


Nevertheless, *Stories between Christianity and Islam* does much to fill out the picture of the late antique landscape and the rise of Islam that has been sketched in influential recent studies. Durmaz offers a commendable first book that will be valuable reading for scholars interested in Late Antique studies, Qur'anic studies, orality studies, hagiology, and beyond.

Josh Mugler 

Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA

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***Bede and the Beginnings of English Racism.* By W. Trent Foley.**
Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2022. 221 pp. € 65.00, paperback.

An enormous body of scholarship on the history of race and racism in the West has appeared over the last several decades. The majority of studies seeking the origins of modern racial ideologies are by specialists of the postmedieval centuries who argue for the predominant influence of colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and modern scientific theories of genealogy and evolution. In recent years, however, specialists of antiquity such as Benjamin Isaac, and of later medieval Europe such as Suzanne Akbari, Geraldine Heng, and Cord Whitaker, have pointed to adumbrations of the modern beliefs in those eras. The ideas about race still haunting western society today have demonstrable roots in ancient and medieval thought.

Most scholarship on these issues gives at best peripheral attention to early medieval sources. *Bede and the Beginnings of English Racism* helps fill a major gap in the history of race, while also contributing valuably to studies of the eighth-century English monk and scholar, Bede. Using methodologies derived from New and Structuralist Criticism, Foley offers a penetrating formal analysis of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (c. 731) aimed at discerning its "racial" ideology (37–38). Foley distinguishes two levels on which Bede's text may be interpreted: a simple level that less educated audiences of his day would have grasped and a more sophisticated level probably only accessible to Latin-literate religious or clergy. As Foley observes, modern analyses of the *History*, too, often neglect the latter level of meaning. A fundamental argument of his book is that much imagery in the *History* apparent at the simple level is racially charged. Above all, this is true of Bede's stereotypical portrayal of the Britons, the population living in Britain when the Angles and Saxons arrived in the fifth century. Bede, Foley contends, "excoriated [the Britons] not just as individuals, but as an entire race" (24). Close reading at the more sophisticated interpretive level, though, reveals ways Bede qualified this imagery on the basis of his conviction that all human beings, even the British, "receive their redemption from a God who is a respecter neither of persons nor of races" (50).

Foley's prologue traces the personal motivations for writing his book: a childhood in the Jim Crow South, graduate research on early English culture, and a summer in Oxford studying how Victorian and Edwardian historians read Bede. The latter project introduced Foley to the nefarious reconstructions of England's medieval past published by nineteenth-century "Anglo-Saxonists," mainly in Britain, whose historiography was

indebted to Bede's *History* (17–23). A prominent refrain in those publications was the racial superiority of the English over other groups within Britain and beyond its borders. English superiority was held to derive from innate qualities inherited from Angle and Saxon forebears. The guiding question behind Foley's research for the present monograph has been to determine whether Bede is himself responsible for such racialized interpretations. The answer given is largely affirmative: the *History* constructs "durable and recognizable" stereotypes (35) that Victorian and Edwardian historians easily adapted to conform with their racist beliefs.

Chapters 2–5 analyze Bede's representation of four population groups identified in his *History*: the English, British (Britons), Irish, and "Latins." Bede refers to these groups as *gentes* (plural), a term that Foley contends is properly translated by "races." Chapter 2 examines Bede's vision of the universal church of Rome comprising a Latin "spiritual race." In Foley's estimation, Bede's portrayal of this "race" lacks racial specificity and is thus "analogous to what some scholars observe about the status of whiteness in the contemporary world" (68). Chapters 3–5 center on three "council-type scenes" (37) in the *History* involving interactions between the Latin and other *gentes* of Britain. In each scene, a *gens* (singular) must decide whether to abandon its parochial religious practices to join Rome's church. The meetings have varied outcomes, but each illumines Bede's understanding of the participants' prevailing characteristics. The British are portrayed as implacably opposed to Rome as well as to the English, whereas the English and later the Irish embrace catholic unity.

In the concluding Chapter 6, "The *Historia* and Its Legacy of Racist Discourse," Foley argues that Bede's representation of the British, English, and Irish is "consistently sober, earnest, and morally serious" (183), yet when the *History* is read at its simple interpretive level, the portrayal of the British, especially, guides readers toward a moral outlook corresponding with modern racial prejudices. This is the reading level that informed the historiography of Victorian and Edwardian scholars. In Foley's view, Bede's *History* bears "more than just a little responsibility for whatever racist legacy it engendered" (204).

Overall, Foley's analysis of the *History* is full of new insights into Bede's intent. While this is a scholarly book, its prose is easily within reach of non-academic readers. My one significant concern lies with the insistence on translating Bede's *gentes* by "races," and the implications for the book's larger argument. Foley himself acknowledges that Bede's conception of human group identity was, in crucial respects, distant from modern racial ideologies. A particular difference is that Bede lacked the modern "understanding of race rooted in the language of 'blood'" (24). The early medieval antecedents of modern theories of race have received too little scholarly attention, yet the disparities also need careful evaluation. Foley's repeated translation of *gens/gentes* as *race/races*, usually without reminding readers that Bede used the Latin terminology of *gentes*, collapses the differences in ways that undercut an otherwise nuanced exposition. The somewhat strained comparison—noted above—of Bede's vision of a Latin spiritual *gens* to current thinking about whiteness is indicative of the problem.

Still, it is important to recognize, first, that Foley's reading of Bede through a racial lens is in line with Heng's path-breaking work on race-thinking in later medieval literature and with much subsequent scholarship building on that foundation. Second, leaving aside whether it is appropriate to describe Bede's imagery as racial or to contend that his *History* represents the "beginnings of English racism," Foley's masterful reading of key portions of Bede's text opens an important new window on its central themes

and formal design. There is much to learn from and admire in this provocative, well-written, thoughtful monograph.

Celia Chazelle
The College of New Jersey, Ewing, NJ, USA
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***Churches in the Irish Landscape AD 400–1100.* By Tomás Ó Carragáin. Cork: Cork University Press, 2021. 520pp. €49/£45 hardback.**

For much of the second half of the twentieth century, the dominant understanding of church organization in early medieval Ireland—most notably shaped by the influential historian Kathleen Hughes—was that it was a largely monastic system. The Irish Church was thought to be led and administered by powerful monasteries and their daughter houses, in the absence of established diocesan and parish systems. Some historians queried the extent of pastoral care that was provided to lay communities beyond the borders of monastic estates, while others emphasized the importance of the *airchinnech* (best translated as “ecclesiastical land manager”) in the Irish ecclesiastical hierarchy and saw it as evidence of the “oddity” or exceptionalism of ecclesiastical organization in Ireland, compared to other territories where bishops dominated. This paradigm was thoroughly refuted by Richard Sharpe in a series of important studies, including his “Some Problems Concerning the Organisation of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland,” *Peritia* 3 (1984), 230–270, and his “Churches and Communities in Early Medieval Ireland: Towards a Pastoral Model,” in the 1992 volume, *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester University Press). Sharpe’s argument was refined in more recent decades, most notably in numerous publications by Colmán Etchingham, although Etchingham too cast doubt on the extent to which pastoral care reached the laity in more remote communities, distant from any major ecclesiastical establishment. Most recently, Liam Breatnach produced an edition and translation of the fragmentary seventh-century legal tract, *Córus Bésgnai* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2017), which provides vital evidence for the regulation of relations between church and laity, including the provision of pastoral care.

Into this debate, which was largely informed by documentary sources, such as law tracts, hagiography and annals, and by arguments regarding the terminology of ecclesiastical personnel, stepped Tomás Ó Carragáin, who brought his vast learning and experience in landscape archaeology to bear on the question of church organization in early medieval Ireland. Ó Carragáin has published widely, and his previous monograph, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland: Architecture, Ritual and Memory*, published by Yale University Press in 2010, is a monumental study of early Irish church sites—not only their archaeology but also their ideologies, as expressed through their architecture—and is an essential read. This most recent monograph builds on Ó Carragáin’s previous work but offers something entirely new, and incredibly important.

Using a series of detailed case studies, Ó Carragáin explores the full diversity of church sites in early medieval Ireland, which is far more complex and extensive than has hitherto