

The bulk of the volume lies in a large number of case studies of illustrative archaeological sites. The point that it is the excavated evidence which underlies the vital archaeologically based perspective on these centuries is an important one. Nevertheless, with the first 600 pages made up of just five chapters, it does make for a read in which the chapters feel rather long. And with Harvard-style references in chapter endnotes, the weight of those case studies can get wearying at times. The book is also copiously illustrated, but regrettably it must be noted that the quality and scale of reproduction is often unsatisfactory. In light of Carver's own long experience, it seems likely that the fault in this respect lies with the publishers and the approach to production. At present, technology and business models seem widely to be leading to a conspicuous deterioration in publication standards.

Intellectually, probably the most innovative feature of the work is the proposition that it is especially relevant to conceive of Britain as a whole in this period in terms of its 'formative' state: one more re-conceptualisation of a period for which we have a long tradition of different perspectives. It is admittedly a little facile, but not irrelevant, to note that it can only be a truism that any and every period of history is formative – if at different paces, and with varying weight. The term is quite briefly explained, with an ostentatious reference to Mesoamerican archaeology from the former editor of *Antiquity*, on pp xxiii–xxiv of the Preface. One thing that I think was really needed to give this concept more traction and to justify an especial focus on formativity was a fuller evaluation of the virtual *tabula rasa* of Roman Britain. It would also seem to be implied that this formative process saw a culturally more consistent Britain in major respects by the eleventh century. That may indeed be a valid proposition, but it would be right, then, also to stress the extent to which it is true as a Europe-wide phenomenon. It poses, however, a further critical question: was the level of cultural consistency achieved by a thousand years ago significantly different from that two thousand years ago at the end of the Iron Age? That could lead us to the proposition that the contrasting processes of disruption and divergences on the one hand and re-assimilation on the other during the first millennium AD were definitive features of an even wider period and zone.

This is profoundly relevant to painful and destructive controversies that are currently being driven forward from some quarters in respect of the fifth to eleventh centuries AD, with reference to England in particular. Leaving aside obsolete

concepts like the 'Dark Ages', notions of a 'post-Roman' or 'pre-Conquest' or even an 'Early Medieval' period effectively de-characterise the phase within itself, focusing instead on its status as a (long) transitional phase, which ended with the enforced political linking of England to Continental power-blocs, and of Wales – subsequently Ireland – with England; rooted in a system of 'feudal' social control involving a regular pattern of manors and parishes, and all correlated too with substantial, favourable, climatic and demographic changes. That the period of the fifth to eleventh centuries was one of change and reconstruction with long-term ramifications is undeniable. But to represent it primarily in potentially teleological terms for purposes of 'interest' and 'relevance' may have implications that are considerably more problematic than is immediately obvious.

JOHN HINES

doi:[10.1017/S0003581520000323](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581520000323)

The Book of Llandaf as a Historical Source. By PATRICK SIMS-WILLIAMS. Pp xiv + 211. THE BOYDELL PRESS, WOODBRIDGE, 2019. ISBN 9781783274185. £75.00 (Hbk).

The Book of Llandaf, to use the Welsh spelling (Llandaff in English), or *Liber Landavensis* (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS 17110E, digitised on the NLW website), was compiled in the first half of the twelfth century in the diocese of Llandaff in Glamorgan, south Wales. Described by the historian Wendy Davies (1979), who published some of the most influential modern studies of the manuscript, as 'part-cartulary, part-history, part-register', the manuscript is among the earliest surviving from Wales and is often invoked as a supplement to Domesday Book by scholars investigating Norman settlements in south-east Wales in the decades following the Conquest.

Yet the manuscript has also been controversial among modern historians, not all of whom have been convinced by the historicity of its contents. Written over a period of time, from about 1120 to 1134, in a number of hands, mainly in Latin but with some important Old Welsh and Norman French forms, the primary purpose of the book was to establish the boundaries of the diocese of Llandaff since its supposed foundation in the fifth century. The man who wanted thus to set Llandaff up as an ancient and extensive episcopal see in order to fend off competition from St Davids in the west and Hereford

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

doi:10.1017/S0003581520000335

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.