

François Dolbeau, Rathier de Vérone. Lecteur, remanieur et centonisateur, Firenze (SISMEL – Edizioni del Galluzzo) 2021, VIII–510 p., 4 ill., 8 pl. (mediEVI, 29), ISBN 978-88-9290-073-8, EUR 70,00.

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Among medieval authors, Rather (Ratier or Ratherius) of Verona (c. 890–974) is not widely known. Yet many of his writings have now been edited within the »Corpus Christianorum« and translated into English by Peter L. Reid, with significant input from François Dolbeau. If Rather is remembered for anything, it tends to be for his difficult personality (or rather his desire to present himself as a spiky individual), and his failure to find an environment in which he could flourish. The 10th century frequently tends to get considered as a moment of slow cultural growth between the dynamism of Carolingian culture in the 9th century and the reform movements of the 11th. As a monk of the abbey of Lobbes, he was described as restless. In 926, Rather went with Hilduin, abbot of Lobbes, to Italy, where in 931 the king offered him the bishopric of Verona. Lasting only a few years in that position, Rather then took refuge in Germany, before returning to Lobbes in 952. After a short spell as bishop of Liège, he was forced to retire in 955 to the abbey of Aulne, from where he attempted to regain the bishopric of Verona. The experiment failed, however, and he had to spend the last years of his life at Aulne. When his career is summarized like this, it is clear that Rather is not someone who fits neatly into any category other than that of an eccentric and difficult scholar. Nonetheless, it has been the great achievement of François Dolbeau to demonstrate that he was a skilled writer endowed with remarkable knowledge of the Church Fathers. This volume of Dolbeau's collected essays on Rather of Verona (including certain hitherto unpublished texts) synthesizes his research into a figure who deserves to be better known.

Dolbeau has been exploring the writings of Rather of Verona for over forty years (along with much else besides). This volume opens with an updated version of his 1987 introduction to Rather in the »Dictionnaire de spiritualité«. This survey article was itself the fruit of a series of studies of Rather's literary output, published initially within »Analecta Bollandiana« in 1980, and then within three major articles (called »Ratheriana I, II and III«) within »Sacris Erudiri« in 1984, 1985, and 1986. The manuscript diffusion of Rather's writing is not large, as he never acquired canonical status as an author. Nonetheless, Dolbeau has pulled together in these studies scattered references to this bibliophile monk of Lobbes, laying the foundation for meticulous identification of his patristic sources. Rather acquired minor fame among historians of the reception of classical texts for providing rare witness to Catullus. Yet while he occasionally reveals that he delighted in reading neglected Latin authors, his major attention went to the Church



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Fathers, whose writings he never ceased to quote from within his writings. One suspects that the hostility he encountered as bishop of Verona was not just because he was a vigorous critic of corruption within the clerical and monastic order, but because he immersed himself in a number of extraordinarily rich libraries, like those of Lobbes and Verona. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of his personality are the caustic autobiographical comments that he scatters throughout his writing.

Dolbeau's specialty lies in the identification of patristic sources used by Rather. Not the least useful aspect of a volume like this is the index that he provides to these various studies, which effectively constitutes a survey of Rather's reading. Thus Augustine and Gregory the Great (often through the anthologies of Gregory's writing by Taio of Saragossa) are particularly important in his reading. The subtitle to this volume, »lecteur, remanieur et centonisateur« (reader, manipulator and anthologizer), directs our attention to the particular angle taken by Dolbeau in these studies. His focus is not so much on the literary experimentation evident in Rather's writing, through titles like »Dialogus confessionalis«, »Phrenesis« and »Praeloquia«, or in any theological originality. Rather Dolbeau shows how Rather was a gifted Latinist, whose sermons and reflections may be heavily based on tradition, but are not devoid of originality. Dolbeau establishes a pattern in various studies of sermons created out of extracts from the Church Fathers, of editing these *catenae* in two columns, with the right-hand column devoted to providing the original text. Careful use of bold type enables readers to see how Rather has chosen and sometimes modified the original text.

The newly edited material in this volume includes an edition of Rather's »Life of St. Ursmer« and an analysis of eight sermons created out of *catenae* of patristic texts. As in all his scholarly writing, Dolbeau adheres to the highest level of academic rigour. The Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo are to be congratulated for adhering to the highest standards in producing this anthology of one aspect of Dolbeau's many contributions to medieval studies.



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