

Early Medieval Britain, c. 500–1000

Blending an engaging narrative with clear explanations of key themes and sources, this undergraduate textbook deconstructs the early history of Britain's island nations within an accessible framework. Using extensive illustrations, maps and selections from crucial primary sources, students will examine the island as a collective entity, comparing political histories and institutions as well as societies, beliefs and economies. Each chapter foregrounds questions of identity and the meaning of 'Britain' in this period, encouraging interrogation and contextualisation of sources, including the latest debates and problems. Featuring timelines, a glossary, end of chapter questions, suggestions for further reading and a companion website, students can drive their own understanding of how the polities and societies of early medieval Britain fitted together and into the wider world, and firmly grasp the formative stages and developments of British history.

Rory Naismith has published extensively on early medieval history, including *Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: The Southern English Kingdoms 757–865* (2012), *Medieval European Coinage 8: Britain and Ireland c. 400–1066* (2017) and *Citadel of the Saxons: The Rise of Early London* (2018).

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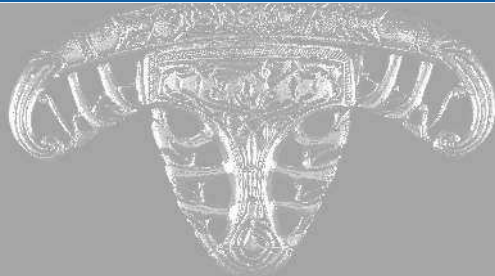
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Preface and Acknowledgements

This volume is written to provide students with an introduction to early medieval Britain: what happened, why and how to understand where the information comes from. It gives an outline of key chronological developments, and looks at larger themes, including the idea of Britain and the island's place in contemporary Europe. The chapters are divided into three sections on 'Conceiving Early Medieval Britain' (which concentrates on ideas), 'Making Early Medieval Britain' (which concentrates on chronologically specific developments) and 'Living in Early Medieval Britain' (which concentrates on broader cultural and social developments).

The book is, it should be stressed, about Britain, at a time when the island was divided by language, culture and politics. For that reason there is a lot of comparison: setting one area alongside others, with important differences in how they worked. I have sought to include examples and discussion from multiple parts of Britain in every chapter, but inevitably balance and coverage is uneven. This is a result, above all, of what sources survive from the period; for some parts of the island on some topics, virtually nothing is known. Certain areas are outside the remit of reliable written history for the entirety of this period. Conversely, some areas are very well covered. Where the balance in a given chapter swings more towards one region or tradition, it is partly a response to what is available, but also out of an effort to present a coherent and informative approach. I have, wherever possible, noted ways in which details from one region might reflect what was going on elsewhere in areas less favoured in their surviving sources.

A number of practical points should be laid out here. The first relates to language. Early medieval Britain had multiple languages, each with its own spelling conventions. These referred to the same people and places differently, and in some cases there are also separate conventions in modern scholarship depending on various national or disciplinary traditions. In this book, names of places and individuals are generally given in the most familiar modern English form: hence London for *Londinium*, *Londonia*, *Lunden* or *Lundenburh*, and Alfred the Great for *Ælfræd*. Rulers of Alba in the ninth and tenth centuries are often now referred to using the medieval Gaelic or Middle Irish form (e.g. Causantín or Constantín) in order to underline the dominant language of the kingdom at that time, though for the sake of clarity this volume will primarily use the modern English equivalent if one exists (e.g. Constantine).

XII ❧ PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Each chapter is set up to include an initial overview paragraph, which functions as an abstract. The main text is complemented by boxes, most of which contain extracts from key sources, or discussion of particular methods or issues. All are provided in translation, with a note in the caption of which language the original was in. At the end of each chapter will be found a selection of ‘key texts’. These are chosen to emphasise general issues raised in each chapter: a fuller list of further reading can be found at the end of this volume and on the associated website, including all works directly used in writing each chapter. Also at the end of each chapter is a series of ‘points for discussion’. These are not meant to have easy, simple answers: many of them are versions of the questions that professional historians are still tackling. They are meant as a starting point for broader thinking on the topic.

A great many friends and colleagues gave their help and support towards the completion of this volume. I am grateful to Liz Friend-Smith for the initial invitation to write this book, and to her and Stefanie Seaton for friendly editorial support throughout the process. They contacted a number of anonymous peer reviewers who looked at individual chapters, and collectively provided very helpful feedback. Amy Mower oversaw production, and Charles Phillips provided expert copy-editing. The finished volume owes a great deal to all of them.

The format of this volume, which does not include full annotation, means that the work of a great many scholars is condensed in the main text. Specialist readers will be able to identify the sources on which I have drawn, and all are included in the key texts or further reading for each chapter. But I would like here to underline that the arguments and approaches in this book are based on the excellent research of a great many other historians, archaeologists and others: my respect for their achievement is great and sincere, even if of necessity it must generally be silent.

I would also like to thank specific friends and colleagues for their help in bringing this book to completion. Nancy Edwards and Alex Woolf provided access to scholarship that was not easily consulted during the Coronavirus lockdown of 2020. Alex, along with Ben Guy, Paul Russell, Rebecca Thomas and Francesca Tinti, answered questions or discussed specific points of interest, and Alex and Francesca both read and commented on substantial portions of the text. Rebecca also translated passages of medieval Welsh, while Máire Ní Mhaonaigh translated passages of Middle Irish and Brittany Schorn those in Old Norse. Michelle Brown and Michael Winterbottom both kindly granted permission for their translations to be reproduced here, and several institutions or organisations allowed their images to be used free of charge. Finally, my wife Brittany Schorn read all chapters in draft and provided invaluable and insightful feedback.

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