Guy, B.: *Medieval Welsh Genealogy: An Introduction and Textual Study*. Woodbridge: Boydell. Studies in Celtic History vol. XLII. 2020. xviii + 524 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78327-513-7. £90.00.

The most recent volume in Boydell's Studies in Celtic History Series is both an edition and a monograph. In recent years Ben Guy has emerged as one of the most energetic scholars working on the early medieval Brittonic-speaking world, publishing important articles on topics as wide ranging as the colonization of Brittany and the early textual history of *Historia Brittonum*. The present volume, which derives ultimately from his doctoral work, but which is far more than simply a published version of a dissertation, builds on and supersedes the groundbreaking work carried out by Peter Bartrum over the last half century. Both Bartrum and Guy have sought both to understand, explicate and make available significant portions of the surviving genealogical material that has come down to us from medieval Wales.

The present volume is made up of two halves. From p. 333 onwards we are given new editions of eleven of the most significant surviving collections of pedigrees, including manuscript variations and with any expansion clearly indicated and, where appropriate, commentary on readings and variants. The reader is thus exposed to a printed edition which comes as close to what they would encounter in the manuscripts as is possible yet still made immediately coherent and accessible. The first part of the book, up to p. 268, comprises a series of essays and pp. 268–332 comprise 'supporting' material, mainly in the form of stemma and other tabular representation of the relationship between surviving recensions as argued in the foregoing essays. This is certainly a book which shows its working and the value of the reference material in the editions and the 'supporting material' is such that this part of the book supersedes anything else available on the topic.

Chapter 1, 'Medieval Welsh Genealogy and its Contexts', is perhaps the part of the book that will prove most useful for undergraduate teaching. It comprises a discussion of why genealogical information was important in medieval Wales and how it compares with the wider practices of the Insular World. Guy draws a clear distinction between the practical requirement for almost every free man to know his pedigree back three or four generations, for purposes of inheritance and legal obligation, and those genealogies stretching much further back than this that were the product of scholarship and depended upon a written record. The popular view of oral lore informing bardic tradition is countered by drawing attention to the fact that Gerald of Wales, when discussing bardic custodianship of princely pedigrees, explicitly states that the bards 'have a genealogy of the aforementioned princes in their old and authentic books' (p. 32) and that the

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'Highland Scot' who recited the Scottish king Alexander III's pedigree back to Adam at his royal inauguration is said to have *read* it out (p. 37). This first chapter also discusses specifically how exegetic scholarship and classical learning fed into the production of the earliest levels of the pedigrees and how genealogy functioned to legitimize social order. He also points to the fact that surviving continental material tends to emphasise biblical and classical descent for entire *gentes* and is less interested in the segments of those *gentes* in the more recent past. Guy suggests that this is in part because of the 'plurality of kings in the Insular World' (p. 17). I am not entirely sure that I found this argument convincing, since both the Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties did segment, and we know that many non-royal aristocratic lineages in the Frankish kingdom and its successor states claimed descent from them. Possibly the different patterns of survival, by the time we get to the later Middle Ages, reflect issues of transmission (of which see below). The richness, in sheer quantity, of Carolingian texts, often blinds us to the extent to which they are thematically and geographically relatively constrained. This quibble aside, this introductory essay is a *tour de force* that should appear on reading lists for courses on both Welsh History and wider medieval studies.

Subsequent chapters in the first half of the book deal with different collections. Guy has organised them on the basis of shared prototype and much of each chapter is concerned with demonstrating that different surviving versions share a prototype and then identifying when and where this prototype is likely to have been compiled. Chapter 2 deals with the earliest and best know collection which derives from a collection of pedigrees a number of which function to show quite how royal Owain, king of Deheubarth from c. 950–988, was. This collection is best known through the version that was preserved in MS Harley 3859 where it was interpolated into *Historia Brittonum*, indeed it is probably the best known of all Welsh pedigree collections and has often been mined for its 'plausible' information relating to the sixth and seventh centuries. Guy demonstrates that although the extant version of this collection goes back to a recension made at St David's in Owain's lifetime the bulk of the material available to the compiler at that stage had probably already been put together in Gwynedd c. 870. As a Scottish historian I was slightly disappointed that he did not provide an ingenious solution as to why material relating to the alleged descendants of Coel Hen travelled with this collection when no link to Owain's pedigree is presented and the latest individuals in this group (if truly historical) seem to have lived in the early seventh century, but I have no alternative solution and this may simply remain intractable. One of the more original contributions in this chapter was Guy's demonstration that the hagiographical writers at Llancarfan, in Glamorgan, had access to a version of the St David's recension in the decades around 1100. Indeed, throughout this book the author is able to identify connections and communications between religious houses across Wales and the March.

Chapter 3 follows a similar analysis of the related collection of pedigrees found in Oxford MS Jesus 20, identifying the two main sources and the significance of a set of pedigrees relating to the tenth-century king Morgan ab Owain, from whom Glamorgan was named and whose ancestors are conspicuously absent from the northern and western material in the St David's recension. A key horizon in the compilation of some of the material that ended up in the Jesus collection seems to have been the period immediately following the Council of Aberdyfi in 1216 when the king of Gwynedd, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, as Prince of Wales, recognised Rhys Gryg as the preeminent ruler in Deheubarth. This material was principally a reworked and augmented version of the St David's collection to which was added a series of pedigrees, probably put together at Llancarfan, which included the Morgannwg and south-eastern material. Jesus 20 as it stands is a manuscript of around 1400 but Guy makes a good case that the material it contains had already been brought together before 1300.

Chapter 4 is, in some ways, and certainly to an early medievalist like myself, the most challenging. Here Guy makes, and sustains, a case that another group of pedigrees that seemed to have travelled together were originally put together at some point towards the middle of the reign of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth (r. 1200–1240). This material is not so well known to medievalists since although many manuscripts bear witness to it in part or in whole few if any of them are actually from the medieval period. A huge portion of this chapter (pp. 159–200) comprises a painstaking account and analysis of the work of antiquarians between the late fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries. The number of witnesses to some or all the material in what Guy labels 'The Llywelyn ab Iorwerth Genealogies' is truly bewildering and at times this reader almost despaired of making sense of it. Guy's account and analysis remains, however, very important. So much of what has come down to us from Wales in the preconquest period is dependent on the interest of early modern collectors and copyists and their correspondence with one another. Indeed, one is tempted to argue that it is the existence of such people in early modern Wales that has created the distinctive appearance of medieval Wales. In Scotland (or indeed England) we have no such pedigree tradition save a single very meagre collection from the eleventh century ('clan' pedigrees have a genuine earliest horizon in the thirteenth century and were probably not compiled before the mid-fourteenth at the earliest) but reading this chapter, I was led to wonder if this was largely because of the different character of the lesser gentry and clergy of early modern Scotland from those in Wales, rather than actual differences in aristocratic and clerical interests in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The way in which the *uchelwyr*, the gentry of postconquest Wales into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, represented a cultural continuity from the circles around native kings prior to the conquest, has long been recognised by students of Welsh poetry but here we are also shown their role in the preservation and reproduction of another princely literary form. What I did find myself thinking whilst reading

Guy's tightly focused textual history in this chapter was whether this material could be redeployed to give an account of these copyists and collectors in their own right—something like Mary-Ann Constantine's work on Thomas Pennant and his Enlightenment milieu, but stretching further back into the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries. Perhaps this exists and it is merely my ignorance that is here being exposed?

The final substantive chapter looks at the way that the 'prehistoric' portions of the pedigrees of the kings of Gwynedd were expanded subsequent to the establishment of the canonical historical line found in the St David's Recension. In the ninth century the apical figure of this dynasty was imagined to be Cunedda who supposedly came to North Wales from Manaw on the Firth of Forth in modern Scotland. This chapter looks at the various ancestries that were developed for him, first from Beli Mawr, who was allegedly married to a cousin of the Virgin Mary (and who may in some convoluted way derive from the historical Cunobelinus (*fl.* 30 CE)), and then beyond him to Adam via the wilder shores of Irish pseudo-history with a good seasoning of Geoffrey of Monmouth thrown in. One interesting bit of trivia that caught my eye here was the discussion of the relationship between the Welsh genealogical figure *Annhun rex Grecorum* and the Irish pseudo-historical character Agnoman, the father of the early colonist Nemed, whose descendants became the legendary people known as the Fir Bolg (pp. 238–239). Guy reminds us that 'Builc and his people' appear in *Historia Brittonum*, where they are said to have settled on the Isle of Man and the other islands around it, and that some versions of the Irish *Lebor Gabála Érenn* specify Aran, Islay and Rathlin amongst these islands. On the one hand this might be taken for some kind of origin legend for the Gall-Ghàidheil or the Kingdom of the Isles but for the fact that *Historia Brittonum* predates the establishment of either of these polities. Instead, it is possible that the location of these people in this region comes from a false etymology of the term *Muir Builc*, 'sea-bag', that seems to have been applied to the waters where Britain and Ireland lay closest together.

In his Coda (pp. 265–267), Guy summarises by emphasising that 'literary genealogy' was a 'distinct and pervasive phenomenon' in Medieval Wales. The stress here should probably be on *literary*. 'Begats' were not simply listed and reiterated in slavish repetition, with variation to be attributed to scribal error, but instead the compilation, editing, and contextualising within collections, helped to shape and reshape the past in usable ways. Genealogy was a genre not simply a form. Ben Guy has demonstrated this in an exemplary fashion. As well as pages of closely argued and heavily referenced text he has also supplied copious tables, comparing variants, and diagrammatic stemma indicating how he believes extant collections came together. Even if much of the main text is perhaps too challenging for many students these illustrations can be extracted and used for teaching introductory classes or introducing seminars to the complexity of the

material whilst at the same time persuading them that despite its complexity this material is not intractable and that the path Guy has laid out for us can be followed by others. This is a magisterial work that will entirely transform the subject area.

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