Beginning as a pair of sessions at the Fifteenth Leeds International Medieval Congress in 2008, The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture contains much to please a wide range of medievalists. Numbered nine, the core chapters of the volume present a rich range of perspectives on the contact points and interstices of oceanic imagination and national identity. The volume is a valuable addition to our understanding of medieval notions of Englishness and of England, and yet also reveals much about diverse medieval thought-worlds, the myriad tropes of insular identity, and the history of the ocean in the process.

The volume is well served by the introductory essay, 'Edgar's Archipelago' (pp.1-30), launching the discussion with the sentiment, originally voiced by David Baker, that ‘Britain isn't an entity, it's an argument’ (p.1). Beginning with the notion that '[w]hat has historically delimited and therefore defined insular Britons is the sea with its all-encircling boundary, the shoreline’ (p. 2), Sebastian Sobecki outlines ‘King Edgar's legendary title to archipelagic domination’ and its historical reception up to modernity (p.3). By doing so, Sobecki grounds the context of discussion and highlights the vast scope of the receptions and interpretations it enables.

The essays proper begin with a strong thread of Anglo-Saxon insular identity. These essays will be of interest not only to those interested in English identity and thalassologies, but those with an interest in Anglo-Saxon spirituality and self-imagination. The first of the essays, 'The Spiritual Islascalpe of the Anglo-Saxons' by Winfried Rudolf, draws on Anglo-Saxon religious writings in order to sketch out a spiritual identity driven by the dual forces of spiritual peace and of imprisonment of self-definition through insularity (pp.32-33). Next, Fabienne Michelet's 'Lost at Sea' focuses very profitably on the intersections between Old English myths of the 'founding migration' to the British Isles (p.60) and the historical, biblical and cultural character of the anxieties contained within. 'Edges and Otherworlds: Imagining Tidal Space in Early Medieval Britain', by Catherine A.M. Clarke, explores the mutable, permeable edges produced by the interaction of land and water’ (p.81), presenting a compelling image of their fraught interactions and the end of human power at the ocean shore.

The second major focus of the volume is the wide variety of possibilities for study presented by later medieval literatures. In 'East Anglia and the Sea in the Narratives of the Vie de St Edmund and Waldef', Judith Weiss presents an Anglo-Norman rendering of English oceanic identity through two contrasting attitudes to the sea, one optimistic, the other pessimistic (p.103). Weiss presents an understanding of the ocean nuanced by the competing forces of triumphal religious imagery in the late twelfth-century Vie and a more cynical imagining of political strife through oceanic turbulence in the anonymous early thirteenth-century romance, Waldef. In 'The Sea and Border Crossings in the Alliterative Morte Arthure', Kathy Lavezzo studies the simultaneous awareness of insular roots and of expansion into imperialism in the narrative of the Morte Arthure in which disregard for British insularity in the form of continental conquest leads to the ultimate collapse of an Arthurian empire (p.117).

Alfred Hiatt's “From Hulle to Cartage”: Maps, England, and the Sea identifies 'a growth of interest in the production of relatively detailed maps of Britain’ in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (p.141), focusing on a wide range of mappae mundi and navigational charts in which ‘England's insularity was always recorded on the world image, but rarely emphasised,’ and the implications of this trend for our understanding of British identity (p.146). In the final essay of this central bloc, Jonathan Hsy's 'Lingua Franca: Overseas Travel and Language Contact in The Book of Margery Kempe' explores the manner in which ‘the Book conjoins travel and cross-linguistic exchange and troubles unitary conceptions of “Englishness”’ (p.161). Hsy presents a compelling
‘fluid, dynamic sort of linguistic exchange’ (p.165) across the ocean blended with the ‘imminently portable’ Englishness of Margery herself (p.178).

In the final section of the volume, the focus shifts to Victorian England, beginning with “‘Birthplace for the Poetry of the Sea-ruling Nation”: Stopford Brooke and Old English’ by Chris Jones. The essay sounds out the resonances imagined by Victorian literary historian Stopford Brooke between the early English mastery of the sea in Old English literature and the Victorian naval supremacy of the nineteenth century (pp.193-194). In 'Ruling the Waves', Joanne Parker takes a different approach to Victorian cultural imagination and identity, exploring the nostalgia and cultural legacy associated with the Saxons and Vikings. Through a study of Victorian understandings of Saxon and Viking interactions with the British Isles, Parker argues that Victorian Anglo-Saxonism ‘was already moving away from the simplistic English nationalism with which it is commonly associated’ towards ‘an increasing interest in questions of union, hybridity, and mixed nationality’ (p.206).

At a time when awareness of the ocean as an object of discursive interest has been expanded by books in the vein of Sobecki's *The Sea and Medieval English Literature* (2008), Steven Mentz's *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (2009), and Margaret Cohen's *The Novel and the Sea* (2010), *The Sea and Englishness* presents a rich array of new studies to augment and enrich an already vibrant field. Sobecki and his collaborators have expanded the scope and focus of the ocean in medieval literature to include new voices, new perspectives, and a compelling glimpse of a nascent and ambiguous national identity in the making. In the conclusion to the volume, entitled 'Sea, Island, Mud', David Wallace ends with an image from the *Morte Arthure* of King Arthur stuck in the mud, neither in sea nor on land and unable to reach either (p.207). This is an entirely fitting conclusion, for *The Sea and Englishness* demonstrates that English identity is and was a constant struggle against the pull of land and ocean alike, a hybrid existence at the edge of earth and water.

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