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978-0-521-31384-1 - The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great: By an Anonymous
Monk of Whitby

Bertram Colgrave

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THE EARLIEST LIFE OF
GREGORY THE GREAT

In his role of apostle of the English and promoter of Augustine's mission, Pope Gregory the Great became the subject of what is one of the earliest pieces of literature surviving from the Anglo-Saxon period: a *Life* written by an unknown author of Whitby around 680–704. Although crude in its Latinity and idiosyncratic in its presentation, this work is a fascinating source of early traditions about the conversion of the English – including the famous story of Gregory's encounter with the Anglian slave boys – and an important witness to the veneration felt for the saint himself. It casts valuable light on English history in the seventh century, particularly on the career of Edwin of Northumbria, and it is the source of two of the most famous legends of the Middle Ages, the Mass of St Gregory and the story of Trajan's rescue from hell. The *Life* of Gregory seems to be the earliest of the Saints' lives of this period and it is in many ways the most remarkable.

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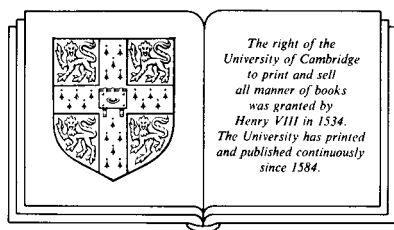
THE EARLIEST LIFE OF GREGORY THE GREAT

By an Anonymous Monk of Whitby

TEXT, TRANSLATION AND NOTES BY

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Preface

IT SEEMS REMARKABLE that no critical, annotated edition of the earliest Life of Gregory the Great has so far appeared, seeing that it has been eighty years since the attention of scholars was drawn to its importance. Besides having some claim to be the earliest extant piece of written literature produced by the Anglo-Saxons, it is also the source of two of the most famous legends of the Middle Ages, the Mass of St. Gregory and the story of Trajan's rescue from hell. It throws a few gleams of welcome light on church life in Northumbria in the seventh and early eighth centuries and, though the writer is no Bede, yet in his own simple way he reflects the attitude of his time to two outstanding figures, Gregory the Great and King Edwin, and the honour in which they were held by his own countrymen. His biography reflects too the difficulties that faced an early writer who attempted to build up a written literature to replace the native oral tradition and adapt it to the use of the recent converts to Christianity.

The fact that there is only one manuscript of the *Life* only adds to the difficulties of the editor, and the production of a text which is more or less intelligible has not been easy. It has been possible to make a few emendations based mostly upon the frequent scriptural quotations and upon the author's tendency to quote passages from Gregory's work and to echo his phrases. The earliest users of the *Life*—Paul the Deacon's Interpolator and John the Deacon—were often uncertain as to the writer's meaning. But, on the whole, the narrative sections of the *Life* are compara-

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tively straightforward, and the worst obscurities are mostly confined to the writer's theological and philosophical comments.

The text is based on a collation of the original MS at St. Gall. I am very grateful to the authorities of the Stiftsbibliothek for putting every facility at my disposal; I am also grateful to Sir Roger Mynors for allowing me to make use of his collation of the text made some years ago. The original has no chapter divisions, but, for the sake of convenience and ease in reference, I have used those made by Ewald and followed by Gasquet, even though they leave something to be desired. In one instance only have I altered Gasquet's arrangement, where he attaches the first sentence of c. 22 by mistake to the end of c. 21.

My thanks are due to Paul Meyvaert for various suggestions and to Sister Hildegarde W. Parry, O.S.B., of St. Cecilia's Abbey, Ryde, Isle of Wight, who has given me much valuable help and advice, especially in matters dealing with the author's Latin style and liturgical borrowings. I would also like to thank Professor Bruce Dickins and Professor Dorothy Whitelock for reading through my manuscript and making valuable suggestions and particularly the latter for calling my attention to the insertion in the Cambridge MS (Kk 4, 6) which helped to clear up the enigmatic and otherwise unintelligible references to St. Jerome in c. 28.

I am also grateful for the willing help given me by the staff of the Cambridge University Library. I am indebted to the London Library for the long-term loan of basic books and works of reference—the provision of a unique service which during more than a century a multitude of scholars have had reason to appreciate. It would

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indeed be a tragedy if, owing to lack of funds, this service had to be discontinued.

In undertaking the publication of this book, the University of Kansas Press has preserved my happy association with the University, extending over several years. I am grateful to the staff for their careful work and particularly to Professor Clyde Hyder for the immense pains he has taken in preparing my copy for the press and for his many very helpful suggestions.

BERTRAM COLGRAVE

Cambridge, England

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Abbreviations

- ASC** Whitelock, D., ed. (with D. C. Douglas and S. I. Tucker), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, 1961).
- Bede Opp.** Giles, J. A., ed., *Venerabilis Bedae opera quae supersunt*, 12 vols. (London, 1843-44).
- BHL** *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*, ed. Socii Bollandiani, vols. 1, 2 and supp. (Brussels, 1898-1911).
- BLTW** *Bede, his Life, Times and Writings*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (Oxford, 1935).
- Brechter** Brechter, S., *Die Quellen zur Angelsachsenmission Gregors des Grossen* (Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens, Münster, 1941).
- Bright** Bright, W., *Chapters of Early English Church History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1897).
- Cabrol** Cabrol, F., et Leclercq, H., *Dictionnaire d'Archeologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*, 15 vols. (Paris, 1907-53).
- DCB** Smith, W., and Wace, H., *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 4 vols. (London, 1877-87).
- Eddius** Colgrave, B., ed., *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge, 1927).
- EHD I** Whitelock, D., *English Historical Documents I, c. 500-1042* (London, 1955).
- ERE** Hastings, J., ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 13 vols. (Edinburgh, 1908-26).
- Ewald** Ewald, P., "Die älteste Biographie Gregors I," *Historische Aufsätze dem Andenken an Georg Waitz gewidmet* (Hannover, 1886), pp. 17-54.
- Gasquet** Gasquet, F. A., ed., *A Life of Pope St. Gregory the Great* (Westminster, 1904).
- HAA** *Historia abbatum auctore anonymo*. See under Plummer.
- HAB** *Historia abbatum auctore Beda*. See under Plummer.

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- HE* *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum auctore Beda.*
See under Plummer.
- Liber*
- Pontificalis* Mommsen, T., ed., *MGH. Gestorum Pontificum Romanorum I* (Berlin, 1898).
- MGH* *Monumenta Germaniae historica.*
Auct. Ant. Auctores antiquissimi.
Epp. Epistolae.
Poet. Lat. Poetae Latinae.
SRM. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum.
- PG* *Patrologia graeca*, ed. Migne, J. P., 161 vols. (Paris, 1857-86).
- PL* *Patrologia latina*, ed. Migne, J. P., 221 vols. (Paris, 1844-64).
- Plummer Plummer, C., ed., *Baedae Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum: Venerabilis Baedae opera historica*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1896).
- RS* *Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages* (Rolls Series) (London, 1858-96).
- Stenton Stenton, F. M., *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1947).
- Tangl Tangl, M., ed., *S. Bonifatii et Lulli Epistolae*, *MGH Epp. selectae, I* (Berlin, 1916).
- Taylor Taylor, H. M., and J., *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1965).
- Two Lives* Colgrave, B., ed., *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert* (Cambridge, 1940).
- VA* *Vita sancti Cuthberti auctore anonymo.* See *Two Lives*.
- VP* *Vita sancti Cuthberti prosaica auctore Beda.* See *Two Lives*.

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