness as its decoration, style and manufacture. The discussion is divided into two chapters on Interpretations and Wider Meanings. I found the latter particularly satisfying and thought-provoking, but I felt the picture was perhaps too static: I am convinced that special places like Windmill Hill acquired a life and restless dynamic of their own, which could not be contained and which later spilled out into the landscape round about. The version of the truth in *Harmony of symbols* seemed comfortably at ease with itself: perhaps a little too harmonious — or am I being unfair?

My detailed inspection of the ditch filling sequence has prompted one observation which arose from work at Etton, where we were able to identify a series of deliberately placed deposits which filled the bottom of (at least) three successive recuts in most of the ditch segments. Whittle and his colleagues were not able to open anything approaching an open-area of ditch filling, but their meticulous recording of