

(whether proudly or begrudgingly), others (quietly, or loudly) omit it – but earlier councils too (especially the Council of Ephesus of 431) are also part of a still-malleable tradition. Neil and Allen are, understandably, keen to foreground the political context of the letters, but their claim that ‘most major religious controversies between 500 and 700 CE can be explained by external or internal political circumstances’ (p. 26) perhaps pushes the point a little too far. Assuredly, the theological is often political, but the relationship works in both directions. Again and again, the authors of these letters seek to understand political conflicts and divisions in explicitly theological terms. Indeed, one of the under-explored aspects of the letters is the amount of scriptural exegesis and interpretation, conducted with a seriousness and urgency that belies the view that it is mere background noise to the bishops’ real, and essentially ‘political’ concerns. Nevertheless, *Conflict and negotiation in the Early Church* makes a valuable contribution to the study of this period, and, in opening up such rich sources to a wider readership, has performed a very great service.

CLARE COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE

MARK SMITH

A companion to Isidore of Seville. Edited by Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood. (Companions to the Christian Tradition, 87.) Pp. xii + 675 incl. 1 colour ill. and 6 tables. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2020. €299. 978 90 04 34784 7

JEH (72) 2021; doi:10.1017/S0022046921000221

Like other volumes in this series, this book contains a selection of articles, in this case twenty in total, on the chosen author’s life, works and influence, including in later periods. In the case of Isidore this extends up to his rather slight representation in works recording indigenous religion in Spanish America in the sixteenth century. Like all such compilations, including the equivalent Oxford University Press *Handbooks* series, the value and scholarly longevity of the whole is affected by variations in the nature and quality of the individual components. Decisions have to be made that inevitably combine the ideal with the possible. Here, the limits of what can be said about Isidore’s life and even his writings in such a context as this make the coverage of them in parts I and II more comprehensive than the more seemingly random selection of topics included in the third part on his influence, interesting as they are. It is fair to note that the two editors were also responsible for an earlier and shorter volume of ten essays on Isidore, published by Amsterdam University Press in 2016, that complements this one, and justifies some omissions here.

In little over half a century the standing of Isidore of Seville (d. 636) has been transformed from that of a worthy but dull author whom hardly anybody really read to that of an object of rapidly growing scholarly interest. The rise in the number and the quality of editions of his works and of volumes of articles devoted to him has been paralleled by a comparable increase in their price, requiring a mounting financial sacrifice on the part of contemporary enthusiasts. Nobody has yet produced a monograph biography of the savant of Seville to replace the handful of pious and inventive tomes that once passed themselves off as such, not least in Spain.

This is unsurprising in the light of the very limited amount of hard information about his life, and in consequence the temptation to speculate or extrapolate from the few details that are available remains strong, even in this more critical age. And some can still get misty-eyed about the young Isidore being raised by his elder brother and wax overly inventive about his monastic upbringing, the realities of which are completely obscure. Rather more hard-edged speculation should take account of the financial implications of his family's ecclesiastical prominence, as well as what might be called its conscious dynastic suicide, with every single member of Isidore's own generation entering the clergy or devoting themselves to a monastic life, resulting in three bishops and a nun but no descendants. Securing a nearly sixty-year tenure of the diocese of Seville, the metropolitan see of the province of Baetica, will have required a substantial alienation of their patrimony, and the 'monastery' over which Isidore's sister presided must surely have been a family foundation.

The turning point in Isidore's reputation can be dated to the publication in Paris in 1959 of the two-volume (extended to a third in 1983) doctoral thesis of Jacques Fontaine, to be followed the next year by his edition of Isidore's *De natura rerum* (*Traité de la nature*). The thesis was principally devoted to the sources for the most substantial and generally influential of his works, the *Etymologiae*, and his intellectual debts more generally. Under Fontaine's inspiration, a project was launched in 1975 to publish in Paris a new edition, with translation in the language of the editor, of the *Etymologiae* in twenty volumes, one per book of the text. While largely accomplished, this remains to be completed, and individual volumes have attracted both praise and criticism, including in the book under review here.

Since 1975 a succession of new editions of most of Isidore's other works have also been published, including some, such as those by José Carlos Martín for the *Corpus Christianorum* series, of outstanding quality. While there are still gaps and deficiencies, the hitherto classic seven-volume edition by Faustino Arevalo (Rome 1797–1803), reprinted with numerous misprints in *PL*, has now largely been superseded, although retaining value for some items, notably texts spuriously attributed to Isidore; a topic regrettably overlooked in contexts where it might be expected to be found in this book. While textual study and that of the influence of Isidore's works, in some periods and places more than others, has progressed, so too have attempts to see him in context and understand his role in the practical and ideological shaping of the Romano-Gothic kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula after the Third Council of Toledo in 589, not least through his historical writings.

This process is less firmly grounded than the textual studies, in that it has tended to take at face value Isidore's own evaluation of the Arian-Catholic conflict preceding that event, and it depends on belief that the unquantifiable dissemination of literary texts was more important than personal influence in the formation and spread of ideas and their practical application. For example, arguments based on the presumed influence of Isidore's *Historia* or *De origine Gotorum* of the 620s need to take more seriously the fact it was seemingly unknown in Toledo in the time of Ildefonsus (657–67). This cannot be attributed to inter-diocesan rivalry.

When it comes to Isidore's writings, the subject of the second part of this book, the presence of articles on individual works alongside others looking at broader

themes they cover can lead to occasional repetitiveness, especially when so little is known about their chronology and the contexts in which they were composed. The four thematic chapters, covering theology, history, science and grammar, provide perceptive and authoritative surveys of these areas of his thought. However, the very limited survival of Isidore's letters and the derivative nature of the content, though not the structure and purpose, of many of his books make his personality obscure almost to invisibility; something that was probably not unintentional on his part. This makes the achievement of Graham Barrett in teasing it out and in delineating his authorial purposes and practices a particularly important and wide-ranging contribution to this volume, as too is Jacques Elfassi's chapter on the problem of the compositional history and organisation of the *Etymologiae*.

The third part, on the transmission and reception of Isidore's works, can only be a sampling, and wisely avoids broad surveys. Indeed, Immo Warntjes's article on his role in the development of medieval Computus is the longest in the book, probably the most specialised and amongst the most interesting and authoritative. For Hispanists not least, Jeremy Lawrance's contribution on Isidore in the 'Golden Age' is fascinating, focusing primarily on his declining reputation, his canonisation in 1598 – a much later occurrence than might be expected – and his liturgical commemoration in sixteenth-century Spain. All of the chapters of the book repay close reading and their authors have re-examined or opened up a broad and interesting range of topics for the better future study of this enigmatic figure. It is only to be regretted that they themselves did not deserve a proper listing and set of biographical entries – a *De viris illustribus* – in the book they have created.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

ROGER COLLINS

The Hibernensis, I: Book 1, A study and edition; II: Book 2, Translation, commentary, and indexes. Edited by Roy Flechner. (Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law, 17.) Pp. 475. 476–1015 incl. 1 ill. and 5 tables. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019. \$130 (Paper.) 978 0 8132 3193 8; 978 0 8132 3221 8

JEH (72) 2021; doi:10.1017/S0022046921000245

'Observing the numerousness of copies of synodal texts, and foreseeing that the obscurity of a great many of them will be less useful to the uninitiated, and also anticipating that the inharmonious diversity of the rest would be destructive rather than constructive, I have provided a brief, clear, and harmonious exposition in a single volume out of a great forest of authors, adding many things, reducing many things, excerpting many things word for word, asserting more things following the sense with the order of the words disregarded.' With these words a scholar working in Ireland on a fascinating eighth-century text described his effort to bring together a mass of material setting norms for a proper Christian way of life. The 'brief exposition' consisting of sixty-six books has now been edited and translated in two fat volumes by Roy Flechner as the *The Hibernensis*.

The *Hibernensis*, or *Collectio Hibernensis* as it is generally known, was edited twice in the late nineteenth century by Hermann Wasserschleben, once in 1874 and again in 1885 with an expanded introduction and commentary. It is this edition that Flechner's work aims to supersede and with this publication a long-lasting