

Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia regum Britanniae*

1 (fols. 1r–136r) Cum mecum multa | et de multis sepius animo re | uoluens in
 historiam regum | britannie inciderem . . . interno gratuletur affectu. || Britannia insula
 optima | in occidentali oceano inter galliam et | hiberniam sita .dccc. milia in longum
 .cc. uero in | latum continens. — in honore predictorum princi | pum hoc modo in lati |
 num sermonem transferre | curauit; explicit;

Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia regum Britanniae*: ed. M. D. Reeve & N. Wright (Woodbridge, 2007). This copy contains §§ 1–3, 5–208 of the work, in which 83–4, 173–4, 179, 184 are compressed; the text is not divided into the normal book-divisions; there is no rubric, although at the foot of fol. 1r, in an expert 14th-cent. textura, is ‘ystoria bruti primi regis britannie maioris id est anglie modo’; see further, J. C. Crick, *The Historia regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth III. A Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 150 (no. 151).

Parchment. iii (flyleaves of early modern paper, the first pastedown) + 137 + iii (flyleaves of early modern paper, the last a stub); the Bodleian pencil foliation counts 136 leaves, skipping one after fol. 63. *Dimensions*: 189 × 130 mm, written space 127–134 × 78–80 mm (first scribe) and 135–140 × 98–105 mm (second scribe). *Collation*: 1–7⁸ (fols. 1–56) 8⁸ (fols. 57–63, 63*) 9–13⁸ (fols. 64–103) 14⁶ (fols. 104–109) 15–17⁸ (fols. 110–133) 18⁴ (fols. 134–136; lacks 4). Catchwords are given at normal text size, centred at the foot of the page, mostly marked out by a red paraph. Parchment is good and smooth with a silky nap, with some distinction in colour between the ivory hair-sides and the whiter flesh-sides. Arranged like to like, flesh-side uppermost. *Layout*: Each scribe adopted a different format, both writing below top-line: (1) fols. 1r–81r, ruled for between 22 and 30 long lines; (2) fols. 81v–136r, ruled in a double column of between 24 and 27 lines with an inter-columnar space of 9mm. Ruled in lead; rules are single lines going to the edges. Catchwords are separately ruled. Tramline prickings are visible in the outer margins only of quires 7–8.

Script: Two collaborating southern-French scribes, both writing early gothic bookhands of southern style. The script of both hands is rotund and not markedly compressed. Scribe 1 (fols. 1r–81r) uses a pale brown ink and a wide nib, so that where the gothic angle asserts itself the result is a dense, firmly-based module. Tall *s* is usual in final position but the two southern forms of round *s* are also found there; medial *s* is always tall; straight-backed *d* is a conscious choice in the early stages of his copying, but quickly falls away for round-backed *d*; and *e-caudata* is employed. Scribe 2 (fols. 81v–136r) used a darker brown ink for letters that are a touch larger although similarly rotund, and paid more attention to the treatment of ascenders, which receive flat serifs and sometimes a bifurcation. Round *d* is his constant choice and final *s* is nearly always round. His first limb of the tironian-nota is particularly elongated, in proper southern-French style. Punctuation in both hands is by medial point.

Decoration: Decoration is confined to the illumination of capitals, which are two-line lombards (the first initial is five-line) of red or blue with very expert penwork flourishing in the contrasting colour; this flourishing is sometimes extended to form a border bar, while at fol. 67r it is elaborated into the shape of a wyvern with a man’s head. Capitals within the text are often stroked with red.

Annotations: One reader, a French hand of the fourteenth century, annotated occasionally in the margins, drawing attention to the content of the text: his notes are of the ‘hic’ and ‘ibi’ style. Some *nota* marks are marginal braces drawn as faces in profile (as on fols. 47r, 60r, 65r, 88r, 106v).

Binding: Secondary New College binding, second half of the 17th century. Reverse calf, light brown in colour, over millboards. Two fine double-fillet frames, one around the perimeter, the fillets running to the edges in each case, doubled at the spine, and an inner panel made of fillets with at each corner a fleuron of a type used in the later 17th century. Splitting at the base of the spine. Four paper flyleaves

at the front, the first pastedown; three at the back, no pastedown, the third a folded stub. Sewn on four raised bands of white tawed leather. Endband stitching uses bands of white and brown thread. Edges are not sprinkled. There are no signs of clasps, ties or metal furniture.

Labels and marks: Parchment fore-edge tag reads 'Histor. Brutonis Rs Anglie'. Printed spine-label 'MS New Coll. E. 276'. At the top of the first flyleaf is '276' in modern pencil. New College Library stamp on same page and sporadically on rectos throughout the manuscript, more restrained than usual.

Provenance: The book has an early provenance from, and may indeed have been made at, the Cistercian abbey of Belleperche in France (dioc. Montauban, dept. Tarn-et-Garonne). The abbey was founded in 1143, was a daughter-house of Clairvaux, and became one of the wealthiest monasteries in the south of France. On fol. 1r is an *ex-libris* inscription for the house in a large textura quadrata, written down the outer margin: 'liber monasterii bellepertice'. This writing is in the same pale brown ink as the text but is probably a little later in date. At the end of the text another *ex libris*, as it seems, has been erased: all that remains in a cartouche on fol. 136r is the opening word 'liber', in red and blue lombards. The book's subsequent medieval history cannot be known, although it was clearly still in France in the fourteenth century when it received annotation. It was given to the College by Thomas Martin (d. 1584), fellow 1540–54, later Master in Chancery, who is discussed further above at MS 65. His inscription is at the top of fol. 1r, 'Thome Martini Liber', with another hand adding underneath, 'Reliquit nomen' (perhaps leaving understood 'narrantur laudes').

Secundo folio: tē glebe temporibus suis

Bibliography: Coxe, p. 97; J. C. Crick, *The Historia regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth III. A Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 150 (no. 151).

Status: first draft