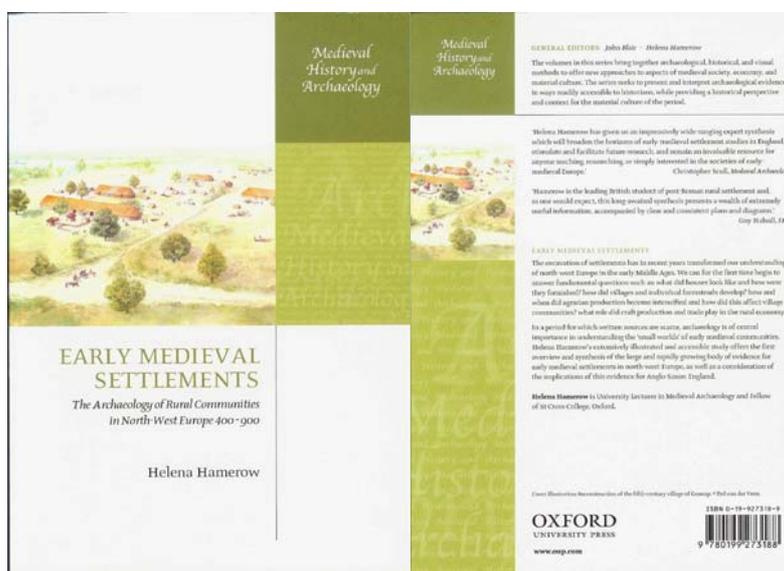


**Hamerow, H. 2004. Early Medieval settlements. The archaeology of rural communities in North-West Europe 400-900. – Oxford, Oxford University Press.**

Book review by J. Nollen



Helena Hamerow's book gives an overview of the settlements and everyday life of rural communities in North-West Europe from 400 to 900 AD and also compares the evidence, mainly from archaeological excavations of the mainland, to Anglo-Saxon England. The region which is covered stretches from Anglo-Saxon England to southern Scandinavia through northwest Germany to The Netherlands.

The book is divided into seven chapters. In the first chapter the writer lays out her aims. She gives the reader a short history of the development of settlement archaeology and discusses the different methods that were used at the individual excavations and the role they play in interpreting the available data.

The second chapter deals with the archaeology of buildings. First, the development and functions of the longhouse are explained. Then the regional variations of the houses are compared to one and another. Other buildings like sunken featured buildings, barns and granaries are also discussed. At the end of the chapter the building traditions of the mainland are compared to that of Anglo Saxon England.

The next chapter is about settlement structure and social space. Hamerow looks at how the settlements are arranged. The 'shape' of the settlement is determined by the features that are in it: the paths, the boundaries and the central features or unbuilt areas. Summarising these components, five distinct forms are defined. She gives some examples of each of them. The structure of the individual farmsteads is also examined. The author looks for written evidence of settlement and farmstead structure, and to the social structure of the settlement and its status. Again at the end of the chapter there is a comparison with Anglo Saxon England.

In the fourth chapter the settlements are placed in their territorial context. The basic question being asked in this chapter is: what can archaeology tell us about the effects of territorialisation and estate formation on rural communities? Several models that can help to answer this question are discussed. The research of the history of settlements is illustrated by two case studies. The first is H.A. Heidinga's research project of the village of Kootwijk and other places at the Veluwe (NL). The second is the research project of the Kempen region (NL), initiated by F. Theuws.

The fifth chapter is about crop and animal husbandry. It starts with giving us an overview of agrarian practices of individual communities. Then it deals with the intensification of production, and the introduction of new techniques, such as new field systems and crop-rotation, and the surplus production that was the result of all this. Finally, Hamerow compares the farming practices in the various regions with each other and, of course, with Anglo Saxon England.

Chapter six is about rural centres, trade and non-agrarian production. The writer shows us that there were rural centres and that there was long-distance trade on a substantial scale. The chapter treats several products that were being traded, where they were produced and the role of rural settlements in this trade.

The last chapter, the epilogue, is called 'Trajectories and turning points'. She concludes that the "long eighth century" (the period from c. 680 to 830) was not only a turning point in terms of settlement structure and architecture but also in agrarian production and regional exchange. It coincides also with the beginning of the development of early states.

This book gives a good overview of several disciplines concerned with early medieval settlements in North-West Europe. It is a very nicely written book for anyone interested in this period; it gives not only practical information about the subjects but also a solid theoretical background. It will be very useful, especially for studying Anglo Saxon archaeology. A very extensive list of references is printed at the end of the book, which those wanting to read more about the various excavations cited in the book will find very useful.

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