

Nuns section, with Kirsten Wolf on the Icelandic bishop Þorlákr Þórhallson and Dubois (again) on the royal saint Katarina, daughter of St Birgitta of Sweden. The section on Saints' Lives in Lived Context is concerned largely with conjugal matters, with Marianne Kalinke dealing with chastity in the legendary material about Emperor Henry II and Margaret Cormack concentrating on miracles relating to pregnancy and birth.

As one would expect from a work on sanctity, most of the texts translated are *Vitæ* but other genres are also represented. Two ballads and a play featuring Knud Lavard are included, as are skaldic poems and narrative sagas. Many of the texts featured here were not previously available in translation, or were available only in rather archaic translations. Not all texts are provided in their entirety due to their length, but short summaries of the omitted material are provided in place. One hopes that some of the excerpted texts will later appear in full elsewhere.

DuBois describes the book's aim as to 'draw greater scholarly attention to this comparatively little-studied area of Nordic literary history, while making Nordic materials better known to scholars of pre-Reformation European Christianity' (4). This dual purpose is well-served by the essays introducing each translation. Generally they provide enough information on the Nordic milieu to give a gentle lead-in to non-Scandinavists, while also highlighting links between Scandinavia and the continental church that are easily overlooked when focusing solely on the northern material. For instance, Scott Mellor's contribution, 'St Ansgar: His Swedish Mission and its Larger Context', which opens the volume, fully lives up to its title. It deftly locates Ansgar's mission within Carolingian politics and archiepiscopal jurisdictions, and identifies structural links between Ansgar's *Vita* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. This kind of information is often omitted from Nordic-centred studies, and its inclusion here is welcome.

Overall, this book is an extremely useful addition to Scandinavian studies and to church history.

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**Follett, Westley, *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages***

(Woodbridge: Boydell Press, Studies in Celtic History 23, 2006) hardback; xii + 253 pages; 3 b/w illustrations; RRP £50.00; ISBN 1843832763

Westley Follett's *Céli Dé in Ireland* is a development of his Toronto University Centre for Medieval Studies PhD. In it, he sets out to demonstrate that *Céli Dé* did not perceive themselves as a reform movement, as has been asserted by almost every scholar who has written on

the subject. This firm purpose is perhaps the book's greatest weakness, for it unnaturally constrains the otherwise extremely fruitful research and reasoning that Follett presents. I do not mean to suggest by this that I disagree with Follett's central argument; on the contrary, I find it compelling to the point of conviction. Nonetheless, the constraints of his argument paint Follett into some awkward corners.

For instance, in his enthusiasm to counter arguments that *Céli Dé* were distinguished by extremes of asceticism, Follett, not content with having amply demonstrated that *Céli Dé* were little or no more extreme with regard to vigils, fasting and other ascetic practices than other early Irish religious, goes on to seek an alternative distinction that might be applied to *Céli Dé*. He seizes upon their 'remarkable concern' for pastoral care and penance. These are two very distinct areas of observance. In terms of penance, he notes that the *Old Irish Penitential*, a *Céli Dé* text, 'does not represent a fundamental change from previous penitential works produced in Ireland' (213). He also demonstrates that *Céli Dé* penitential practices were not original: they, like various other Irish penitential regimes, were drawn from such sources as Gregory the Great and Cassian. One wonders, therefore, in exactly what way the *Céli Dé* attitude to penance distinguishes this movement from any other. Follett would have us believe that it is in their 'almost obsessive' (p 195) concern with penance, but since the evidence for this obsession consists of the existence of two written works, it is somewhat difficult to accept, given the vagaries of textual transmission and survival. On the pastoral care front, he is perhaps on slightly more solid ground. Yet here, too, he cites the *Rule of Patrick* as '[o]ne of the most important Old Irish texts on pastoral care' (193). Although Follett regularly reminds us of this text's importance to *Céli Dé*, witnessed by its presence in manuscript collections of *Céli Dé* texts, the fact remains that it was written at a centre which he maintains had no association with *Céli Dé*. Thus we have another example of *Céli Dé* sharing a text and therefore ideas with other religious.

One is forced to wonder why Follett finds it necessary at all to seek out distinguishing features of the *Céli Dé* movement. Surely his purpose is adequately served by his very convincing demonstration that the movement was not one of reform urging extraordinary asceticism. He concludes this argument so well that indeed his demonstration that there had been no widespread relaxation of Irish monastic standards in the eighth century, as is frequently asserted, is really icing on the cake.

Much of the book is given over to a survey of texts that have been associated with the *Céli Dé* movement. Follett adopts quite strict criteria in determining whether a text can be categorised as a *Céli Dé* text. These centre around whether the text can be identified as having been written at a known *Céli Dé* centre, whether it mentions *Céli Dé*, a known *Céli Dé* centre

or a known *Céli Dé* figure, and whether it contains ‘striking internal similarities’ with texts that are accepted as *Céli Dé* texts. It seems to me unsurprising that the survey essentially concludes that the only securely *Céli Dé* texts are those written at identified *Céli Dé* centres or mentioning *Céli Dé* people or places. It is of some concern, then, that in his epilogue Follett proclaims that the texts which can be ascribed to *Céli Dé* all have their provenance around Tallaght, the accepted home of the movement, or the Lower Ormond region, where the majority of the Tallaght texts were transmitted in manuscript form, and uses this as the basis for suggesting that *Céli Dé* were ‘a local phenomenon rather than a regional or general one’ (218).

While the majority of this review has been taken up with criticism of Follett’s arguments, the fact remains that this book is a very valuable one. It demonstrates meticulous research and categorisation of the available information pertaining to *Céli Dé*, and its central argument, that *Céli Dé* were not a reform movement, is well made and convincing. It is a pity that Follett’s over-enthusiasm has pushed him to mount other, less convincing, arguments that risk his central very important point being dismissed.

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**Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An edition and translation of the De gestis Britonum [Historia Regum Britannie]*, ed Michael D Reeve, trans Neil Wright**

(Woodbridge: Boydell Press, Arthurian Studies 69, 2007) hardback; 338 pages; RRP £50.00/US\$95.00; ISBN 9781843832065

Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote the *Hystoria de regibus Maioris Britannie* during the 1130s and it quickly became somewhat of a medieval ‘best-seller’. Today, more than 200 manuscripts survive, together with countless early printed editions, so it comes as somewhat of a shock to find out that the present work of Michael Reeve and Neil Wright is the first critical edition of the main version of that text to appear in almost 80 years.

Geoffrey’s *Hystoria*, of course, occupies a central position in early medieval and Celtic studies, dealing as it does with the earliest British kings. It was Geoffrey who introduced much of the Latinate world to the suffering of Lear, and to the radiance of Arthur and his noble band of companions. It is also within Geoffrey’s *Hystoria* that we encounter early recensions of Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*, Gildas’s *De excidio Britanniae* and the *Historia Britonum* often accredited to Nennius. Reeve and Wright’s edition, then, is a long-awaited addition to an under-resourced subject area and, as such, it does not disappoint.