

Liutprando di Cremona, *De Iohanne papa et Ottone imperatore: Crimini, deposizione e morte di un pontefice maledetto*, translated with introduction and notes by Paolo Chiesa, Florence: Edizioni del Galuzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, 2018, lxxv, 126 pp., *Per Verba: Testi mediolatini con traduzione*, vol. 33

The publication presented and reviewed here is an Italian translation of Liudprand of Cremona's *Historia Ottonis* text, for which Walter Ullmann gave its author the moniker 'biased reporter'.<sup>1</sup> It is a fascinating source on tenth-century conflicts in Italy and particularly in Rome, both due to the subject matter and the way the narrative is constructed. Its author, Liudprand of Cremona, born in Pavia, was one of the most prominent authors of that age. Today he is mainly known for descriptions of contemporary affairs in Constantinople, featured both in his longer chronicle on Europe (*Antapodosis*) and in the oft-cited *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana*. Liudprand's career is emblematic of Italy in the tenth century. His family was connected to the king's court and at an early age he was in the choir of Hugh of Arles. After a few years he continued in his father's and stepfather's footsteps and worked as ambassador for Hugh's successor, Berengar II. He did not remain in Berengar II's service, since in c. 950 he moved north of the Alps and joined King Otto the Great's court. He remained in Otto's service for the rest of his life until c. 972.

Liudprand wrote all his known texts during the time he served Otto. All apart from *Homilia Paschalis* are regarded as having been written with the

---

<sup>1</sup> Walter Ullmann, 'The Origins of the *Ottonianum*', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 11, 1953, 1, pp. 114–28 (p. 124).

court's political interests more or less in mind. Such a view, largely accurate, finds confirmation in the *Historia*, which was written in a very passionate and bi-ased way. In it Liudprand described the conflict between Otto and Pope John XII. Both the narrative and the of this struggle began in 961 when Pope John, afraid of the power of Berengar II and Berengar's son Adalbert, asked Otto for help. This plea was grasped by Otto as an occasion for the advancement of his own political aims. Through alliance with the Pope he acquired an imperial crown in 962. While he was able to rout Berengar's forces, Pope John began to feel uneasy in this new alliance. He soon changed sides and allied with his former enemy Adalbert. When he was informed of this, Otto moved his army to Rome. Having taken hold of it, the Emperor pushed through the deposition of the unfaithful Pope and the election of his own candidate Leo VIII. This was far from the end of the conflict, as after quashing the rebellion in the city Otto returned to pacification of the peninsula. Seeing an opportunity, Pope John returned to the city while Pope Leo took flight. John then organized a council that denounced the decision of the council that deposed him — both had to large extent the same attendance. Pope John died before Otto began a new siege of the city and according to sources he died in unfitting manner. Liudprand remarked that it was after he was punched by the devil whilst Pope John was with certain woman from the city. The conflict continued afterwards as Rome chose Pope Benedict V as Pope John's successor. The end came only after Otto was able to conquer Rome again and send Pope Benedict into exile in Hamburg. Liudprand described all these events in detail and with a great mastery of Latin.

The translation of the *Historia* was prepared by Paolo Chiesa, one of the foremost scholars of Latin historiography. Since at least the early 1990s he has expressed keen interest in Liudprand and his works. In a series of articles and a book, he has proposed returning to an old thesis that the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 6388 manuscript containing the bishop of Cremona's *opus magnum*, *Antapodosis*, was supervised by Liudprand himself.<sup>2</sup> Soon afterwards Chiesa prepared a new edition of Liudprand's oeuvre. It was published as part of *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis*.<sup>3</sup> This edition, now seen as the standard one, was following the series's guidance on textual commentary. Footnotes were therefore limited to the presentation of alternate readings of manuscripts.

This new edition has sparked renewed interest in Liudprand's works and provoked a fresh impetus for translation of his works into modern languages. A complete English translation of his oeuvre was prepared by Paolo Squatriti.<sup>4</sup> It has a good introduction and a number of footnotes to the text, but it is restrained in its quantity of critical apparatus. Later, François Bougard published

<sup>2</sup> Paolo Chiesa, *Liudprando di Cremona e il Codice di Frisinga Clm 6388*, Turnhout, 1994, *Corpus Christianorum. Autographa Medii Aevi*, vol. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Liudprandus Cremonensis, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Paolo Chiesa, Turnhout, 1998, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediævalis*, vol. 156.

<sup>4</sup> Liudprand of Cremona, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, transl. Paolo Squatriti, Washington, D.C., 2007.

a French translation of Liudprand's complete works. Bougard also proposed correction to the text prepared by Chiesa. This bilingual edition had an extensive introduction and detailed footnotes concerned with philological and historical matters.<sup>5</sup> At around the same time Chiesa prepared an Italian translation of *Antapodosis*.<sup>6</sup> It was likewise published in the bilingual format and complemented by an in-depth commentary and long textual footnotes, explaining and discussing Liudprand's writing.

Now Chiesa has prepared a new translation of the *Historia*, providing us with a new publication on Liudprand's work. This comes in the form of small book which presents a detailed view on the text. The book — which deserves to be commended — contains the original Latin text on the pages facing the translation. It begins with a short introduction presenting the text, the narrative it contains and the recreations of the past that have been done by historians. This introduction does not provide much new information, but serves as a good primer for the reader — even one who is not a scholar of tenth-century affairs.

Following the introduction, there is a concise chronological table presenting all the events discussed in the *Historia* with references to particular chapters. Another short note follows, this time on the Clm 6388, where the main textual witness of the *Historia* is included. *Historia* in it was not edited by Liudprand, as it was added by a different hand to the manuscript sometime after the text of *Antapodosis* was completed.

Chiesa has chosen the unaltered text of his own 1998 edition as the basis for his translation, which together with the Latin text takes up twenty-nine pages. Chiesa's translation is direct, very close to the Latin text but at the same time readable and pleasant. This means that the reader can easily compare the translation to the Latin and, more importantly, use it well in quotations and in the discussion of interpretation of particular expressions by Liudprand. This is important as many recent translations of tenth-century sources stray from the Latin text. It would not be an overstatement that Chiesa shows in this publication his superior knowledge and mastery of Latin. No part of the translation is controversial, or unconvincing. This needs to be highlighted as there are some instances in other recent publications that could be seen as either confusing or even intentionally specious.

While this is easily enough to praise the publication, there is something more that makes Chiesa's work as highly important. The forty-four pages after the translation contain — in much smaller print — in-depth notes to the text. They not only give information on characters appearing in the text, or the particular problem of the interpretation of Latin text, but at times they give brief discussions on Liudprand's writings and their broader questions. These notes both summarize our knowledge of the *Historia* and expand on it. The

---

<sup>5</sup> Liudprand, *Liudprand de Crémone. Œuvres*, transl. François Bougard, Paris, 2015, Sources d'histoire médiévale, vol. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Liutprando, *Antapodosis*, transl. Paolo Chiesa, Milan, 2015, Scrittori greci e latini.

quality and quantity of the author's comments mean that any scholar who is now attempting to write on Liudprand's text should first look into Chiesa's book. The richness of the commentary is even more pronounced in the contrast to rather limited notes present in the English translations of medieval texts, including Squatriti's. It has to be noted that some readers would like to have more commentary on certain elements of the text, for example on the individuals present at the council where the accusations against Pope John were presented. From the reviewer's perspective, collecting information on those present on that occasion and contrasting them with the individuals who sat on Pope John's council would be both practical and helpful. On the other hand, for other readers these additions could seem unnecessary or even bloat the text. Such a situation is unavoidable. Nevertheless, even those who would want to have more notes will have to concede that the current commentary is more than ample. Chiesa next presents an appendix. With a very short introduction he includes there a selection of other witness texts to the conflict between Otto and Pope John. These are, in the publication order: a *Continuation of the chronicle of Regino of Prüm*; Benedict of St Andrew by Monte Soracte's *Chronicon*; Flodoard of Reims's *Annals*; *Liber Pontificalis*; Acts of John XII's council conveyed after he returned to Rome in 964, and finally the *Ottonianum* privilege. This is only a selection of the first three texts where the affair is discussed. Not only is a translation present but the Latin text on which it is based is also included. The presentation of the text is different here, as the translation is not put on pages facing the Latin text but instead follows it directly. The appendices also lack of any form of commentary.

Chiesa's work is something of an exemplary publication on a very specific text. The author provides readers with everything they need regarding the research and discussion of the *Historia*. In many ways this is a complete book that should be seen as a point of reference in later translations of the medieval texts. The minor criticisms from reviewers demonstrate even more the extent to which the book is not only an important publication for the researchers of the tenth century, the papacy and early medieval Germany, but should also serve as a guide for those who want to prepare their own translations of historical sources.

Antoni Grabowski  
(Warsaw)

(Proofreading by Yelizaveta Crofts)