

**Christoph Galle, Predigen im Karolingerreich. Die homiletischen Sammlungen von Paulus Diaconus, Lantperhtus von Mondsee, Rabanus Maurus und Haymo von Auxerre, Turnhout (Brepols) 2023, 515 S. (Sermo, 18), ISBN 978-2-503-604145, EUR 125,00.**

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In the late eighth and first half of the ninth century, four prominent Carolingian intellectuals (Paul the Deacon, Abbot Lantperhtus of Mondsee, Hrabanus Maurus and Haymo of Auxerre) produced five substantial collections of homilies. These works were true products of their time, intended to serve the empire-wide efforts to create a Christian people through teaching and preaching. Since the majority of the hundreds of homilies contained in these collections were not written from scratch, but compiled reusing works by the Church Fathers and other important Christian writers of the past (for instance St. Jerome, Gregory the Great, St. Augustine, Caesarius of Arles, Bede), the five homiletic corpora have not received the scholarly attention which they deserve. Christoph Galle's study offers a first, comparative analysis of this material, with which he contributes in important ways to our knowledge of early medieval sermons and the culture which produced them. In his book, a revised *Habilitationsschrift* from 2021, the author discusses both the context which made the Carolingian world undergo what he calls a »Reform des Predigtwesens« (22), and the contents (including sources) of the five collections. That the typical Carolingian technique of »cut-and-paste«-compilation produces new texts is well known, and these works are no exceptions. What makes Galle's work particularly interesting in this respect is the way in which he shows how the resulting homilies (and, for that matter, the entire collections themselves) were tailored with precision to meet the needs of a wide range of audiences, and those of the preachers expected to instruct them.

The book opens with a (somewhat dated) discussion of how, from the second half of the eighth century onwards, several Carolingian rulers strove to improve the moral standards of the Frankish population (Introduction and Chapter 1). It sketches the traditional, top-down image of rulers laying down decisions in their capitularies, which were then followed up by other members of the ecclesiastical elite. Within this narrative, sermons and homilies are pictured as »political instruments« (23), intended to communicate correct Christian knowledge and an appropriate code of behaviour to both clerical and lay audiences. In this way, and here one cannot but agree with Galle, these texts can tell us a lot about high-level ideals of a Christian society of the future, expectations from the homilies' audiences (belief, behaviour), and the way in which such messages were delivered.



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The collections and their authors are introduced in Chapter 2, which also addresses the question of the audiences targeted by each particular work. Interestingly, different collections were put together with different audiences in mind, which can be derived from the contents and style of each work as a whole: for instance, Paulus Diaconus wrote for the inhabitants of monasteries, while Hrabanus Maurus wrote one collection for Emperor Lothar (who liked to listen to lengthy homilies during dinner), and one for much less educated lay audiences (for whom homilies were much shorter and simpler). Each author also had his own convictions on which days of the year required homilies, and followed his own ideas about which material was appropriate for each occasion.

The short third chapter highlights how each author drew on his own selection of patristic and similarly respectable sources to produce useful material for as many occasions as possible. Interestingly, they did not just reuse older homilies, but also drew on biblical exegesis, and on the works of authors as recent as Alcuin of York. One especially impressive feature of this book is a set of tables which contain the results of this source analysis. The first three appendices (413–446) provide overviews of the direct sources for each homily in the collections by Paulus Diaconus, Lantperhtus of Mondsee and Hrabanus Maurus. The variation and range of selected material is impressive, as is the fact that no direct sources have been identified for quite a lot of them.

In chapter four, the longest by far with more than 160 pages, the collections and their authors mostly disappear into the background. Instead we find a rather lengthy discussion of four important and well-known themes of pastoral care »Carolingian style«: teaching (and, where needed, defending) orthodox ideas about central themes of correct belief; explanations of what it means to lead a virtuous life; the ins and outs of fighting sin; actively doing good works. Many of these themes show connections with normative texts of the day, and underline how the Carolingian attempts to create a population of Christian Franks pleasing to God rested on shared ideals and efforts. How each of the four authors engaged with these themes in the five collections is unfortunately left out of the analysis. To what extent they communicated similar or different messages to each of their audiences is also a question left unanswered.

The last chapter brings us back to the collections again, tackling the question of their reception and influence later in the Middle Ages. There is a lot of work to be done here, since only Hrabanus Maurus' writings have been subject to this kind of research. This chapter, too, comes with a useful appendix (*Anhang IV*), which traces the manuscript transmission of Hrabanus' two homily collections on the basis of Raymund Kottje's study of 2012, with several new manuscript finds added.<sup>1</sup> What becomes quickly visible

<sup>1</sup> Raymund Kottje, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften mit den Werken des Hrabanus Maurus*, Hannover 2012 (MGH Hilfsmittel, 27).



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in the description of the later history of Hrabanus' works is the »pick and mix«-approach of later compilers. Hrabanus' homilies were enthusiastically received, but no two compilers ever chose the same selection of homilies for their own purposes – one can only imagine what an enormous enterprise it will be to track and trace the reception histories of the other collections in order to understand their longer-term influence. The book closes with a short conclusion, which reiterates its most important findings.

As is often the case with studies of huge corpora of texts, this book underlines both what can be gained by undertaking this kind of work, while it also shows inevitable shortcomings in view of the size of the operation. It is a valuable contribution to our understanding of early medieval sermon collections, their authors, audiences, sources and themes. Its appendices will be extremely useful to sermon researchers.



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