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Decuman [St Decuman, Decumanus]

(fl. 6th cent.)

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Decuman [St Decuman, Decumanus] (fl. 6th cent.), holy man, is the patron of St Decumans, Watchet, Somerset, and of Rhoscrowther (Llanddegyma), Pembrokeshire. The earliest record of him is the Welsh martyrology in BL, Cotton MS Vespasian A.XIV (c.1175–1200), recording the feast of 'St Decumannus confessor' for 30 August, and he occurs in later medieval calendars from Muchelney Abbey and Wells Cathedral as 'martyr'. A very late and brief *Vita sancti Decumani*, composed in the fifteenth or early sixteenth century, probably at Wells or Muchelney, describes his alleged origin 'of illustrious stock' in west Wales and his journey over the Bristol Channel on a makeshift raft, alighting near Dunster Castle. Establishing himself as a hermit at a suitably isolated location (Watchet) and being fed milk daily by a cow, he is eventually beheaded by a pagan, but his decapitated body carries the head to a nearby fountain, probably St Decuman's Well near the present church. Of his dedications in Wales, Rhoscrowther was the senior: about 900 it was the main church of the cantref of Penfro and was accordingly considered one of the 'bishop-houses' of Dyfed. His cult is also linked to the churches at Pwllcrochan (also in Penfro) and Llanfihangel Cwm Du in Brecknockshire. In the west country his original church at Watchet was probably located near Dawes Castle (perhaps the site of the Alfredian *burh*) but was moved across the Washford River to the present site before the thirteenth century. Decuman's cult also penetrated Cornwall, perhaps being associated with that of St Petroc, as reflected in Degibma (in Wendron parish) and Decon Downs. Some calendars place his feast day at 27 August. The tradition that he was killed in 706 is probably no earlier than the seventeenth century in origin.

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