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## Review of The Historia Brittonum 3: The 'Vatican' Recension, by D.N. Dumville

Joseph F. Kelly

John Carroll University, [kelly@jcu.edu](mailto:kelly@jcu.edu)

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was the result of “a project clearly conceived by its prelates of the second half of the fifth century and fully realized by Gregory of Tours at the end of the sixth.” Pietri’s book is a study of the church of Tours, synonymous with the city of Tours in this period. The political initiative of its bishops came from a true conviction of God’s special providential election of Tours, heralded by his envoy, Martin.

To show how the bishops strove piously to make of Tours a model kingdom for the chosen people of the Franks, Pietri divides his book into two parts. The first is a (new) chronology of the earliest bishops through Gregory of Tours, their family origins, and their dealings as bishops of Tours with the outside world in the troubled political history of Gaul at this time. His chief explanation for the rise of Tours is the accession to its see of men who by their birth and membership in a social elite had a decisive influence on the city’s destiny. They had the advantages of an intellectual formation that prepared them to be administrators and diplomats, as well as contacts with powerful people and personal financial resources, to manipulate a greater authority for Tours.

The second part of Pietri’s book elaborates fully on the bishops’ accomplishments by exploring the topographical, liturgical, cultic, ecclesial, and social development of the City of Saint Martin.

Pietri’s book is valuable for systematizing the myriad nuggets of information in the extant sources, especially Gregory of Tours, and for offering plausible new hypotheses on the when and how of the growth and fame of the Christian city. It is a scholarly work, as the extensive bibliography and footnotes attest, but it will appeal also to any layperson who has ever been fascinated by *The History of the Franks*. The 800-plus pages should not deter. The book reads with ease and rapidity due to numerous subtitles, frequent summarization, and its method of alternating very large print with sections of smaller print for more detailed discussions.

*Davidson College*  
Davidson, North Carolina

SUSAN A. KEEFE

*The Historia Brittonum 3: The ‘Vatican’ Recension.* Edited by DAVID N. DUMVILLE. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985. xx + 122 pp. \$33.75.

The *Historia Brittonum*, long attributed to the obscure Nennius, is an essential work for the Arthurian legend, telling of the early British, their saints and kings, the coming of the pagan Saxons, and the career of the Christian hero Arthur—about whom little actually is said in the text. The text survives in several recensions, and the indefatigable Mr. Dumville plans to edit all of them and produce the “Archetypal Text” and a translation, a publishing venture encompassing ten volumes.

This volume, the third, is the first to be published. The student interested

in the *Historia* will be disappointed, but the scholar will not. The book deals with the “Vatican” recension—so-called from the home of the manuscripts—and that—and only that—occupies this edition. Dumville dates the recension to 944, and he relates it to “Learning and the Church in the England of King Edmund I, 939–946” (pp. 9–23). He argues that this brief reign produced a flurry of intellectual activity in “a period during which the Celtic Churches made a substantial contribution to the revival of English ecclesiastical life” (p. 18), an explanation of the Anglo-Saxon interest in this Welsh *opus*. This historical section is followed by an introduction to the manuscripts and a *stemma codicum* and then the text. Dumville pays attention to the Latin, and both the introduction and index deal heavily with proper names, a key to the provenance of the manuscript. Although parts of the introduction are overwritten, Dumville has gotten a monumental work off to a good start.

John Carroll University  
Cleveland, Ohio

JOSEPH F. KELLY

*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a Collaborative Edition, 17: The Annals of St. Neots with Vita Prima Sancti Neoti*. Edited by DAVID DUMVILLE and MICHAEL LAPIDGE. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985. cxxxvi + 155 pp. \$29.50.

This is the second volume to appear of the immensely ambitious enterprise which aims eventually to publish critical editions of all the versions, recensions, and analogues of what is most often spoken of simply as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Several of these analogous documents are in Latin rather than Old English; the present volume contains two such works.

The major one, the *Annals of Saint Neots*, is rather late, having in its present form been compiled at the abbey of Bury Saint Edmunds between 1120 and 1140. It is noteworthy less for its contents—annals from 60 B.C., but largely from the mid-seventh century to 914—than for the sources it has used and the way in which these have been combined. This means that the editor’s function, in tracking down the former and discerning the latter, is of crucial importance. David Dumville has performed this function magnificently. In an introduction of over sixty pages he discusses all aspects of the work, above all laying out the sources in what is in fact a major historiographical essay. This is complemented by an immensely valuable Concordance of Annals and Sources which shows year by year on what materials the chronicler drew.

The second work is a good deal slighter, but of considerable interest also. Far from being merely a pious legend, it contains valuable information for Alfred’s reign, or at least about how it was later viewed. Indeed, the best known detail about Alfred, the story of the burnt cakes, comes originally from the *Vita Prima S. Neoti*, and interpolation from this source into Asser’s eyewitness account of Alfred’s life has been a proverbial cause of confusion