
H-France Review Vol. 6 (April 2006), No. 36

M. A. Claussen, *The Reform of the Frankish Church: Chrodegang of Metz and the Regula canonicorum in the Eighth Century*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought: Fourth Series, 61. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xii + 342 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, and indices. £50 U.K./\$80.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-521-83931-9.

Review by Abigail Firey, University of Kentucky.

In the middle of the eighth century, in the middle of what would become in the next century the Middle Kingdom of the Carolingian Empire, was Metz, and in the middle of the Metz cathedral close was Chrodegang. The centrality of Chrodegang in early medieval church history is not news to early medievalists, but his importance has been obscured in many general accounts by an inclination to treat his contemporary Boniface as the more intriguing figure in eighth-century ecclesiastical developments. In part this is because Boniface has long been embedded in a grand narrative of insular missionary work, itself embedded in an even grander narrative of the conversion of all Europe to Christianity. In part, it is because the surviving corpus of Bonifatian correspondence is relatively substantial and certainly interesting. But also, one suspects, it is because it has been easier to tell stories about even the undeniably complex situation at the edge of Christian Francia than to confront the curious liminalities perceptible at the center. Turning the spotlight on Chrodegang and his environs illuminates the uncertain boundaries between clerics who vowed to serve their brothers in community and those who vowed to serve their community as brothers; between Merovingian and Carolingian phases in the exercise of ecclesiastical authority; between the creation and the continuation of Christian institutions; and between the urban forms of the centers of civic administration of the later Roman Empire and of the medieval market towns to come.

Sometimes more and sometimes less explicitly, M. A. Claussen's *Reform of the Frankish Church* advances our understanding of those issues. Claussen describes the project as an exploration of Chrodegang's "preoccupation with the creation of communities of faith and concord modeled on the early church" (abstract page). These themes of community-building and recourse to an apostolic model, however, may be among the lesser contributions of this dense and useful work. The text is so laden with data that Chrodegang's putative ideology of "community" cannot compete with the weight of the erudition displayed with regard attention devoted to other subjects. The book has every appearance of being a doctoral dissertation converted into a monograph. Like many (if not most) dissertations, it presents a flood of information for an audience obliged to provide a thoughtful reading; little or no context (other than the scholarly *status quaestionis*) is owed to this audience, but all evidence of the author's capabilities will be generously supplied to them. The footnotes swarm busily beneath the main text, and in them one can discern at a glance how much of Claussen's industry is indebted to the specialized German scholarship of early medieval studies. To have both distilled that material and to have refreshed the investigation of eighth-century Metz in English is a great service.

The presumption that the work is for an audience with specialized interests governs the decision to omit identifying descriptors. Early medievalists will know what Claussen means by a "Pirminic house" (referring to Gegenbach) and will keep straight the Augustines (of Hippo and Canterbury) and Gregories (the Great and of Tours) who dash through consecutive paragraphs, usually with no means of identification other than literary context, sometimes elliptically indicated (pp. 11-13). The cast of minor characters is quite sizeable and closely specified in some explanations: "Finally, St.-Trond had an unusually close relationship with the bishopric of Metz, at least according to the city's traditions. Trudo,

the noble founder of the house, was a pupil of Remaclus, abbot of Solignac. Remaclus set Trudo to be educated at Metz, under Chlodulf (consecrated c. 654), the putative son and eventual successor of Arnulf" (p. 24). It helps to remember from a passing reference twenty pages before that Arnulf was a bishop of Metz, and not to become too distracted by Solignac, a foundation hitherto not noted in discussion.

One might expect that scholarship of this nature would be matched with an equally detailed and meticulous index, but it is not the case. If, say, a reader were puzzled by the seemingly unconnected information that "by 755, the abess of this house [St-Pierre-aux-Nonnains in Metz, for which Chrodegang may have had some responsibility as founder or reformer] was a certain Eufemia, the daughter of Cancor, one of the original founders of Lorsch" (p. 28) and decided to trace information on Lorsch through the index, this reference is not cited—nor are the other references to Lorsch until page 116. Eufemia is noted, but for this reference only, leaving one to wonder about her significance. Cancor, however, had appeared six pages before: "Much of this argument hangs on one piece of evidence, the Lorsch annals for 764 states that Cancor, probably the count of Alemannia, and his mother Williswind, the widow of Count Rupert, gave the monastery to Chrodegang *tamquam consanguineo*" (p. 22). Aha!

Yet the sometimes demanding presentation of the material should not discourage readers, for there is much that is worthwhile in this study. In Claussen's analysis of the mechanics of "reform" (in this context, a concerted and successful expansion of episcopal influence reflected in increased legislative activity), he considers both personnel and strategies. Among the important topics addressed are the rationale for according Chrodegang more stature than Boniface in Frankish ecclesiastical politics. The view (set forth by other scholars, but meriting repetition) that it was likely Chrodegang, rather than Boniface, who anointed Pippin in 751 as king of the Franks is supported by the exposition of Chrodegang's more prominent position in the affairs of the realm after the retirement of Carloman, Boniface's sponsor (pp. 26-27). The implication that it was through the extra-Bonifatian network of established Frankish nobility and clergy that churches in Austrasia grew and prospered makes sense of contemporary and subsequent developments.

At the more theoretical level, Claussen's appreciation of the ways in which "old law" can be used to make sweeping changes is a refreshing departure from the tired claim that Carolingians were bound by slavish devotion to the precepts of the past, the *sententiae patrum*. Rather, Claussen argues, the legitimacy law has by virtue of its deceptive articulation of tradition can provide a secure foundation for effecting change (p. 49). Among the book's most important contributions is Claussen's attention to the impact of sources outside the legal corpus in the framing the ideals which canon law could reify: it is almost certainly correct that the writings of Gregory the Great and Julianus Pomerius shaped religious discourse in Austrasia more than has usually been recognized. The section on Pomerius (pp. 184-203) is especially welcome, for there is little scholarship available on this author so enthusiastically embraced by an important group of Carolingian clerics. Claussen's discussion of Caesarius of Arles, whom he presents as the third member of the textual triumvirate dominating ideas of reform, is weaker (pp. 177-84). Still, it invites further attention to the transmission and use of Caesarius's work in the Carolingian realms.

Claussen's central thesis is that Chrodegang was motivated to compose the *Regula canicorum* (Rule for Canons) as part of an effort to "build community" and that the community he sought to build was to be modelled on that of the apostolic church. Early in the book, Claussen proposes that the model of identity formation used in analysis of ethnicities in the early Middle Ages, "ethnogenesis," may be adopted to understand the formation of collective religious identity (p. 46, 57). He adduces the adoption of marriage practices as a manifestation of such "spiritual ethnogenesis": "by marrying outside the prohibited degrees, for instance, or by having a public ceremony, one showed that one sought to follow the

disciplina of the church, that one was a member of the Christian society” (p. 52). Just as Franks became Franks by social coalescence, so, by this argument, did they become Christian, subject to governance by synod and imperial *placitum*. Chrodegang’s project, Claussen believes, was to advance the formation of a Christian community by imposing a discipline upon the cathedral canons of Metz that would require them to loosen their ties of allegiance, both formal and affective, to their secular social groups and rebind them in a carefully engineered society. This was accomplished, Claussen argues, by providing new options for the disposal and retention of property, creating a system of feasting that both bound the canons to each other and encompassed groups outside their order, enacting a liturgical innovation that joined the churches of Metz in a circuit of connected observances, and eventually providing relics as a focus for memory of a common Christian past.

Metz, memory, and martyrs provide a context for Claussen’s reading of Chrodegang’s *Regula*. Evoking the civic buildings that dominated Roman Metz when it was a provincial capital—including both one of the largest amphitheatres in northern Europe (it could hold 25,000 people) and a notable basilica—as well as its rewarding location near the imperial capital at Trier, Claussen presents a city restored to some glory after its destruction by Attila. Merovingian churches were erected and Metz’s status as capital of Austrasia ensured both noble and royal investment (pp. 37-45). By the mid-eighth century, Metz had acquired an apostolic history: not only did Paul the Deacon report the apostolic origins of its Christian community, but a preponderance of cult sites was dedicated to St. Peter, or, in a refraction of the perceived connection to Rome, other Roman saints (p. 41). Early medieval Metz had thirty-two churches of which we know (nicely mapped on p. 211), and their construction, maintenance, renovation, and ornamentation seem to have supported skilled craftsmen who drew on Italian models, perhaps later commissioned for the building of Charlemagne’s palace at Aachen (p. 253). Claussen draws a parallel between contemporary papal restoration of Rome and Chrodegang’s support for art and architecture in Metz to illuminate Chrodegang’s understanding of the bishop’s role as “the leader of his community,” a community located in a particular place (pp. 254-56). The translation of Roman relics (those of the obscure saints Gorgonius, Nabor, and Nazarius) to “his own foundation at Gorze, as well as to Lorsch, a monastery with which he was deeply connected, and Hilariacum, a potential place of enemies, both of his and of his patron, Pippin the Short,...would help keep these disparate and geographically dispersed communities bound both to one another and to Metz” (pp. 261-62). The forging of a particular imagined Roman past in Metz was also the impetus, Claussen suggests, for Chrodegang’s selection of the Benedictine Rule as the essential template for his *Regula canonicorum*: “the very idea of RB [not, in fact, used in early Roman or Italian houses] as a specifically Roman norm was a creation by northern Europeans, both Anglo-Saxons and Franks” (p. 161).

Claussen’s thesis revolves around what he imagines as Chrodegang’s view of the past. “Late antiquity did indeed stand as normative with Chrodegang, but he saw his role as a creator of a new institution, not a reconstitutor of an old and decrepit one...Chrodegang’s is a solution that both looks to the past yet understands the present, and it is a solution that recognizes the difference between the two” (p. 204). In Claussen’s view, the past that Chrodegang “was concerned, deeply and zealously” to restore was not that of imperial Rome, however, but of the apostolic church, especially that of Jerusalem (p. 163). Despite Claussen’s reiterations of this idea (pp. 80-81, 99, 100-02, 111, 238, 248-49, 261, 286), the evidence is limited at best. It appears that Claussen arrived at this conclusion because of one citation of *Acts* in the *Regula canonicorum* and one image that he construes as derived from *Acts*. Chrodegang’s prescription of seven tables for the various grades of persons dining in the refectory resonates, Claussen asserts rather vaguely, with the verses in *Acts* 2 and 4 and their depiction of “joy, unanimity, personal poverty, while *Acts* 6:1-6 discusses the seven deacons chosen by the Apostles to serve at table” (pp. 80-81). The only direct citation of *Acts* in the *Regula* is of 4:32 (“Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common”—RSV), in the chapter that explains how those wishing to join the order of canons may donate their property to the church, with a provision for its usufruct during the

canon's lifetime. This interesting incentive to ease the transition of landholders into religious life is then linked to Chrodegang's rationale that "mother church not be burdened" as she ministers to paupers, widows, and orphans. After some rather convoluted reasoning to link the image of "mother church" to the abandonment of familial identity presented in the biblical text, Claussen concludes that Chrodegang's formulation is "the obverse" of the "afamilial, but nonetheless united apostolic church" and that Chrodegang sought "to unite the various alienated and marginalized groups...into a new family...The choice of words and themes is purposeful, and relates to his attempts at community creation" (p. 101).

Claussen's insistence on the "creation of community" raises questions about the analytical destination to which many historians have been guided. Claussen's work is to be read against Susan Reynolds' *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*, which, although cited in *Reform of the Frankish Church*, seems to have exercised little influence.[1] Instead, the German traditions of analyzing *Genossenschaft*, *Gemeinschaft*, and *Gesellschaft* dominate. One of Claussen's key arguments is that the *Regula* was not intended to effect a monasticisation of the cathedral, but rather a blurring of distinctions between laity and cathedral clergy. Claussen's interest in the possible mimesis in the *Regula canonicorum* of the conditions of the apostolic church seems related to his efforts to parse a latent code of egalitarian relations, even freedom, operating within the hierarchical organization he does present as fundamental. The perception that "liberty, equality, and community go together" is one Reynolds specifically marks as tendentious: "there is no reason why they should do so in a society that had never heard the slogan 'liberty, equality, and fraternity.'"[2] More to the point, one may wonder to what extent "community creation" is a modern concept that sits ill in a past society rooted in place, family, livelihood, and custom. It would be interesting (and a quite different project) to pursue the problem Reynolds identified: "what we need to study are the ways in which communities and their responsibilities and solidarities changed; the ways in which their autonomy was increased, reduced, or circumscribed by formal, recorded rules; and the ways in which the new conditions provoked new conflicts, solidarities, and methods of internal government." [3] A model of such analysis, oddly omitted from Claussen's study, is Dominique Iogna-Prat's *Ordonner et exclure: Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaïsme et à l'islam, 1000-1150*. [4]

Although Claussen is to be commended for exhaustive excavation of materials, the difficulty he faced was that of situating the only text we have from Chrodegang's pen—a highly formalized text derived from another, at that—in a social context about which little is known. The valiant attempts to muster every interpretative force in the books (Turner, Geertz, Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, Natalie Davis, Kristeva, and others parade in a veritable Catalogue of Ships) seem insufficient to conquer the intractability of the *Regula* as the primary source of information. The traditional approaches to textual analysis—examination of transmission history, consideration of the text's representation in surviving manuscripts, and analysis of the author's use of sources—are not among the book's strengths. Claussen does offer an exciting suggestion regarding Chrodegang's method of correcting his exemplar (pp. 156-57), and this is a nice addition to investigations of Carolingian editorial practices. Readers seeking information on the manuscripts and studies of the *Regula canonicorum* should consult the *Clavis scriptorum latinorum medii aevi, Auctores Galliae 735-987*. [5] A critical edition of the Rule is promised for the Corpus Christianorum series.

Despite Claussen's sensible account of the historiographic impulses that produced the account of the degenerate condition of the Merovingian Church (pp. 30-37), he seems to have been drawn back into many of the same presumptions. To argue for community building—and Reynolds maintains that communities were not formed by the intervention of the ecclesiastical hierarchy—one would need evidence of fractious relations between (indeed, of the very existence of) Ewig's Bonifatian and Pirminic "zones" of ecclesiastical power; one would need evidence that it was Chrodegang who "reincorporated the Frankish episcopal synod within the structure of the noble placitum," and one would need evidence that laity hitherto were unincorporated in religious devotion and then were integrated into the canons'

particular form of piety by Chrodegang. If these demonstrations are still lacking, nevertheless, Claussen has given us much. *The Reform of the Frankish Church* is in some respects akin to the barnacle goose, the delightful bird that counted as fish for Friday fasting: it has the feathers of a truly magisterial study, and flies through the fields of prosopography, archaeology, intellectual history, critical theory, art history, urban and political history, music, anthropology, liturgical studies, legal history, and patristics with full recognition of the elements they contribute to the study of this bishop, his city, his Rule, his context. Claussen has with great generosity collected and redistributed wealth to support future ventures, and has pointed to important and interesting lines of research.

NOTES

[1] Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. xl.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. xli.

[4] Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Ordonner et exclure: Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaïsme et à l'islam, 1000-1150* (Paris: Aubier, 1998).

[5] M.-H. Jullien and F. Perelman, eds., *Clavis scriptorum latinorum medii aevi, Auctores Galliae 735-987*, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio mediaevalis (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 273-75.

Abigail Firey
University of Kentucky
afire2@uky.edu

Copyright © 2006 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172