

## REVIEWS

**Neil Christie, *The Lombards: The Ancient Longobards.*** (The Peoples of Europe) Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, xxvii + 256pp. ISBN 0 631 18238 1. £37.00.

**Peter Heather, *The Goths.*** (The Peoples of Europe). Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, xviii + 358pp. ISBN 0 631 16536 3. £20.

It is appropriate that the Blackwell series 'The Peoples of Europe', inaugurated in the late 1980s by David Morgan's *The Mongols* and my own *The Franks*, should have arrived just at the time that historians and archaeologists alike were becoming very uncomfortable with the old assumptions about the history of European peoples. But it is ironic that those worries should actually make it much more difficult to write such ethnic histories: it is no longer a question of following the arrows labelled 'Goth' or 'Lombard' across the map of Europe in the Migration Period and assuming that this tells us the history of the people.

It is perhaps because of the intensity of the debate on ethnic origins that books in this series have tended to concentrate on the beginning of the story rather than the end. *The Franks* was criticised for fading out in the seventh century, with only a brief chapter bringing the story forward to nearer the present day; that was because I felt that the nature of the Franks changed drastically in the seventh century, when many non-Germanic inhabitants of the Frankish kingdom started calling themselves Franks. Criticism was perhaps even more justified in the case of Roger Collins' *The Basques*: he ended the story in the fifteenth century despite the fact that, unlike the Franks, the Basques are still a significant and easily identifiable European people. It would be possible to make similar criticisms of the two books under consideration. Charlemagne's conquest of Lombard territories did not end Lombard distinctiveness, as Christie notes in a brief section at the end (though he did not take the story up to the 1990s, with the successes of the Lombard League); and Heather only has a brief

comment on the seventh century, the last century of Gothic rule in Spain, and nothing on the survival of Gothic identity in Spain (let alone in the Crimea, where Gothic was still being spoken in the sixteenth century).

Nevertheless, within the format of the series (somewhat altered in the case of Heather, who has managed to persuade the publisher to accept a text considerably longer than either James or Christie), both these books perform their tasks admirably. Of the two, Christie probably performs the more valuable task, even if Heather's is perhaps the better book. Until now, the English-speaking monoglot has been able to pick up some of the history of the Lombards from a translation of Paul the Deacon's *History of the Longobards*, from the general study of early medieval Italy by Chris Wickham, or even from volumes V and VI of Thomas Hodgkin's monumental *Italy and Her Invaders* (1895). The Goths are much better known to the English reader, thanks to the studies over the last quarter-century by Burns, Collins, King, Moorhead, Thompson, Wolfram and others.

Christie has sensibly decided to resurrect the older, and more precise, name for this people: in the text he calls them Longobards, since the word 'Lombard' has come to mean several other things, including an inhabitant of Lombardy and a medieval banker. But he has not entirely solved the problem faced by anyone trying to write the history of an early medieval Germanic people: how does one distinguish between the achievements of a specific ethnic group and those of the people (Italo-Roman, Gallo-Roman, Romano-British and so on) over whom they ruled and with whom they lived? At times Christie resorts to phrases like 'Longobardicised natives' or 'Italo-Lombard'; at other times he indulges in dubious and even old-fashioned attempts to distinguish between the 'Germanic' and the 'Roman' elements of society. What is sometimes lacking in the book, in this case and elsewhere, is the awareness of methodological problems, or the willingness to complicate the issue by admitting those problems to the reader. We find statements, rather than suggestions: 'The lowest army level was made up of half-free archers' (p.47), or 'Burial in full dress... implies a belief in an afterlife and a need to exhibit one's social trappings in the next world' (p.189). And some of those statements, such as that 'archaeologically, the countryside [of Italy] appears to be virtually deserted between c.600 and 750' (p.92), can be correctly decoded by the early medievalist, but

may mislead the student and general reader for whom this series is intended.

Heather is much more self-conscious about the need to involve his reader in the debate over ethnicity; indeed, his is a revision of the revisionist position which has become the orthodoxy in recent years. He does not accept the idea that only a small elite within the Gothic people in the fourth and fifth centuries saw themselves as Gothic; he would prefer to think of a much larger group (though still a minority) of Gothic freemen constituting what Procopius called the 'best' or the 'notables'. The emergence of Gothic identity is the main theme of the book; in tracing this, he provides a very clear narrative, particularly strong on the confused events of the fifth century, as well as a discussion of the archaeological evidence for Gothic culture, which is scattered in a dozen languages across Europe from the Crimea to Spain.

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**Janet L. Nelson, *The Frankish World, 750-900*.**  
London, Hambledon, 1996, xxxii + 256pp.  
ISBN 1 85285 105 8. £38.00, hardback.

Professor Nelson's first volume of collected essays, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (Hambledon Press, 1986), was mostly concerned with the origins of inauguration rituals such as anointing and coronation. This volume, rather more varied in content, confirms her status as one of the most perceptive and illuminating historians writing in English today. She has an incomparable knowledge of the often very intransigent sources for Carolingian history, an eye for significant detail, an ability to extract new insights from well-known material and to see the potential of sources of which few other historians had seen the value, and a gift for summing it all up in a telling phrase. About half the essays are responses to commissions, for chapters in books on early medieval literacy, on Louis the Pious, early medieval dispute settlement, rituals of royalty, medieval queenship and others, but none of these are the obvious or

straightforward responses to those commissions. Asked to write on *Rituals of Royalty*, for instance, she does not just reproduce her important early work on the development of Carolingian royal inaugurations, but in a sense puts herself in her place, suggesting that royal ritual was not that important to Carolingians, and that it was not so much an expression of royal aspirations (as in other medieval contexts) as a cooperative expression of the confidence of Frankish solidarity.

The strength of the volume as a whole is its emphasis on individual people and their needs and desires. It is all too easy to write early medieval history in the abstract, not even making the difficult attempt to get to the personalities who hide behind the names and the texts, and treating political processes or the development of ideas as if they were things that happened of their own accord. Nelson never makes that mistake. And her approach succeeds most particularly in the last three essays, which are a major contribution to that most elusive of topics: the history of women in the early Middle Ages.

Women come alive in those chapters. Sometimes they are anonymous women: women in Meaux, dancing as they sang the triumphs of King Chlothar and Bishop Faro, two centuries earlier; women clubbing to the ground some cowardly counts who fled from their defeat by the Slavs; nuns composing and circulating love-poems (or perhaps heroic poems); the woman whose obscene comment about the miracles being worked by her murdered husband led to her spoken words being replaced by farts every Friday for the rest of her life. But Nelson also tries to recover women writers, arguing for the female authorship of two of the most important historical texts of the early Carolingian period (the *Annales Mettenses Priores* and the *Liber Historiae Francorum*), while in the final essay, on Charlemagne's women, she argues, with a wonderful use of Carolingian court poetry, for the political importance of Charlemagne's wives and, above all, of the daughters, 'a cadre functionally similar to Byzantine court eunuchs' (p.241). The collection as a whole will illuminate; it ought to inspire.

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**Les Statuts Synodaux Français du XIIIe Siècle. Tome IV. Les Statuts Synodaux de l'Ancienne Province de Reims (Cambrai, Arras, Noyon, Soissons et Tournai). Collection de Documents inédits sur l'histoire de France, Section d'Histoire Médiévale et de Philologie, vol. 23. Edited by Joseph Avril. Paris, Éditions du Comité des Travaux historiques et scientifiques, 1995, xix + 395 pp. 400F.**

**Recueil des Chartes de l'Abbaye de Grasse. Tome 1, 779-1119. Collection de Documents inédits sur l'histoire de France. Section d'Histoire Médiévale et de Philologie, vol.24. Edited by Elisabeth Magnou-Nortier and Anne-Marie Magnou. Paris, Éditions du Comité des Travaux historiques et scientifiques, 1996, lxxxv + 346 pp. 400F.**

The two most recent medieval publications of this excellent series are concerned with opposite ends of the Frankish kingdom. For 1995 there are the synodal statutes of five of the twelve bishoprics that made up the Reims province in the thirteenth century. None of the others survive for this period. The oldest is that of Cambrai, which dates from the episcopate of Guiard de Laon (1238-48); the other four all relate to the post-1280 period. In addition, Arras has a separate decree setting out the observance for feast days, and Noyon has a text for the opening ceremonial for the synod, which includes a list of all the institutions which should be represented. In contrast, the publication for 1996 is the first volume of the cartulary of the abbey of La Grasse in the Aude region of the Pyrenees, covering the period from 779, when it was taken under Charlemagne's protection, down to a bull of Calixtus II in 1119. Both sets of texts are provided with essential interpretational frameworks. The synodal statutes are extensively footnoted, showing both the origin of the various

legislative clauses as well as indicating further secondary reading on the matters covered. The cartulary of La Grasse has a detailed lexicographic introduction which seeks to elucidate the vocabulary of the transactions recorded in the charters, encompassing the definition of terms such as *villa*, *villare*, *alodis*, *mansus*, *casalis*, *tenentia* and, most problematic of all in Languedoc, *fevum*, or *fief*.

The fullest of the synodal statutes are those of Cambrai, where it is possible to trace the evolution of their codification from 1230 until the early fourteenth century. They are heavily influenced by the Parisian legislation of a generation before and by the prescriptions of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. They treat the sacraments, 'the life and honour of the clergy', and the administration of both the diocese and the parishes (including wills, seals, burials, cemeteries and churches, the mendicants, feasts, forgers and usurers). Although this is a broad pattern common to them all, nevertheless each diocese has its own particular characteristics: Tournai, for example, is unique in including four clauses, *De crucesignatis*. They were particularly powerful instruments for implementing reform, enabling prelates like Guiard de Laon, a Cistercian with long experience in the Parisian schools, to reach clergy at all levels in the diocese. At Cambrai there was a tradition of annual assemblies of parish priests, non-attendance at which would only be accepted in cases of 'grave infirmity or unavoidable necessity'. Moreover, additions, clarifications, and corrections were a regular element in the synodal legislation of all these dioceses.

The cartulary of La Grasse shows how it grew from a modest (and vulnerable) Carolingian foundation to a wealthy twelfth-century house, intent upon building its own monastic empire. Fundamental is the protection granted by Charlemagne in 779 - significantly the year after Roncesvalles - which is the first document in the collection. As the editors say, this was evidently a political act given the continuing threat of both Basques and Muslims in the Pyrenean region. Charlemagne's interest was followed up by his successors: in 814 Louis the Pious exempted the abbey from all taxes on commercial transactions. In the tenth century the abbey seems to have looked towards the papacy for protection as well as the monarchy, perhaps because of the incapacity of the later Carolingians, but this nearly cost it its independence when, in 1081, Gregory VII claimed that the abbey appertained to the Holy See and that he therefore had the right to attach it to the jurisdiction of the Abbey of Saint Victor at

Marseille. Within about two years the pope had been forced to rescind this order in the face of fierce resistance from La Grasse.

While these texts provide the foundation for the histories of both province and abbey, they also have a wider significance for the social historian. Clauses 118 and 119 of the Cambrai statutes, for example, offer a fascinating glimpse of contemporary attitudes towards various occupations, for they set out lists of activities which clergy were allowed to engage in and those which they were not. Permissible were gardeners, tree-cutters, shepherds, feeders of cattle, farmers, painters, scribes, repairers and sellers of books, makers of parchment and inks, apothecaries, fishermen, cabinet-makers, joiners, blacksmiths, lime-burners, stonemasons, goldsmiths, barbers, phlebotomists, and cutters of woollen garments. Prohibited on the grounds that they were 'shameful and dishonest' were money-changers, shopkeepers, butchers, brokers, and advocates in lay courts, 'which they cannot exercise without sin and scandal in these modern times'. If they involved themselves in business and usury, they were excommunicated. In addition there were further occupations which it was not 'seemly' for them to follow, including fullers, shoemakers, weavers, actors, jugglers, secular *baillis*, goliards, toll-gatherers, makers of ointments, tripe-sellers, and rope-makers.

Two of the later donations to La Grasse illustrate another fundamental aspect of medieval life, that of crusade and pilgrimage, emphasising the role of women in both. In 1101, Ermengarde, *vicomtesse* of Béziers and Carcassonne, and her son, Bernard, the *vicomte*, who 'were setting out on a journey to the Holy Sepulchre', granted the abbey the *villa* of Cazilhac and the church of Saint Hilary within the *villa*. They did so 'fearing the magnitude of our sins and considering how we might be able to find mercy before the severe and dreadful judgement of God, accepting the advice for salvation from the Lord himself, saying in the Gospel: "Give alms and behold all things are clean unto you"[Luke, 11.41]'. In return the monks were 'always to pray to the Lord for us and for the souls of our parents'. The second charter, issued eight years later, is an interesting variation on the same theme. Here, Agnes, Countess of Roussillon, granted La Grasse the ruined monastery of Saint Andrew of Sorède, 'to be governed and administered in accordance with God and the rule of Saint Benedict in perpetuity'. The gift was on behalf of her husband, the Count Girard, away in the Holy Land. Her husband, she said, would confirm the gift on his safe return. Not only does this document offer some insight

into the mind set of these donors, but it also reflects a dual aspect of the early twelfth-century expansion, showing both crusade and colonisation.

Although in many ways different in period, region, and type of source, in one aspect the two collections have common ground, which is that of forgery. To the upright bishops of the thirteenth-century province of Reims, the fraudulent use of documents was a serious offence: those who falsified papal letters were to be brought to justice, while forgers of seals were to be excommunicated. Yet the editors of the cartulary of La Grasse have detected twenty-two forged documents, which is more than 10% of the total, including false bulls and false donations. The monks felt this was necessary because a fundamental shift in attitudes was taking place. Written documents had become essential instruments in the central middle ages; for La Grasse, early medieval *lacunae* had to be filled if its privileges (real or imagined) were to be protected and proven. Ironically, in 1228 a trusting pope authenticated two of the abbey's key forgeries.

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**The Life of St. Edmund by Matthew Paris.**  
**Translated, edited and with a biography by C.H.**  
**Lawrence.** Stroud, Alan Sutton in association with St.  
Edmund Hall, Oxford, 1996, viii + 184pp.  
ISBN 0 7509 1166 2.

This translation of Matthew Paris' *Life of St Edmund* provides a valuable and welcome extension of Lawrence's earlier work, *St. Edmund of Abingdon, A Study in Hagiography and History* (Oxford, 1960), which contains the Latin texts of the *Lives* by Paris and Eustace of Faversham together with the *Quadriologus* (depositions concerning the life of St. Edmund by four members of his *familia*). The *Life of St. Edmund* by Matthew Paris, chronicler of St. Albans, is an essential source for the study of this scholar, teacher and

reluctant Archbishop of Canterbury, who was buried at the Cistercian foundation of Pontigny and subsequently canonised. It was influential in repeating and promoting the myth of Edmund's self-imposed exile built around the model of St. Thomas Becket, a myth effectively demolished here by Lawrence.

Lawrence's translation from the Latin is accessible and faithful, retaining the distinctive stylistic features signalled in the chapter on Matthew Paris. The introduction is both eminently readable and impeccably scholarly, full of helpful pointers to the nature of hagiographic material and to the preoccupations and distortions of Paris and his sources, in the light of which the *Life* is to be read. The reconstruction of Edmund's life is considerably expanded from the earlier version, with particular attention paid to what can be gleaned about his background and about his early periods at Paris and at Oxford before his spell as treasurer and canon of Salisbury Cathedral and his elevation as Archbishop of Canterbury. This section includes speculation on the source of his father's wealth, supplemented by useful parallels from Thomas Celano's *Life of St. Francis*, and a full discussion of the nature and aims of Edmund's *Speculum Ecclesie*. In addition to the methodical documentation and consideration of the problems of chronological reconstruction, Lawrence brings to life the backdrop against which the events of Edmund's life were played out, including the rise of the universities in Paris and in Oxford in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the relations between England and the French-speaking countries of the continent at this time, and the relations between Church and State under Henry III.

While Lawrence's book offers much of particular interest to those concerned with the political and religious affairs of England in the thirteenth century, its accessibility and breadth of scope is to be warmly recommended to anyone with a general interest in the Middle Ages.

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**D.A. Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*.** London and Rio Grande, The Hambledon Press, 1996, x + 480 pp. ISBN 0-8528-5070-1. £40.00.

Dr David Carpenter is the leading historian of Henry III's reign of his generation. Apart, however, from his magisterial *The Minority of Henry III* (1990), his work has appeared mostly in a series of articles scattered through a wide range of periodicals and publications stretching back to 1976. It is extremely useful to have them brought together with other material in this new single volume, which contains a total of twenty-one essays. It is particularly valuable to have reprinted here Carpenter's seminal pieces on 'King, Magnates and Society: the Personal Rule of King Henry III, 1234-1258' (1985) and 'What Happened in 1258?' (1984), both of which successfully challenged established orthodoxies and provided fresh interpretations of the historical events concerned. Especially welcome, too, are the reprints of 'The Fall of Hubert de Burgh' (1980), 'The Decline of the Curial Sheriff in England, 1194-1258' (1976), and 'Was there a Crisis of the Knightly Class in the Thirteenth Century? The Oxfordshire Evidence' (1980), but all the articles, whether on the gold treasure of Henry III, Henry's building programme at the Tower of London, or the political role of the peasantry in 1258-67, contain a characteristic abundance of interest, factual detail and stimulating insight.

Four articles appear here for the first time. The first, on 'The Dating and Making of Magna Carta', revisits the much-debated question of when the final form of Magna Carta was agreed between King John and the baronial opposition and therefore of when the engrossing and sealing of the charters began. Carpenter argues persuasively, against J.C. Holt and others, that these developments took place on 15th June 1215 at Runnymede, thereby restoring credibility to the explicit statement in the charter's own dating clause. In a long and important essay, 'Justice and Jurisdiction under King John and King Henry III', Carpenter discusses J.C. Holt's conclusions, as set out in the second edition of his *Magna Carta* (1992), concerning the effects of the Charter on the litigation of tenants-in-chief, and especially on that involving the writ *praecipe in capite*, which, according to Holt, made such litigation routine and comparatively free from royal interference after 1215. His reassessment not only overturns Holt's main conclusion, arguing in

particular that the importance of the writ *praecipe in capite* has been exaggerated, but also suggests that the developing doctrine of the crown's prerogative jurisdiction was in any case soon to supersede its feudal jurisdiction in the thirteenth century. A short paper on 'Matthew Paris and Henry III's Speech at the Exchequer in October 1256' has the dual purpose of upholding (not entirely satisfactorily) the chronicler's essential accuracy in reporting this speech and, in the light of it, of assessing the king's aims and political abilities. Finally, in a detailed discussion of 'The Burial of King Henry III, the *Regalia* and Royal Ideology', the author surveys the evidence for Henry's funeral arrangements and the light which it throws on how the king viewed the nature of his monarchical authority, with particular stress on the link with Edward the Confessor.

Requiring mention in more detail, too, is an article to have appeared in another publication in 1996 but not otherwise previously published. 'The Beginnings of Parliament' identifies taxation as the central factor in the assembly's development, but, though wide-ranging and impressive, the discussion fails adequately to reconcile two of its key views, namely, that of parliament as a focus for opposition to the Crown, especially regarding taxation, and that of parliament as having the king's council at its heart, or (following F.W. Maitland) as its core and essence. One remains puzzled as to how these two apparently or potentially conflicting aspects developed in practice. Moreover, readers of this chapter may be surprised to find the *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum* of Edwards II's reign cited no fewer than five times without proper reference either to the controversies surrounding it or to its unofficial and arguably radical nature, and equally surprised to discover the important work of G.L. Harriss relegated to a footnote in the consideration of parliament's ability to refuse taxation to kings in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

These essays are enhanced throughout by Dr Carpenter's limpid writing and finely tuned sense of style, for which he possesses a good ear. Not only is he alert to stylistic characteristics in other authors but he can write with considerable vividness and elegance himself. These two aspects occur nicely together in a compelling antithesis comparing the work of W. Stubbs and F.W. Maitland. Carpenter writes (407-8):

Reading Maitland is like galloping a fine horse across open country; reading Stubbs is like following the plough through heavy soil.

It is a pity to have to report a disturbing number of misprints. Among others, I have noticed five cases of 'chose' for 'choose' in six pages of text (10-15); the confusing 'write' for 'writs' (18); 'and *iniuria*' for 'an *iniuria*' (41); and 'countries' for 'counties' (387). These ought to have been eliminated by more careful checking, but, on the other hand, they cannot be seen as more than minor blemishes in a valuable and most welcome volume of essays.

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**Suzanne MacAlister, *Dreams and Suicides: The Greek Novel from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, London, Routledge, 1996, 248pp. ISBN 0-415 - 07005-8. £40.**

Routledge are to be congratulated for adding to their already impressive list on the ancient novel a study which looks at the revival of the novel/romance in the twelfth century in terms of the thematics of the ancient novel, showing the three complete revival texts in relation with the five ancient exemplars. While this approach is not new and is generally agreed to be essential, this is the first attempt to follow through two motifs from the ancient novel to the revival. It is an ambitious, well written and highly disciplined account, which will engage specialists from both sides of the chronological divide in serious debate. Its theoretical credentials are impressive: for narrative Bakhtin's concepts of the chronotope and 'alien speech'; for suicide Durkheim, and for dreams Artemidoros. It has a tight and convincing symmetrical structure: a theoretical introduction, two chapters on the ancient novel (general, then focused on the motifs), two chapters on the twelfth-century revival (focused on the motifs, then general) and a

link chapter between these two pairs. It is a sophisticated study which has carried the study of twelfth-century Byzantine literature to a higher plane, and all medievalists should be grateful.

Ironically it is for medievalists that it is least satisfactory. The reasons for MacAlister's choice of motifs are not immediately comprehensible. In *Chaireas and Kallirhoe*, Chariton lists the subject-matter of his previous books, which may stand also for the novel/romance as a whole: pirates, servitude, lawsuits, fighting, self-killing, war and capture (to which we might add shipwreck). Of these suicide appears the least characteristic, and dreams do not appear at all. Besides there is a sense of imbalance, that the two motifs are different in kind and function. The plots of the ancient novels do turn on 'suicide actions', but dreams, which are omnipresent in both groups of texts, are less a plotting device (but see MacAlister's attractive readings in two of the ancient novels, pp.76-82) than an alternative level of discourse, as was seen by Alexiou already in 1977. These motifs in fact work quite well for the ancient novels, but are less successful with the twelfth-century material. The lack of a twelfth-century equivalent to Artemidoros makes the dream analysis methodologically dubious; it is also ill-timed, for the precise relationship of theory and practice in Byzantine dreaming and the distinction between dreams, visions and *logismoi* have yet to be determined even for everyday Byzantine experience, let alone with the additional complications of fiction - MacAlister here leans too heavily on her (less than persuasive) theory of the connection between Aristotelian commentary and dreams in fiction. As for suicide, her connection of Christian martyrdom with classical suicide is not unproblematic, despite Bowersock. Further, what is in the ancient novels a somewhat absent factor (very few characters ever actually kill themselves) becomes even more absent in the revival novels. MacAlister's demonstration that twelfth-century romances have far fewer 'suicide actions' than the hellenistic novels leaves a curiously empty effect: what then *was* the twelfth-century novel concerned with?

While the work makes no claim to comprehensive coverage, the subtitle 'from ... to' raises expectations of engagement with the phenomenon of revival. These are disappointed. Chapter 3, 'The novel, the dream and the "suicide" in the interim period', shows most clearly the dangers and limitations of MacAlister's approach. For dreams and suicides it leans on tendentious or interim interpretations,

and in the section on the reception of the ancient novel in the period it strays into speculation treated, and repeated (pp.114, 118), as fact: 'by the time of the twelfth century it [the ancient novel] was at a peak of popularity it had not enjoyed since its floruit'. Chapter 4, 'The Byzantine revival', concentrates on the two motifs in the ancient and medieval texts - with all the weaknesses identified above - rather than on an analysis on the phenomenon of the revival. The final chapter, 5, 'The revival in context', shows interesting connections with the intellectual world of the twelfth century while never providing an explanation why in the 1140s it became desirable to revive an ancient form; rather, disparate features are invoked without clear result. The answer to the puzzle of revival is surely rather to be sought in the interplay of Byzantine narrative, rhetoric and fiction and in the concerns of twelfth-century (rather than second-century) literary society. MacAlister's use of hagiography (e.g. pp.110-111) points the way. While the strengths of this book are in the individual readings in chapters 1, 2 and 4 rather than its flawed thematics or in any broader contribution to the literary history of the twelfth century, it is a serious work and a significant attempt at a necessary advance in the reading of Byzantine literature.

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**Claudia Seebass-Linggi, *Lecture d'Erec; traces épiques et troubadouresques dans le conte de Chrétien de Troyes*, Bern; Peter Lang, 1996, 295pp.**

This is the book of a thesis, and at points this is very apparent in the dense and subtle analysis of *Erec* which the author offers us. Her aim is to show the influence of the *chansons de geste* and the troubadour lyric on the first of Chrétien's romances which she does by discovering numerous verbal echoes from both genres. She suggests an interesting rivalry with Raimbaut d'Aurenga by showing the links between Chrétien's lyrics, which pick up one of the themes of *Erec*,

and those of Raimbaut. She uses the references to epic to suggest that Chrétien is distinguishing his hero from the heroes of the *chansons de geste* and unobtrusively distancing himself from the values associated with them. One of her important points is that critics have been too ready to assume that the views expressed by Erec or Enide reflect those of Chrétien himself. Her detailed analysis of his vocabulary and use of particular terms which she then contrasts with the other genres suggests that Chrétien consciously distances himself from the views of his characters, whom he regards with a certain irony. She also stresses his interest in the *chier tans orcarestia* which is experienced by Erec and Enide during their journey and is a theme developed in Chrétien's lyric which she would date to just after the composition of *Erec et Enide*. She could also have linked it to the speech by Gauvain in *Yvain*. This is a stimulating and scholarly addition to the corpus of Chrétien criticism. Those of us who are less gifted linguistically than the author will regret that she does not offer any translation of the many quotations in English, German and Italian, although she does translate the Occitan lyrics. There is a surprising number of misprints in a book of this quality (p.54, *isloé*, p.158 *imortance*, p.201 *Topsfied* who was a man not a woman, etc) and although the bibliography is extensive and interesting, there are some surprising omissions, for example Linda Gowan's book on Keu or Glyn Burgess's book on *Erec et Enide*. Occasionally the author expects too much from the reader. On p.111 for example she says 'Dans le *Brut*, ce n'est plus Bedoer qui livre le combat, mais Arthur; ce changement du personnage n'a toutefois pas d'importance.' She never makes it clear why this change is unimportant or indeed why it is a change. She has not mentioned Bedoer as a combattant before, as far as I can see, and as a result the significance of this sentence escapes me. Despite these criticisms this book is the work of a gifted and knowledgeable scholar who has given us new insights into the work of one of the greatest French poets.

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**Stephan Maksymiuk. The Court Magician in Medieval German Romance** (Mikrokosmos Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Bedeutungsforschung vol. 44), Frankfurt a. Main, Lang, 1996, 185pp. ISBN 3 631 30099-9. £ 29.

Stephan Maksymiuk demonstrates convincingly by a host of historical parallels in the first chapters of his book that the magician was far from being simply a literary topos in the medieval period. Rather were the court magicians of literature reflections of the 'magical advisors' employed in court circles from Roman times through the era of Celtic druidism up to the time of the courtly romances: even Frederick II, sometimes condemned by contemporaries for his 'rationalism', had recourse to such advisors. The author also demonstrates very thoroughly how Christianity itself was shot through with magical practices and that it owed many early successes to its practitioners' ability to convince others of its greater efficacy vis-à-vis more indigenous systems of sorcery. Even in pointedly Christian romances such as *Parzival* and *Wigalois* the ability to overcome opponents' magic as well as being able when necessary to harness magic of one's own (albeit in the benign form of *le merveilleux chrétien*) were indispensable parts of statecraft and war-making.

The demonisation and criminalisation of magic were in fact largely manifestations of the later Middle Ages which, trying to draw non-existent distinctions between Christian and 'heathen' magic, were responsible for such excesses as witch hunting - whereas for instance in *Parzival*, even the holy Grail messenger, Cundrie, is depicted with many attributes of a rather marginal 'wild woman', features which in the later era would undoubtedly have characterised her as a witch. The early and High Middle Ages have in fact given us one of the more sympathetic magician figures of world literature in the person of Merlin. Merlin owed his original ability to 'see into the life of things' to his self-imposed seclusion in the Caledonian forest to which he had repaired after the battle of Arfderydd, finding communion with Nature infinitely more preferable to the horrors of war. At a later stage Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Vita Merlini* embellishes early accounts and shows how Merlin's suprasensible powers are

instrumentalised by his king (Rodarch) for his own, not very noble purposes. It seems then that the bad repute which magicians acquired in the later period may have had something to do with their 'selling out' to worldly princelings with (sometimes) demonic designs (Merlin being then on this analysis a prototype of J. Robert Oppenheimer? Sensibly Maksymiuk steers clear of suchlike speculation).

The author's fresh approach to the phenomenon of the magician takes good account of recent contributions such as those of Keith Thomas and Valerie Flint and he is an able practitioner of what he himself terms 'historical anthropology'. He gives us clear readings of figures who might otherwise have seemed nebulous or tangential or at any rate difficult to classify imaginatively. The book is written with an exemplary clarity and is an important modern study of a literary figure not studied in monograph form since the early thirties (Adelaide Weiss, *Merlin in German Literature*. Catholic University of America Studies in German vol.3, 1933, repr. New York: AMS Press, 1970).

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**Monika Deck, Die Nibelungenklage in der Forschung. Bericht und Kritik** (Europäische Hochschulschriften vol.1564), Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 1996, 254 pp. ISBN 3 631 49686 9. £32.

*The Nibelungen Lament* is one of the strangest works of the medieval literary tradition. As the chapters of Monika Deck's very thorough conspectus show, the subjects of its date (chapter 7), authorship (chapter 6), genre (chapter 11), sources (chapter 8) and critical status (chapter 12) are still controversial (and likely to remain so). The reason that it is read today is that it is contained in all but one of the *Nibelungenlied* manuscripts and seems to function as an 'Afterword' (Deck, p.230) to that larger narrative (although a special crux here is that some scholars - including Michael Curschmann in the modern era - have always felt that it may have arisen before the *Nibelungenlied* was actually written down; or perhaps that it may have somehow

arisen in response to an evolving tradition, cf. Deck's ninth chapter). But if it is an Afterword, it is one written without any special *sympatico* with the larger text, whose ethics it largely rewrites (which is why I queried George Gillespie's description of it as a 'commentary' on the *Nibelungenlied*, cf. *Reading the Nibelungenlied*, Durham Modern Language Series 1995, pp.73-81, p.95).

The manuscript tradition makes this work (called *diu klage* in its last line) seem like an appendix but it is written in rhyming couplets, not in the strophic form of the *Nibelungenlied* itself and where the *Nibelungenlied* had ended on a decidedly final, tragic note, the *Lament* narrates the mourning for the downfall of the Burgundians (Nibelungen), apportions blame for the tragedy amongst sundry fictional characters (often in a way which runs counter to the neutral tone of the original narrator) and suggests that happier times are just round the corner (again counter to 'the grim silence of the heroic world'(Hatto) which had enveloped the conclusion of the larger poem).

Deck's book (which grew out of a doctoral thesis supervised by Werner Hoffmann) will be of great use to all in the medievalist community with a special interest in the heroic genre, together with the excellent English translation done recently by Winder McConnell (*The Lament of the Nibelungen*, Columbia, Camden House, 1994). I hope it will increase international interest in a work which with audacious brio opposes the tragic philosophical premises upon which the old heroic epic operated in favour of a theodicean ethic which certainly does not endear itself to the late twentieth-century *Zeitgeist*.

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**Zygmunt G. Baranski, "Sole nuovo, luce nuova": Saggi sul rinnovamento culturale in Dante, Turin, Scriptorium, 1996, 317 pp.**

Professor Baranski's work on Dante is highly respected in the English-speaking world of Dante studies: this volume will allow it to be more widely known in Italy. It is a collection of articles on Dante, two of which have already appeared in Italian, the others, originally in

English, being translated by Marco Pustianaz. All have been revised and amplified. The author clearly aims at a certain unity provided by consistency of approach and literary concern, and he himself names experimentation, memory and structure as three aspects of Dante's work to which he keeps returning.

Emphasis is placed on the ways in which Dante, always aware of his readers, seeks to establish his own place in relation to the culture of his time, a culture which he has mastered while being aware of its limitations. This is explored especially in the area of rhetoric and poetics, in which Dante goes beyond the assumptions of his contemporaries and predecessors, both Latin and vernacular, subverting the conventional *genera dicendi* and taking the Bible as his model for his flexible idea of 'comedy'. These are the topics of the first four chapters, in which the interest in the 'cultural renewal' of the book's title is most apparent. Chapters five to eight contain various readings of specific episodes in the *Commedia*. These may be *lecturae* of individual cantos (*Inferno* 16 and 6; *Purgatorio* 27) or studies of larger topics (the three dreams in *Purgatorio*). The author expresses his dissatisfaction with the traditional *lectura*, in which the canto is, he claims, too often seen in isolation from the rest of the poem, and chooses episodes with a structural importance, or which lend themselves to a discussion of patterns of internal references. The Gerione episode is ingeniously seen as providing a coded account of Dante's Biblical politics. A discussion of the interpretation of '*giusti son due*' (*Inferno* 6, 73) leads to a consideration of analogies between Florence and Sodom. Dante's dreams are seen as realistically portrayed as developing from the pilgrim's state of mind on falling asleep, and thus having a retrospective rather than a prophetic function. Finally, an appendix offers a reading of the *Fiore*. While Baranski does not commit himself on the question of authorship, he demonstrates the skill with which the writer draws on contemporary culture. Professor Baranski's various soundings are accompanied by an impressive knowledge of the literary tradition on which Dante is drawing, and he is at his ease in the vast world of Dante criticism in both Italian and English.

There is much of great interest in this study, which certainly deserves to be made more fully available to Italian readers. However, despite its recurrent literary preoccupations, the work does not altogether achieve the desired unity. A book on Dante's poetics would

be welcome, which might give a more sustained, systematic and developed treatment of this important topic.

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