Doddss and His Critics
History 110: Saints, Sinners and Philosophers in Late Antiquity
Fall 2002
William North

Part I  Research and Discussion
Due Date:  Wednesday, September 25 in Class (absolutely no extensions)

Aim: Having discussed Dodd’s argument, method, and conclusions among ourselves, the object
of this project is for us to learn what Dodd’s contemporaries in the scholarly world thought
of the book when it first came out; in other words, we want to know how experts reviewed
contribution did they think it made to the field? Reviews can deepen and extend one’s own
reactions to a book and often provide excellent insight into the state of a field of inquiry.

Method: Using databases at Gould, identify and obtain copies of all the book reviews of Pagan and
Christian that you can. Because all members of the class will be looking for essentially the
same pool of material, it is vital that, once you have found the reviews that you have
identified, you replace the relevant works so that others may find them. There is no reward
for being the only one in the class to find a given review or the most reviews. Collegiality
is the hallmark of great scholars.
N.B. Keep in mind that every time a book is cited for other than factual information, there is an
implicit review/assessment being made of the work. Appearance in footnotes, discussions of
literature, etc. in monographs should also be considered.

Once you have located your body of reviews, read through them (they are generally short) and ask
a couple of questions and do a bit more poking around in the library:

1) Who is the author of the review? What do they work on? What have they published?
2) In what kind of publications do the individual reviews occur? What do you think this
means?
3) What does the author of the review identify as the strengths of Dodd’s work? the
weaknesses?
4) Does the reviewer comment on methodology? Selection of sources? Use of particular
theories or disciplinary assumptions? Influential/parallel studies?
5) How does the author assess the significance of Dodd’s work in the larger field? What is
the larger field/topic/set of questions to which the reviewer sees Dodd’s contributing?
6) Finally, but perhaps most importantly, what do you think of the reviewers’ praise and
criticism? With which review do you most agree? Least agree? Why? What have the
critics missed?

To submit: • 1 bibliography in proper format of the reviews you have found.

Final thoughts: In pursuing this project, you are welcome to work in groups, teams, or individually. Each
person, though, should be prepared to contribute to the discussion. History’s library
liaison, Colleen McFarland, can be very helpful on this project.
PART II  Writing it Up

Due Date: Thursday, September 26 by 1 pm in my box in the History Department office. At that time, I will pick them up. Those not in my box will be considered late.

To Submit: 2 page (500 words max,double spaced) review of Dodds. This should be your assessment of Dodds and not a patchwork of other scholars’ reviews. You may quote another review if you find an observation particularly telling. It is your voice/mind, however, that I want to hear. Keep in mind that a good review not only evaluates and argument but also presents the author’s argument succinctly and fairly.

Suggestions: When you evaluate this work (and the criticism of it) try to keep immediate reactions at bay and remember that, in this class, you are a historian who happens to be an undergrad rather than an undergrad who happens to be taking history. When you run into names, terms, foreign languages, etc. that may not be familiar, don’t be put off or panicked. I don’t expect you to know them. What I do expect is that you will note the recurring names, the languages, etc. and realize their potential implications for the work. For example, “Hmmm.. whenever the author discusses point A, he mentions the same guy. I wonder whether he has any other evidence for this claim.”

Among the things that you should think about (not necessarily write about):

- structure of book and argument
- sources/evidence/theoretical models
- the genre of the work and its implications
- what is this book/article attempting to do? does it succeed in accomplishing its own agenda (even if I don’t like the agenda). This is another way of saying that it is unfair to criticize a book for not being the book you would have written. What you can fairly criticize a book for doing is successfully addressing question x but failing to address the equally important matter y or posing question x in a loaded way.

Any questions: Wnorth@carleton.edu or call 645-7807 (it can be dialed from campus phones)