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***Gatherings: Past and Present. Proceedings from the 2013 Archaeology of Gatherings International Conference at IT Sligo, Ireland. BAR International Series 2832. Edited by F. Beglane. ISBN: 9781407314587. BAR Publishing, Oxford, 2017.***

2013 was the year of 'The Gathering', a government sponsored tourist drive focused on attracting the international diaspora back to Ireland. A group of archaeologists at the Institute of Technology Sligo used this opportunity to organise an international and interdisciplinary conference on the Archaeology of Gatherings. This collection of eleven papers, representing the contributions of twenty-one scholars, is the result.

As might be expected, the papers are a diverse 'gathering' in themselves. For those familiar with Irish history and archaeology, it will be no surprise that studies of (early) medieval Ireland are prominent. Nugent supplies a study of pilgrimage at Kildare and Croagh Patrick that raises a issue that occurs and reoccurs throughout the volume – how can we interpret the material culture of gathering in the absence of documentary records of assembly? Gleeson's paper on *óenaig* ('assemblies') engages with the same issue. His interdisciplinary discussion of the landscape surrounding the *Óenach Carmáin* – the major assembly for south-east Ireland – is intriguing, but his suggestion that the more widespread 'cemetery settlement' sites of Ireland represent the assembly sites of individual *túaithe* – while not implausible – is bound to generate controversy. Gleeson does, however, tackle these broader issues: the study of *Tlachtga* ('the Hill of Ward', Co. Meath) provided by Davis *et al* is very much a study of a single site, from a fundamentally archaeological perspective. But even here, written sources play an important role in discussion, and the absence of a specialist in Old / Middle Irish among the four authors is mystifying, even if it does explain some unfortunately poor phrasing.

A number of other papers engage with the material culture of gathering in modern Ireland. Barry draws on extensive archival research in a wide-ranging [117/118] assessment of the impact of railways on mobility and gatherings in nineteenth-century Ireland, while Bonsall *et al* provide an even more contemporary assessment of the archaeology of the 1985 Scout Jamboree at Portumna Castle, Co. Galway. While this presentation is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, the almost total absence of archaeological remains of temporary accommodation for approximately 10,000 people some thirty years after the event demonstrates some of the problems that archaeologies of gatherings must confront. MacConville, on the other hand, moves away from material culture entirely, in a small-scale, surprising examination of near-death experiences.

Beyond Ireland, Hognestad assesses contemporary 'passionate gatherings', in a study of football fans that reflects his background in social anthropology, but which also includes discussions of gathering sites, from stadiums to pubs, both old and new, and the tension between local identity and globalisation. Tyson Smith assesses the validity of comparing the Durbars of the British Raj to (Egyptian) New Kingdom ceremonies of presenting *Inu*, finding both parallels and differences, although in such a consciously post-colonial narrative, it is odd that more time was not spent discussing the socio-historic *milieu* in which the two events were first compared.

As will be clear, almost all the papers in this collection deal with the historic period, and make use of documentary sources in their discussion. The only paper with an entirely prehistoric focus is Scottish rather than Irish. Cussans *et al* examine some evidence for Iron Age feasting using faunal remains from

two sites to argue that they acted as focal points for surrounding communities. More controversially, it is argued that some bones, the remains of feasting, may have been deliberately deposited in primary ditch fill as a statement of social status.

This diverse group of papers is bookended by a useful introduction by Beglane and Moore that introduces some theoretical concepts relating to gatherings and crowds, and a concluding paper by McPhail, a leading scholar of crowd behaviour. This provides much food for thought, but it is difficult to envision ways in which his exploration of 'elementary forms of collective action' might be applied to the archaeological record.

Published conference proceedings have become a primary mechanism for dissemination new archaeological research, but it is rare to find an essay collection like this one, that makes one genuinely regret missing the conference itself. The essays are eclectic but hang together surprisingly well. While some have problematic moments, they are always engaging, and with such diverse subject matter and approaches, there will be something here to interest almost any reader.

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