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Aloys SUNTRUP, *Studien zur politischen Theologie im frühmittelalterlichen Okzident. Die Aussage konziliarer Texte des gallischen und iberischen Raumes*, Münster (Aschendorff) 2001, XXXVII–434 p. (Spanische Forschungen der Görresgesellschaft, 36).

Political ideology has long been a popular topic among historians of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Apart from standard works, such as Walter Ullmann's ›Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages‹ (London 1961), Hans H. Anton's ›Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit‹ (Bonn 1968), or J. M. Wallace-Hadrill's ›Early Medieval Kingship in England and on the Continent‹ (Oxford 1970), several more recent works have dealt with various aspects of late antique and early medieval political thought, such as Frank Kolb's ›Herrscherideologie in der Spätantike‹ (Berlin 2001), or Rachel Stocking's ›Bishops Councils and Consensus in the Visigothic Kingdom‹ (Ann Arbor 2000). Aloys Suntrup's book ›Studien zur politischen Theologie im frühmittelalterlichen Okzident‹ (a revised version of a PhD. dissertation submitted at the University of Trier) is one of the latest contributions to the burgeoning literature on this topic.

Suntrup's aim is to examine the ways in which the political ideology, or as he put it ›politische Theologie‹ (in a very broad sense), is reflected in the conciliar decrees from the Merovingian and the Visigothic kingdoms. Hence, the book is divided into two major sections – one dealing with the Merovingian Church councils, and the other with the Visigothic ones. Suntrup starting point is the early fourth century, when, under Constantine the Great, the Christian political ideology was first formulated. Constantine's reign, it appears, was not a dramatic breaking-point with pre-existing political ideology and tradition. Like his predecessors, Constantine associated himself with Apollo and Sol Invictus from the very beginning of his reign, and it was only later (especially after the victory over Licinius in 324) that he no longer regarded himself as divine, but perceived his imperial office as being protected by God. Suntrup argues for continuity, in the sense that early medieval rulers and churchmen re-interpreted late Roman norms, metaphors and traditions, and in this respect his book concurs extremely well with Kolb's study.

Turning to the evidence from the Merovingian and the Visigothic kingdoms, Suntrup discusses each of the relevant Church councils, and manages to delineate the development in political ideology that characterised each of the kingdoms. He rightly marks the council of Clichy (626/27) as an important turning point in the Christianisation of rulership in the Frankish kingdom, and the third and the fourth councils of Toledo (589 and 633 respectively) as important landmarks in the formation of the Visigothic ideology of rulership. This notion is not new. Wallace-Hadrill, for example, had already noted that a change in emphasis came over western kingship in the seventh century, and consequently kings moved into an ecclesiastical atmosphere. Nevertheless, Suntrup manages to demonstrate his point nicely and effectively.

All in all, Suntrup has written an engaging book, with some very interesting and thought provoking ideas. One fault however, undermines his argument, that is, the omission of significant and relevant books from the discussions and references (which does not of course, indicate that the author has failed to read them). Items such as Wallace-Hadrill's book on early medieval kingship or Ullmann's study on the formation of early medieval political thought – which are highly relevant – are conspicuous in their absence. Moreover, recent studies by scholars such as Ian Wood, Janet Nelson, Roger Collins, or Edward James, are all missing. The result is that Suntrup in several cases still subscribes to ideas and perceptions that were rightly questioned and convincingly challenged in the past, such as the notion of sacral kingship among the Merovingians.

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