

patrick j. geary, gen. ed., *Authors of the Middle Ages, Historical and Religious Writers of the Latin West*. Vol. iv, No. 12, carol straw, *Gregory the Great*; No. 13, roger collins, *Fredegar*. London: Variorum, 1996. Pp. 144. isbn: 0-86078-625-0. \$58.95.

Two slim studies presented here in a single volume are of real interest and value. They conform to the stated goals of the series in which they appear. That is, they present essential facts about an author's life and times, a manageable account of current scholarship, details about the transmission or publication of the author's work(s), and a starter bibliography.

Carol Straw, well known for her *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (1988) does a masterful job of recounting the life and times of Gregory, the scion of an ancient and aristocratic family and pope from 590–604. She assesses Gregory's education and intellectual interests, his spirituality, and his profound sense of duty. I spotted nothing new in her account, but I cannot imagine a better one in so short a space. Straw carefully sets each of Gregory's major writings into its place in the author's life. She notes that many of Gregory's famous books began as sermons, but she fails to draw out any potentially interesting and important implications of this fact. Many readers will wish that Straw had reflected more on Gregory's writings than on his political milieu. In her last few pages of interpretative text she makes sparkling observations that hint at what we might have had: how desperately wrong Harnack was to dismiss Gregory's 'ergismus'; what, exactly, Gregory owed to the monastic tradition and who brokered his debts; how one can and cannot compare Gregory to Augustine. Gregory was, Straw says, 'pragmatic and realistic...the moral theologian who gave answers to life's problems.' Overcoming life's challenges required a 'disposition of continuous penitence.' Readers will wish they had more of this. Straw's bibliography is thorough, lacking only a reference to Ernst Pitz's magisterial *Papstreskripte im frühen Mittelalter* (1990).

Everyone has heard of Gregory the Great, and most medievalists have read one or more of his works. Roger Collins thus faced a very different problem in introducing Fredegar. Many readers of *Arthuriana* will not have heard of Fredegar. But, then, we have no idea who 'Fredegar' was. We do not even know if Fredegar was one, two, or three (or more!) separate authors—although a weak consensus is forming around Gabriel Monod's century-old contention that there was only one Fredegar (or, at any rate, only one person wrote the first part of 'Fredegar's' chronicle). The eighth-century continuations were sponsored and possibly written by members of the Carolingian family: Pippin's nephew Childebrand down to 751, and Nibelung—a name to conjure with!—from 751 to 768.

Why does this obscure Frankish history matter? The initial portions, drawn entirely from older historical compilations, are rarely read today and are of little interest. What has come to be known as Book IV, with its continuations, provides an absolutely critical source for the years 584 to 642 and then 642 to 768. Although the name Fredegar cannot be traced back before the sixteenth century with complete confidence, 'he' wrote virtually the only contemporary and detailed account of Frankish history in the generations after the death of Gregory of Tours in 594. And until Einhard

wrote his *Vita Karoli* around 830, we cannot attach a name to another Frankish historical text. The chronicle of Fredegar took shape only gradually in its own author's recension and in later manuscript traditions. Collins provides a careful account of all the historiographical wrangling concerning Fredegar and a concise treatment of the manuscript tradition of the text. If readers of Straw may wish that she had focused more directly on Gregory's writings, readers of Collins may wish that he had supplied them with a little more of the Merovingian history that would have put his Fredegar into context.

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