

The Medieval Low Countries

2 (2015)

The Medieval Low Countries

An Annual Review

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Manuscript and Memory in Religious Communities
in the Medieval Low Countries

edited by

Jeroen Deploige and Renée Nip



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Gislebertus Trudonensis, Rodulfus Trudonensis, *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium VIII–XIII. Liber IX opus intextum Rodulfi Trudonensis*, Paul Tombeur (ed.), Turnhout: Brepols, 2013 (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, 257A). XXXI + 173 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-55216-3. € 125.00.

In 2013, Paul Tombeur published a new double volume edition of the first thirteen books of the *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium* in the series of the *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*. The first part, comprising seven books, was written in 1114–15 by Rodulf. From 1108 to 1138, he was the abbot of the monastery of Sint-Truiden, which was situated in the bishopric of Liège. The main focus of Rodulf's report was the crisis the abbey underwent in the last quarter of the eleventh century and the first years of the twelfth century, when – in the context of the Investiture Controversy – five different individuals laid claim to the abbacy. In 1136, an anonymous monk resumed the work on the *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium* describing the life and abbacy of Rodulf himself in books VIII to XIII. As early as in 1967, Paul Tombeur suggested that Gislebert, the *custos* of the monastery, had been the anonymous author of the second part ('Un nouveau nom de la littérature médiolatine: Gislebert de Saint-Trond', *Cahiers de la civilisation médiévale*, 10 (1967), n° 39–40, pp. 435–46). This persuasive hypothesis is repeated in the introduction of this edition. In doing so, Tombeur refutes the old hypothesis that Folkard – provost at that time and Rodulf's successor – was the author. More interesting than the new name introduced is the author's profile Tombeur sketches. As *custos*, Gislebert had access to the archives of the abbey and was in charge of the *scriptorium*, which enabled him to write the first continuation of the *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium*. Gislebert was also a confidant of Rodulf. He had been his student when the abbot was *magister scholarum* of the monastery. This close relationship between the author and the abbot appears clearly in the continuation.

The first continuation of the *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium* starts with a report of Rodulf's life before he became abbot of Sint-Truiden (Liber IX). Rodulf was born in Moustier-sur-Sambre around 1070 and received an education in Liège. At the age of eighteen, he left Liège and ended up around 1100 in Sint-Truiden, after having wandered from one German monastery to another. He quickly became a confidant of Diederik, who, as the last of the five claimants, succeeded in becoming abbot in 1099. There, Rodulf successively occupied the functions of deacon and prior. Furthermore, his giftedness and passion for music and literature did not go unnoticed. Gislebert aimed to depict Rodulf as a reformer from his early years onward. Wherever he went and whatever he undertook, Rodulf

was portrayed as a zealous advocate of strictly following the monastic rule. As a *prior*, he took decisive measures against the degeneration of religious celebrations and processions. He also acted firmly with monks whose dress didn't correspond with the prescriptions. Finally, Rodulf also set himself up as the promoter of introducing the Cluniac Reforms in Sint-Truiden.

During his abbacy, Rodulf repeatedly had to contend with difficulties from outside the monastery. The abbot continuously had to resist threats of the lords of Leuven and Duras, the latter of which was also the advocate of the abbey. Rodulf's position in Sint-Truiden became untenable during the struggle for the episcopal see of Liège. The abbot, being a proponent of the apostolic candidate Frederik of Namur, was confronted with an alliance of the townsfolk and the lords of Duras and Leuven, who had chosen the side of Alexander of Jülich. In 1121, Rodulf was forced to leave Sint-Truiden and he lived for two and a half years in Flanders and the Rhineland, where he became abbot of St Pantaleon in Cologne, before returning to Sint-Truiden (Liber XI).

Another central theme of the *Gesta* is the economic situation of the abbey. It had suffered severely from the various crises the monastery underwent since the end of the eleventh century. Gislebert pays a great deal of attention to Rodulf's efforts for recovering lost possessions. Liber IX is very instructive in this regard. It consists of a letter Rodulf wrote to the bishop of Metz in 1136, listing which possessions were lost and which ones the abbot was able to retrieve. Moreover, the first continuation provides us with information about a wide range of subjects, such as the eating habits of the monks (Liber XIII, 3–6), the construction history of the abbey (Liber XIII, 14, Liber IX, 29 and 30, Liber X, 13, 15 and 16 and Liber XII, 2), the disintegration of the *familia* (Liber XIII, 10), beer brewing (Liber IX, 22), and two eventful journeys of abbot Rodulf to Rome (Liber XII, 3–4 and 6).

The *Gesta abbatum Trudonensium* also provides us with fascinating documentary details about the townspeople of Sint-Truiden. The part the urban elite played in expelling Rodulf from Sint-Truiden (Liber XI, 5–11), and the mutual oath of fidelity that the townsfolk and the bishop of Liège took against the lords of Leuven and Duras (Liber XII, 8), illustrate the growing political ambitions of Sint-Truiden's inhabitants and bear resemblance to the urban emancipation movement that occurred in the same period in the large cathedral cities and trade centres of Flanders, the Rhineland, and the north of France. The most outstanding event the townspeople were involved in was, undoubtedly, the arrival of a land-ship in Sint-Truiden. In 1135, weavers carried a ship across the land from Kornelimünster into town, where this carnivalesque incident gave rise to a lot of mockery at the expense of the weavers (Liber XII, 11–14).

Tombeur based his edition mainly on the manuscript *Maurits Sabbebibliotheek, Faculteit Theologie en Religiewetenschappen, KULeuven, Collectie Mechelen, codex 4*, which also includes the first seven books of the *Gesta*. The manuscript was written in the first half of the twelfth century, probably between the time Gislebert finished his continuation in 1136 and Rodulf's death in 1138. Tombeur formulates the hypothesis that it might have been Gislebert himself who wrote this manuscript. This new edition replaces the older editions from Rudolf Köpke (1852) and Camille de Borman (1877). The elaborate footnotes and five indices make the work of Gislebert highly accessible. Tombeur pays this rich and multifaceted text his proper respects with this excellent edition.

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