

REVIEWS

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Amongst the Ruins: why civilizations collapse and communities disappear. By JOHN DARLINGTON. 240mm. Pp ix + 291, 77 col figs. Yale University Press, London and New York, 2023. ISBN 9780300259285. £25 (hbk).

Many voices, among them Lord Byron, Ibn Khaldun and Confucius, have urged us to learn from the past. We can certainly learn from our forebears, but we must ask the right questions. *Amongst the Ruins* is an excursion through archaeology and history that searches for the present and future in the past. The author's magnifying glass examines seventeen sites around the world, from the borders of the Stone Age to the present. They tell often complex tales of decline and collapse. His definition of such events revolves around the notion that immortality is the successful passing on of ideas. An authority on cultural heritage, Darlington argues that ruins are the heart of his chosen subject. They represent both failures and successes. This is a search for the present and the future in the past, which explores the collapse of ancient civilisations, the demise of ruling elites and the disappearance of modern communities, telling specific tales of decline and collapse.

The seventeen examples are an eclectic array that includes Bronze Age stone circles from Ireland, an Arctic whaling station, an abandoned saltpetre mining community in Peru and *moai* from Rapa Nui. This book has one fundamental assumption: that nothing lasts forever. Darlington reminds us that 'we celebrate the architecture of the past in our own moments, seek to conserve that which we value now, and at the same time try to predict what future generations will cherish'.

The chosen locations lie in five general categories: climate change, natural hazards, human disaster, war and economy. Each example is linked to the others in cogent introductions, which, for example, present the reasons why Arctic whalers share space with desert civilisations such as the Garamantes of the Sahara. From the

familiar phenomena of global warming, we move on to natural hazards like earthquakes and tsunamis, the drowning of Port Royal in the Caribbean and the destruction of Plymouth on Montserrat. The section on disasters caused by humans includes the little-known Sumerian city of Girsu in southern Iraq, which offers a sobering lesson on the dangers of neglectful conservation. The island of St Kilda off northern Scotland, abandoned by its permanent residents in 1930, is now the most important seabird sanctuary in Europe. Rapa Nui is a well-known World Heritage location. Darlington offers a nuanced analysis of the future of Rapa Nui, in which heritage conservation and tourism will play an important role.

In his Conclusion, the author asks what we have learnt from ancient collapse. He argues that there are rarely single causes for collapse, especially those that are under-represented in the archaeological or historical record, like the poor or enslaved. Second, change is inevitable, which means that our successes in adapting to it must be well grounded in the past. We have much to learn from ancient buildings, but not all the solutions used in the past were necessarily successful. The same applies to restorations and repairs carried out as a sign of returning normality. But conservation often means physical restoration, which has priceless value when considering global development and the social advancement of humankind. Moving major archaeological sites is not necessarily a solution. Finally, loss is inevitable. Conservation is, in the final analysis, the questions surrounding management of change and how this could be done with the help of a strong sense of Place, with a capital P.

The section on war focuses on the Assyrian palace at Nimrud in northern Iraq, ravaged by nineteenth century archaeologists, and by ISIS militants in 2014. This part of the book is, above all, about loss, the accidental and deliberate abandonment of cultural heritage, and how we handle the consequences, a much-neglected issue in today's archaeology. The essay on Abu Simbel and the Nubian sites in the Economy section again raises the issues of success and failure in conserving the past.

This is an eloquently written and thoroughly researched book that paints wonderful impressions of the issues facing archaeologists today. The author has a refreshing global perspective as he ranges widely, taking a seemingly haphazard but thought-provoking journey through the past. If someone is new to archaeology, or for that matter to cultural heritage and history, this is an excellent place to start one's exploration. I only wish that it was longer, for some of the cultural heritage discussions could be more comprehensive. This book will entertain and instruct you – and the colour pictures add much to the text.

BRIAN FAGAN

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Dublin Castle from Fortress to Palace, Volume I. Vikings to Victorians: a history of Dublin castle to 1850. By Seán Duffy, John Montagu, Kevin Mulligan and Michael O'Neill. 300mm. Pp xvi + 309, 141 ills (many col). National Monuments Service of Ireland, Dublin, 2022. ISBN 9781446880715. €50 (hbk).

This book is the first of three intended volumes that, taken together, will start to tackle a major gap in our knowledge of medieval and later Ireland. Dublin castle was the principal English royal castle of Ireland and it remained at the centre of the government of the island until 1921. As with any other major castle, medieval Dublin castle combined a number of roles: a residence, a military stronghold, a ceremonial centre and the focal site of political and judicial actions of the king's representative in Ireland, but it has a number of features that distinguish it from other places in Ireland and outside. In 1237 King Henry III ordered the construction of a magnificent, aisled great hall, which was built against the west curtain wall and took up nearly half the western half of the space inside the walls. This was a purely ceremonial hall, with no chambers attached to it, serving as the site of grand occasions, the holding of courts and, later, for the meeting of the Irish parliament; it was separate from the regular hall and chamber range along the south wall. Its construction marked the castle out as the chief place of the king's governance of Ireland. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attempts were made to convert it into a Renaissance palace: Sidney built a new lodging and council chamber for the lord deputy in the 1570s on the north side, with Falkland's grand long gallery of the 1620s

connecting it to the medieval hall. From the late seventeenth century into the eighteenth, the whole castle was converted from the irregular space and buildings of the old, essentially medieval, castle into regular, classical ranges around one rectangular courtyard; the Upper Yard, and the less formal Lower Yard, framed by the Treasury building and the buildings for the horses. The castle was placed on a site at the end of the ridge between the Liffey to the north and its tributary, the Poddle, to the south and east, which also formed the pool of Dublin immediately south of the castle. It was hemmed in by the city on the ridge, on the north and west. Space was restricted, at first by nature and then by the walls of the castle itself. Re-use, re-building and compromise were very much the features of the later castle. It remained, however, the seat of real power and the centre of ceremonial and high society life until the end of the English government.

While it is remarkable that this major site has not been described before now, it is understandable, for Dublin castle is a most complex site and its long history makes for a great mass of documentation (as well as much re-building). This has shaped the project, of which this volume is the first of three; to be followed by one on the Viking archaeology and one on the medieval and post-medieval archaeology. Its aim is straightforward: to bring together into one volume the evidence of the documentation of the castle. It does so in a lavish manner; large pages with double columns, printed on glossy paper with many illustrations. However, to manage the amount of material and present its content to the reader, the editors have taken two major strategic decisions. The first is to ask more than one person to work on it; the volume consists of three essays by different authors on three periods: the medieval period (by Seán Duffy); 1560–1684 (by John Montagu); 1684–1850 (by Kevin Mulligan and Michael O'Neill). Each of these is broken up into chronological and topographical sections. The second decision was that the priority of the authors should be, first and foremost, to present the details of the documentation, rather than to analyse it or weave it into a coherent narrative, let alone to combine the written record with information derived from a record of the physical remains of the standing buildings or the excavations.

The primary objective of the project has been achieved. No-one can be at a loss any more as to what the documents can tell us of the castle's development and the individual buildings within its walls and the evolution of the area around them. It has been possible in the past to pick a