PREFACE

Two teachers of medieval history, one on each side of the Atlantic, have planned and written this book in the hope that it will make their chosen field of study, Merovingian history, accessible to a wider audience. The aim has been to present the essential sources for the period in a way which will allow us to demonstrate how its history can be constructed. To this end we have translated eight narrative texts which cover the eighty-year period 640–720, a time in which Merovingian Francia is often said to have been in political and economic decline. We hope to show that there is rather more to the period than that. Seven of our sources are contemporary, but one, the *Annales Mettenses Priores*, was written some eighty-five years after the period. We have included it as a kind of postscript which shows how Merovingian history would be rewritten by later generations, starting with the Carolingian denigration of the reputation of their royal predecessors.

Our central concern has been with a kind of political history. Much of what we say is about the texts themselves and about the identity of the people who figure in them. We spend much effort simply trying to ascertain all that can be known about a given subject, not an easy task in most cases. Only then do we fit the pieces into a jigsaw of political history, and this we do not because we think that political history is generally the most important or the only way of looking at the past, but because it best serves the purpose of drawing the behaviour and actions of our particular subjects into a coherent pattern. This pattern we have always attempted to shape in accordance with the conceptions of contemporaries rather than with those of historians. And we can do so because our Merovingian writers were themselves very much concerned with the political behaviour and the political relationships of the leading members of their society. By politics we certainly do not mean simply a narrative of the deeds of queens, kings, warriors, monks and bishops, although we shall have many delicious things to say about all of these, but rather an investigation into the way in which this early medieval society organised itself for political ends.

We have tried to keep our translations literal and our discussions explicit in order to show how our material can be used by the historian. Since our sources are frequently difficult to interpret, the Merovingian period has often been subject to some fairly heavy-handed historical analysis, much of which seeks to confirm preconceived ideas about 'Dark Age' disorder. To counter this we have taken pains to comment on each of our sources at length and in a way which will allow the reader to engage with matters such as their originality and reliability, as well as to understand the various interpretations which may be placed upon them. The introduction, in fact, consists of substantial discussions, of the historical background, of the Latin of the texts, and of methodology, hagiography and historiography. These are intended to explain the issues which will

be encountered later when each source is discussed. For it is our experience as teachers that when scholars assume too high a level of prior knowledge in this area they tend to choke off the interest of the uninitiated. Though in planning our book like this we had the student reader in mind, when actually working on our translations and interpretations we found time and again that we had to advance our own views on matters either not previously considered in the secondary literature or in need of re-examination in the light of recent research. In consequence the book contains much material which will be of interest to scholars as well as to students. We hope that we have succeeded in writing in a way which will stimulate both audiences.

The work has been our intermittent occupation for the last seven years. We are both immensely grateful to colleagues and friends who have helped and encouraged us. In particular we should like to thank Marie Adams and Rupert Segar, whose kindness made our work together possible. The University of Alabama in Huntsville, Research Institute and Humanities Center, provided travel expenses over the years. Rosamond McKitterick, Janet Nelson and Ian Wood kindly commented on drafts of various chapters and were typically generous with their advice. Janet Nelson also made essential improvements in the translation of the *Passio Praejecti*. David Ganz gave invaluable help with questions of manuscripts. David d'Avray, Peter Christian, Cyril Edwards, Andrew Louth and Anthony Pryer all cast light on matters liturgical, dramatical, theological and musical, which allowed us to cloak our ignorance. Our sincere thanks are also due to Gerard Velay of the University Library in Montpellier for kindly sending us a photocopy of ms. Montpellier, H 55, and to William M. Daly for making available John Cox's translations of the *Vita Balthildis* and the *Vita S. Geretrudis*.

As with all long-term projects, this one has produced many joys and frustrations for us both. At the end of it we are still good friends and sign this preface in the hope that our work will make other good friends for the study of Europe in the early Middle Ages.

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