

Symeon of Durham *Libellus de exordio atque procursu istius, hoc est Dunhelmensis, ecclesie*. Tract on the origins and progress of this the church of Durham

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In early twelfth-century Durham the body of St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne was still enshrined in its seventh-century coffin with its iconic images of the Virgin and Child, saints and archangels. Associated with the shrine were two magnificent manuscripts from early eighth-century Northumbria, the Lindisfarne and Stonyhurst Gospels. One central concern of the history by Symeon of Durham under review was to narrate Cuthbert's life and the wanderings of his body from Lindisfarne to its final resting place at Durham. Among the vicissitudes recounted in these wanderings of the holy body was the miraculous survival unharmed, after total immersion, of the Lindisfarne Gospels. St Cuthbert's body inevitably attracted gifts, and among these was the handsome South English manuscript of Bede's life of St Cuthbert (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 183), which was donated to the Cuthbert community by Athelstan. This included an early witness to the so-called Anglian collection of episcopal lists and genealogies. Symeon's tract placed the history of Cuthbert and his shrine in an Anglo-Saxon chronological setting, and the Athelstan codex could have provided Symeon with a useful framework for his history had he chosen to use it. Symeon was also inevitably concerned with two other matters: the recording of Durham's landed possessions, and the reestablishment, not long before the date of the *Libellus*'s composition, of a monastic community at the see. The first would have led to research into the records and histories of Durham's past, and Lindisfarne's monastic achievements would provide a superb background for the second.

This edition adopts the division into four books of a late twelfth-century witness. Book I takes the history of Lindisfarne and Cuthbert to the death of Bede, on whose Ecclesiastical History and Life of Cuthbert Symeon almost totally relied. Book II narrates both the history of Northumbria and of the Lindisfarne bishops, and the wanderings of the religious community from 735 to the interim settlement at Chester-le Street. Book III traces the settlement at Durham in 995 and the community's history in the eleventh century down to the reestablishment of a monastic community. Book IV carries the story up to the death of William of St Calais in 1096.

Our knowledge of historiography in twelfth-century Durham was significantly enhanced by the 1995 conference on Symeon. He is first named as the author of the *Libellus de exordio* in a later twelfth-century

copy, and his exact role in its composition and in that of other Durham works has been a little uncertain. He is known to have been the cantor of Durham, and the identification of an early twelfth-century Durham manuscript, (Durham Cathedral Library B.IV.24) as a cantor's book, and Michael Gullick's identification of the hand in this manuscript (which was arguably his) in some forty-three charters and manuscripts (and this included corrections in an early witness of the *Libellus*, C (Durham, University Library, Cosin V.II.6)), substantially transformed our knowledge of his contributions to Durham history writing. The chronological limits for composing the *Libellus* were probably 1104 - 1107 x 1115. In 1104 Symeon is known to have attended the opening of Cuthbert's tomb; and Turgot, who is described as prior at the time of writing in what might be the earliest *Libellus* witness (F, London, British Library Cotton Faustina A.V), ceased to be the incumbent sometime between 1107 and 1115.

This edition exemplifies the changes in the scope and detail of the series. The earlier Nelson Medieval Texts series and the first volumes of its OUP successor provided a limited critical apparatus and historical commentary. This Symeon admirably offers an apparently full critical apparatus and an extended and comprehensive commentary. The apparatus includes the readings of all ten witnesses (apparently mostly from Durham, and dating from the early twelfth century to c. 1400), and enables a full textual history to be provided. It is true that for the establishment of the *Libellus* text the readings of C, and of a selection of others, might have been sufficient since, in Rollason's own words, 'the normative text was that offered by C in the form in which it had developed by the end of the twelfth century'. Rollason's severest problems concern the relationship of the two earliest Durham witnesses, C and F. They are splendid *de luxe* coeval copies. Gullick thought that F was written slightly later than C, largely because it has some of the more substantial alterations made to C. Rollason argues, however, that F could not have copied C since it has some independent errors. Whilst more of these errors than is allowed for here could have been caused by carelessness - it is noticeable that F is prone to eyeskip- some must go back to its exemplar. Rollason argues that F goes back to a working copy O, which was subsequently modified into O1. C was a copy of O1. Both C and O1 came to be further modified (O1 into O2), sometimes perhaps simultaneously. The two versions O1 and O2 could have been stages in the revision of O, and, like C, O2 came to offer 'the normative text'. In turn O2 was modified to produce Ca (Cambridge, University Library Ff.i.27), which was later at Sawley. Ca, a witness without progeny, is the first both to name Symeon as author, and to divide the *Libellus* into four books and into chapters. (It is interesting that the paragraph divisions in F (the only one of the two *de luxe* copies this reviewer had at hand) and apparently C (*teste* Gullick) were the basis for later chapter divisions.) Rollason's fascinating hypothesis thus zooms in on the making and revision of a text, often giving plausible historical reasons for the more substantial alterations. Once at least the revisers backtrack: thus a passage found in F (and presumably in O), but not in C (and hence not in O2), is later restored to C. The restored passage must either have been still visible in the working copy O (in spite of the alterations which transformed it into O1 and into O2); or taken from F; or still available elsewhere. In a paper published in the 1995 conference, Gullick identified Symeon's hand at work in C, and claimed that he carried out all the contemporary alterations, with the exception of two. Rollason does not say as much, and one wonders if there is now room for doubt. C was the key witness, both in its original and in its altered forms, though, as Rollason himself acknowledges, other hypotheses could be constructed of the formation of the working copies and of their relationship to C. The *Libellus* was a relatively short text with a specific focus, and it is interesting that two *de luxe* copies were produced almost simultaneously with generally similar but at points significantly different texts. One wonders about its distribution outside Durham, and in what form, for instance, it, or a possible precursor, reached John of Worcester for use in his chronicle. It is satisfying to have its genesis and history comprehensively explained, and so clearly definitive an edition presented.

Most of its sources lay close at hand in Durham. Bede's Ecclesiastical History and Life of Cuthbert, and Cuthbert's text on the death of Bede provide almost the entire basis for Book I, and are liberally and extensively quoted verbatim, occasionally ingeniously interspersed, as in i. 10. (Both in Book I, and later in the edition, not all quotations have been identified, though this failure is rarely of significance: one exception being the missed quotation from Bede, *HE* iv. 29 (*Libellus* i. 10 (pp. 48-50, n. 65), which is the basis for the unexplained chronology.) Occasionally Symeon employs some contemporary evidence or point of view :

thus he reports a fellow monk's sighting of Oswald's arm-relic, the survival in the Durham cemetery of the cross erected by Æthelwald in Cuthbert's memory; implies that hermits were resident on Farne in the early twelfth century; and uses the example of Cuthbert's rule at Lindisfarne implicitly to criticise Turgot as prior.

Already in the account of gifts to Cuthbert and Lindisfarne (i. 9), Symeon refers to *cartule ecclesie*. This account is based on a probably mid-eleventh-century precursor of the *Libellus*, the Durham text, the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto*. This text, as well as the slightly later *Cronica de monasterii Dunelmensis*, which Craster reconstructed from later medieval Durham texts, and the first eighteen Cuthbert miracle stories known as the *De miraculis et translationibus sancti Cuthberti*, which was probably compiled between 1083 and 1115, underpinned some of Books II and III. The identity of the *cartula* or *cartule ecclesie*, referred to three times as supporting claims to particular estates, is not clear. From Durham, original or genuine early charters do not survive, and there is no surviving eleventh-century cartulary such as Hemming's at Worcester (to which the chronicler John almost certainly had recourse): Rollason's suggestion that by *cartule* Symeon meant the grants mentioned in the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto* is acceptable, though the references are still a little puzzling.

Books II and III are held together in a tight chronological mesh, with multiple dates of Incarnation, Episcopal and regnal years, and retrospective years to a particular event in the history of Durham, sometimes using as many as four or more links for one event. The sources for some of Symeon's dates are to a large extent unresolved. He had gained some experience in the writing of annals when compiling two sets which are now regarded as his work, the *Annales Lindisfarnenses et Dunelmenses*, and the annals of English and Continental affairs laid out on fly leaves in Durham Cathedral Library B.IV.22. He knew Robert of Hereford's treatise on Marianus' era of the Incarnation. He probably had access to some Northern Annals. He may have contributed at some stage to the *Historia regum*, a compilation, which was long attributed to him. He probably had access to kings' lists and regnal lengths such as lay behind the information in the contemporary Durham *De primo aduentu Saxonum*, which was analogous to the accounts of the kings now found before the chronicle of John of Worcester. The list of Lindisfarne-Chester le Street-Durham bishops he used may have provided him with their years of rule. It is at the moment not easy to suggest where he may have obtained the material for his chronological mesh. The differing dates in the sources for these events, and for Episcopal and regnal reigns are meticulously noted in the detailed commentary. (It is very likely that the dates given by John of Worcester are in nearly all cases derived from a version of the *Libellus*, and are not therefore independent evidence.) Rollason sensibly says that the solution of Symeon's sources (and hence his dates) must await 'more wide-ranging studies of Durham historiographical activity in the twelfth century', but some idea of how Symeon or his team may have proceeded in the dating of at least one or two bishoprics or reigns in the late ninth- and tenth-centuries might have been instructive. The experience gained in writing the two sets of annals introduced him- if Levison on the *Annales Lindisfarnenses* is still a reliable guide- to reconciling varying dates and sources of greater variety than he faced in the *Libellus*, and can be regarded as a tentative, faltering stage in his apprenticeship. Perhaps when the text of the *Historia regum* has been finally deconstructed, and its Durham additions more firmly identified, the different dating systems and contradictions in Durham historiography might be more clearly perceived.

Two appendices offer editions of ancillary texts: the so-called summary, beginning 'Regnante apud Northanhymbros', which, however, ends in 1083 with the establishment of the monks at Durham, and not, as the *Libellus*, with the death of Bishop William in 1096; and the Continuation, which ends with the installation of William of Sainte-Barbe (1143-52). The descriptions of the ten manuscript witnesses shows that these two texts were not always present, and a table of contents might have made their varied distribution clearer.

This edition is a welcome culmination to the recent dramatic advances in our knowledge of Durham historiography to which Rollason himself has made a significant contribution. The text will hold its own, its historical commentary is helpful and exhaustive, and the introduction brings Symeon and Durham historical writing into sharper focus. Studies of the *Cronica monasterii Dunelmensis*, of the *De primo aduentu Saxonum*, and of the *Historia regum* in time might give a fuller picture, but they are unlikely to affect the great value of this edition for which Rollason must be warmly thanked. The history of the see of St

Cuthbert from its start at Lindisfarne in the seventh century to the reestablishment of a monastic community in Durham is again firmly underpinned and clearly visible. Symeon and his team could not have wished for more.

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