

Tino LICHT (ed.), Walahfrid Strabo: *De imagine Tetrici. Das Standbild des Russigen Dietrich.* Eingeleitet, herausgegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert von..., Heidelberg: Mattes Verlag, 2020 (Reichenauer Texte und Bilder 16), 132 pp., ISBN 978-3-86809-164-9, €12.80.

This inconspicuous little book is a fine example of a carefully executed edition of a mediaeval text.

The author of this text, Walahfridus Strabo, was a Benedictine monk born in Germany in 808 or 809. He was educated at the monastery on the island of Reichenau, then continued his studies at Fulda. He became abbot of the monastery at Reichenau in 838 and died on August 16, 849.

Strabo is the author of several works. Besides his theological treatises, such as *Glossa ordinaria*, *Expositio quattuor Evangeliarum* or *De rebus ecclesiasticis*, he also wrote historical texts (e.g. *Vita sancti Galli*) and some poems. Probably the best known of his poems is *De cultura hortorum*. Another of his poetic works, *De imagine Tetrici*, was recently edited by Tino LICHT (= L.) and published by the Heidelberg publishing house, Mattes Verlag, as the 16th volume of the series "Reichenauer Texte und Bilder".

De imagine Tetrici is a very unusual and intriguing poem that deserves the scholarly interest it generates. It has survived in only one manuscript, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, 869, on folios 143–163. The codex dates from about 900 and was made in the St. Gallen scriptorium. It contains several poems by Walahfrid as well as some other texts. It is a valuable witness, especially for Strabo's *carmina minora*. An important feature of this manuscript is that some poems have been interrupted by the introduction of other material. This is the case of *De imagine Tetrici*: on folios 153–156 we find interpolated poems: *De libro Machabeorum priore* and *De sancto Gallo*, as well as two poems by Bede the Venerable.

The author of the latest edition of *De imagine Tetrici* describes the manuscript and also all the previous editions; this is done in order to provide justification for his own work. Indeed, one may wonder why prepare another edition of Walahfrid's poem when the previous one is only 30 years old. As L. points out, this previous edition, by Michael HERREN, deviated from the manuscript basis. "The above-mentioned insertions in the St. Gallen manuscript caused Herren to redistribute the parts of the poem in a different order so that all verses from 128–238 are in a new place". This decision was, in L.'s opinion, unjustified and did nothing to improve the text of the poem. As for the older editions, they all contain some errors and misinterpretations. Heinrich CANISIUS, who published the *editio princeps* of the poem in the sixth volume of *Lectiones antiquae* in 1604, closely followed the St. Gallen manuscript, with all the interpolations. The editor of the *MGH*, Ernst DÜMMLER (1884), also mistakenly considered a portion of Bede's work as part of *De imagine Tetrici*. The edition by Alois DÄNTL (1930) provides the text which, for prosodic reasons, is not correct in some places. His edition, however, presents the first complete German translation of the poem.

His own edition, as L. explains, adheres closely to the manuscript but excludes the poems inserted on folios 153–156. L. has also decided to include in the critical apparatus not only the *marginalia* preserved in the manuscript, but also the conjectures of all previous editors in order to allow readers to appreciate different approaches to the task of editing a mediaeval text. As a result, we receive a carefully prepared scholarly edition of one of the most intriguing poems from the 9th century.

A poem which is not what it at first sight seems to be. Its real subject is not the *imago Tetrici*.

The equestrian statue of the Gothic king Theodoric the Great is merely a pretext, an object that triggers a conversation between the author (Strabus) and his muse (Scintilla). The dialogue quickly turns to the king himself, his personality and his reign. However, the poet does not aim

for a panegyric of Theodoric, but describes him as a cruel tyrant. The panegyric comes later: when a procession formed by the emperor Louis the Pious, his family and his court enters the square in front of the statue. The first part of the poem now takes on its real meaning: it was a background that provided a contrast to the focal image. Moreover, the eulogy of the new emperor is formulated allegorically, comparing Louis, his wife, sons and associates to important figures from the Old Testament.

Such an unusual narrative requires analysis on more than one level, and L. provides it. After the Prologue and the first chapter describing the manuscript and previous editions, the next chapter (“Das Reiterstandbild Theodorichs des Grossen”) is devoted to the statue of Theodoric and its history. What could have been dismissed as an imaginary object from an allegorical poem actually attracts the attention of scholars, because we know of the existence of the statue from another source, the *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* by Agnellus. Thanks to both texts, we know that an equestrian statue was brought to Aachen from Ravenna by order of Charlemagne. Since the statue has not survived, we cannot know with certainty whose representation it really was. Various proposals have been offered by scholars. However, Walahfrid was undoubtedly convinced that it represented Theodoric the Great. The question of why Charlemagne placed the statue of the Gothic king in front of his imperial palace is another point L. addresses in this chapter. The emperor’s interest in popular and vernacular traditions may provide the answer.

The next two chapters are devoted to literary analysis. The first of them, entitled “Literarisches”, deals with the question of the literary genre to which *De imagine Tetrici* might belong. Some scholars have associated the form of poetic dialogue with the bucolic, but other features of Walahfrid’s work undermine this theory. L. compares the antithetical composition of *De imagine Tetrici* to the *Psychomachia* by Prudentius. He provides a detailed analysis of all the passages in the poem that can be seen as allusions to the *Psychomachia*. He also discusses numerous allegories that refer to biblical figures and events. Another work that influenced Strabo (as already noted by Ludwig TRAUBE) is Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*. All references and quotations from Prudentius, Lucretius, the Bible and other works (Ovid, Virgil, patristic literature, etc.) are marked in the edition and discussed in the Commentary that follows.

The next chapter, “Metrik, Sprache und Stil” contains an examination of Walahfrid’s language and poetic style. Here, L. reveals the sources of inspiration and the models Strabo used to compose his work. The final chapter of the first part of the book is devoted to the historical and political context of *De imagine*. It may indeed seem strange that Walahfrid, while intending to praise Louis the Pious and his reign, chose to contrast it with the reign of Theodoric, whose statue was placed in Aachen by Louis’ father. Although the poet does not criticise Charlemagne himself, he allows for the idea that Louis is a better ruler. As L. points out, Louis’ reign was one of change rather than continuation. By reintroducing the practice of travelling with the royal court, he had already broken with Charlemagne’s project to establish the imperial capital at Aachen.

The first, descriptive part of the book ends with an epilogue. The second part consists of the edition of Walahfrid’s poem with critical apparatus and a German translation. It is followed by notes (the chapter entitled “Kommentar”). A very rich bibliography and three indexes (“Handschriftenregister”, “Namenregister”, and “*Initia carminum*”) conclude the book.

Overall, this latest edition of *De imagine Tetrici* is a very useful and well written work. The quality of the edition is matched by the insightful commentaries on historical and literary questions which are presented by Walahfrid Strabo’s poem.

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