

Zitierhinweis

Wassenhoven, Dominik: Rezension über: James T. Palmer, Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish world, 690-900, Turnhout: Brepols, 2009, in: German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol. XXXIII (2011), 2, S. 35-38, <http://recensio.net/r/8a35cdd745b3f90898c88ffa46390c69>

First published: German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol. XXXIII (2011), 2

GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE LONDON

Bulletin



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BOOK REVIEWS

JAMES T. PALMER, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World, 690–900*, Studies in the Middle Ages, 19 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), xii + 324 pp. ISBN 978 2 503 51911 1. €70.00

'Above all, it was through the men and women of English descent who worked with [Boniface] in Germany that the English tradition of an organized church under the ultimate authority of the pope passed to the countries converted under his leadership. When all allowance has been made for the part played by Boniface in the ecclesiastical politics of the Frankish kingdom, he remains essentially the leader of an Anglo-Saxon mission to the heathen of Germany.'¹ This quotation from Frank Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England* summarizes the older research on the Anglo-Saxon missions to the continent and their main strands: the well-organized missionaries constituted ecclesiastical structures, brought papal authority to the Frankish kingdom, and converted the German heathens. Despite the title of his book, James Palmer is not concerned with every aspect of the Anglo-Saxons' contact with Francia, but concentrates on the Anglo-Saxon missions. Unlike many earlier writers on this topic, Palmer is interested less in the missions themselves than in their legacy and the literary manifestations of their activities, especially in hagiographical texts. In particular, he analyses how the *vitae* written in the eighth and ninth centuries reshaped or shaped the past and thus the conception of the Anglo-Saxon missions as a whole.

The study, which emerged from a doctoral dissertation, is clearly structured. After an outline of the modern scholarship on the subject and a summary of the sources in the introduction, the missionaries' motives are scrutinized. *Peregrinatio* was clearly an issue, but has to be treated individually and at the same time seems to be 'a literary construction of piety' (p. 75). The second chapter, 'Kings and Nobles', reflects on contacts between the missionaries and the Frankish aristocracy. It is not by chance that the success of the Anglo-Saxon missions and the rise of the Pippinids-Carolingians coincide. Chapters 3

¹ Frank M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3rd edn. Oxford, 1971), 171.

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and 4 are mostly concerned with the hagiographers' views of the missionaries, and especially their conception of the Frankish world. Paganism 'gave a clear "something" against which the saints could fight', so that the protagonists of the *vitae* were heroes of a kind and 'the focal points from which true Christian culture spread into different communities' (p. 144). By this means, the saints' lives also contributed to the formation of local Christian identities. As the next chapter shows, the hagiographers depicted the missionaries as bringing order into the wilderness. Apparent manifestations of change and transformation were the (re-)establishment of ecclesiastical institutions, above all, monasteries. Consequently, Palmer elaborates on monasticism in chapter 5, focusing on the development of the saints' cults in several specific contexts (especially Fulda and Tauberbischofsheim). The last two chapters go beyond the Frankish kingdom, bringing into focus Rome, namely, the papal authority, and the Holy Land by analysing the account of Willibald's pilgrimage.

In his concise conclusion, Palmer stresses that the missions 'did play a role in defining the language and direction of Church reform, an invigorated monasticism and interest in papal authority'. But, he suggests, this was not exclusively the result of the missionaries' influence, and these topics may as well be projections of hagiographers and other writers 'onto the "golden age" of the Anglo-Saxon "missions"' (p. 283). Moreover, hagiography was written with certain audiences in mind, but this factor did not always affect the content, especially the concept of sanctity. Saints are not just there, they were created by individuals or groups, and this creation is already an interpretative act that finds expression in saints' cults and especially in *vitae*.

The entire study is clearly and fluently written, which adds to the comprehensibility of the presented insights. One major drawback, however, is Palmer's use of German-language scholarship. He makes ample use of German (and Dutch) works, but it is questionable to what extent he really understands them. The assumption of Palmer's poor command of the German language is based on his use of a number of odd quotations, as in the introduction, to pick one example. On p. 10, Palmer cites Albert Hauck as follows: 'Wer vom Standpunkt der konfessionellen Polemik [. . .] kann annehmen, dass ohne Rom die Entwicklung der mittelalterlichen Kirche eine geradere, gesün-

dere Richtung innegehalter [*sic!*] hätte, als sie es wirklich hat.’² The original passage reads: ‘Wer vom Standpunkt der konfessionellen Polemik aus die Geschichte der Vergangenheit betrachtet, kann annehmen, daß ohne Rom die Entwicklung der mittelalterlichen Kirche eine geradere, gesündere Richtung innegehalten hätte, als sie es wirklich that [*sic!*].’ Palmer’s omission shows that he does not understand the grammatical structure of this sentence, especially as his translation contains a question mark in square brackets, as if Hauck would have asked a question and forgotten to set a question mark. There are various other passages in which Palmer quotes erroneously,³ inserts wrong words in omissions,⁴ cites titles of works incorrectly,⁵ or just uses incorrect terms.⁶ The examples given here are not complete, and they are not meant to ridicule the author, but are intended to demonstrate that the errors cannot simply be explained as careless mistakes. Rather, they suggest that the author has limited language skills in German.

Leaving these deficiencies aside, the book presents an articulate study of hagiographical interest in the Anglo-Saxon missions, revealing that these literary works do not only interpret past events and their protagonists, but shape the picture of this past and thus affect the impression of the Anglo-Saxon mission(s) as a whole. ‘This is why something like the Anglo-Saxon missions cannot be understood as a series of confined events: their significance was constantly revised, edited, and reshaped according to the needs, interests, and tastes of anyone whose attention was drawn by the saints of the Carolingian world’ (p. 290). It is to be hoped that future research on hagiography will display the same diligent and prudent analysis as James Palmer has carried out for the *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon missionaries.

² The omission is Palmer’s; [*sic!*] was inserted by the reviewer. Palmer cites the 2nd edn. of Albert Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* (Leipzig, 1898), i. 577, although a 3rd and 4th edn. were also published (Leipzig, 1904), in which the cited passage appears on pp. 593–4.

³ On pp. 11–12, for example: ‘der den universalkirchen Zusammenhalt erneuerte’ instead of ‘der den universalkirchlichen Zusammenhalt erneuerte’.

⁴ On p. 215, n.2: ‘[die] Grund [. . .] der Einheit der mittelalterlichen Kirche und [. . . die] mittelalterlichen Papstmach [*sic!*]’ (square brackets by James Palmer; [*sic!*] inserted by the reviewer).

⁵ On p. 254, n.19: ‘Schriebenschulen’ instead of ‘Schreibschulen’.

⁶ On p. 112: ‘Kultenpropaganda’ instead of ‘Kultpropaganda’.

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