

'Maritime Wales in the Middle Ages'

McGuinness, Shaun

## Archaeologia Cambrensis

Published: 01/01/2017

Peer reviewed version

[Cyswllt i'r cyhoeddiad / Link to publication](#)

*Dyfyniad o'r fersiwn a gyhoeddwyd / Citation for published version (APA):*  
McGuinness, S. (2017). 'Maritime Wales in the Middle Ages': Book Review. *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 166, 350-351.

### Hawliau Cyffredinol / General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**K. L. Gruffydd, *Maritime Wales in the Middle Ages: 1039-1542* (Wrexham, 2016).**

In his preface, Ken Lloyd Gruffydd maintains that general histories of Wales often neglect to mention, or attribute sufficient attention to, the significance of the role of coastal and inland water transport. As such a central aim of his book is to address that deficiency for the period from the ascendancy of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn to the 'Acts of Union'. The author makes it clear that the chapters of the book largely reproduce the contents of articles written by him for the journal *Cymru a'r Môr/MaritimeWales* (ten such articles are listed in the Bibliography, as well as one '*Llafur*' article, 1985 to 2006 inclusive) with relevant revision where subsequent research has made it necessary. The result is 'a collection of selected essays'.

The first chapter details the histories of the Welsh kings and princes to 1283, and, whilst far more detailed histories are available, the aim of the author was presumably to give those with little or no knowledge of medieval Wales the context in which to understand his discussion of maritime events. The next two chapters are dedicated to the governance of Wales during the post-Edwardian-conquest period, and concern, firstly, Defence and Settlement, and secondly, Mobilizing Offensives. The remaining six chapters concentrate on specific elements, including: types of ships employed, their construction and those who sailed in them; the changing economy, and the consequent effects on coastal traffic, with an explanation of Welsh society as pertinent to that discussion; the export trade (in particular wool exports, and later, the trade in cloth made possible by advances in the fulling process); import organisation and practices; commodities imported (especially wine, salt, iron, and interestingly, fish); and finally, pirates, privateers, and shipwreck.

There are copious illustrations, drawings, maps, tables, and graphs to which the reader is referred in the narrative. A helpful glossary of relevant terms is also provided. As well as maps detailing successful voyages undertaken by, amongst others, Gruffudd ap Cynan (and his contemporaries), and, later, Jasper Tudor, there is a map showing where ships which were not so fortunate were wrecked on the Welsh coast. Illustrations of vessels are provided, including evidence from Welsh borough seals, and, in one instance, an image of a carving from a gravestone now in the porch of Llanfaglan church, thought to represent the type of ship that may have visited the nearby port of Abermenai (p. 83). There are charts detailing the Welsh ports where wine was prised, and the frequency of use of Welsh ports in general. The names of vessels (when recorded in the primary sources), and their ports of origin, are given, including, for example, *La Damaysel* which brought supplies to the beleaguered English garrison of Deganwy in the winter of 1245/6 (p.13).

There is an interesting discussion (p. 143) of the special permission required from the English crown, in times of conflict, before a ship could proceed overseas for foodstuffs due to the fear of 'unprincipled speculators' working a better deal with the Welsh princes. This could help explain an incident (that I could not see mentioned in the book) in which a ship laden with corn, at the behest of Cadwgan, bishop of Bangor, for the sustenance of the poor

in Wales, was detained in an Irish port in 1234, prompting the bishop to seek Henry III's help (see *Cal. Close Rolls, 1231-1234*, p. 417, and *Cal. Doc. Ireland, 1171-1251*, p. 313).

A wide range of secondary material has been consulted, and many well-established printed editions of primary sources (including cartularies, chronicles, Chancery rolls, customs accounts, port books, the Welsh laws, as well as prose and poetry) are employed to good effect. All are referenced in a reader-friendly manner. More recent scholarship, such as J. Bezant's chapter 'Travel and Communication' in *Monastic Wales* (2013), has been utilised. Coverage is, therefore, commendably comprehensive.

However, further evidence worth considering includes the discussion of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's naval strategy in M. and S. Davies, *The Last King of Wales* (2012), referencing the additional primary source of Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*. For Gruffudd ap Cynan, another valuable source is P. Russell (ed.), *Vita Griffini Filii Conani: The Medieval Latin Life of Gruffudd Ap Cynan* (2005), which records that Gruffudd bequeathed the harbour dues of Abermenai to his wife Angharad (Russell, *Vita*, pp. 88-9). Whilst H. Pryce (ed.), *The Acts of Welsh Rulers* (the 2005 edition appearing in the Bibliography amongst 'Secondary Sources', and not 'Printed Sources') is used to cite the clause which granted the Cistercian abbey of Aberconwy valuable rights of shipwreck in Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's charter of 1199 (pp. 219-20), the probability that the charter is spurious (albeit still possibly a later product of the same house), as is suggested by Pryce, is worth noting. Further, another charter, given supposedly to the same abbey on the same day by the same prince, granted the right of 'crossing' the river Conwy (Pryce, *Acts*, p. 348).

Archaeological evidence is discussed. The felled timbers of the wreck discovered at Magor Pill have been dendrochronologically dated to 1239 X 40 (p.114), and geochemical analysis of the boat's cargo of iron ore, and yellow ochre, has pinpointed the site(s) of its extraction, and therefore the overland route by which it was most probably transported to the shore. Indeed, the book considers other matters relating to the coastal hinterland such as the responsibility, often communal, for keeping watch for enemy ships, together with fines imposed for failing to do so, e.g. 10s. 0d. for one night's missed watch imposed on the Anglesey community of Llifon in 1323 (pp.34-5).

A history covering 500 years is a tremendous undertaking, and K. L. Gruffydd's book is a welcome addition to the historiography of medieval Wales. It will appeal both to professional scholars, and to a wider non-academic readership. The author expressed the hope that his study would stimulate an interest in Welsh medieval maritime history. It deserves to do just that.

S. D. McGuinness

Prifysgol Bangor University