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BOOK REVIEWS

Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. Pp. xv + 491.

Much of our knowledge of early medieval Europe depends upon four historians: Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon. In *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, Walter Goffart provides new perspectives on these historians. His goal is twofold: to liberate each from a narrowly defined status as national historian and to uncover their unique historiographic contribution. He seeks to free each from a romantic, historiographic "isolation." He succeeds in his first goal, but by pushing beyond a narrow, nationalistic analysis, his interpretation of their works becomes marked by a constant desire to uncover a historiographic "program" in each. This search is consistently founded upon discursive arguments from silence, buttressed by elaborate constructs that fail to convince. At best, his interpretation is interesting and daring; at worst, it confuses.

Goffart's analysis of Jordanes has three goals. First, he strives to portray Jordanes as more than the "historian of the Goths." Second, he attempts to liberate Jordanes from his customary role as a mere epitomator of Cassiodorus. Last, he wishes to reveal a coherent historiographic program in the *Getica*, a work generally considered a flawed, tangled compilation from Cassiodorus. He is convinced that Jordanes consciously omitted information from Cassiodorus (41). Omissions are part of a plan behind the *Getica* to meet the new political context in Constantinople following the reconquest of Italy in the 550s (96). The work's happy conclusion—the birth of a Gothic-Roman child—symbolizes the new fusion of the Goths with the Empire of Justinian. Together with his *Historia Romana*, the *Getica* forms a three-part history to educate a newly-conquered Italy as part of the Empire. In short, the *Getica* is political propaganda, not merely "Gothic history" (107). It is difficult, however, to be entirely convinced either by Jordanes' independence from Cassiodorus on the basis of these supposed conscious omissions or by a definite linking of the *Getica* to the 550s. Goffart's suggestions, based upon Jordanes' silence, are interesting, not persuasive.

Gregory of Tours is similarly rehabilitated by Goffart. More than merely a credulous, nationalistic historian of the Franks, Goffart portrays Gregory as an innovative historian concerned by contemporary affairs (119). Gregory did not write a "History of the Franks," but instead "Histories" designed to provide a satirical commentary on his generation, a society supposedly increasingly sceptical of the Christian message (141). Goffart links Gregory's work on miracles, the *Wonders*, to his *Historiae*: the former a list of continuous, ubiquitous miraculous events compelling the audience to accept the immanence of God's intervention (134), the latter an exaggerated portrayal of Augustine's sinful earthly city (182). Both provide concrete examples that are necessary to persuade a sceptical audience. Once again, Goffart argues that Gregory consciously omitted information, omissions that help us to discern his program: a union of satire with history (197). This program is, however, not so apparent. Gregory's "satirical historiography," rather than a conscious, programmatic caricature of contemporary society (231), seems instead an excellent example of the Christian mimetic tradition, recently discussed by Karl Morrison. Without other historians for comparison, it is hard to be confident that Gregory was painting a caricature, rather than a portrait of history as he knew it. It is also difficult to believe that the *Histories* should necessarily be linked with the *Wonders*, and that both form a program to convince a sceptical age that the Christian message—a message whose words were no longer as believable now that society had been superficially "christianized"—could best be believed through events known to both narrator and audience (145ff.). Gregory's use of Jerome's dream in the preface to his *Wonders* (148), does not necessarily mean that the "philosophers" are the intended audience of his *History*. Once again, Goffart's interpretation is engaging, but based on conjecture.

Bede needs no rehabilitation as a "barbarian" historian. Goffart instead turns his attention to uncovering the background of his *History of the English Church*. He concludes that, like Jordanes, Bede was concerned with contemporary events, events that shaped his *History* into a political program. His *History* treats the Northumbrian church within an English context, providing a critique of the present with examples from the past. Once more, this analysis rests on the supposed omissions by Bede of the historical record (254). To Goffart, the heart of the *History* is an attack on Bishop Wilfrid of York (d. 709), the self-styled defender of Roman interests in the North and fervent opponent of the divergent Irish church. Written some twenty years after Wilfrid's death, at the time of York's

elevation to metropolitan status alongside Canterbury, Bede's *History* strives to minimize Wilfrid's anti-Irish legacy in favor of a rehabilitated Irish church now in harmony with Canterbury and Rome. Specifically, the *History* continues a programmatic response to the *Life of Wilfrid* composed by Stephen of Ripon already begun by Bede in his earlier revision of the *Life of Cuthbert* (290). Bede is the "hostile reader" of Stephen's work (309).

Goffart argues that Bede either omitted key information about Wilfrid or diminished his role compared to his portrait by Stephen of Ripon. Both arguments appear tenuous at best. The omissions and diminished role have perhaps more to do with the difference between the focus of a *Vita* and a *History*, rather than any conscious manipulation by Bede. It is difficult to see where Bede "subverted" or "abased" Stephen's account (312). It appears extreme to call Bede a "revisionist" (p. 311) or to accuse him, when Goffart encounters an example of Bede's support of Wilfrid's position on the Easter dating against the Irish practice, a direct contradiction of the *History*'s supposed hostility against the bishop (311), of having to "outdo the Wilfridians." Contemporary affairs were undoubtedly not lost on Bede, but Goffart's elaborate, obscure analyses fail to provide convincing information that the *History* was as much a polemical tract as an account of the ecclesiastical history of the English people.

The last historian considered is Paul the Deacon, and Goffart once more contrives a novel interpretation of the text, in this case the unfinished *Historia Langobardorum*. Paul composed the *Historia* in the seclusion of the still-Lombardic kingdom of Benevento for the political/historical instruction of the young king Grimoald III (333). Apparently the *Historia* would serve as a type of Lombardic *Fürstenspiegel*. This promising insight promptly vanishes, never to be developed. As with the other *Histories*, Goffart sees the *History of the Lombards* as a response to contemporary events (348). More than a simple national history, the work contains an elaborate bi-partite structure that constantly opposes events by contrasting anticipation and fulfillment (360). Goffart finds this a feature in Paul the Deacon's other works, notably the *History of the Bishops of Metz*. These are all interesting insights but, like the unfinished *History* itself, they leave the reader wondering about their purpose. A comparison with the slightly later Carolingian *Fürstenspiegel* would have provided a valuable point of reference to interpret the *History* as a text for political instruction.

In conclusion, Walter Goffart has written a challenging study of four important early medieval historians. Apart from a brief conclusion, there

is no real attempt to link these authors. They stand as interesting individuals, whose works are less "nationalistic" and "barbarian" thanks to Goffart's account. Still, he appears to have overreached his texts too often in a desire to find "programs" and links with contemporary affairs. *Narrators of Barbarian History* is founded upon a shaky principle, one clearly stated by Goffart in his analysis of Paul the Deacon: "It is risky to judge a book only by the description its author provides" (348). This is undoubtedly true, but the risk is perhaps greater to ignore the interpretative brake that this description provides.

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Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987. Pp. xx + 289.

In *Sister of Wisdom* Barbara Newman examines the female images in the writings of St. Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), and seeks to construct from them a coherent theology of the feminine. The result is an interesting and erudite volume which places Hildegard's thought within the tradition of sapiential theology and relates it to modern feminist spirituality.

Newman organizes Hildegard's use of the feminine around several symbolic characters. The first and most important is Sapientia or Wisdom. Hildegard presents Sapientia as decidedly female and firmly part of the divine. Sapientia is closely associated with the material of creation and mediates between the world and the more spiritual aspects of God. As such she takes on roles traditionally assigned to the Holy Spirit or the incarnate Son. "The feminine divine brings the world into being that God may be born in it and leads it back to God through the Word-made-flesh" (87). Newman goes on to examine Hildegard's reflections on Eve, Mary, and Ecclesia or "mother church." For Hildegard these three are key figures in salvation history. Eve loses God's grace for her children less through malice than through weakness. Her punishment is intercourse and child-birth. Mary, preexistent with her son, corrects Eve's misfortune through virginal maternity. As Sapientia gives the material to creation, Mary gives flesh to God. Ecclesia continues Mary's maternal virginity and regenerates lost souls through the purity of baptism.