

Regio of Prüm, Giulio Silano (trans.), Two Books on Synodal Causes and Ecclesiastical Disciplines, Turnhout (Brepols) 2022, VIII–366 p. (Medieval Sources in Translation, 60), ISBN 978-0-88844-310-6, EUR 32,50.

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Regino of Prüm's canon law compilation »Libri duo de synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis« here receives a most welcome translation by Giulio Silano. Regino († 915) was a prolific writer of the later Carolingian age, well-known to historians for his »Chronicle« of Frankish history down to 906, and also for a treatise on music. »De synodalibus« was composed in or shortly after 906, seemingly at the request of Archbishop Ratbod of Trier. Ratbod was one of the closest advisers of the young East Frankish king Louis IV »the Child« (899–911). Another, Archbishop Hatto of Mainz, was the intended recipient of the work's surviving version. The text itself is a compilation of extracts from the legal tradition of the church, drawing on various sources including biblical, patristic and conciliar authorities, and Carolingian royal capitularies. Although the surviving manuscript tradition is not very large, the text would go on to have a lasting legal impact via its influence on Burchard of Worms's »Decretum« (1012–1023).

In the preface, Regino tells Hatto that he intends his work to be used as a handbook (*enkyridion*), because he knows the archbishop is extremely busy and will not always have the time or opportunity to consult his library. The work's utility is also indicated by the long questionnaires which open each of its two books, containing questions which »the bishop or his ministers must ask diligently at their synod in all the public villages and estates and the parishes of his diocese«. These make it clear that Regino saw his work not just as a reference work for Hatto or Ratbod, but as a kind of handbook for use in episcopal visitations more generally. They also give a fascinating insight into the lifestyles of priests and laypeople, and Carolingian attempts to structure local societies around church institutions.

»De synodalibus« contains about 900 chapters altogether, half dealing primarily with church and clergy (Book I), and half with the lives and behaviour of the laity (Book II). Regino's choice of excerpts gives fascinating insight into his perception of a range of topics, and by extension perhaps of local practice in the dioceses of Mainz and Trier. The administration of penance, for example, is covered in some detail and has informed much of the important recent work on the topic. Excommunication, homicide, marriage and its dissolution, drunkenness, slander, theft and unorthodox beliefs are among the other subjects addressed, some of them at length. The work does not hand down definitive legal solutions



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to each scenario, but rather lays out a range of relevant and sometimes contradictory texts as resources for local agents dealing with complex situations. As an attempt to excerpt and organise intellectual traditions around real-world problems which Regino imagined episcopal agents would face as they travelled the countryside, the book serves as a fascinating document of social as well as legal history. This English translation is therefore a great resource for students, teachers and scholars.

The translation itself is avowedly literal (in deference to the legal nature of the source), but nonetheless very clear and readable. The choice of vocabulary is sometimes debatable, particularly when Regino deploys the notoriously slippery terminology of social status. To take one obvious example, the consistent translation of words like *mancipia* and *servi* as »slaves« (e. g. p. 51, 150) is very likely to mislead. Such issues could have been explained in footnotes, but unfortunately none are provided because Silano wishes to place his audience – rather optimistically in my view – »in a position similar to that of ... medieval reader[s]« (p. 12). The absence of notes also makes it difficult for readers to understand the significance of Regino's work as a source for the reception of early medieval law. Regino's own citations of his sources are translated, but these are usually quite vague since the 10th-century bishops he was writing for needed less orientation than a modern audience. Silano suggests that readers looking for more detail go online to consult the apparatus of Wassersleben's 1840 Latin edition.

Even those undeterred by that challenge will remain uninformed about the findings of more recent scholarship which has changed our understanding of Regino's use (or manipulation) of sources. Here, one might mention Karl Ubl's argument that Regino's careful selection of material on marriage articulated a subtly argumentative take on Carolingian debates; and Wilfried Hartmann's demonstration that references to an otherwise-unknown Council of Nantes actually originated in Carolingian episcopal capitularies¹.

Some of the most fascinating selections in »De synodalibus« have no known source and may even have been inventions of Regino himself. These include a famous chapter about women who claim to go riding on beasts at night »with Diana«, and another about the singing of »diabolical verses« over the bodies of the dead. Nor are these aspects of the work addressed in the 30-page introduction, the main theme of which is the significance of »De synodalibus«

¹ Karl Ubl, Doppelmoral im karolingischen Kirchenrecht? Ehe und Inzest bei Regino von Prüm, in: Anne Grabowsky, Wilfried Hartmann (ed.), Recht und Gericht in Kirche und Welt um 900, Munich 2007 (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, 69), p. 91–124; Wilfried Hartmann, Die capita incerta im Sendhandbuch Reginos von Prüm, in: Oliver Münsch, Thomas Zotz (ed.), Scientia Veritatis. Festschrift für Hubert Mordek zum 65. Geburtstag, Ostfildern 2004, p. 207–216.



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for understanding the nature and authority of canon law across the Middle Ages – an interesting topic, but perhaps not the most helpful starting point for readers coming to this particular text for the first time.

Although Silano is clearly familiar with much of the relevant modern scholarship on Regino and on »De synodalibus«, his account engages more directly with the work of Wasserschleben and Fournier, writing in 1840 and 1920 respectively, than with the much more recent studies of Hartmann, Ubl, Sarah Hamilton and others. Readers seeking a more conventional introduction to this text would benefit from seeking out a very useful article by Greta Austin published in 2019². There is some compensation in the form of a thematic index which can be used to direct students to particular themes and topics. The nature of the introduction and the absence of footnotes, though, means an opportunity missed for the book to become a new starting point for future work on »De synodalibus« and puts a ceiling on its usefulness.

All that said, to translate such a bulky and technical work is no small undertaking. It is a service to the field and to the profession. Criticisms aside, those of us who teach this period of European history are indebted to Professor Silano for producing this book.



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² Greta Austin, Regino of Prüm, in: Philip Lyndon Reynolds (ed.), *Great Christian Jurists and Legal Collections in the First Millennium*, Cambridge 2019 (Law and Christianity), p. 444–457.