

Cracking the Egyptian Code

Andrew Robinson

Thames & Hudson, £19.95

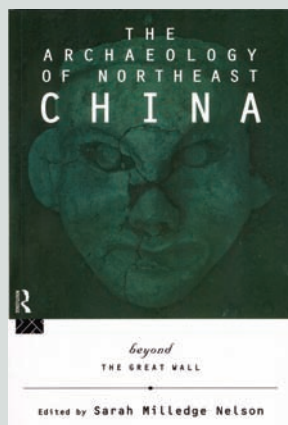
ISBN 978-0500051719

In 1922 Howard Carter could be confident that he had found Tutankhamun's tomb, but when Giovanni Belzoni discovered the tomb of Seti I in 1817, the pharaoh was initially misidentified as 'Psammis'. The difference was that in Belzoni's day nobody could read hieroglyphs; this knowledge had faded from living memory around the 4th century AD, and it was not until 1822 that a brilliant young Frenchman, Jean-François Champollion, broke the ancient code.

In the first English-language biography of this remarkable figure, Andrew Robinson introduces a mercurial but staggeringly gifted man who died aged just 41. As in his recent biography of Michael Ventris (reviewed in *CWA* 52), another linguistic prodigy who died tragically young, Robinson shows his flair for splicing arresting personal insights into his narrative.

We learn that Champollion had little formal schooling and taught himself to read and write, but was a professor by the age of 19, and that his radical political views ultimately led to his exile from Paris and ostracism by the academic community. A determined Republican raised during the French Revolution, Champollion was a great admirer of Napoleon – who, by happy chance, would send an expedition to Egypt that uncovered the very artefact that provided the key to Champollion's work on hieroglyphs: the trilingual Rosetta Stone.

Robinson's analysis of Champollion's fanatical pursuit of his linguistic goals, and his rivalry in this with the English polymath Thomas Young, is also utterly compelling. These two intellectual giants are such different men, with completely opposed approaches to unpicking hieroglyphs, but their interweaving lives make for a fascinating read.



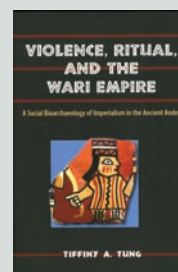
The Archaeology of Northeast China: beyond the Great Wall

Ed. Sarah Milledge Nelson

Routledge, £26.00

ISBN 978-0415513472

Elegantly illustrated and admirably comprehensive in its scope, this synthesis of recent archaeological research into the prehistoric peoples of Donbei – best known in the west as Manchuria – sheds new light on a region rather less discussed than the civilisations of central China. Nelson's introduction, contrasting the linear Marxist approach to archaeology common in China with Western approaches, provides an enlightening framework for the eight papers that follow. Spanning the Neolithic and Bronze Age, these cover both nomadic groups and early farming communities, as well as unique sites such as the Hongshan 'Goddess Temple' with its enigmatic female figurines. Each of the papers is written by Chinese archaeologists working in the region, providing a welcome first-hand overview of ongoing work.



Violence, Ritual, and the Wari Empire

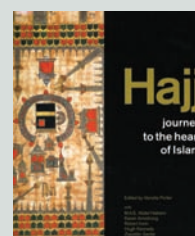
Tiffany A Tung

University Press of Florida, £64.50

ISBN 978-0813037677

Between AD 600-1000,

the Wari Empire represented one of the first politically centralised states in the New World. This study reveals the biological and social impact of the military aggression on which this power was founded, with groundbreaking DNA and osteological data shedding light on the rituals of power and use of violence. A thought-provoking – if not always comfortable – read.



Hajj: journey to the heart of Islam

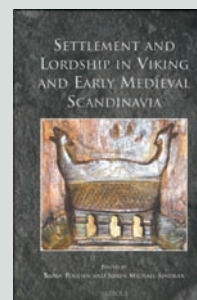
Ed. Venetia Porter

British Museum Press, £25.00

ISBN 978-0714111759

Drawing on a recent British Museum exhibition of the same name, this beautifully illustrated catalogue contains stunning photographs of artefacts, sites, and artwork associated with the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, as well as a wealth of information on the evolution of the Hajj and the lives of the people who have undertaken it over the centuries.

See also Hajj: the first British Pilgrims on p. 60.



Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia

Ed. Bjørn Poulsen and Søren Michael Sindbaek

Brepols, £79.00

ISBN 978-2503531311

Recent advances in settlement archaeology have uncovered a treasure trove of new information about social power in Early Medieval Scandinavia, and this comprehensive work brings together 17 papers, ranging from landholding and the changing influence of royal and Church authorities, to insights into all levels of society from the aristocracy to slaves. Beginning with a useful overview of previous scholarship on the subject, subsequent articles discuss material evidence from the vocabulary of power in runic inscriptions to signifiers of social and military rank in burials. A useful and wide-ranging compilation.