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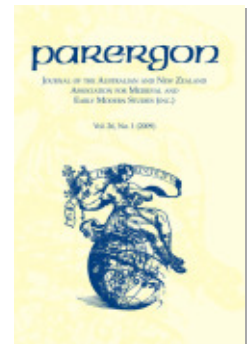
Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict (review)

Toby Burrows

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and skaldic poetry emanating from Iceland. Perhaps the best of these is Gísli Sigurðsson's essay that challenges the existing orthodoxy and argues that the sagas were built upon a shared narrative tradition and represent 'an unbroken memory in an oral tradition reaching from the times they describe up to the time they were put into writing' (p. 204). Other notable contributions include John Lindow's consideration of the attributes of the dwarfs in relation to poetry, Vésteinn Ólason's examination of *Njáls saga* to show that although it includes elements of fantasy and exaggeration it was a response to the realities outside the text, and Diana Whaley's use of Þjóðólfr's *Magnúsflokkur* to suggest a supplementary model of analysis for skaldic encomia.

There are also a number of excellent essays not primarily concerned with the literature of medieval Iceland. Stefan Brink uses place-name evidence as a guide to the worship of different Norse gods, demonstrating that such worship was regional, and his list of theophoric place names in Scandinavia is sure to prove very useful to many scholars. Also of note are Jens Peter Schjødt's examination of pagan Norse ritual, especially that which is associated with Óðinn, M. J. Driscoll's account of the Icelandic version of the life of the fifteenth-century Albanian hero known as Skanderberg, and Kari Ellen Gade's appraisal of the use of Ælfric's vernacular grammar in Iceland.

Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World is a varied and fitting tribute to Margaret Clunies Ross, and the bibliography of her published works which concludes this volume, including important contributions to Australian Aboriginal studies, demonstrates the considerable influence she has had.

Shane McLeod

School of Humanities (History)

The University of Western Australia

Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, *Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict* (Cistercian Studies Series 212), trans. David Barry, Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 2007; paperback; pp. v, 568; R.R.P. US\$49.95; ISBN 9780879072124.

Smaragdus was one of the more significant Western monks of the earlier ninth century. Abbot of the imperial abbey of Castellio (later moved to Saint-Mihiel, near Verdun) and an envoy of both Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, he appears to have been closely associated with the efforts of Benedict of Aniane to reform monasticism in the Empire. Smaragdus was a prolific author, whose detailed commentary on the *Rule of Saint Benedict* was written as part of this

monastic reform programme and draws heavily on one of its key texts, the *Concordia Regularum* produced by Benedict of Aniane. The first complete commentary on the entire *Rule*, it was much copied and influential in later centuries, not least among the early Cistercians. Smaragdus' commentary was almost certainly one of the sources used by Robert of Molesmes and his colleagues to draw together their understanding of the *Rule*.

David Barry, who worked on this translation for almost twenty years, is himself a Benedictine monk at the Abbey of New Norcia in Western Australia. His main aim is to make the commentary of Smaragdus 'better known by monastics and those interested in the monastic tradition' (p. 36) – especially those who are unable to read him in the original Latin. The translation is clear and readable without over-simplifying or over-modernising; at the same time, it manages to be accurate and faithful to the original without becoming too Latinate in structure and style. There are footnotes dealing with the occasional difficult or obscure Latin word or phrase, while the original Latin word is noted in the margins when required to understand the etymological point being made by the author.

An introductory essay by Terrence Kardong covers the life and work of Smaragdus, while Daniel M. LaCorte examines the relationship between Smaragdus' writings and the early Cistercians. A third essay, by the late Jean Leclercq, discusses the relevance of Smaragdus to the monastic life today. Together, these essays provide a valuable framework for situating the translation in its historical and monastic contexts.

The Latin text used as the basis for this translation is that of the standard modern critical edition in the *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticorum* (by Alfred Spannagel and Pius Engelbert, published in 1974). The footnotes, though based on those of the Latin edition, update and expand them where appropriate. A consolidated index to authors and works cited is given as an appendix. There is a similar index to biblical citations. The layout of the page makes it easy to distinguish text cited from the *Rule* (in bold) or from the Bible (in italics), as well as to identify the citations. The pagination of the Latin edition is also clearly marked. In all, this is a very well-presented, accessible and reliable version of a text which still resonates today, nearly 1,200 years after it was written.

Toby Burrows
School of Humanities
University of Western Australia

