

First Kingdom hardback: over to you

FK metaphorically hit the shelves on Feb 4th, and was reviewed more or less right away in *The Times*, by Tom Holland. He wrote a very kind review of *The King in the North* years ago, and I am predisposed to be grateful to him. He has been kind, again, to the *First Kingdom*, but I was rather disappointed to find that his piece was really about (and was accompanied by a meaninglessly anachronistic picture of), King Arthur. Oh dear. I suppose, when Head of Zeus insisted on having the 'A' word in the title, I should have expected it. Even so, Holland has missed an important (to me) point. He gets the impression that I am 'uninterested' in Arthur – so I'm guessing he didn't read as far as the bit where I explain WHY I relegate Arthur to a bit-part vignette. The book is about the exercise of power and the development of territorial lordship, because that's the best lead we have for following a continuous thread through the very shady parts of a pretty shady period. And Arthur tells us *nothing* about territorial lordship.

And then, in short order, another piece, by Gerard de root, came out the following week, also in *The Times*. It's a little more measured; and I think he had read more of the book than Tom had. What amused (and, partly, horrified) me was the series of comments posted online about the De Groot article, many of which presumed that it was a precis of the book, rather than a commentary. I leave readers of this newsletter to read some of the choicest, with no additional comment required by me – I've left out the more complimentary posts. The lesson, long absorbed by any author, is that once you have set your work free and it's in the public domain, you cannot be surprised if people make of it what they will. You can't tell them what to think (Okay, you can, but it's not what I want to do). If they get the 'wrong' impression, you have to suck it up and accept that your mind is now, to an extent, public property.

I've posted the DeGroot piece too on my Homepage after the Tom Holland review, so you can see the context...



James S

1 DAY AGO

Well shame the author did not bother to read any Welsh/British sources from the 4th and 6th centuries. They are very clear about their being a huge Saxon invasion.

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Voxplop

1 DAY AGO | ↔ James S

Absolutely! The contemporary historian Gildas on the Saxon Revolt of the 440's: 'they dipped their red and savage tongue in the western ocean'.

Not an 'invasion' by an organised sovereign state as such; rather a massive island-wide viking-style raid, among a constant series of raiding/settling actions spreading westwards.

'Bleeding Saxons, coming over here, raping our women, taking our lands; God help us, I'm off to Armorica'.

Oh, and Arthur did exist; just another humdrum Balkanesque warlord who got romanticised in later centuries and who made the mistake of killing Gildas' brother, the pirate raider Hueil Ap Caw, and thus got himself cancelled out of official history. Very unHollywood.



F-HBLE

1 DAY AGO | Edited

Very interesting article .

I thought the comment about concentrating on ethnicity as being unhealthy very interesting .

The reality of survival in what is traditionally called the dark ages was that cohesive communities were vital for survival . One gets an insight of what the ingredients of a cohesive community might look like with the Sutton Hoo dig . The high status helmet and the long ship and the incredible jewellery.

The leader of the community in a hostile environment would not have the luxury of idleness . They would have to show great wisdom and warrior prowess if the community had any chance of survival . The warrior leader would need to motivate others and earn respect by example .

... [See more](#)

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Restless legs

1 DAY AGO

I dont understand why it's intellectually unhealthy to look at what (if any) displacement there was of the native population from invaders. If there's a sequel about the Vikings will that also be ignored, and the Norman invasion ?

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Eric Richard

17 HOURS AGO | ↩ Michael Parkes

Britain can only prosper when ruled by a continental elite? Plenty of examples from history suggest otherwise.

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The Laughing Gnome

1 DAY AGO

Rejecting, for the most part, hackneyed nationalist narratives of Dark Age Britain that focus on immigration, invasion and ethnicity, I paint a picture of vibrant, dynamic responses to a new order

From his own blurb of the book we can see that Adams is part of the woke intelligentsia who seek to disprove fact. As such should be ignored as his work is him enforcing his views onto history, in a way more insidious than BLM or marxists

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Trees of Life paperback

Meantime, I've just been sent advance copies of the paperback edition of *Trees of Life*. It's more financially accessible than the giant coffee table version and, thumbing through it, I think it's nicer all round – the compactness of it, the print quality and the more integrated text and images condense it into something altogether more satisfying. It would hit the shelves on March 4th, if there were any shelves left to hit. If you order it online at *Wordery*, you can avoid the guilt of purchasing from you-know-who...

The Wood Age on Fire

Sometimes a chapter comes more easily than you think it will; at other times, you think it'll be straightforward and then... don't know quite where to start. I had stupidly assumed that I could fill a 9,000 word chapter about fire more or less knowing what I was about. I mean, I've played with plenty of fire; suffered its consequences; sold firewood; made charcoal and read plenty about it. And then, like fire itself, the solid content went up in smoke and I was left with a pile of tropes to type up. So it was back to the drawing board and to some more obscure reading to get the chapter properly on track and to ensure that I could underpin it with evidence and thinking, rather than with anecdote. I had thought, for example, that I knew the literature on fire, cooking and nutrition as elements of human evolution. It turns out not to be quite so simple. But then, that's why writing is itself an intellectual pursuit; and why it's so challenging.