

*Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian.* Edited by L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald. Pp. ix + 179. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996. ISBN 906 980 0926

This book contains eight papers, five of which were given to a conference at the University of Groningen in 1990, the remainder being new essays. On the one hand a collection of papers on Bede emanating from a university in the Netherlands is warmly to be welcomed, on the other, there has in recent years been a mass of scholarship published on this writer, so that the appearance of yet more requires justification.

In the case of this book, the papers are not an especially distinguished collection, and nor do they show any real coherence between each other. Three papers concern Bede as historian. Jan Davidse opens the volume with an attempt to apply the concepts of modern historiographical study to Bede, but the attempt is not a productive one, and Davidse does not deal with the most important recent commentaries on Bede's writings and purposes. A.T. Thacker gives a characteristically lucid and learned account of Bede's treatment of the Irish, but really adds little that is new to previous perceptions. Michael Allen is perhaps the most interesting of the three with his treatment of Bede and Frechulf at St Gallen, a treatment which, whereas it would clearly merit further development, is rather disappointing in the conclusions it actually reaches. Only one paper, that of Karl Lutterkort on Bede's miracle stories, considers Bede as hagiographer, and the exposition, although clear, makes little real progress. Two further papers, respectively by B.A. Blokhuis and A.M. Jansen, concern later treatment of Bede's work on Cuthbert (by Aelfric) and the development of the Oswald legends on the continent. Dan O'Donnell offers a very technical paper on a Northumbrian version of Caedmon's Hymn in a Brussels manuscript, which is a valuable contribution but sits uneasily with the more discursive papers, resembling only Blokhuis's in tone. The best paper in the volume is in this reviewer's opinion J.E. Cross's study of Bede's influence, where the author deals with the impact of Bede's writings on homilies and martyrologies. The paper goes best with Allen's on St Gallen, and points the way to a rich field of study of Bede's work which is peculiarly suited to be conducted in a continental context.

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