

This is a book with a great deal of potential. Case studies such as *Power, Politics and Episcopal Authority* provide a means to look beyond the local or regional and to engage with underlying similarities and differences in the political and religious positions of the bishops of Europe. Silvestri should be applauded for undertaking a difficult and ambitious exercise. However, this work is ultimately rather shallow, leans towards narrative, and adds little to the current debate.

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BEN SNOOK, *The Anglo-Saxon Chancery: The History, Language and Production of Anglo-Saxon Charters from Alfred to Edgar*. (Anglo-Saxon Studies 28.) Woodbridge, UK, and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2015. Pp. xvi, 234; 3 black-and-white figures and 37 tables. \$99. ISBN: 978-1-78327-006-4.  
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Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas, recording (in Snook's phrase) "where and when who gave what to whom" (1), seem on the face of it to offer slim pickings in terms of interest to anyone other than historians who routinely mine their contents for information about the constitution of the king's council and the estates these texts convey to ecclesiastical foundations and individuals. At their heart lies the straightforward record of a land transaction, but one flanked by an introduction and anathema frequently written in an impenetrable and verbose style often running to several hundred words. These texts were frequently reduced to their bare essentials by later copyists in the medieval period, and even when they appear in full, later readers frequently direct their contemporaries to the "vis et medulla" of the grant with what one imagines was an impatiently gesticulating marginal manicule. Ben Snook shows in fact that there is much to learn from these apparent incidentals and offers a new perspective on Latin learning in Anglo-Saxon England during the later ninth and tenth centuries through a close analysis of the language of these aspects of the texts. He shows that a succession of draftsmen, culminating particularly during Æthelstan's reign and in the work of the somewhat prosaically dubbed "Æthelstan A," showcased their learning in extravagant ways by larding the introductions to these texts with the most extraordinary language, freely adapted from the work of the immensely influential Latin writer, Aldhelm (d. 709/710).

Snook begins his story with the reign of Alfred, demonstrating that Aldhelm's work was read, understood, and imitated in such texts in ninth-century Mercia. Such knowledge, he argues, seems to have been much scantier in Wessex and Kent, where the limited use of Aldhelmian vocabulary suggests that the somewhat ordinary words that do appear may derive from a glossary rather than firsthand familiarity with the work of this most challenging author.

The undoubted highlight of the volume is the chapter dealing with charters produced during the reign of Æthelstan. For Snook, the extraordinary vocabulary of these charters coupled with an array of Aldhelmian rhetorical features together set out to prove "that the court was at the very cutting edge of England's vibrant intellectual culture" (84). He devotes a separate chapter to the highly accomplished prose of Æthelstan A, responsible for drafting nineteen surviving charters, whom he describes as "the foremost Anglo-Latinist of his generation" (107). Snook demonstrates through careful analysis, supported by a series of illustrative tables, how Æthelstan A artfully varies the wording of his texts with altered syntax and synonymous words and phrases, drawing from and emulating Aldhelm's work. This is followed by a discussion concerning Æthelstan A's possible identity, supporting Simon Keynes's suggestion that he might have been Ælfwine, bishop of Lichfield. After

Æthelstan A stopped copying, Snook argues there seems to have been a slight downturn in the innovative quality and style of the prose being produced. Interesting sections follow on the style of the rather curious sequence of alliterative charters produced between 940 and 957, and on the “Dunstan B” charters (closely associated with the archbishop of the same name), plain, to the point, and largely unadorned by hermeneutic vocabulary. Snook surmises that perhaps Dunstan was essentially saving such pyrotechnics for literary texts associated with the reform, in order “to announce that it was no longer the king’s court, but the Church that was at the scholarly cutting edge of Anglo-Saxon intellectualism” (146), a most suggestive but somewhat undersupported contention.

Snook’s final chapter deals with the charters produced during the reign of Edgar, which he attributes to the expansion of bureaucracy during the period. This chapter includes a discussion of a further draftsman, “Edgar A.” Charters issued during this period seem to have consciously looked back to the past for their models, and Edgar A seemed certainly to have drawn on a formulary in order to do so. Snook characterizes charter production during this period as a push towards standardization as the set elements (if not the phrasing) of these texts establish themselves.

Snook’s conclusion returns to the looming literary figure of Aldhelm, neatly arguing that the use of his writing “in the tenth century, or even in the ninth, does not in any way indicate any kind of ‘renaissance’ or ‘revival’ of Anglo-Saxon intellectualism; wherever and whenever there were Anglo-Saxons writing Latin, there was Aldhelm. He had never gone away” (192).

Snook’s monograph succeeds in highlighting the wider importance and interest of these texts in an engaging and articulate manner. There is, however, some lack of contextualization throughout and rather few concessions made to the audience. Although, for example, an attempt has been made to accommodate a more general readership by including topics in the introduction such as the history of the land charter in England, the editorial history of the corpus, the vexed issue of authenticity, and potential links with Europe—all useful to those not familiar with these difficult texts—there is nowhere an explanation of diplomatic terminology (such as *proem*, *invocation*, *dispositive clause*), all of which require at least some glossing to those readers new to the field. Nevertheless, for those prepared to engage with its contents, there is a great deal to enjoy and profit from in this book.

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ALESSIO SOPRACASA, *Venezia e l’Egitto alla fine del Medioevo: Le tariffe di Alessandria*. (Études Alexandrines 29; Alexandrie Médiévale 5.) Alexandria and Paris: Centre d’études alexandrines, 2013. Pp. 852; many black-and-white figures and tables. €40. ISBN: 978-2-11-128614-6.  
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Sopracasa presents three lengthy manuals detailing Venetian customs at Alexandria, two dating from the mid-fifteenth to early sixteenth century and one to the mid- to late sixteenth, and compares them to earlier *tariffe*. The manuals address practices and procedures, weights and measures, currency and precious metals, lists of merchandise, expenses incurred, and institutions and personnel encountered in import and export at Alexandria. The value of these manuscripts is enhanced by the fact that the author of one of the three was from a distinguished Venetian family, and he and his father were themselves actively involved in Alexandrian commerce. Sopracasa’s commentary and editions will be of interest to scholars researching legal, diplomatic, social, and cultural history and indispensable to future research in the economic history of the Mediterranean basin, North Africa, and