

## The Bretons

Patrick Galiou + Michael Jones

Blackwell 1991

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A book review by [Danny Yee](http://dannyreviews.com/) © 2007 <http://dannyreviews.com/>

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A history of Brittany down to 1490, *The Bretons* offers a good mix of archaeology, political narrative, and social and economic history.

The first three chapters describe the early archaeological record — Paleolithic and Mesolithic finds, Neolithic graves and standing stones, Bronze Age tumuli and socketed axes, and Iron Age crafts, burials, and dwellings and settlement patterns — and discuss religion, politics, and trade and other outside contacts. There are two chapters on Roman Armorica, the first covering economic and social foundations and the second putting the region in its broader political context.

Seven chapters then follow the history down to 1490: the "Dark Age" migrations of Britons, largely from Cornwall and Devon, and their relations with the Franks; the integration of Brittany into the Carolingian empire as an independent kingdom, brought to an end by Viking raids; the revival of the duchy of Brittany, the development of feudal institutions, and the rise of local lordships; relationships with Anjou and Normandy and incorporation into the Angevin empire; increasing prosperity under Pierre Mauclerc and his successors; the civil war of 1341-1365, with French and English interventions following a disputed Breton succession; and the development of state institutions under the Montfort dukes, down to the end of independence with the marriage of Anne of Brittany to Louis in 1491 and an act of union in 1532. The final chapter briefly outlines Breton history down to the present.

As well as covering political and military events, these chapters include solid treatment of social and economic history — and the penultimate chapter is devoted to a portrait of Breton society at the end of the medieval period. There is some discussion of sources and historiography: the linguistic evidence for the migration from Britain, the cartulary of Redon, the "matter of Brittany", and the development of Breton history

under the auspices of the Montfort dukes. (The choice of geographical region and the termination at 1491 necessarily give *The Bretons* something of a focus on "Breton identity", but there's nothing parochial about its approach.)

The *Bretons* includes a small number of halftones, of pottery, coins, manuscripts, buildings and suchlike, and a few plans and genealogies. There are nearly twenty maps, illustrating such features as "distribution of Bronze Age tumuli", "distribution of place-name suffix -ac", "distribution of Breton 'greasy' ware", and "monastic and mendicant houses c. 1300". There is no overall map, however, and the reader is assumed to be familiar with the broad geography of Brittany, with its principal rivers and towns.

The reader is also expected to have a general background in the ancient and medieval history of Western Europe: *The Bretons* is a scholarly history, not a popular work written for tourists. It is, however, clearly written and well presented, and never gets bogged down in narrow details: it should work well for anyone after something substantial.

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