

Michael Heaney. 2023. *The Ancient English Morris Dance*. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd. 536 pages; 94 figures.

Reviewed by Isabela Botezatu

University of Szeged, Hungary

Correspondence: botezatu.isabela@gmail.com

Botezatu, Isabela. 2025. "Michael Heaney. 2023. *The Ancient English Morris Dance*. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd. 530 pages; 94 figures." *Martor* 30, 196. [DOI: 10.57225/Martor.2025.14]

The *Ancient English Morris Dance* is the latest work published by Michael Heaney, the result of decades of research and immersion in the topic. According to Heaney, the book provides "a chronological account of the history of Morris dancing" (144), spanning from medieval records to contemporary practices. It traces the circumstances that shaped Morris dance from its first record on 19 May 1448 to the present day, in a descriptive rather than interpretive manner. The author presents a wide range of historical documents, giving readers a multifaceted understanding of the dance evolution.

While the primary focus is the scholarly analysis and documentation, the author skilfully weaves in anecdotes that engage and entertain a broader audience. These carefully placed stories serve as vivid vignettes that humanise the historical account. As a result, the book appeals not only to academics who seek rigorous analysis and documentation, but also to general readers who may encounter it by chance and become drawn to its subject. By blending academic rigour with engaging storytelling, the author bridges the gap between specialised scholarship and wider readership, expanding the book's reach and impact inviting a diverse range of readers to explore the rich history and cultural significance of Morris dance.

An exceptional facet of Morris dancing highlighted in the book, and one that personally resonated with me, is its detailed portrayal of the many roles it has played throughout history. Notably, Morris dance is shown not only as something shaped by its environmental and socio-political context, but also as a dynamic vehicle for engaging with and responding to the dominant cultural trends of different periods. Through meticulous analysis and compelling narratives, the book demonstrates how Morris dance has served as an active medium for addressing and reflecting the pressing issues of different periods, spanning centuries of cultural evolution. This nuanced exploration underscores the adaptive capacity of both the dance and its dancers and highlights its profound significance as a form of artistic expression and a mirror of the socio-cultural dynamics of the eras in which it thrived.

In conclusion, *The Ancient English Morris Dance* written by Michael Heaney is an invaluable resource for scholars and enthusiasts alike who explore the rich history of Morris dance. This work serves not merely as a chronological account but as a rich tapestry interwoven with threads of social, political, and cultural contexts that have shaped its development over centuries. Moreover, the book goes beyond mere description, examining the underlying motivations and implications of Morris dance's evolution and offering readers valuable insights into the broader cultural dynamics at play. Through careful analysis of archival documents, folkloric sources, and scholarly literature, Heaney provides a nuanced understanding of how Morris dance has been shaped by, and in turn has shaped, the socio-political context in which it has existed. By exploring the myriad transformations that Morris dance has undergone over the centuries, Heaney invites readers on a journey of discovery that illuminates the profound significance of this ancient tradition and its enduring relevance in today's world.