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Everyday Products in the Middle Ages. Crafts, Consumption and the Individual in Northern Europe c.AD 800-1600. Edited by Gitte Hansen, Steven P. Ashby and Irene Baug. 18×25 cm. 374 pp, 128 colour and b&w pls, figs and tables. Oxford: Oxbow, 2015. ISBN 978-1-78297-805-3. Price: £37.00 hb.

The chapters in this volume explore a wide array of aspects of craft production in northern Europe, mainly in the medieval period but occasionally extending to as late as the eighteenth century, and with a focus largely on Britain, Scandinavia and the Baltic. The aim of the volume is to elucidate the individuals involved in craft production, principally the craftworker, but also the manufacturer, trader, consumer and other occupants of the places in which crafts were conducted. The twenty case-studies explore the means by which raw materials were acquired and processed, the stages of production, and the tools and equipment required, and many of them follow the completed artefacts through distribution to the market place and beyond. The introduction states that the volume is seeking to make a contribution to a 'bottom-up' approach to the archaeological record, as opposed to one driven by a focus on such large-scale issues as the origins of towns, or state formation, although the chapters certainly do make important contributions to such larger debates by revealing the people and everyday processes and interactions that made such developments possible.

Most of the chapters focus on a specific industry in a given place or region (e.g. bone working in Viljandi, Estonia; the production of soapstone vessels in Agder, Norway; leather-working in Tartu, Estonia; non-ferrous metalworking in Kaupang, Norway). What emerges clearly from the volume is the sense of place inherent to craft working. Access to raw materials frequently required detailed and nuanced understanding of the wider landscape and natural

environment – whether by the craftworkers themselves or the individuals who provisioned them – while craftworkers also needed to find spaces to work within settlements, which they might only need to access periodically, as well as to market places, which may be seasonal.

Craftworkers clearly needed to be able to navigate the requirements and demands of multiple urban and rural communities; craftworking, thus, emerges as an inherently social undertaking. Through their activities and contacts, craftworkers were clearly central to the articulation of some of the most important social, political and economic processes of the Middle Ages, and the chapters in this volume cast important light on this underexplored contribution. Many of the studies also explore the extent to which the activities of craftworkers were constrained by lords and communities, and the degree to which certain craftworkers were itinerant, with much discussion about what that concept entails. The identities of the craftworkers are explored in many of the chapters, although given the clear evidence for the array of individuals and communities with which the craftworkers interacted, the notion that they ever possessed a clearly identifiable or firmly articulated ‘identity’ is probably to be doubted.

So much archaeological research on the medieval period purports to be about people but is actually about processes and ‘-isms’. In this volume, however, while the broad concepts and issues are never far from the surface, real people, making everyday items are at the forefront, and their decisions, practices, skills and knowledge emerge vividly from the detailed accounts presented in individual chapters, most of which are well supported by illustrations. Many of the chapters offer a very detailed understanding of the myriad decisions, processes and negotiations with which craftworkers were confronted on a daily basis. The hustle and bustle of daily life emerge clearly from the pages of this volume, with my only significant quibble being the lack of

an index to help the reader navigate more effectively the themes and debates that are interwoven throughout the volume.

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