

Short Notices

Australia's Magna Carta, Canberra, Department of the Senate, 2010; paperback; pp. v, 35; 1 col. plate, 11 colour and b/w illustrations; R.R.P. A\$5.00; ISBN 9781742292939.

On permanent display in Australia's Parliament House in Canberra is one of only two thirteenth-century copies of Magna Carta outside England. The other copy, now in the National Archives in Washington, DC, was sold at auction in 2007 for US\$21.3 million. Both are copies of the 1297 *Inspeximus* version, re-issued by Edward I's council in his name while he was campaigning in Flanders. This booklet tells the story of how Australia came to have its copy of Magna Carta. It was discovered at a school in Somerset in the 1930s and sold to the Australian Government in 1952 – in the face of vigorous opposition from the British Museum. Nicholas Vincent, from the University of East Anglia, provides a detailed account of the machinations surrounding the sale, for the then substantial amount of £12,500. The charter's adventures were not quite over, however, for its location became the focus of a dispute in the 1960s between the newly created National Library of Australia and the Australian Parliament – a dispute that was not officially resolved until 2005.

Vincent gives a lively and authoritative account of the history of Magna Carta, and particularly of the circumstances surrounding the 1297 reissue. He also provides a plausible explanation for the way in which this copy, originally addressed to the county of Surrey, ended up in the King's School in Bruton in Somerset. This is supplemented by Kylie Scroope's short but fascinating description of the preservation measures applied to the charter by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). It took eight years to complete the work of enclosing the charter in a glass and metal container filled with argon gas, where it has remained for the last fifty years.

The booklet is intended for the general public, rather than the researcher. One result is that there is an English translation, with a lengthy glossary, but no transcription of the Latin text; another is that the colour photograph of the charter is too small to be legible. A standard catalogue description would also have been useful. Nevertheless, this is a very welcome and valuable account of the history and provenance of Australia's best-known medieval manuscript.

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Davies, Wendy, *Welsh History in the Early Middle Ages: Texts and Societies* (Variorum Collected Studies, 915), Aldershot, Ashgate Variorum, 2009; hardback; pp. xii, 462; 15 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £75.00; ISBN 9780754659716.

As with other volumes in the Variorum series, this collection offers a series of papers, articles and essays that span the professional life of the scholar concerned. In this case, Wendy Davies, a medievalist specializing in early medieval Wales and Brittany, is represented by eighteen essays, mostly on Welsh History. A second volume in the Variorum series, *Brittany in the Early Middle Ages: Texts and Societies*, provides access to Davies' writings on Brittany (CS, 924, Ashgate Variorum, 2009).

This collection's subtitle, *Texts and Societies*, gives insight to the different foci of the collection. The first ten papers deal with texts, in particular Davies' survey of a series of early Welsh charters. They cover a range of early legal issues, including land measurement, episcopal government and post-Roman settlements. The remaining papers deal with society, in particular early medieval Welsh society as shaped by its proximity to England.

The span of the essays (from 1972 to 2004) means that many changes in historical approach and even quality can be judged. Davies herself points to aspects of her earlier works that she now suggests could be revised, or where later scholarship now challenges an earlier interpretation. However, one of the chief values of the Variorum series (besides making accessible a range of scholarly works) is to show the evolution of an individual scholarly career. In Davies' case, her pioneering work on the charters stands the test of time, and one unchanging feature of her work is her scrupulous scholarship.

This feature of Davies' work is especially noteworthy, as Welsh history is a polemically charged field of study, especially material relating to Welsh interaction with the English in the early Middle Ages. Much of what passes as mainstream historical scholarship, including the proceedings of the Honourable Society of Cymrodorion and much that is taught in Welsh schools and universities, is shaped by the nationalist agenda of *Plaid Cymru*. These polemical influences are notably absent from Davies' writings, even though much of what she discusses (such as the interaction of Welsh princes with the English monarchy) is the same field that is so susceptible to this nationalist agenda. Instead Davies' work stands forth for its pioneering study of the

charters in particular, and for its commitment to honest scholarly scrutiny of issues central to Welsh identity.

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Goodall, Peter, ed., *Chaucer's Monk's Tale and Nun's Priest's Tale: An Annotated Bibliography, 1900–2000* (The Chaucer Bibliographies), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2009; cloth; pp. xviii, 338; R.R.P. US\$110.00; ISBN 9780802093202.

The *Nun's Priest's Tale* famously has the narrator quoting St Paul and exhorting his listeners to 'taketh the fruyt and lat the chaf be stille', and this tale has been especially fruitful in generating critical response, as the latest volume in the comprehensive Chaucer Bibliographies testifies. The *Nun's Priest's Tale* is paired here with the textually tricky *Monk's Tale*, regarded by the Host and by subsequent readers as probably the least engaging of the pilgrims' narratives and yet one which has provoked much literary and historical contextualisation.

Peter Goodall's introduction to this volume provides an excellent guide to the arrangement of the critical material surveyed, as well as summarizing the trajectory of critical response to the tales individually and collectively. The individual annotations are concise and thorough – and it is good to see so many Australian academics involved. The volume proper begins with noting nearly 200 editions, translations, modernisations and retellings of *The Canterbury Tales*: the magisterial Robinson OUP edition is sharply criticized for its poor Glossary and for not dealing with Chaucer's syntax; the Neville Coghill translation, beloved by students, but the bane of academics, goes unscathed. A further 50 manuscript and textual studies are most helpfully noted, followed by linguistic and lexical studies and those items that deal with Chaucer's wide-ranging source material.

Half-way through, the volume moves further into the tales by considering the Monk and the Nun's Priest as characters in their own right and grouping the studies that have explored the relationship between the teller and the tale, and between the pilgrims as individuals. The Nun's Priest himself has generated much critical controversy; often he is regarded as the archetypal unreliable narrator, while Derek Pearsall is convinced that he is 'the maturest and wittiest voice of the poet himself' (p. 149). The following section of the book deals with material relating to both tales, although the subtitle, 'The

Tales Together', is a little misleading since very few items combine their discussion of the two.

As a big fan of the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, I must admit that I turned first to the final section of the bibliography – to find nearly 300 items on this tale. As noted in the introduction to this section, the post-modern preference for ambivalence has vied with critical approaches that focus on rhetoric and allegory. With so much to plunge into, the notes provide a welcome guide that would enable scholars to focus their reading and to isolate gaps that might be filled, or directions not taken. In the preceding section, for instance, Goodall helpfully points out that relatively little historical research has been conducted on the *Monk's Tale* and thanks to his compilations it is easy to see that the *Nun's Priest's Tale* has been deluged with six times the volume of critical attention that *Monk's Tale* has received.

Overall, this is an indispensable guide to anyone interested in Chaucer – not only the Chaucer specialist, but any reader for whom the wealth of medieval lore contained in Chaucer studies is of interest. There is much to digest in this bibliography – though preferably without enduring the indisposition that the *Nun's Priest's Tale's* protagonist, Chanticleer, suffers.

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Grafton, Anthony, *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West*, Cambridge, MS, Harvard University Press, 2009; hardback; pp. 422; 5 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US\$29.95; ISBN 9780674032576.

Anthony Grafton is as much a polymath as the Early Modern scholars who are the focus of his work. This collection of essays, originally published between 1983 and 2008, ranges far and wide, from Leon Battista Alberti and Johannes Trithemius in the fifteenth century to Robert Morss Lovett and Hannah Arendt in the twentieth. A loosely unifying theme is provided by the nature of scholarship and the place of scholars in the intellectual communities of their times. Along the way, Grafton covers such diverse figures as Francis Bacon, Johannes Kepler, and Mark Pattison, together with such topics as the place of Latin in the modern world, the Jesuits as 'entrepreneurs of the soul' and 'impresarios of learning', and the relationship between Christian and Jewish learning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. All these highly specialized subjects are presented

with a lightness of touch and sharpness of style that belie Grafton's formidable scholarship and breadth of knowledge.

Some of the essays strike a more personal note. Arnaldo Momigliano was Grafton's own postgraduate supervisor in the 1970s, and one essay looks at the way in which Momigliano's intellectual development was shaped by the scholarly community at the Warburg Institute in London. Grafton's account of his father's attempt to write an article for *Look* magazine about Hannah Arendt, based on an interview with her at the height of the controversy over her book on Eichmann, is particularly interesting, being based partly on his own childhood memories and partly on the surviving documents. He also reviews the history of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, of which he is one of the editors; the result is an illuminating miniature history of the field of the 'history of ideas' over the last fifty years.

The essays that open and close the volume are those of the most general interest. Grafton begins with an overview of the Republic of Letters, that 'lost continent' of an interdisciplinary and international community of scholars which flourished in Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. He shows how, despite their confessional differences, these scholars managed to work out ways of communicating and exchanging ideas and learning across all fields of knowledge – both in formal societies and through informal contacts. Perhaps the most important means of communication was through letters, thousands of which survive to the present day.

His closing essay, 'Codex in Crisis: the Book Dematerializes', is a thoughtful and judicious consideration of the future of reading and libraries in a scholarly world dominated by Google and its global digitization project. While well aware of the benefits of instantaneous access to millions of electronic books, he sounds several cautionary notes. Google has left the digitization of the imprints of the Early Modern era to the large-scale commercial products of Chadwyck-Healey and Gale, and its digitized books have been plagued by poor metadata and inadequate Optical Character Recognition (OCR). More generally, he thinks, the future will not produce a universal digital library, nor a universal digital archive. While the present (1990 onwards) will be almost entirely accessible in digital form, anything earlier will only be represented by a patchwork of interfaces and databases. We will still need unique physical copies of books, together with the libraries to hold them, and we will still need 'serious' reading.

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