

Book Review

Farming Practice in British Prehistory. Edited by Roger Mercer. Edinburgh University Press, 1981. viii+ 245 pp., illus., 9.50 Pounds Sterling, paperback.

Farming Practice in British Prehistory is a collection of papers from a symposium held in honor of Robert Munro at the University of Edinburgh in 1980 on prehistoric farming and its relevance to modern agricultural problems. It begins with a brief history of agrarian society in the British Isles and an overview of modern British agriculture. Peter Fowler's chapter, "Wildscape to Landscape" provides data on prehistoric field systems derived from an analysis of aerial photography. Halliday, Hill, and Stevenson examine "Early Agriculture in Scotland". Sian Rees reports on prehistoric agricultural tools, including sickles, ards (Celtic plows), and brush hooks. P. Rowley-Conwy suggests that much of the northern European pollen data should be re-evaluated not in terms of the more traditional interpretation of slash and burn land clearance, but in favor of more extensive clearance and permanent field systems. He cites long-term yield data from experimental stations at Woburn and Rothamstead that show no reductions in the return from cereal crops after fifty years of continuous farming by traditional methods. Peter Reynolds discusses the results of three research projects at the Butser Iron Age Farm, dealing with experimentally replicated and utilized ards, the yields of prehistoric grain types- emmer and spelt wheat, and the competition between field weeds and crops. (I have often wondered why Reynolds' book, *Iron Age Farm: The Butser Experiment*, has not received more attention in the American literature on experimental archaeology.) Gordon Hillman presents guidelines for interpreting crop husbandry practices from the charred remains of cereals and associated weeds recovered from archaeological sites. A. J. Legge focuses on Iron Age cattle husbandry. Michael Ryder reports on skins, fleece, and other important products from prehistoric livestock. Alexander Fenton discusses another significant animal product, manure which was critical to maintaining the high yields reported in earlier chapters.

Although the specific geographic focus of this research is the British Isles, and more generally temperate Europe; the data, models, and methods presented in this volume will be of interest to any investigator studying traditional agricultural problems.

CHM

REFERENCE CITED

Reynolds, Peter J. 1979. *Iron-Age Farm: The Butser Experiment*. London: British Museum Publications, Ltd.