

Arvind Thomas. 2019: *Piers Plowman and the Reinvention of Church Law in the Middle Ages*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press. Pp. 288. ISBN 978-1487502461.

Reviewed by MARGARET KIM, National Tsing Hua University

Piers Plowman and the Reinvention of Church Law in the Late Middle Ages is a work of great learning and intellectual sophistication on canon law and Langland's engagement with it. Canon law itself is a vast subject, and Arvind Thomas' specific focus in this book is on penance, an area of canon law that receives more attention than others from Langland (p. 19). Analyzing the way Langland deploys, critiques, and conceptualizes canon law on the tradition and regulation of penitential procedures in the medieval church, Thomas argues that canon law is central to Langland's poetics. Not only does Langland draw on canon law in *Piers Plowman*, but he also reinvents and in turn enriches and reinvigorates it as a church institution in the poem.

While Thomas' study of canon law attends to both the B- and C-text and it characterizes the relation between B and C as a development that culminates in a reinvigorated poetics of canon law in C, it is with the C-text that Thomas seems most comfortable, as it best illustrates Langland's imaginative powers in engaging with and recreating canon law as a spiritually vital and organic institution (e.g., pp. 20–21, 207). Besides the introductory chapter and an epilogue, the five chapters that make up the analysis proper of *Piers Plowman* in Thomas' book are organized around traditional precepts and practices of penance. Chapter one introduces readers to the penitential procedure that begins with contrition and confession. Chapter two's focus on Langland's treatment of usury, mainly in the C-text, sets up Thomas' discussion of socio-economic activities regulated under canon law and Langland's reinvention of canon law as a spiritually restorative means of proper relations. From this note on righting the wrongs of socio-economic abuses Thomas moves on to restitution in chapter three to

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suggest that Langland's vision of law and justice is one beyond powerful individuals who make and execute law. Satisfaction is the theme of discussion in the following chapter, where Thomas continues to argue that Langland's criticism of clerical neglect and abuse serves to strengthen and reform canon law as an institution beyond the whims of church personnel. The next and final chapter makes a systematic demonstration of Langland's commitment to canon law and its enduring relevance for the church by tying together the poet's notions of the penitential process as a coherent poetics of allegory in *Piers Plowman*.

Law has long been a major topic of investigation in the study of *Piers Plowman*. One easily recalls influential works by Richard Firth Green (*A Crisis of Truth*) and Emily Steiner (*Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature*) that have shown readers the way law served as a system of thought and knowledge in medieval writing and culture. *Piers Plowman and the Reinvention of Church Law* follows such influential scholarship in its focus on canon law as pertains to the penitential tradition (another vast area of medieval/Langland studies), and it exhibits many of the same virtues as the earlier scholarship in its engagement with the discursive dimensions of law, in this case, canon law. Not only does Thomas' book offer an impressive reading of *Piers Plowman*, but what it has to say on canon law also represents a learned contribution to the field of canon law itself. Scholarship on canon law predominantly focuses on the earlier Middle Ages, and so the book's comments on canon law in *Piers Plowman* in the context of the late Middle Ages represent a notable study of late medieval canon law. Moreover, its emphasis on institutional reform marks an innovative way of conceptualizing canon law.

The strength of Thomas' book, in my opinion, lies in its brilliant ability to demonstrate canon law's enduring relevance and the extent to which it is vital to Langland's imagination of individual behavior, social relations, and institutional arrangements. Contrition is a performance of "dramatic actions," and it is the "postures and gestures" before the confessor that condemn Mede as lacking in contrition (pp. 30, 31). The spiritual nature of justice, beyond the king's court, is illustrated in Reason's lesson of penitential satisfaction for the king's confessor (pp. 179–80). Not only do allegorical characters illustrate precepts and practices of canon law, but they also enact the dynamic

debates on institutional reform and ecclesiastical order, debates that, according to Thomas, Langland reshaped church governance and contributed to its prestige and strength as well.

As Thomas himself indicates in the beginning of the book, the vitality of canon law in Langland's critical and creative imagination of church and society as he sees it in *Piers Plowman* challenges David Aers' reading of *Piers Plowman* as an anti-Constantinian poem committed to a church beyond a princely prelacy and its worldly possessions and powers (p. 24). Whereas scholars such as Wendy Scase see Langland's anticlericalism as a challenge to the church hierarchy (pp. 146–47), Thomas diffuses much of the full force of what Langland scholars have traditionally perceived as the poet's unmistakable attack on the princes and clergy of the post-Constantinian church, by explaining social satire and political criticism in *Piers Plowman* as a highly effective strategy to strengthen the prestige and vitality of church governance under canon law beyond the personal conditions of ecclesiastical lords and clergy. The debate over Langland's stance on the post-Constantinian church will continue in the field, but Thomas' book has raised an important question that Langland scholars must address henceforth when they consider this issue. To what extent did the practices and configurations of the post-Constantinian church inform and continue to inform the institutional imagination of governance and socio-ethical conduct in the late Middle Ages and even beyond?

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Francis Leneghan. 2020: *The Dynastic Drama of Beowulf*. Cambridge, D. S. Brewer. Pp. 323. ISBN 978-1-84384-551-5.

Reviewed by ANDREW BREEZE, University of Navarre, Pamplona

Beowulf Studies are booming. Long the *bête noire* of those who did it as a set text (and hated it), *Beowulf* is now described as a masterpiece, a 'work of rare sophistication and supreme artistry' and 'the subject of countless translations' (p. viii). Here noting the 594 items in (for example) Hans Sauer's *205 Years of 'Beowulf' Translations and Adaptations* (2011), one sees popularity increasing apace. The poem has much to offer. Hence Dr Leneghan's book.

Its focus is original and intriguing. While many critics have taken *Beowulf* (after Tolkien's 1936 lecture on 'The Monsters and the Critics') as a poem about youth and age, with dangerous beasts in the foreground, Dr Leneghan regards it instead as about kingship and governance. The approach has a huge advantage. It means that the 'digressions' (as in Adrien Bonjour's 1950 Oxford monograph), often considered as tedious interruptions of the story, actually belong to its central theme. *The Dynastic Drama of 'Beowulf'* is thus a work of rehabilitation. It retrieves a mass of stuff from the junk-room and shows it as fit for use. Fail to perceive that and we shall not grasp what the poet was trying to say.

Beowulf is, then (in the author's brilliant phrase), a 'Book of Kings' (p. 1). He expands the hypothesis in four chapters sandwiched between Introduction and Conclusion (themselves substantial). Chapter one takes on questions of poetic structure and the nature of government in the post-Roman world (when, as expected, monarchy underwent major political and religious adjustment). Chapter two moves us on to the artistic possibilities of kingship. They are as fundamental to *Beowulf* as they are to *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* or *Henry V*. The third chapter brings us to the monsters, hardly swept out of the way, but found in a new perspective. Rather than being at the narrative's core, they are now devices enabling commentary on (and testing of) royal power. After that, a final chapter on kingship and the Bible, a book with special significance for early English dynasties (as also German and Merovingian ones), because bishops and theologians then found themselves having to accommodate a Teutonic institution to the

Christian scheme of things (or vice versa).

In all the above, the author makes copious and up-to-date reference to the poem's bibliography, itself a troublesome monster. His book is thus worth buying merely as a guide to publications on *Beowulf*. Yet it of course takes us farther. Those ever-mystified by allusions to Scyld and Offa and Thryth and Sigurd here find illuminating answers. With kingship offered as the poet's overriding concern (whether the ruler be good or bad), so much at once becomes intelligible. This is the case not merely for ancient Continental leaders (for most of us, semi-legendary characters out in some Baltic mist), but for ones in England itself. Dr Leneghan is careful to take on board the views of Leonard Neidorf and others for the poet as a Mercian of the early eighth century. That unknown genius knew on the one hand of kings and battles previous to his time: Æthelfrith at 'Degsastan' (west of Peebles, Scotland) in 603; Oswald at Rowley Burn (near Hexham) in 633 and *Maserfelth* (south of Welshpool) in 642; Ecgfrith at *Nechtansmere* (east of Forfar, Scotland) in 685. A poet at or near eighth-century Lichfield (with its clerics) and Tamworth (with its lords and ladies) would 'have had ample opportunity to reflect' on dynastic triumph and disaster (p. 239).

On the other hand, *Beowulf* (as a literary classic) was itself read by later generations. Its lessons on royal leadership did not grow old. That brings us to Alfred and theories of kingship in his translation of Boethius, as well as to the Alfredian *Orosius*, its translator (not Alfred, but an unknown Cornish cleric dictating to a West Saxon scribe) having plenty to say on rulers noble or evil (p. 241). Thereafter we come to the years about 1000, with England again under attack, so that a venerable poem was thought worth copying into what is now the British Library's Nowell Codex. This kind of analysis (dynamic and not static) is something truly refreshing to read.

It makes *The Dynastic Drama of 'Beowulf'* a rich and rewarding study, a book to come back to, and one destined for long use. One hopes that newcomers to *Beowulf* Studies will not feel swamped by its profuse referencing, the result occasionally being pages on which a few lines of text float secure (like Noah in his Ark) upon a bibliographical flood. Those students should persist, thereby encountering ideas which deepen understanding not only of *Beowulf* but of other Old English texts, some of them not here mentioned, including *The Battle of Brunanburh*, by a clerical author (who was, according to Sarah Foot and

A. E. Redgate, perhaps Bishop Cynwald of Worcester) taking Joshua 10:1-27 as his source (as observed long ago by Brandl and Klaeber and Dobbie). He equated Athelstan with Joshua, Northumbria with Gibeon, *godes condel* with the Bible's motionless sun, and the five kings slain with the Five Amorite Kings 'scornfully used and hanged' by Joshua. Apply *The Dynastic Drama of 'Beowulf'* to *Brunanburh*, and yet more will be revealed on kingship and Old English poetry.

As for advanced researchers, *The Dynastic Drama of 'Beowulf'* will of course be fundamental, not just for Anglo-Saxonists, but for all who work on early medieval Britain. Much has been said (by scholars including Helen Fulton of Bristol and Catherine McKenna of Harvard) on saga and the like as *Fürstenspiegel*, including texts (like the twelfth-century *Four Branches of the Mabinog*) with emphasis upon realities of government: negotiation, organization in peace and war, relations with foreign rulers, settlement of disputes, redress of grievances, punishment of offenders, granting of estates. In this respect *Beowulf* gains from comparison with such *specula principum*, even comparatively late ones.

So we end with a salute. *The Dynastic Drama of 'Beowulf'* is a welcome arrival. It will be a volume widely noticed; quoted in hundreds of books and articles; cherished by its publisher and admired by its readers; it will have lasting impact.

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Rory Naismith. 2021: *Early Medieval Britain, c. 500-1000*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Pp. 490. ISBN 978-1-108-42444-8.

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Dr Naismith's volume for the Cambridge History of Britain has an introduction and three parts. The first of the latter takes on Britain's early identities; its relation to the rest of Europe; legend and history (Beowulf, Bede, Geoffrey of Monmouth); and the survival of evidence, whether in manuscript or archaeological or other form. Part two is chronological. It starts with Britain in 500; then the 'age of tyrants' up to 650 (with Gildas a crucial witness); the period 650-850, of Picts, Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and the first Vikings; and 850-1000, an age of crisis wherein the new kingdoms of England and Scotia were forged. Part three is a survey of society: kingship, religion, lords, slaves, women, land, trade, towns, language. So there is plenty to keep one busy.

Not, however, in a way intended by Dr Naismith. His study, alas, relays only too accurately the confusions and shortcomings of twentieth-century historians. It is thus massively out of date. In nearly fifty years, this writer has never reviewed a book with more errors and omissions than this one. Here are thirty of them, plus corrections and the like from historians better-informed than Dr Naismith. Although a review is no place for a full bibliography, readers may be assured that all twenty-seven points relate to material in print, as shown by publications cited.

1. The Loidun (p. 3) whence the Scottish pilgrim Cathróe of Metz was taken to meet Erik Bloodaxe (d. 954) at York cannot be 'Penrith in the Leath ward of Cumberland'. It will have been Leeds (with a Celtic tribal name 'ardent (warriors)' related to Welsh *llawd* 'fervour'). Penrith was not in Erik's kingdom. Leeds was. Naismith completely misunderstands what appears in volume one of D. N. Dumville, *Celtic Essays 2001-2007* (Aberdeen, 2007) (p. 166).

2. Statements (p. 22) on Britain's 'Twenty-Eight Cities' as listed in *Historia Brittonum* are misleading. Most were not 'cities' on the Roman model, but monastic and other locations (in south-east Wales, Cornwall, Strathclyde) such as Dinas Powys, Monmouth, Much Dewchurch, Trelvelgue, Dumbarton. The list's many corruptions are

emendable after authorities including Wendy Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth, 1979).

3. That the rulers attending Edgar at Chester in 973 were all 'kings from elsewhere in Britain' (p. 28) is untrue. Two were neither kings nor from Britain, being the Breton counts Hywel and Iuchil. See T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350-1064* (Oxford, 2013) (p. 544), his scepticism notwithstanding.

4. That the location of Brunanburh in 937 has 'never been satisfactorily identified' (p. 31; also pp. 32, 34, 229), is also false. It was evidently eight miles west of Durham, by the Roman burh or fort of Lanchester, above the River Brune or Browney, as indicated by *The Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. Alistair Campbell (London, 1938) (p. 61, fn.2).

5. Now for an omission. In discussion of *The Battle of Brunanburh* (pp. 32-3) is no reference to Cenwald (Bishop of Worcester 929-58), surely its author. See A. E. Redgate, *Religion, Politics, and Society in Britain 800-1066* (London, 2014) (pp. 46, 87). Nor do we hear of how its clerical author based his poem on chapter ten of the Book of Joshua, with King Athelstan redeeming Northumbria from Scottish and Viking rulers just as Joshua redeemed Gibeon from kings of the Amorites, as noted in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie (New York, 1942) (p. xl).

6. The dating of the bloodthirsty Welsh poem *Armes Prydein* 'The Prophecy of Britain' to the 'tenth century' (p. 32) is inadequate. Its allusion to Arlego and Lego (Legorensis or Leicester) shows it as of late 940, immediately after an ignominious West Saxon capitulation there to the Vikings. A Welsh bard saw England's humiliation in 940 as Wales's opportunity for 941. Hence his call to arms. See *The Book of Taliesin*, tr. Gwyneth Lewis and Rowan Williams (London, 2019) (p. 213).

7. *Caer Weir* in the same poem, where Welsh Anglophobes wanted to send the English, is not 'Durham' (p. 33). It was a Pictish stronghold in Caithness, near the Gweir ('bend') of Duncansby Head, known to Ptolemy as Virvedrum ('great bend'). Compare A. L. F. Rivet and Colin Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (Princeton, 1979) (p. 507). The Welsh war party of 940 wanted to pack the English off to John o' Groats or beyond.

8. A reference to 'ports on the Baltic' (p. 57) visited by the navigator Wulfstan in the 890s is too vague. The town of Truso described by Wulfstan (in an addition to the *Old English Orosius*) was Tczew (German

Dirschau) on the lower Vistula, and nowhere else, despite what it claimed. See Stanislaw Rospond, *Słownik etymologiczny miast i gmin PRL* (Wrocław, 1984) (p. 395).

9. The British hero Arthur is consistently made out (pp. 86, 88, 89) as 'legendary'. Readers never learn that he really existed, fought his battles in North Britain, and was killed at Camboglanna or Camlan or Castlesteads (not Birdoswald) on Hadrian's Wall in 537, the data being set out in Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydain*, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 1978) (p. 160). Arthur died probably on a cattle-raid during the terrible famine of 536-7 (years of a world-wide 'volcanic winter'), which is mentioned with Arthur in a Welsh-Latin annal for 537.

10. That the date of Beowulf is 'a matter of hot debate' (p. 90) is not so. No reference is made to Leonard Neidorf, *The Transmission of 'Beowulf'* (Ithaca, 2017), proving beyond doubt that Beowulf is a Mercian work of the early seventh century.

11. One reads with surprise that south-west Scotland might 'always have been Irish-speaking' (p. 120), because the earliest place-names of the region are British, not Irish. They include even a minor one like Ptolemy's Abravannus 'very weak (stream)' or Piltanton Burn (not Water of Luce), site of a beach-market near Stranraer. See G. R. Isaac, 'Scotland', in *New Approaches to Place-Names*, ed. Javier de Hoz, E. R. Luján, Patrick Sims-Williams (Madrid, 2005) (pp. 189-214) (where Dr Isaac misidentifies the stream and misinterprets its name).

12. 'Durotriges' for a British people of the Dorset region (p. 151) is a ghost-form. Patrick Sims-Williams, *Ancient Celtic Place-Names in Europe and Asia Minor* (Oxford, 2006) (p. 309), cites the correct reading Durotrages 'swift attackers from the stronghold'.

13. St Patrick's birthplace is given (p. 154) as 'Bannavem Taburnae' (an impossible form) and called 'unidentified' (an untrue statement). On the toponym, read (after the Austro-Irish scholar Ludwig Bieler) Bannaventa Tabernae 'market-place by a hill and with a tavern'. It denotes Banwell, North Somerset, situated in a Romanized area near Bath, but (unfortunately for Patrick) also near a low-lying coast open to Irish pirates. The identification was first made in Harry Jolley, 'The Origins of St Patrick', *Irish Studies Review*, xii (1995) (pp. 31-6): a paper routinely ignored by professional scholars.

14. The British ruler Coroticus addressed by Patrick will not have been of the 'late fifth century' (p. 160), but its middle years, as is clear

from the time-scale of his genealogy. See Ben Guy, *Medieval Welsh Genealogy* (Woodbridge, 2020) (p. 334). Patrick thus died in or around 461, not 493 (as some argue).

15. The Bernicians of Northumbria certainly had a 'Brittonic' name (p. 167). Yet nothing is said on its bellicose sense 'stormers of a battle-line gap' (not 'dwellers in mountain passes'), the evidence being assembled in Joseph Vendryes, *Lexique étymologique de l'ancien irlandais: Lettre B* (Paris, 1980) (p. 41).

16. As for Deirans living to the south of Bernicia, their name cannot be 'related to the river Derwent in Yorkshire' (p. 167), as Dr Naismith imagines. The link is not with a river of oak trees (*derw* in Welsh), but with Welsh *dewr* 'brave', the meaning being 'brave ones, heroes'. Compare K. H. Jackson, *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969) (pp. 80-1).

17. That King Oswald's death in battle at Maserfelth in 642 was in Shropshire and 'most likely at Oswestry' (p. 162) is out of the question, as proved by Margaret Gelling, *Signposts to the Past* (London, 1978) (p. 187). It was instead on the Roman road east of Forden, Powys, with Maserfelth representing the Welsh district-name Meisyr, as pointed out by the German scholars Förster and Holthausen, whose proposal is cited in *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. G. I. Needham (London, 1966) (p. 36).

18. The Scottish 'army that attempted (unsuccessfully)' (p. 176) to invade Northumbria in 603 figures without mention of 'Degsastan' where it was wiped out by the English; or of the correct reading Deguistan 'stone of Dewi'); or its location west of Dawyck 'Dewi's settlement' on the upper River Tweed, Scotland. The stan or stone of Dewi or David is still there, providing a cover-illustration for Andrew Breeze, *British Battles 493-937: Mount Badon to Brunanburh* (London, 2020).

19. That Gildas 'gives no precise indication of when he wrote' (p. 178; cf. pp. 180, 277) is unfounded. David Woods of Cork proved in 2010 that Gildas was working in the spring or summer of 536, as shown by his allusion to the volcanic cloud which covered Europe from March of that year, and his failure to mention the crop failure and famine which it produced. Because Gildas put the Battle of Mount 'Badon' forty-three years previous to the time of writing, it will have been in 493; the very year given independently by Bede. See N. J. Higham, *King Arthur: The*

Making of the Legend (New Haven, 2018) (p. 156), despite his attempt to dismiss these arguments.

20. The battle of 'Badon Hill' is not 'at an unknown location' (p. 179). It was at the hillfort of Ringsbury east of Braydon, Wiltshire. See N. J. Higham, *King Arthur* (New Haven, 2018) (p. 192). Meaningless 'Badonicus' in the text of Gildas is a scribal error for Bradonicus, as demonstrated by Welsh *brad* 'treason, betrayal' (applied to woods where robbers waylaid travellers). Bradonicus denotes a hill above Braydon Forest and by the Roman road to Cirencester: a city that in 493 was the capital of the Britons and an obvious target for West Saxon aggression.

21. In stating that many early British monasteries lay on the coasts and rivers 'of what is now south-west England' (p. 183), no mention is made of the most important of these, Old Kew, on the Fal Estuary south of Truro, Cornwall. It was the 'Rosnat' or Alba or Magnum Monasterium famous for educating sixth-century Welsh and Irish saints. See the first volume of A. W. Haddan and William Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents* (Oxford, 1869-78) (p. 120) (where, despite assertions, it cannot be Whithorn, Scotland), and, for 'Rosnat' and Alba, Bewnans Ke: *The Life of St Kea*, ed. Graham Thomas and Nicholas Williams (Exeter, 2007) (p. xxxviii).

22. That the 'exact borders' of the Viking Kingdom of York are 'not known' (p. 227) is inexact. At one place we can be very exact. Penyghent is a Yorkshire hill with a Cumbric name meaning 'summit of the gentiles' or Vikings; compare discussion of Welsh gynt 'Vikings' in *Armes Prydein*, ed. Ifor Williams (Dublin, 1972) (p. 56). The mountain overlooked the frontier between Cumbrians and Vikings, to this day the border between Cumbria and Yorkshire. Nothing of this in *Early Medieval Britain*, however.

23. *The Old English Orosius* is certainly 'not the work of Alfred' (p. 265); but there is silence on its real translator, a Briton dictating to a West Saxon scribe who unwittingly reproduced his pronunciation of toponyms and personal names. The anonymous British translator is discussed by *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Janet Bately (Oxford, 1980) (p. cxii); his consistent use of Old Cornish *Ercol* 'Hercules' (instead of Old Welsh *Ercul*) proves further that he was a Cornishman, not (as some assert) a Welshman.

24. On a map of major churches in early Britain (p. 305), Old Kew

does not appear, despite its fame as Magnum Monasterium. Nor does the monastery of (emended) Uagnalæch, which figures in book three of Bede's *History* and will have been Wawne, near Beverley, Yorkshire. What is included (wrongly) is Dunwich, Suffolk, even though its name 'dune-settlement' is English, so that it cannot be Domnoc in book two of Bede's *History*. Domnoc will instead have been (vanished) Walton Castle, a Roman fort near Felixstowe, Suffolk. Wawne and Dunwich are discussed by Richard Coates in his co-authored *Celtic Voices, English Places* (Stamford, 2000) (pp. 176-7, 234-40), which Dr Naismith cannot have read, even though he lists it in his bibliography.

25. Mention of 'the battle-site of Heavenfield' (p. 317) repeats a common error, avoided by historians like Stenton or Hunter Blair, who were both the very opposite of incompetent. 'Heavenfield' (its first element nothing to do with Providence, as Bede makes out, but representing Caelestis, the name of some Romanized Briton) was where Oswald assembled his troops. His actual defeat of Welsh invaders occurred nine miles to the south, at Denisesburn or Rowley Water, as Bede narrates in book three of his *History*.

26. Reproduced from a manuscript (now in a Cambridge college library) of Bede's *Life of St Cuthbert* is a picture of Athelstan, presenting the volume to the saint (p. 321). Yet there is no word on how the manuscript, prepared by Wessex scribes, was given to monks of Chester-le-Street in 937 during celebrations for the triumph of Brunanburh, eight miles from the monastery, with the victory attributed to the saint's intercession: information deducible from N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957) (pp. 64-5).

27. Despite some wavering, the eighth-century Anglo-Latin *Life of St Gregory* (with its familiar story of Anglian slaves at Rome) is described as 'by an anonymous monk of Whitby' (p. 323). We hear nothing on it as surely by a woman, as noted in Colin Ireland, 'Some Irish Characteristics of the Whitby Life of Gregory the Great', in *Early Medieval Ireland and Europe*, ed. Pátraic Moran and Immo Warntjes (Turnhout, 2015) (pp. 139-78). On pp. 339-45 of *Early Medieval Britain* is a complete section on women in this period. Yet England's earliest female author is not thought worth mention there, despite her unique perceptions on male domination.

28. The Exeter Book *Riddles* figure (p. 347) with attention exclusively

on lewd ones, which is a pity. Other riddles, one may think, tell us more about Anglo-Saxon life: 4 (door of a city gate); 30 (glass-blowing); 39 (hope); 43 (guardian angel); 48 and 59 (ciborium); 74 (Ovid's King Ceyx and Queen Alcyone); 95 (instruction in wisdom). Clues for these solutions occur in Mercedes Salvador-Bello, *Isidorean Perceptions of Order* (Morgantown, 2015); *Riddles at Work in the Early Medieval Tradition*, ed. Megan Cavell and Jennifer Neville (Manchester, 2020); and Jorge L. Bueno Alonso, *Adiviñas medievais do Exeter Book* (Cangas do Morrazo, 2021).

29. The Welsh monks whose massacre after the Battle of Chester (in 616) is narrated by Bede did not belong to 'Bangor (Gwynedd)' (p. 396). Their house was at Bangor Iscoed or Bangor-on-Dee, near Wrexham. See J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (London, 1911) (p. 195).

30. As for the names of Thames, Severn, Trent, they are not merely 'pre-English' (p. 418) but Celtic, as shown respectively by Welsh *tafell* 'slice', *berw* 'seething', *chwant* 'desire'. The Thames is the 'cutter', making its powerful way through landscape; Severn is 'she of waters seething together' (those of the Severn Bore); Trent is 'much-loved one' (the goddess of the river). Sources here are indicated by Alexander Falileyev, *Dictionary of Continental Celtic Place-Names* (Aberystwyth, 2010).

Our conclusion is melancholy. *Early Medieval Britain*, like Dr Naismith's co-edited *Writing Battles: New Perspectives on Warfare and Memory in Medieval Europe* (London, 2020), calls for a reproof and a warning. The book contains not merely simple errors, but something worse: a bizarre unawareness of fundamental advance in historical knowledge over the last twenty-five years. One may be scathing. It is not a book in which Cambridge University Press can take any pride. It will for all time demonstrate how low the writing of early British history had sunk in the early twenty-first century.

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