

The above brief catalogue does no justice to the collection. All the authors have something new and interesting to say about their subjects, and to extract a common theme is not so much difficult as impossible. All the same, most of the essays reflect the book's subtitle: they are looking at the designs of seals and coins with a view to bringing out the unspoken messages they conveyed; above all, statements of personal or corporate identity and statements of power over those who saw and handled them. Implicit in what several of the authors say, and set out explicitly by Susan Leibacher Ward (p 178), is that while we are accustomed to replicated objects in a vast variety of contexts, they were most unusual in the Middle Ages, and it was in seals and coins that most people would come across them, giving these objects a peculiarity, even a status, that is now difficult for us to grasp.

While the book's subject is coins and seals, nearly every contribution deals with only one or the other. Eleven are about seals, nine about coins; only two, by Lisa Mahoney and Erin L Jordan, discuss both, though several other authors make valuable cross-references. Thus, Guido M Berndt lists fifth-century rulers portrayed on seals as well as those on coins (p 89) and Susan Solway describes the 'long tradition' of medieval seal designs copying those of Roman coins (p 426). More, however, could be said of the relationship of coins and seals, not only in their impact on those who saw or used them but also in similarities or dissimilarities of design or wording. Stuart Rigold (Rigold 1974, 99–100) suggested that the design of Anglo-Saxon pennies was taken from contemporary royal seals, and that from 'all positive evidence, throughout history ... the seal-type has the priority and the coin-type is derivative'. It would be very interesting to know how far – if at all – this was a general rule: was the authenticating power of the seal used to validate the coinage by copying its design?

Other unanswered questions will occur to every reader of this book. But this is praise, not criticism: the essays are as stimulating as they are informative. They are superbly illustrated, with black-and-white pictures, mostly much enlarged, at the end of each piece, and nearly fifty of them are repeated in full colour at the end of the book. It is an important contribution to work on both numismatics and sigillography.

Rigold, S E 1974. 'Seals and titles', *Brit Numis J*, 44, 99–106

P D A HARVEY

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*Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*. Edited by PHILLIPP R SCHOFIELD. 290mm. Pp ix + 205, ills (some col), genealogical table, maps. Oxbow Books, Oxford, 2015. ISBN 9781782978176. £90 (hbk).

This volume of essays arises from a conference sponsored by the Seals in Medieval Wales project to coincide with an exhibition at the National Library of Wales. The papers necessarily include a range of apparently disparate and unconnected studies, but as well as the three themes under which the editors have grouped their papers – Status and Power; Law and Practice; and Sources and Their Content – they also demonstrate the uncertainties and paradoxes in the use of medieval seals.

Some papers focus on the ways in which motifs on seals were expressions of power and personal authority. Nicholas Vincent's article on the seals of Henry II and his court considers how those seals explore the nature of twelfth-century kingship and Adrian Ailes revises the date of Richard I's second seal, demonstrating how its iconography reflected shifting networks of power. Brian Kemp demonstrates how one noble family – the Longespees – used the family's devices and arms on the seals of both men and women to express their authority, while Jörg Peltzer suggests that English aristocratic seals of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries demonstrated family rather than rank within the aristocracy, in contrast to contemporaneous and comparable seals of the Empire.

Dealing with more problematic aspects of seals are papers by Elizabeth New, Daniel Power, John Cherry and Brigitte Bedos-Rezak. New's careful and detailed study of radial motifs on a selection of Welsh seals from around Kenfig demonstrates that it is dangerous to make generalisations. She argues that the use of a standard motif chosen by individuals of all social statuses and by communities cannot be dismissed as all alike, as what seem to be simple geometric designs actually divulge a range of detail which can reveal family networks. Power provides a detailed analysis of the seals on one document, the declaration on the Norman church of 1205, which reveals increasing innovation and experimentation in seal motifs that reflected the status of the sigillants much less simply than seals of the mid-twelfth century. Cherry's paper is a reminder that the seal was not the only possible form of legal authorisation for a document. He explores the ways in which late medieval Italy made use of the notarised as well as the sealed instrument. Bedos-Rezak considers the place of learned

discourse about seals and sealing and the way in which the uncertainty of theory about sealing may have undermined their ability to act as signs of authority. Harvey asks a deceptively simple question – what is a seal – and answers it by drawing attention to the easily overlooked cross with which so many legends begin, suggesting that the answer might lie here.

The context of the seal is also shown to be important. Paul Brand reminds us that acts of sealing could be as important – and as complicated – as the seals themselves. His study of the seal in thirteenth-century law demonstrates that personal responsibility for the attachment of the seal was not straightforward and that whether a seal had been validly attached, and the form of the attachment itself, were questions asked in the courts. John McEwan, on the seal makers of medieval London, demonstrates that the social status of the seal maker and the economics of seal making, are an important part of the seal's place in cultural history. Markus Späth puts English monastic seals in the context of their own history: as memorialisations of the 'glorious past' of these houses, using imagery of architecture and individuals to justify monastic authority through a house's past. Memory is also important to T A Heslop and Matthew Sillence, who demonstrate how medieval seals could be used on an eighteenth-century plan to reflect views of civic governance.

Overall, this volume reminds the reader that seals cannot be either overlooked or viewed simply as providing straightforward information in their legends and iconography. They must be considered in the context of their affixing and of their creation. In particular, several of the papers here serve as a reminder that if seals were about authority – legal and personal – their use could be complex, sometimes even confusing, and that the uncertainty arising from this could make seals not only a source of strength but of instability. In short, the collection presents the study of medieval seals as a vibrant and exciting area of research.

PHILIPPA HOSKIN

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*Accounting at Durham Cathedral Priory: management and control of a major ecclesiastical corporation 1083–1539.* By ALISDAIR DOBIE. 222mm. Pp xvi + 340, 31 tables. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2015. ISBN 9781137479778. £80 (hbk).

Alisdair Dobie offers a meticulously researched and well-written book that considers the evolution and purpose of the accounting systems and records at the Benedictine Cathedral Priory at Durham between 1083 and 1539. It will appeal in the main to historians of finance and business, but will also be of great interest to historians of medieval monasticism. This book differs from previous books on the monastic economies at Durham and elsewhere: rather than focusing upon a particular section of the considerable surviving archive, Dobie has utilised selected documents representative of the entire surviving corpus of records at Durham. He sets out to analyse the purpose of the records themselves, the ways in which the keeping of financial records developed at Durham over time and whether accounting systems and historical financial documents had a direct impact upon management and administration of the Cathedral Priory throughout the 460-year history of this house. He concludes that this was certainly the case and that the monks of Durham adapted and modified their record-keeping systems throughout the period, kept accurate, balanced accounts, closely monitored arrears and debts and used historical accounts for comparison, particularly when evaluating the assets of the priory. This challenges a number of existing perspectives on the economy of Durham Cathedral Priory, some of which, the author believes, were founded upon erroneous research that had misinterpreted the arithmetic methods used in the accounts while others had analysed only a small sample of documents.

The book has seven chapters. The first two are largely contextual, taking into account that some among the target audience may have only a limited knowledge of the medieval Church and monastic economy. There is a detailed section introducing the reader to the function of a cathedral priory in medieval England, the local and wider significance of Durham Cathedral Priory and the complexities of the monk obediary system. Through this system, which varied considerably from place to place, monk officials or obediaries administered departments within a religious house on a day-to-day basis. The accounting records that they produced, in the form of *compoti*, *status*, rental and other documents, constitute a significant archive of more than 4,500 documents at Durham. It is a selection of these that are the focus of the following three chapters. Because of the great volume of surviving records, the author has used a sampling strategy for his study. For example, he has analysed one bursar's account for approximately each decade between 1278 and 1536, tabulating the totals for these in Chapters