



Richard Huscroft, *Making England, 796-1042* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2018). Print, 306pp., £110, ISBN: 9781138182455.

Review

In this volume, intended as a companion to his 2005 book, *Ruling England, 1042-1217*, Huscroft undertakes to provide a narrative history of political events in England from the death of Offa of Mercia (796) to the ascension of Edward the Confessor to the English throne (1042). In content and methodology it is Anglo-centric, driven by chronology and narrative, and focused on the exercise of political power. None of this is inherently problematic, and all these limitations on the scope of the volume are noted by Huscroft in his preface, with the book situated as an introduction to the topic for students. It does, however, mean that the history presented herein is not intended as an innovative approach to early medieval political culture, so much as a synthesis of pre-existing research. In this, *Making England* is probably best characterised as a textbook and it is in that spirit that this review will proceed.

There is much to recommend *Making England* as an introduction to the political history of pre-Norman England. The introductory materials provided in the volume represent a useful collection of summarised information for a textbook, allowing readers to contextualise the narrative of Anglo-Saxon history. Huscroft provides a six-page chronology of key events, four well-presented maps depicting the political transition of territorial influence between 800 and 1050, and includes some select regnal lists and genealogies. These speak to Huscroft's background in pedagogy and an understanding that such visual aids can help readers make sense of a complex chronological history.

The transition of the disparate Anglo-Kingdoms of the late eighth century to a single centralised administration is not a simple tale to tell, and Huscroft does well

to construct a clean and concise narrative. In part, this is because he refuses to be drawn by the digressions that tempt many other historians of the period. Thus, rather than engaging scholarly debates on matters such as whether the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is dynastic propaganda, or who killed Edward the Martyr, Huscroft apporitions brief isolated sections of text to introducing, but not partaking in, the discussion. There are ten such text boxes throughout the volume, indexed in a separate contents page – a valuable approach and resource for a student audience.

The main text is logically structured and is divided into three sections, delineated by the deaths of Alfred (899), Edgar (975), and Harthacnut (1042). Each section is constructed of four chapters. The first provides a chronological account of the main political and military events and developments in each period, the second deals with the evolution of government and governance, the third with legal culture, and the last with ecclesiastical governance and the relationship between church and king. Each of these is necessarily brief given the nature of the book, and Huscroft should be commended for distilling the political history of Anglo-Saxon England into precise, digestible prose for a non-expert audience.

References throughout the text are minimal and take the form of endnotes located at the end of each chapter. This is augmented by a 'suggested further reading' section toward the end of the book, separated both into general thematic works and texts that support individual chapters. As a bibliography, it is far from exhaustive and can be characterised as orthodox and somewhat dated. Nonetheless, it should provide a starting point for students' further research and it seems likely that, at least in part, Huscroft has selected these recommended texts as readings that are broadly accessible (in a way that scholarly literature is often not for those without institutional access).

Making England is eminently readable and provides a concise overview of late Anglo-Saxon political history and the systems of governance that informed its evolution. As a textbook it will be of interest to librarians and teachers to support medieval survey courses up to an undergraduate level and, moreover, *Making England* is capable of finding a wider readership in a popular audience.

Matthew Firth

Flinders University



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).