

to the east was Urban, bishop of Glamorgan from 1107 until his death in 1134. *The Book of Llandaf* was created by Urban to lend support to his ambitions, and, like a number of other monastic histories devised for similar propaganda purposes, was based on an essentially spurious claim to ancient land rights. This is what led some twentieth-century historians, including Christopher Brooke, to classify the manuscript as an example of a twelfth-century forgery.

Patrick Sims-Williams, a leading Celticist and one of the foremost scholars of early Welsh literature and history, has taken up the task, begun by Wendy Davies, of recuperating the *Book of Llandaf* as an important and valid source of early Welsh history. His main focus is that section of the manuscript which contains 159 charters purporting to date from the fifth to the eleventh century; charters that record grants made to the supposed founders of the see of Llandaff and its subsequent bishops. The book is divided into fourteen short chapters, each dealing with a different aspect of the charters, including their chronology, the witness lists, the use of diplomatic, genealogical references, and the larger structure of the manuscript. Together, the chapters build an impressive body of evidence that the manuscript is, in total, a carefully curated compilation drawn for the most part from existing sources.

Through a painstaking textual archaeology, Sims-Williams retrieves a chronological order for the charters which is at odds with the manuscript's page order, indicating that compilers added in charters of different dates as they made the manuscript. He also provides a new and persuasive interpretation of the process of compilation, namely that the charters were taken from single sheets containing one or more charters of different dates that were then copied out continuously in the manuscript, a practice that explains the wayward chronology.

Further evidence comes from the formulaic style of the charters, which is almost entirely consistent with twelfth-century diplomatic even though the charters claim to be of different dates. Using frequency diagrams for key formulae, Sims-Williams is able to conclude that the style of the charters represents editorial decisions made by the compilers at Llandaff rather than the language of their earlier exemplars. Though the diplomatic may not be authentic to a period earlier than the twelfth century, Sims-Williams agrees with Davies that the charters were not all calculated forgeries but edited versions of earlier charters. Based on

his collection of fine-grained data from the witness lists, doublets and personal names, displayed in tables and appendices, Sims-Williams goes much further than Davies in establishing the status of the charters as largely a compilation of earlier material.

Challengingly complex, this is the most detailed study of the *Book of Llandaf* yet published and now, surely, the standard work of reference on the manuscript for historians, codicologists, linguists and armchair scholars who enjoy linguistic and codicological puzzles. Though Sims-Williams shows that there are few easy solutions, and that Urban's claims were unconvincing even at the time, he establishes beyond any doubt that the *Book of Llandaf* is indeed a 'genuine archive' and thus a vital historical source for a study of Wales and its border with England in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

DAVIES, W 1979. *The Llandaff Charters*, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

HELEN FULTON

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The German Ocean: medieval Europe around the North Sea. By BRYAN AYERS. 245mm. Pp xxi + 268, 93 figs, 4 maps. Equinox Publishing, Sheffield and Bristol, 2016. ISBN 978904768494. £75 (hbk).

Author Bryan Ayers concludes *The German Ocean* by describing the object of study as 'a maritime region where the seas bind communities together rather than dividing them'. Archaeology thus gives 'timely reminders of the importance of the European interconnectedness that is provided by the North Sea'. This is especially true of the medieval period when trade links, fostered in the two centuries prior to 1100, expanded in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to ensure the development of maritime societies whose material culture was often more remarkable for its communalities than for its diversity. The name 'German Ocean' for the North Sea has its origins as *Oceanus Germāic* on printed 'Ptolemy' maps of 1477 and persisted up until the Great War. In the aftermath of Brexit, it is timely to be reminded by archaeology of the deep history of economic and cultural exchange between communities around the North Sea that, irrespective of local political climate and events, endures to the present and will doubtless continue.

From its beginnings in the mid-twentieth century, medieval archaeology has developed as an international comparative discipline with its founders and followers developing extensive research networks far beyond their immediate national boundaries. Ayers acknowledges the importance of the colloquia series *Stadtarchäologie im Hanseraum* (Urban archaeology in the Hanseatic region) established by the north German city of Lübeck, which has brought together archaeologists from a dozen countries on a biennial basis over the past twenty-five years to review and publish the latest discoveries from towns and settlements around the North Sea and Baltic rim. We are in the author's debt that this extensive dataset of fieldwork and post-excavation analysis has now been brought to wider international attention.

In a nutshell, *The German Ocean* is a remarkable work of synthesis of the material evidence accumulated over the past forty years for the emergence of a consumerist mercantile culture in the ports and towns of the region, each exploitative of its hinterland ecologies. The book contains an extensive overview of the growth and reach of the Hanseatic commodity trade that stretched from the Gulf of Finland to the English Channel, with its distinctive ecosystem of commerce-serving urban infrastructure and housing, maritime transport, proto-industrial manufactures, architectural expression, religious devotion and commemoration, eating and drinking habits and domestic material culture. What was once the preserve of town archivists is now an interdisciplinary domain combining documentary history, buildings archaeology, iconographic studies, excavated artefacts and ecofacts and the environmental record. These trading communities were so connected through commerce, culture and kin that new ideologies, fashion trends and technologies were transmitted with speed over long distances. It is no coincidence that these increasingly mobile and diasporic merchants and artisans were responsible for the percolation into local popular culture of the revolutionary changes in design taste and in religious practice sparked by the Italian Renaissance and Lutheran Reformation respectively. Traversing many diverse specialist research areas, from the bulk trade in Rhenish stoneware jugs to fish bone distributions, the book clearly demonstrates the growing and decisive influence of archaeology on what were previously ring-fenced historical paradigms.

The value of a study such as this is the careful deployment of multiple datasets on diverse structures, materials and scientific analysis into a meta-narrative of continuity and change in long-distance commercial and cultural transfer over 500 years. The archaeological record of maritime trade in a diverse catalogue of commodities, from timber, bricks, textiles, pelts and fish to domestic tableware, ceramic stoves and altar pieces, reveals the agency of the merchant in medieval society. It also highlights the transmission in cultural practice, technological innovation and design. In this way, Rhenish stoneware, which has the widest archaeological distribution of any domestic commodity across the North Sea region, can be viewed as both an indicator of long-distance commercial activity and a *Kulturträger* or cultural identifier in the destination context, in this case through pan-regional conformity in drinking habits. Occasionally, as in the case of medieval Novgorod, the Hanseatic station on the edge of the Russian pine zone, the archaeological record can reveal conformity to long-distance influences, but also resistance to cultural transfer. Here the distribution of German stoneware is concentrated within the enclave of foreign traders and largely absent from the indigenous settlement. *The German Ocean* illustrates yet again why excavated objects can be read as primary historical documents.

DAVID GAIMSTER

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These ten papers were given at a colloquium in 2014, which marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Jean Bony's *The English Decorated Style: Gothic architecture transformed* (1979). Moreover, twenty years had elapsed since the appearance of Nicola Coldstream's *The Decorated Style: architecture and ornament 1240–1360* (1999). The same year as the colloquium (2014) also saw the publication of Paul Binski's *Gothic Wonder: art, artifice and the Decorated style 1290–1350*. Articles by Coldstream and Binski, therefore, book-end pieces by younger scholars in which aspects of Bony's attractive and perceptive synthesis are scrutinised and revised in the light of new research.