



Martina Giese. *Die Textfassungen der Lebensbeschreibung Bischof Bernwards von Hildesheim.* Monumenta Germaniae Historica Studien und Texte. Hannover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2006. xxviii + 137 pp. EUR 20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-7752-5700-8.

Reviewed by David Stewart Bachrach (Department of History, University of New Hampshire)

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Thangmar on Bernward

Bishop Bernward of Hildesheim (993-1022) was one of the most important political figures in the German kingdom during the reigns of Otto III (983-1002) and Henry II (1002-24). He was an energetic defender of the prerogatives of the diocese of Hildesheim against the claims of both secular nobles and other ecclesiastical princes. Bernward's political skills were particularly tested by his efforts to make good the rights of Hildesheim to hold authority over the royal convent of Gandersheim, whose abbess, Sophia (1001-39), working in tandem with Archbishop Willigis of Mainz (975-1011), sought to have the house transferred to the authority of the latter's metropolitan see. In large measure, Bernward's general success in the realm of ecclesiastical politics was secured through his devoted support for the last two Ottonian kings. He provided them with money, supplies, and troops for their military campaigns. In addition, Bernward constructed, with the resources of his own diocese, several major fortifications along the Danish frontier that he garrisoned with his own troops at his own expense.

The most important source of information about Bernward's career was composed shortly after his death by Thangmar, Bernward's teacher at the cathedral school of Hildesheim. This text has attracted considerable scholarly and popular attention ever since its original composition in the 1020s. However, the most recent critical

edition of the *Vita Bernwardi* was published in 1841 by Georg Pertz in the fourth volume of the MGH *Scriptores* series. This edition was based on eleven witnesses to the *Vita Bernwardi* and used as its base text a revised version of the *Vita* that was composed as part of the effort to canonize Bernward in 1192. Considerable recent scholarship has identified many additional witnesses to the *Vita Bernwardi* and also has called into question Pertz's treatment of the eleven witnesses known in his day.

Martina Giese's study makes a detailed examination, and reexamination, of twenty-seven witnesses to the *Vita Bernwardi* for the purpose of providing a more precise analysis of the diffusion of the text, as well as providing a clearer picture of the *Vita* as it was composed in the early eleventh century. The volume is organized in two main chapters with a brief introduction and conclusion. The first chapter provides a brief description of each of the twenty-seven witnesses to the *Vita*. Giese identified a twenty-eighth witness after the manuscript of the book had been submitted for publication. The second chapter, which forms the core of the book, describes each of the major versions of the *Vita* and their relationship to each other. Giese also includes four appendices that provide a concordance of chapters for two of the main versions of the *Vita*, a list of the printed versions of the text, a discussion of the interpolations in the *Vita* made by Henning Rose, and unedited fragments of texts relat-

ing to the canonization proceedings for Bernward that were bound with one of the versions of the *Vita*. The volume is rounded out with an index of names, and an index of manuscripts. The volume is equipped with a lengthy bibliography and voluminous notes.

Giese draws a number of important conclusions regarding the manuscript tradition of the *Vita*. First, none of the surviving witnesses fills the temporal lacuna between the composition of the *Vita* by Thangmar, which has not survived, and the reworking of this text in the twelfth century during the effort to have Bernward canonized. Second, much of the information in the later redacted version clearly was taken from the original *Vita*, and can be shown to be accurate through comparison with other, independent sources of information. Three, the *Vita* had a much broader temporal diffusion than had

heretofore been understood. Finally, the 1841 edition of the text is inadequate and should be replaced by a new edition.

Giese's study is remarkable for its clarity, given the highly technical nature of this type of scholarship. It would be profitable for advanced graduate students and even scholars to read this work simply for the light it sheds on the complex nature of textual transmission, and the care that must be taken when reading narrative works for information to be used in writing history. This work will be indispensable for scholars working on the history of tenth- and eleventh-century Germany who intend to make use of the *Vita Bernwardi*. It is certainly to be hoped that Giese will soon produce a new edition of the *Vita*, a step for which this study has provided the necessary preparation.

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