

The Christian west and its singers. The first thousand years. By Christopher Page. Pp. xxiv+692 incl. 3 frontispieces and 96 plates. New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2010. £30. 978 0 300 11257 3
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This book would be difficult to put down if it did not weigh so much (though the asking price is remarkably low). I hope a paperback edition will appear on lighter paper (but retaining as much as possible of the book's handsome appearance), for it deserves a wide readership. Christopher Page sweeps with consummate ease through a thousand years of the history of European sacred music, relating and explaining so much of the historical context that any reader interested in the religious life of those days will be enlightened and rewarded, often amused and delighted as well, for Page is a master storyteller, who can convey facts and relate events with marvellous felicity. Sometimes he is downright funny, perhaps in a slightly donnish way. He can write movingly too, even romantically, as when he tells of Cistercian monks singing the *Salve regina* in the face of a tremendous storm, which shatters all the glass in their church; at the words 'Jesum . . . ostende' the great rood turns to face east, the image of Christ opens its eyes, and the storm dies down. 'The breath of singers was enough to set the thin curtain hanging between this world and the next into motion' (p. 516). As Page points out, such stories were instantly meaningful right across western Christendom because by the twelfth century the *Salve regina* was sung practically everywhere. Historical chronicles can confidently use the first words of the introit at mass on particular Sundays of the year, *Laetare, Oculi, Esto mihi* and so on, for the same reason. One of the most important themes of the book is therefore the formation and dissemination of a common body of chant up to the point when it was sung throughout western Europe. Page is intensely curious about how this was possible, about the difficulties to be overcome as well as the factors which were favourable, about the political and economic circumstances, the effects of language, even of diet, and the role of writing: written Latin liturgical texts and then musical writing, when it came in the ninth century.

To say that the book is a delight to read may seem to imply that it is somehow lightweight, so far have fine prose and complicated subject matter become divorced and rhetorical skills somehow suspect. Yet I have rarely learned so much from a recent piece of scholarly writing, so richly is the book packed with unknown or hardly known information and perspicacious observation. As far as the singers of the title go, there is nothing remotely as comprehensive, although Page is occasionally content to refer to extended discussions elsewhere, if these seem adequate. And where new light can be shed, for example on Aurelian of Réôme who knew singers of the imperial palace chapel, Guido of Arezzo and John (Page is satisfied with the designation 'of Afflighem'), Page does so, most profitably.

The chronological and territorial scope of the book is vast indeed. But the path of this odyssey is not dependent on the whims of the gods, and of course it ranges far beyond the Mediterranean, into the Frankish heartlands and eventually the whole of the European continent where Roman chant was sung. What Page does again and again is to find references to singers of liturgical chant (he acknowledges the utility of large text databases) and to reconstruct the circumstances in which they worked, what they sang, how they learned it, taught it, wrote it. Many of

the questions about how and what cannot be answered in detail, but Page brings out far more than one would have thought possible. Few will have paid much attention to such figures as Claudianus of Vienne (d. 470-1), Sinderic of Metz in the 560s, the chaplain Gervoldus in the chapel of Queen Bertrada in the 780s, or the cantor Crimleicus of Metz in the 820s. I find the account of the work of the little-known Rudolf of Sint Truiden (St Trond) in the early twelfth century quite fascinating.

There are three parts: 'Mediterranean beginnings: lector and cantor', 'The kingdoms come', and 'Towards the first European revolution'. The first sifts the evidence for those entrusted with singing sacred texts in the early Church, the development of a 'ministry of ritual song'. It covers a period of about half a millennium, roughly to the end of the Roman Empire. In the next four centuries, the second part of the book, the context is that of the 'Romano-barbarian' kingdoms. There are excellent sections on Spain and Italy, and of course Rome, from 450 to 650, including the nature of the famed Roman *schola cantorum*. With the eighth century comes the determination to bring Frankish liturgical practice more nearly into line with Roman. Figures like Pippin, Chrodegang of Metz and Simeon, the papal singer at Rouen, are discussed, but Page also has an eye for numerous less well-known episodes, such as the creation of what looks like a 'Bavarian-Roman axis' between Theoto of Bavaria and Gregory II, which eventually led to Boniface's organisation of the Bavarian bishoprics. Byzantium and the rest of the east do not feature largely, and nor does Ireland, except for those Irish who moved as scholars and musicians within the Frankish-Roman orbit. After the 'European music' (p. 304) has arisen comes the 'revolution' of the third part, that of staff notation. Page is very good on the role of notation before Guido of Arezzo's famous invention, but rarely has a writer impressed me more with the significance of staff notation as an agent of reform, 'which allowed chants in a stabilized form to be carried to the ends of the Christian world' (p. 493). That Guido's notation was making its way across the Europe of Gregory VII and Bernard of Clairvaux was more than a coincidence.

Comment on the musical characteristics of specific examples is restricted mostly to later pieces by such as Radbod of Utrecht, Stephen of Liège, Leo IX and Hermannus Contractus, all aptly described. Page sees the abandonment of older, established ways of singing in favour of melodies in newer styles not only as caused by the desire to 'improve' the Gregorian heritage but also as influenced by the change from predominantly solo psalmody by choral performance: 'the new styles provided rank-and-file singers with chants of a sharp modal focus, an aid to both memorization and performance' (p. 422). He even contemplates the possibility of drone notes, at least in the inner ear, where the final and fifth of the modal octave 'accompany' the new chants. That may be going further than hard evidence allows, but it certainly accords with practical experience. (As many will know, Page has had an outstanding career as a scholar-performer of medieval music.)

There are two particularly useful appendices between chapters: a 'Nucleus of sources for musical practice in Christian assemblies before the conversion of Constantine' (pp. 72-87), and a 'Conspectus of narrative literary sources concerning some lesser-known composers of 900-1100' (pp. 429-41).

This strikingly original, learned and entertaining work should be read not only by all those interested in what singers were doing in the first millennium of the Christian era, but also by anyone who wants to understand how men and women thought about ritual song and its uses. In many respects, a revelation.

REGENSBURG UNIVERSITY

DAVID HILEY

Stoicism in early Christianity. Edited by Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg. Pp. xiii+301. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010. \$39.99 (paper). 978 0 8010 3951 5

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This is a book of circumspect hypotheses, but for the most part I am less inclined to commend the hypothesis than the circumspection. Doubting as I do that any philosophy maintained a pure tradition in the Hellenistic era, I have yet to grasp the 'paradox' that Troels Engberg-Pedersen 'solves' in the introduction (p. 8) by proposing that Greek schools of the Roman era adopted strategies of survival by absorption; least of all do I understand why this strategy should be imputed to Christian texts that are earlier than most of the texts which are cited as evidence of this change. As all sane moral systems will converge, I admit that Paul adapted a common trope when he spoke of the Church as the body of Christ; but in the maxim 'make your bodies a living sacrifice' (Romans xii.2) I hear Psalm li.17 where Runar Thorsteinsson hears an echo of the Stoics. I would agree with Niko Huttunen that he turned to the Stoics for a theory of natural law, were it not that the works of Philo the Jew are already leavened by this notion. Stanley Stowers, who notes that Greek and Jewish ethics often coincided, surprises me all the more when he derives Christ's exhortation to love our enemies from the Stoics and not from Proverbs xxv.21. Most Stoics would have deplored the tears of Christ at the grave of Lazarus, as Harold Attridge opines, and Gitte Buch-Hansen is not the first to point out that Origen made use of Stoic concepts in explaining away his weakness; men weep for the dead, however, as the sun rises, whether philosophers approve or not. Albert Harrill deftly unearths Stoic antecedents for the combination of appeals for steadfastness with the prophecy of a final conflagration at 2 Peter iii.7; John Fitzgerald prudently concludes that Stoics and Christians had different motives for easing the condition of their slaves. On the other hand, Nicola Denzey is too hasty when she concludes, from the undoubted fact that Christians were emboldened by examples of pagan fortitude, that martyrdom would not otherwise have 'developed as it did' (p. 192). Esther de Boer may be right to adopt the platitude that passion begets confusion as a key to the Gospel of Mary, but it is not an indication of any peculiar indebtedness to the Stoics. I fear that only a series of audacious substitutions enables Ismo Dunderberg to discern a common architecture in Stoic and Valentian cosmologies. It is pleasant to see, in Takashi Onuki's study of the *Apocryphon of John*, an undeniable, if 'critical', appropriation of the Stoic taxonomy of the passions. Tuomas Rasimus argues that Stoic elements in the unattributed commentary on the Parmenides are less likely to have been