

Alexandria famously replied: ‘If Mary is not the Mother of God, then the one who is born from her is not truly God.’ Her title thus became the cipher and fundament for conciliar theology after Ephesus 431. *Theotokos* also served, of course, to displace the goddess who had earlier borne that acclamation as well (as mother of the god Horus) and as filling the *role* of protector of women, namely Isis. Mary, as the Byzantines acclaimed her, was no mere passive recipient of honours, she was an active and aggressively successful evangelist, vigorously elbowing away some of the most attractive and family-friendly cults of the late antique world. The third focal aspect of the texts studied here betrays the hands of the (mainly) monastic authors and preachers: it depicts her in the unusual guise (at least for the West) of an ascetic disciple of Christ. The theme of ‘first disciple’ is already visible in the New Testament texts (despite some resistance there too, especially in Mark) but the idea that her virginity was not merely accidental but an embraced choice and a model for later male celibates and female virgins, was very important to the many monastic communities that formed an important literary class in Byzantium. That approach has roots as early as second-century Christian Syria, and that Syrian influence remained enduringly important in Byzantine liturgical styles and ascetical history.

The reviews of such major pieces as the *Akathistos* Hymn and the works of Romanos Melodos alone make this a study worth having, but they are simply typical of all the studies comprising the book, which all carefully assess the previous scholarly literature, and advance new considerations based upon first-hand and deeply attentive engagement with the materials. The section on the Marian verses that abundantly adorn the various offices of the eastern Church is also a rare and profound contribution. It will be a text that will prove invaluable in an array of higher degree classes. All in all, this is a major work that sets a very high standard and forms a fitting capstone to a long and rich scholarly career.

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY,
OXFORD

JOHN ANTHONY MCGUCKIN

Venantius Fortunatus and Gallic Christianity. Theology in the writings of an Italian émigré in Merovingian Gaul. By Benjamin Wheaton. (The Early Middle Ages, 29.)

Pp. x + 293. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2022. €109. 978 90 04 52194 0; 1878 4879 JEH (74) 2023; doi:10.1017/S0022046923001227

Wheaton’s *Venantius Fortunatus* differs from the man who is portrayed in many modern studies of the Merovingian period. In those he is ‘the Italian poet’ who won success in the Austrasian court circle and whose Latin poetry provides many glimpses of Merovingian society. He is also the friend and *protégé* of Gregory of Tours, and the ‘prurient male hagiographer’ who has been credited with the coining of the term *torrix* to describe Queen Radegund, founder of the convent of Sainte-Croix in Poitiers, in her extremes of ascetic practice.

Certainly, the poems and *Vita Radegundis*, as well as Fortunatus’ *Vita sancti Martini*, are very well known and have been thoroughly quarried for portraits of individuals, descriptions of buildings and his liturgical hymns (such as *Pange lingua* and *Vexilla regis prodeunt*). Wheaton convincingly exposes another important aspect of Fortunatus’ career and writings. In focusing on Fortunatus’ contributions

to the elucidation of Christian doctrine, whose composition was not necessarily confined to the period after 592 when Fortunatus held the bishopric of Poitiers, Wheaton presents a strong argument for Fortunatus' role in the transmission of Christian doctrine in Frankish Gaul. He makes an interesting case for the degree to which Fortunatus shaped it as well, though the evidence for the reception of Fortunatus' ideas appears to be rather meagre. Wheaton's principal focus is on texts in the final two books of the eleven-book collection of Fortunatus' *Carmina*, probably published posthumously. Particular attention is paid to the sermons which present the commentaries on the Apostle's Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Wheaton acknowledges that Fortunatus made heavy use of Rufinus in particular, but shows that he offered nevertheless his own emphases and presentation of Scripture, and that Venantius also drew on Gallic sources and particular elements important at a local level. This in itself is an eloquent indication of the degree to which this rather secular poet from Istria, educated primarily in Ravenna, had become thoroughly integrated into the ecclesiastical community in Gaul.

A convincing case is made for Fortunatus' authorship of the strong statement of Chalcedonian orthodoxy known as the *In laudem sanctae Mariae*. An appendix reproduces Reydellet's edition of *In laudem sanctae Mariae*, but adds an English translation and valuable commentary on the range of sources on which Fortunatus drew. These suggest how much Venantius may have been 'drawing on a pan-Mediterranean current of Marian veneration', but Wheaton underestimates, or is unfamiliar with, the considerable evidence for Marian devotion in both Italy and Gaul, especially in the aftermath of the Council of Ephesus.

Wheaton elucidates how these texts enable the 'ferociously Augustinian' Fortunatus to be placed in the context of Gallic discussions of free will and grace and the 'semi-Pelagian' controversy, as well as the Christological dispute known as the 'Three Chapters controversy'. For the latter, the panegyric addressed to the emperor Justin II and the empress Sophia after the gift of a fragment of the True Cross to Queen Radegund and containing Fortunatus' creative extrapolations of the symbolism of the cross, is a further indication that Fortunatus was 'carefully Chalcedonian' and Roman in all his writings.

Other recent work published both before and since Wheaton revised his 2018 PhD thesis for publication, not least on the reception of the conciliar canons and papal letters and 'decretals' in Gaul by, for example, Geoffrey Dunn, Bronwen Neil and Michael Eber, has greatly enhanced our understanding of the knowledge and range of theological opinion as well as doctrinal expertise of the Gallo-Frankish episcopate and clergy. Wheaton's study is a useful addition to this growing body of material. It also provides a basis for further exploration of the impact of Fortunatus' doctrinal expositions in the Carolingian world in the late eighth and ninth centuries. The preservation of the eleven books of the *carmina* in a manuscript written in the peculiar script known as 'a-b minuscule' (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, lat. 13048, part 2, + St Petersburg F.XIV.1) at the turn of the eighth century by, possibly, nuns who had an association with the monastery of Corbie as well as the Carolingian court, is suggestive in this respect. Fortunatus' work, therefore, may well need further consideration within the context of Carolingian Christological discussions alongside fuller appreciation

of the Gallic and Merovingian underlay for Carolingian ecclesiastical and theological developments. It is to Wheaton's credit that he has provided such an interesting exposition of Fortunatus' theological writings as well as opening up many fruitful lines for further enquiry.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK

Monastic communities and canonical clergy in the Carolingian world (780–840). Categorizing the Church. Edited by Rutger Kramer, Emilie Kurdziel and Graeme Ward. (Medieval Monastic Studies, 8.) Pp. 455 incl. 4 ills. Turnhout: Brepols, 2022. €120. 978 2 503 57935 1; 2565 8997
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This important and exceptionally coherent collection of essays presents more than a fresh perspective on the notion of 'reform' and the challenges of determining the criteria thereof. These are considered in the context of the pre-history and reception, within communities of monks, canonical clerics and religious women throughout the Frankish realm, of the texts drafted for the councils convened at Aachen between 816 and 819 which include the *Institutio canonicorum* and *Institutio sanctimonialium*. Yet, as indicated by this book's title, the fundamental issues perceived by the authors are those of identity, and of categorisation. Certainly, since the late 1970s there has been increasing emphasis on the great diversity of Carolingian religious organisation and practice, and what Mayke de Jong described as the 'repeated redrawing of boundaries and renewal of distance which is usually called "monastic reform"', as well as the degree of local variation, despite or arguably even stimulated by the ideas of harmony and universalising aspirations articulated at a succession of Carolingian assemblies. This book nevertheless effects a crucial re-configuration of understanding. The questioning spirit of the two young scholars to whose memory this volume is dedicated imbues this volume.

The authors concentrate on local contexts and initiatives mirrored in regulatory and liturgical texts in order to stimulate new reflections on all types of religious communities: monastic, clerical and female. Underlying this is the fundamental adjustment of the old-imagined differentiation between monks, canons and other clergy, clearly set out by Emilie Kurdziel, that the *ordo canonicorum* and the *canonici* so often mentioned in Frankish texts are to be understood as canonical clerics, that is, all the clergy, not as a separate category of 'canons'. The authors seek to determine what categorises religious communities at an institutional level and how they defined themselves. They also reflect much recent work in the early Middle Ages in their focus on the cultural influence exerted by texts and their production.

A background to the Carolingian material is provided in the section 'Origins', comprising three papers by Sebastian Scholz, Albrecht Diem and Brigitte Meijns, who look respectively at the organisation of the clergy in the sixth century, the remarkable emphasis on confession and the choreography of spiritual aspiration in the late eighth-century text known as the *Memoriale qualiter*, and the insistence on the religious discipline of everyone in the Carolingian capitularies and conciliar acts. The reader's horizons are widened in the following section on 'Old norms,