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Gallagher, Robert (2023) *Review of Bede's Latin Poetry, ed. and transl. Michael Lapidge. Review of: Bede's Latin Poetry by Lapidge, Michael. Journal of Medieval Latin, 133 (1). ISSN 0778-9750.*

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Michael Lapidge, ed., and trans., *Bede's Latin Poetry*. Oxford Medieval Texts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, for Clarendon Press, 2019. Pp. xvi, 605.

Recent years have seen the publication of a wealth of scholarship on the life and works of Bede, much of which has helped develop a more holistic view of his spiritual and worldly outlook. In particular, Bede's exegesis and computistical treatise are now recognized as equally as important as his historical writings for understanding this most influential of early medieval authors. Thus, Bede is increasingly discussed not simply as a historian, but as a Latin author who committed his extraordinary learning and thinking to a multitude of literary genres and intellectual pursuits. It is probably fair to say, however, that Bede continues to be considered a predominantly prose writer. This is likely to change significantly with the publication of Michael Lapidge's edition and translation of a series of Latin poems that can, with differing levels of certainty, be attributed to Bede. For the first time, we have a single volume that captures the range and variety of Bede's Latin poetic output, which hitherto has only been edited disparately and to varying standards.

This volume comprises four principal bodies of Latin verse, each of which presents its own challenges for an editor: the *Versus de die iudicii*; the metrical *Vita S. Cudbercti*; the *Liber epigrammatum*; and the *Liber hymnorum*. Of these, probably the best known and the least problematic is the verse *Life* of Cuthbert. This exists in two versions, the first of which Bede composed in the early years of the eighth century, based on an anonymous prose account of Cuthbert's life that had been created a few short years earlier. Some fifteen or so years later, Bede produced a new prose *Vita S. Cudbercti*, which then led him to revise his verse account. While the earlier version of Bede's metrical *Life* is only preserved in a single manuscript, Lapidge lists fifteen manuscripts that contain the second version, as well as an additional five fragmentary witnesses. Evidently, the revised text circulated more extensively. Thus, Lapidge labels the revised text as the 'vulgate' version, and it is this version that is printed and translated in the main body of the edition. The earlier redaction of Bede's text is included as Appendix I, which is a significant improvement on the prior most recent edition of Bede's metrical *Life* of Cuthbert by Werner Jaager,¹ who treated the earlier version simply as a variant witness and thus relegated its readings to the *apparatus criticus*. Now we are able to compare the two versions far more easily.

While Bede's authorship of the metrical Cuthbert texts is widely accepted, his authorship of the *Versus de die iudicii*, a hexametrical reflection on Judgement Day, is more contentious. The poem is found fully or partially in over forty medieval manuscripts, the majority of which attribute the poem to Bede. Yet as Lapidge notes, doubts have been raised about its Bedan credentials on two accounts: because it is not named in the list of authored works that Bede included in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, and because of the substantial number of metrical errors within the poem. This issue is addressed squarely by Lapidge, who points to several pieces of evidence that support an association with Bede, namely: the accompanying dedication to Acca found in twenty-three manuscripts; the lexical and metrical parallels with his *Vita metrica S. Cudbercti*; the fact that twenty-eight witnesses to the poem name Bede as its author, while 'no manuscript preserves an attribution to any poet other than Bede' (p. 40); and that several perceived prosodic faults are the error of the poem's previous

¹ *Bedas metrische Vita sancti Cuthberti*, ed. Werner Jaager, Palaestra 198 (Leipzig, 1935).

editor. Four prosodic errors nevertheless remain that Lapidge believes are the work of the poet, which Lapidge uses to suggest that the poem was one of Bede's early verse compositions.

The third and fourth bodies of verse are explicitly presented as reconstructions, since no single full witness of either exists. In the case of the *Liber epigrammatum*, Lapidge has brought together a miscellaneous collection of twenty-two poems of differing forms, lengths and focuses, including epitaphs, prayers and riddles. Some of these poems have been transmitted together but many have not; three have not survived at all but entries are nonetheless included within this reconstructed edition. Lapidge provides varyingly detailed evidence for the Bedan associations of each poem, but the overarching conceptual framework for presenting these texts as a collection is the reference in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (v. 24.2) to a now otherwise lost *librum epigrammatum heroico metro siue elegiaco*. The situation is much the same with the *Liber hymnorum*: within the same passage of the *Historia ecclesiastica* Bede referred to a *librum hymnorum diuerso metro siue rythmo*, which is not known to have survived as a single text or manuscript, but is represented in this edition by a collection of fifteen hymns (most in iambic dimeter) for which strong cases can be made for Bedan authorship. As Lapidge notes, three of these hymns are not associated with Bede in their surviving witnesses, but a Bedan origin can be credibly posited on grounds of their style and content.

Any edition is of course a reconstruction of sorts, but readers will need to be particularly alert to the extent to which elements of *Bede's Latin Poetry* are based on probability and conjecture, particularly in regards to the exact contents of the *Liber epigrammatum* and the *Liber hymnorum*. Within the extensive and hugely impressive introduction, Lapidge is very clear about this, and it is apparent that Lapidge has been both diligent and conservative in assessing the strength of the Bedan credentials of the texts that are included in this volume; several additional poems with weaker claims to Bedan authorship are reserved for Appendices II to VI. Given the likelihood that this edition will be highly influential in determining the canon of Bede's Latin poetry, this point is worth stressing – and it also makes *Bede's Latin Poetry* an excellent case study for students of textual criticism.

This is not to take anything away from Lapidge and his critical edition: it is a monumental achievement that is evidently the product of extensive research carried out over many years. The depth and scope of learning throughout the volume is plain to see – which is no surprising, since it is the work of a scholar who has done more to shape the field of early medieval Anglo-Latin studies over the past half-century than any other. The editions themselves are accompanied by an exemplary *apparatus criticus*; the translations are precise; the volume also contains an extensive index of quotations and allusions. Lapidge uses the introduction, furthermore, to provide a masterly overview of Bede's poetic style and corpus. This includes discussions of metrical features, poetic forms and early medieval hymns that will be of value to researchers of Medieval Latin in general. For readers drawn to this volume primarily for Bede, however, perhaps its most striking contribution is its clear demonstration of Bede as a Latin author who explored and experimented not only with diverse genres and topics, but also with diverse textual forms. Thanks to this edition, the artistic breadth of Bede is coming more fully into view.