

Deconstruction Exercise

John Cooper-Hammond

Student N^o: 2022129

Assigned readings

Chosen: the following articles/chapters read.

- Janet E Burton, '[Authority and Conflict at the Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida](#),' *Welsh History Review/Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, 29/3 (2019), pp. 377–407.
- Harriett R Webster, '[The Annals of Dunstable Priory: From Living Memory to Written Record in a Thirteenth-Century Textual Community](#),' *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* 9 (2020), pp. 147—173.

Hereinafter identified as Burton or Webster

Questions to consider

When reading through the articles, think about the following:

- How do you think the authors came up with the ideas for the research which led to these publications?

From footnotes it can be seen that the authors were already interested and involved with the topics of the research. Out of this has arisen a point of interest that has led to the posing of an academic question. [for example: Webster: who were the authors of the annals? Burton: having noted comments about conflict, what was the effect of conflict on the authority of the abbey and the order?]

- How do you think the authors actually *did* the research that led to these publications?

By reference to relevant texts of the period and investigating the thoughts and comments of scholarship undertaken in similar themes and places.

- What primary sources are used by the authors?

Webster: Manuscripts; previously printed copies of manuscripts and, where appropriate and available, their translations.

Burton: Manuscripts; previously printed copies of manuscripts and, where appropriate and available their translations. Learned texts relevant to the topic in books and journals. Appropriate websites

- Why do you think the authors chose these particular types of primary sources?

They provide first-hand source material and more readily accessible versions. Along with suitably relevant texts to reinforce and support the statements and arguments put forward.

Deconstruction Exercise

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- Where and how do you think the authors accessed the particular primary sources that are used?

Webster: Manuscripts located at the British Library accessed either in person on site or via the online digital versions. The prime source, Cotton MS Tiberius A.X could not be accessed due to its very frail condition.

Burton: Manuscripts and documents from archives and the output of specialist societies. Printed materials via the British Library or from academic libraries of universities and other learned institutions. Relevant websites

- Can you identify instances where the authors have accessed materials from archives or other specialist repositories? And if so, which?

Webster: Royal manuscripts and a Cotton manuscript within the British Library's collection.

Burton: The National Archives; Public Records Office; specialist societies (e.g. Cantilupe, Canterbury and York); local historical and archaeological societies (e.g. Ceredigion)

- Can you identify instances where the authors may have accessed materials from online collections or databases? And if so, which?

Webster: the digital manuscripts put on-line by the British Library would have been convenient.

Burton: Reference is made to two websites: *Monastic Wales* and *Gut'o Glyn*.

However other evidence does not appear, but supposition would lead one to think that the on-line access could well have been used, as the Public Record Office and National Archives have an on-line presence which allows access to documents. The *Cantilupe Society* material is available from on-line sources (e.g. the *Royal Historical Society/ Pennsylvania University*); many local historical societies now have on-line archives of their journals (e.g. Ceredigion – Journals of the Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society). In addition, *British History Online* has relevant information (e.g. *Calendars of Inquisitions Post Mortem*).

- How do the authors' use of primary sources inform their arguments? In what ways do the primary sources add to the historiographical debates which the article/chapters contribute to?

Webster: in this instance the primary sources are the things under particular scrutiny. In order to ascertain the authorship of the *Annals of Dunstable Priory* requires careful reading and examination of the *Annals* themselves – they are the source material. As the author points out, the *Annals* provide '...some of the most comprehensive illustrations of life in the medieval period. ... [p148]' The use of other manuscripts enabled the cross checking of the veracity of the information given in the *Annals*.

Deconstruction Exercise

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It is also stated that the authorship has been ‘... a source of discussion since the nineteenth century...’[p148], so new investigations on this topic provides a development in the historiographic story of the *Annals*. Then author herself point out that as well as the facts, the descriptions of the times, people and places of the content of the pages, the *Annals* ‘... helps us to understand and ask deeper questions about the communication and spread of information ...’ and suggests that studies of annals, such as theses, might ‘...be the basis for new forms of microhistorical research ... or using computational methodologies such as network theory analysis to understand .. the complex web of influences in medieval society.’ She states that it could well be developed with other matters ‘... to provide the next generation of social histories of the Middle Ages.’ [p 172]. Not only does this study further the historiographical work on the *Annals*, but it also points to their use in further developing the field.

Burton: (it should be noted that Professor Burton is a well known figure in the field of medieval monastic studies, especially in the fields of Cistercian studies and Welsh monasteries) Having noted that mention has been made of conflict in Cistercian houses and particularly about the Welsh Strata Florida Abbey/Abaty Ystrad Fflur, the author has investigated this example, as she notes ‘... for the first time.’[p377]. The abbey was not only the first Cistercian house to have a Welsh lord as founder, but was also located in *Pura Wallia*. The primary sources’ importance lie in the new line of research for they provide all the evidence for the incidents under investigation. In addition they also allow them to be set in the context of the time, the Cistercian order and to compared and contrasted with other similar events. This new ‘grist to the mill’ provides new knowledge and insights into the Cistercians and their houses, and do events happening within them, but also into Wales, pre-English conquest and in a time of war and invasion and the changes they wrought. In the use and inclusion of the Welsh poetic, bardic tradition, the author introduces a new element that may well be without the experience of historians from outside Wales. By using this source she amplifies the information and provides a new line of evidence to the (non-Welsh) reader. The study provides more evidence of disputed elections in Cistercian abbeys, and disagreements amongst the community of monks, of local politics within the native Welsh provinces and the changes caused by invasion and conquest and the loss of independence. All too often seen only from the winning side, this last aspect gives valuable insights into the effects on the losing side. In this manner the author has extended the study of the Cistercians, of local Welsh politics in a particular time frame and given a view from the ‘other side’ of conquest. Thus she has developed the historiographical journey in these fields

Summary task

Now make notes in response to these three issues:

1. List as many different types of primary source which you can identify in the articles/chapters.

Deconstruction Exercise

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2.

- a) Manuscripts – actual documents and/or on-line digitised versions
- b) Published texts of manuscripts available via libraries
- c) Learned texts in books and journals
- d) Websites

3. List any archives that you can identify as having been used in the composition of the articles/chapters. *Feel free to speculate here if it is not immediately apparent.*

- a) British Library
- b) Public Record Office and National Archives
- c) Learned societies
- d) On-line archival material from other sources (e.g. Manuscripts Online; The Digital Bodleian; The National Library of Wales/Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru; Trinity College Cambs. James Catalogue...etc.)

4. List any online sources that you can identify as having been used in the composition of the articles/chapters. *Feel free to speculate here if it is not immediately apparent.*

- a) British library digitised manuscripts on-line
- b) The National Library of Wales/Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru
- c) Learned libraries such as British Library; university libraries; Society of Antiquaries Library (and similar)
- d) Public Record Office and National Archives
- e) Learned societies
- f) Websites of digitised medieval documents
- g) Specific websites