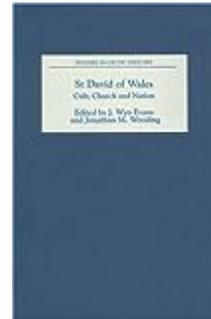




J. Wyn Evans, Jonathan M. Wooding, eds. *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007. xiv + 391 pp. \$105.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84383-322-2.



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St David, Europe and the Spread of His Cult

St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation is the result of a conference held at the University of Wales, Lampeter in 2002 to commemorate the fourteenth centenary of the death of St David, the patron saint of Wales. This collection of twenty-one articles is the first comprehensive attempt to provide a study of the life of David, the location and spread of his cult, and the role he played in Welsh life, and as such is a significant landmark for those studying both Welsh history and hagiography in general.

Grouped into five subsections, the essays in this volume cover the history of St David and his diocese from the sixth to the twentieth centuries. Three aspects of this collection stand out however, and it is the essays which touch on these areas that I would like to concentrate on. The first of these is the role of St David's cathedral on a European level. J. Wyn Evans, in his discussion of the transition and survival of the saint and his cathedral, notes the ways in which the see of St David's was linked to Europe by Gerald of Wales, who tried to create the impression "that the church of St David's was fully integrated into the wider church" through his *Vita*, and by linking the cathedral to wider European movements,

such as recruitment for the Third Crusade in 1188 (p. 31). Mark Rednap provides archaeological evidence for links between St David's and the Hiberno-Norse world, and Jane Cartright and Bernard Tanguy continue the collection with a consideration of the cults of Saints David and Non in a European context, specifically through their links with Brittany. In many ways the setting of St David's in a European context was central to the conflict between St David's and the archbishopric of Canterbury in the twelfth and thirteenth century, as discussed by Huw Pryce (esp. pp. 306-307).

The second important aspect of this collection, as noted by Wooding in his introductory essay, are the studies on the relics of St David, which form the fifth section of the collection. The relics and body of St David appear to have been lost in a raid on St David's in 1081, and despite the status of St David's as a pilgrimage site, it seems that there was no shrine there for most of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (pp. 274-275). In 1275 however, after a vision revealed the location of the saint's body to John de Gamages, a Benedictine monk of Gloucester, work on a shrine at St David's began. Fred Cowley sug-

gests that the convenient discovery in 1275 was a way for St David's cathedral to "recoup its losses, to enhance the status of the cathedral as a pilgrimage centre, and give a new stimulus to the practise of pilgrimage" (p. 278). Recent conflict in south Wales had had a detrimental impact on the number of pilgrims and the collection of revenue from episcopal estates. John de Gamages, moreover, may have "discovered" the body as "a means of obtaining the assistance of the bishop and chapter of St David's in recovering two properties in the diocese which Gloucester abbey had lost in the twelfth century" (p. 278). The relics were appropriated for political as much as religious ends, as Cowley explains Edward I took the head of St David as a symbol of his power over Wales. The various relics of St David disappeared from historical view in the 1540s. In 1866, some bones were discovered in a niche during building work, and the idea that they were the bones of David gained momentum. Once again, in 1920, the bones were recovered, placed in a new reliquary, and used to attract pilgrims. It was, suggests Fred Cowley, Dean Williams's way to secure funding for his cathedral after the Act of Disestablishment divided the church in Wales from that in England in June 1920.

Dispute over the validity of the bones continues, it seems, and it is these that T. F. G. Higham, C. Bronk Ramsey, and L. D. M. Nokes radiocarbon date. They note in their introduction that the remains of three individuals formed the collection of bones in the casket (p. 282), and their test results concluded that none of the fragments were sufficiently old to be those of David. The development of the shrine in the 1920s and 1930s is further explored by John Morgan Guy's article "Shrine and Counter-Shrine." At the same time that Dean Williams

was attracting people to his new shrine, C. H. Morgan Griffiths was building a Roman Catholic chapel (St Non's) at St David's; the "church's claim to being the true Catholic Church in Wales, and its people's true spiritual home" (p. 295). Together, these articles highlight the role of the relics and attendant cult of St David's in bolstering both the finances and the status of the cathedral church.

They are part of the wider propaganda surrounding the saint, which was more carefully "crafted" in Rhygyfarch's *Life* of St David, originally written at the end of the eleventh century. It is the study of BL MS Cotton Vespasian A. XIV (V), probably the manuscript closest to Rhygyfarch's work, that forms the third, and arguably most important, aspect of *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation*. Richard Sharpe provides a detailed and convincing vindication of why Rhygyfarch's work needs reassessing; his explanation of the historiography of the study of the saint's life during the twentieth century highlights in particular how false assumptions and errors of dating led John Williams James to overlook the Vespasian MS (p. 92) when he produced an edition of the *Life* in 1967. The text of the manuscript which follows, masterfully edited and translated by Richard Sharpe and John Reuban Davies, is undoubtedly the jewel of this collection, as it is the only publication of the manuscript version believed to be closest to Rhygyfarch's lost original.

St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation provides much of interest both for those new to the patron saint of Wales and those who are familiar with the life and times of the saint and his diocese. There is certainly a wealth of information and detailed research here—in some cases the individual articles can in fact be too long—and there is an excellent bibliography for those wishing to go further.

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