

Howard M. Wiseman, *The Heroic Age* **12**, *Reviews* (2009).

McCormack, Patrick.

1997 *Albion: The Last Companion* London: Constable & Robinson. 480 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1854874122

2000 *Albion: The White Phantom* London: Constable & Robinson. 460 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1841190518

[2008] *Albion: The Lane Dancer*. [unpublished, but now available as pdf file (258 A4 pages) at <http://howardwiseman.me/LaneDancer.pdf>]

Patrick McCormack's *Albion* trilogy is told in third person, from the points of view of many different characters. The two most important are Bedwyr and his much younger companion Nai. The story takes place around 520, thirty years after the battle of Badon, and ten years after Camlann, but through flashbacks and narrations by various characters, details of the past are revealed. These episodes are concentrated in the periods 475-78 and 493-497, respectively before and after Arthur's great battles against the Saxons.

The story centres on the Chalice of Sovereignty, a cup held by a clan of the Attecotti (a tribe of western Scotland) supposedly since the Britons lost sovereignty to the Romans. In mysterious circumstances Arthur leads a naval expedition to reclaim the chalice in 493, and he is acclaimed Amherawdyr (Emperor) of Britain. Now, ten years after his death, certain kinglets seek to gain the chalice for themselves, while Nai and Bedwyr try to stop them. Other characters are drawn into the struggle, including Eurgain, a young Dumnonian woman, Ceolric, a Saxon youth, and, as the series progresses, former members of Arthur's court who have been in hiding. In the final climax, the spirit of Arthur's Britain is momentarily revived, but at the same time it is clear that the future belongs with the Saxons.

The *Albion* trilogy is refreshingly different from most novels of Arthurian Britain. It is steeped in the early (pre-Galfridian) Welsh myths, legends, and histories, and is almost completely uninfluenced by Geoffrey or the Romances. While there are strong elements of fantasy, such as scrying and the echo of legends in present events, the setting is mostly realistic, even gritty. McCormack's descriptions of life are full of detail and completely convincing. He captures expertly the economic, social and political realities of dark-age Britain, in particular the complex relations between Britons and Saxons. These features more than make up for the few structural weaknesses the novels have.

*The Last Companion*, and *The White Phantom* were published by Constable & Robinson, but they decided not to continue with the third *Albion* volume. I obtained the manuscript for *The Lane Dancer* by personal communication with the author. With the permission of Patrick McCormack and Constable & Robinson, I have now made a print-ready pdf file of the book freely available at the url given at the head of this review.

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