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HUMOUR, HISTORY AND POLITICS IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Although the topic of humour has been dealt with for other eras, early medieval humour remains largely neglected. The essays collected here go some way towards filling the gap, examining how the writers of early medieval sources deliberately employed humour to make their case.

The essays range from the late Roman Empire through to the tenth century, and from Byzantium to Anglo-Saxon England. The subject matter is diverse, but a number of themes link them together, notably the use of irony, ridicule and satire as political tools. Two chapters serve as an extended introduction to the topic, while the following six chapters offer varied treatments of the themes of humour and politics, looking at different times and places, but at the Carolingian world in particular. Together, they raise important and original issues about the ways in which humour was employed to articulate concepts of political power, perceptions of kingship, social relations and the role of particular texts.

GUY HALSALL is Senior Lecturer in History, Birkbeck College, University of London. His publications include *Settlement and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz* (Cambridge, 1995).

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For Ken Taylor (20.viii.1944–8.viii.1998),
who would have laughed

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A Historical Survey (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press)), and is planning a major new project on medieval logistics.

GUY HALSALL teaches in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at Birkbeck College, London. His current research focusses upon the role of the barbarian migrations in the transformation of western Europe from Roman Empire to post-Roman kingdoms. Besides numerous articles on early medieval social history and archaeology, he is author of *Settlement and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz* (1995), *Early Medieval Cemeteries: An Introduction to Cemetery Archaeology in the Post-Roman West* (1995), *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900* (2002) and editor of *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West* (1997).

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PAUL KERSHAW was educated at Jesus College, Cambridge, and King's College, London, and is currently assistant professor in the Corcoran Department of History, University of Virginia. His publications include articles on 'Power, prayer and illness in Asser's Life of Alfred'; 'The Alfred–Guthrum treaty: scripting accommodation and interaction in Viking-Age England'; and 'Time's abuse and the negligence of men: changing attitudes to the inscriptions of early medieval Brittany'. He was a contributing author to W. Davies et al., *The Early Medieval Inscriptions of Brittany/Les Inscriptions de la Bretagne du Haut Moyen Âge*

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(2000), and M. Handley et al., *CISP Database of all Non-runic Inscriptions from Ireland, Scotland, Isle of Man, Wales, South-Western England and Brittany, 400–1100 AD* (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/cisp/database/), and is currently preparing a book on royal peacemaking and the image of the peacemaking king in early medieval Europe.

DANUTA SHANZER was educated at Bryn Mawr College and Oxford University. After serving as director of the Medieval Studies Program at Cornell from 1992–2000, she is currently professor of Classics and director of graduate studies in Classics. She specialises in Latin of the later Roman Empire, both prose and poetry, and in medieval Latin. She is the author of *A Philosophical and Literary Commentary on Martianus Capella's De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii Liber 1* (1986) and *Letters and Selected Prose of Avitus of Vienne* (coauthored with Ian Wood) (2002), and is coeditor (with Ralph Mathisen) of *Culture and Society in Later Roman Gaul: Revisiting the Sources* (2001). Current projects include work on the early medieval judicial ordeal, marriage, inheritance and the church, humour, hagiography and obscenity. She is currently the North American editor for *Early Medieval Europe*.

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Preface

Most of the papers in this volume were first presented in a series of sessions at the fifth International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds in 1998. John Haldon's chapter, however, was first given as his inaugural lecture at the University of Birmingham and I am very grateful indeed to Professor Haldon for allowing it to be included in this volume. The success of those sessions prompted their conversion into this book of essays. I should like to thank the authors for providing a set of such stimulating and original essays and also for their patience during the long and frustrating time spent finding a suitable and responsible publisher for the volume. In that connection I am also most grateful to William Davies and the Syndics of Cambridge University Press for rescuing the project with such enthusiasm and efficiency just when it seemed to be floundering.

Three other papers were delivered during the original conference sessions, but for various reasons do not appear here:

Hugh Magennis, 'A funny thing happened on the way to heaven: comic incongruity in Old English saints' lives.'
Ivan Herbison, 'Comic subversion in *Judith*.'
Stuart Airlie, '"With scoffing and derision": the power of ridicule and irony in Carolingian political narrative.'

I am grateful to all three speakers for excellent, entertaining papers, which sparked interesting and equally enthusiastic debate. By putting forward ideas taken on board by the contributors to this volume, they have contributed significantly to the final version. Similarly, I would like to thank all those who attended the sessions at Leeds for their interest in, and contributions to, the debate, most notably Professor Pauline Stafford for instigating a general debate on the topic at the end of the final session. I am also grateful to Professors David Ganz and Barbara Rosenwein

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for their support for this project. I must also thank Paul Kershaw for suggesting the cover illustration.

The production of the book has, however, been tinged with some sadness. Probably the person who did most to shape my own sense of humour, and instil in me a willingness to look for and – gently – to find a funny side to otherwise serious things, was my godfather, Ken Taylor, who died of a heart attack, much too soon, just a few weeks after the conference where these papers were delivered. It is to his memory that I dedicate my work on this project, in the sure knowledge that he would have found it all (especially the dry academic exegesis) very funny.

GUY HALSALL

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Abbreviations

Amm. Marc.	Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*: *Ammianus Marcellinus*, ed. and trans. J. C. Rolfe (3 vols., London 1935–9)
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin)
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (Turnhout, 1953–)
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna, 1865–)
EME	*Early Medieval Europe*
Ep(p).	*Epistula(e)*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
LPER	*Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
PC	*'Paris Conversations'*
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne (167 vols., Paris, 1857–76)
PL	*Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (221 vols., Paris 1844–63)
PLAC	*Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*
SRG	*Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum*
SRM	*Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*

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