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.

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

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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...
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
### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANRW</td>
<td>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt (Berlin)</td>
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<td>CCSL</td>
<td>Corpus Christianorum, <em>Series Latina</em> (Turnhout, 1953–)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSEL</td>
<td>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1865–)</td>
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<td>EME</td>
<td>Early Medieval Europe</td>
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<td>Ep(ē).</td>
<td>Epistula(e)</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRS</td>
<td><em>Journal of Roman Studies</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>LPER</td>
<td>Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis</td>
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<tr>
<td>MGH</td>
<td>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>‘Paris Conversations’</td>
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<td>PLAC</td>
<td>Poetae Latinorum Carolinorum</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRG</td>
<td>Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRM</td>
<td>Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum</td>
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