

History and Memory in the Carolingian World

Review Number:

474

Publish date:

Saturday, 1 October, 2005

Author:

Rosamond McKitterick

ISBN:

521534364X

Date of Publication:

2004

Price:

£17.99

Pages:

353pp.

Publisher:

Cambridge University Press

Place of Publication:

Cambridge

Reviewer:

David Ganz

Of the importance of history to the Carolingians there can be no doubt, though they were perhaps less concerned with the events of their own time than with the lessons to be drawn from past events. Crucial here were their awareness of the mutability of history itself, their desire to organise information about the past into a systematic process, and their sense of the lessons to be drawn from deeds that seemed worth being remembered and that could teach people (readers) how to think, live, or govern properly. Current studies, including those essays revised and republished in this volume, have tended to stress the didactic features supposedly present in medieval historical texts, but have seldom explained how lessons were to be taught or learned.

But the systematic organisation of the texts was as important: the term *historia* was always used to describe the constructed narrative, whose explicit and implicit categories require investigation. These essays treat books known to Carolingians, and some books written by Carolingians, which may be regarded as historical works. We await a study of how this might relate to the exegetical concept of *historia*, as expressed for example in Christian of Stavelot:

Studui autem plus historicum sensum sequi quam spiritalem, quia irrationabile mihi videtur spiritalem intelligentiam in libro aliquo quaerere, et historicam penitus ignorare: cum historia fundamentum omnis intelligentiae sit.⁽¹⁾

And yet many Carolingian authors of historical texts were not uninterested in understanding the senses of

scripture.

The essays collected here explore notions of Frankish identity and of social memory, drawing on the work of Halbwachs. Frankish historical texts are examined for their agreed vision of the past. They are 'the texts in which an elite defines itself' (p. 7), they 'forge a Frankish identity' (p. 23), 'reflect on political power and on rulership' (p. 57), and have 'specific political objectives' (p. 71), 'a shared political memory' (p. 120); 'Their complex relationship with the past was articulated in many different contexts' (p. 265). The decision to investigate shared values in texts as diverse as the *Annales Regni Francorum* and confraternity book of the cathedral at Salzburg or the cartulary of donations to Fulda and Freising conveys a sense of how local and national, institutional and ethnic memories overlapped and checked one another. This is explored in terms of literate modes of communication, and their interdependent oral modes. 'Because of the way and the contents in which literate skills were exercised in the middle ages, writing was more than a straightforward means of communication' (p. 162).

There are detailed accounts of the *Annales Regni Francorum*, particularly the entries for 751, 788 and 817 and some of the manuscripts of this text. (I would see the insistence on the Franks in that text as a comment about shared power, a tradition in which the ruler claimed the support and consent of his nobles.) There are briefer treatments of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and its picture of the cultural identity of the Franks, the manuscripts and audience for some of the key sources of Carolingian history: the *Liber Pontificalis*, Einhard's *Vita Karoli* and the *Annales Fuldenses*. A further chapter explores the date and the audience for Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, designed, according to McKitterick, 'to instruct the Franks about the Lombard past' (p. 23). Donald Bullough pointed out that 'The Franks figure in Paul's narrative almost entirely as enemies' and the implications of that evaluation do not figure here.⁽²⁾

A high point of the volume is McKitterick's assertion that the account of Pope Zacharias's deposition of the last Merovingian king in 751 and anointing of Pippin is a later Carolingian invention. This is the most forceful presentation of the Franks constructing and manipulating their past, and matches what Mathias Becher has found for the treatment of Tassilo's oath of loyalty in the *Annales Regni Francorum*.⁽³⁾ Her view, first suggested by Werner Affeldt in 1980, is echoed in Joseph Semmler's monograph *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751 und die fränkische Königssalbung*, which suggests that even in 754 Pippin was not anointed king, but merely anointed after his baptism.⁽⁴⁾

The final chapters explore forms of social memory starting with cartularies and *Libri Memoriales*. McKitterick writes that 'The *Salzburg Liber Vitae* is essentially a history book' (p. 174). With regard to the *Libri Memoriales*, Hrabanus Maurus saw their model as the Old and New Testaments:

Libri ergo memoriales sunt volumina duorum Testamentorum, in quibus quae justis pro bonis actibus praemia, et quae iniquis pro peccatis poenae in futuro maneat, commemorantur.⁽⁵⁾

The role of the institutional library as a guardian of memory is investigated in a chapter on the reading of history at Lorsch and St Amand, with lists of 'History manuscripts' associated with Fulda and St Amand. This raises crucial questions about how and why books were acquired, and what lessons they might have taught. The importance of the history of the church is rightly stressed. Long ago Momigliano suggested that one of the distinctive features of ecclesiastical history was its concern for documents. The creation of authority in the history of the church is the subject of a chapter which takes the literary bibliographies of Jerome-Gennadius, the ecclesiastical histories by Eusebius Rufinus and Cassiodorus's *Historia Tripartita* as texts which affected the Carolingian reform movement and their sense of the identity of the church. This is supplemented by an investigation of canon law collections known to the Carolingians, which makes the point that 'chronologically-ordered canon law collections are essentially history books' (p. 255), especially for their views of the treatment of heresy and the claims for Episcopal and papal authority. Sadly the Pseudo-Isidoran decretals do not feature: instead there are discussions of a substantial canon-law collection from Northern Italy now in Vercelli, with six illustrations of historical scenes. One of those, showing Helena

finding the True Cross, leads to a discussion of the illustrated *Inventio sanctae crucis* in an Augsburg manuscript. I feel that this chapter tries to cover too much disparate ground.

The concluding chapter opens with a discussion of sources for the rebellion of Bernard of Italy against Louis the Pious in 817, which raises fundamental questions about how narrators and audience came by their knowledge of events, and what the role of hindsight in the later accounts of the rebellion was. Its use of the prefatory letter of Lupus to his life of Wigbert of Fritzlar reminds us how much information about Carolingian notions of the writing of history and hagiography that life contains. This chapter also discusses the perception of time, attitudes to biblical and Roman precedent and even Frankish influence on England: it has an almost breathless range of topics which define the subject and the scope of the whole book.

Carolingian texts are firm about the distinction between history and annals, and I see no reason to assume that they ignored this distinction or its implications. So the rise of annals, and the paucity of narrative histories – with the exception of Paul the Deacon's *Historia Romana* and *Historia Langobardorum*, the universal histories of Freculph of Lisieux, Ado of Vienne and, at the end of the period, Regino of Prum – demands investigation. What was it that the annalistic form supplied which ensured its popularity? This volume is dismissive of the case for annals deriving from Easter tables, though our earliest brief annal entries are certainly found in such manuscripts. Walafrid Strabo's lines about the commemoration of his dead abbot Wetti seem relevant here:

Innumerisque bonis meritum superaverat omne;
Quis mihi nunc misero verbum demonstrat adhortans?
Annales memorare dies mortemque notare
Quis cogit? (6)

Such formal commemorations could be integrated into a grander narrative, however laconic that narrative might be. Hrabanus Maurus in his commentary on Esther notes the biblical reference to annals:

Leguntur coram eo historiae et annales priorum temporum, in quibus commemoratio fidei et bonorum actuum Mardochei continetur, quia rex sanctorum et princeps regum terrae, in se idem manens, omnium temporum cursus et singulorum actuum notitiam uno contemplatur intuitu, nec est apud illum quidquam recidivum, sed praesentialiter in conspectu ejus omnia patent. Commemorantur ergo gesta Mardochei coram hoc rege, quia bona opera sanctorum doctorum nunquam apud eum oblivioni tradentur, sed fit quod scriptum est: «In memoria aeterna erit justus, ab auditu malo non timebit». (7)

The commemoration of past events otherwise doomed to oblivion was itself a praiseworthy aim: the creation of a sense of identity was secondary. We urgently need a serious investigation of what the brief and early Frankish annals have to say, why they chose to begin their accounts when they did, and what their form may imply.

Professor McKitterick believes that there was an 'extraordinary revolution in historical writing to be observed in the Carolingian period' (p. 99). But this revolution was a widespread rejection of those grand narratives about the history of the Franks, or Christian history, which had occupied the previous centuries. Carolingians clearly spent more time copying and reading the works of earlier historians than they did in writing what they might have regarded as history. So it is worth asking whether Carolingian authors regarded *historia* as a clearly defined genre. The groupings of texts in the Lorsch and Murbach library catalogues imply that they did. Canon law books were kept elsewhere.

It is a pity that Carolingian authors are silent in too much of this book. Isidore's distinction between *historia*, *argumentum* and *fabula* is an essential starting point for any mature reflections on the writing of Carolingian

history, with its insistence that history is true. There is an important early Carolingian discussion of history in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (hereafter BN), MS. Lat 7530, which was printed by Halm in *Rhetores Latini Minores*:

Historia est rerum gestarum et dignarum memoriae relatio: ea versatur aut in rebus bellicis aut in negotiis civilibus, id est pacis. Historici officia sunt tria: ut veras res, ut dilucide, ut breviter exponat. Verae res sunt, si rerum actarum vetustas et obscuritas diligenter exploretur, si explorata libere, id est sine metu aut gratia aut invidia referatur. Lucida fit historia, si ut oportet res pro temporibus, pro locis, pro actibus structura simplici et perfecta explanetur ... Opus historiae est ut nos notitia rerum instruat.[\(8\)](#)

A place in history was earned, and the historian followed rules of style and of source criticism in preserving the memory of great men. This is a larger enterprise than the creation of a 'political memory'.

The reader encounters lists of classical historians, Jewish and Christian historians and of barbarian histories (not a helpful term) known to the Carolingians (pp. 40–50) but there is too little evidence as to how these works were read. Some sense of the role of classical Roman historians is conveyed by the Poeta Saxo when he affirmed that Charlemagne is superior to Camillus, Cato, Caesar, Pompey and the Gens Fabiorum. Hrabanus Maurus has a relevant comment, presumably drawing on his reading of Orosius:

«Regnum a gente in gentem transfertur, propter injustitias, et injurias, et contumelias, et diversos dolos.» Hujus sententiae veritatem omnium pene gentium notant historiae, et causas diversorum populorum ostendunt. Nec hoc ignorare potest, qui Chaldaeorum et Persarum Graecorumque potentissima regna subversa legit, et Romanorum regnum vacillare conspicit, nec stabile aliquid in mundo esse perpendit.[\(9\)](#)

The 1934 Berlin dissertation by Fritz Landsberg, 'Das Bild der alten Geschichte im mittelalterlichen Weltchroniken' would have been helpful. Veronika von Büren's important article on how Lupus corrected the text of Livy and supplied marginal summaries or Sedulius Scottus's concern with the *Historia Augusta* could have been noted.[\(10\)](#) If the *Ilias Latina* is to be regarded as Roman history, why is there no mention of Valerius Maximus? (There seems to be a serious misunderstanding of the nature of Sallust's *Historiae* on p. 41: only fragments of that work were transmitted to the Carolingians and to us.)

Equally important are the dialogues between different historical texts in the Carolingian age. McKitterick is helpful on how manuscripts create implicit dialogues by assembling different texts, though her repeated references to Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (hereafter ONB), MS. 473 do not convince me that this collection was copied for Charles the Bald, rather than at his court. But she has less to say about how the Earlier Annals of Metz use the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, how Einhard assumes readers familiar with the *Annales Regni Francorum*. Her account of the contents of the remarkable Verona collection of historical texts (pp. 53–9) draws attention to a major historiographical enterprise: I should have liked more about its conception of Christian history and the implications of the extracts from Jerome on Daniel. Its material on Assyrians, Scythians and Romans seems to break out of categories of 'ethnic history'. The references to manuscripts of the *Liber Pontificalis* (pp. 51–2, 142–50) ignore several important Carolingian copies: Bern, MS. 225 from Western France; Laon, MS. 342 from Reims and its twin BN, Lat. MS. 13729; Leiden Voss, Lat. MS. Q 41 copied before 844 which went to Auxerre; Florence Medicea Laurenziana Acquisiti e Doni, MS. 195 copied in Northern Italy and Paris; and BN, Lat. MS. 5516 from Tours. They might have lead to an investigation of the nature of the Frankish reception of the several versions of this text.

This practice of selective references to some of the surviving Carolingian manuscripts of the texts discussed seems to me to misrepresent the evidence for their circulation: the *Historia Tripartita* (pp. 194, 240) survives in Naples VI D, MS. 18, second quarter of the ninth century, perhaps copied at Corbie with marginal notes;

in Freiburg Universitätsbibliothek, MS. 6 from the region of Lake Constance; in Munich Clm., MS. 6376 from St Emmeram Regensburg; in Vatican, Pal. Lat., MS. 823 from Reims; in Paris, NAL, MS. 1603 from Tours; in Genua Biblioteca Durazzo, MS. 253 from St Denis; in British Library, Add. MS. 19961 from Belgium; and in Monte Cassino, MS. 302.

Manuscripts of Hegesippus are discussed on pages 46–7, 194, 201 and 212: in addition to the St Amand fragment in Koblenz, and the Lorsch manuscript in the Vatican there was a copy at the Reichenau, Karlsruhe MS Aug. perg LXXXII; at Fleury, Bern, MS. 180 (copied in the Paris region); at Laon, Laon, MS. 403 *bis* from North Eastern France; and Leiden, MS. BPL 21 was copied in North Eastern France in the last quarter of the ninth century. It is a pity that the very helpful list of Carolingian copies of Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* on page 82 is not really integrated into the chapter on Paul's work.

The bibliography has some gaps. The fundamental recent article on Carolingian historical writing by H.-W. Goetz is missing, as is Gertrud Simon's 'Untersuchungen zur Topik der Widmungsbriefe mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreiber bis zum Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts', which is a careful investigation of what Carolingian historians asserted that they were trying to do. The single reference to 'sterile notions of intertextuality' (p. 2) makes it clear that readers of McKitterick should not expect to encounter the work of Rüsen, Ankersmit or Koselleck. But much could have been learned from Marie Schulz, *Die Lehre von der historischen Methode bei den Geschichtsschreibern des Mittelalters VI–XIII Jahrhunderts*. For the question of history as a distinctive genre. H.-W. Goetz's two articles, 'Die "Geschichte" im Wissenschaftssystem des Mittelalters' and 'Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit im früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Geschichtsbewußtsein' make a strong case. G. Melville's 'Wozu Geschichte schreiben? Stellung und Funktion der Historie im Mittelalter' is also important, as are the three volumes of the *Grundriss der Romanischen Literatur des Mittelalters*: xi: *La littérature historiographique des origines à 1500* (Heidelberg, 1986). But the most serious and startling omission is that this volume has not a word to waste on Augustine's *City of God*.[\(11\)](#)

In several cases the palaeographical arguments are at the very least contestable. There is no reason to believe that Heiric of Auxerre corrected a manuscript of Tacitus. I cannot see the features in the Bagford fragment of Justinus (pp. 43–4) which suggest that it is 'a continental production by a Northumbrian scribe' rather than an English copy. I can make nothing of the remarks about b-d uncial in Lucca, MS. 490 (p. 51) that script was used in the sixth century, and has nothing to do with the texts of Isidore or the *Liber Pontificalis*. The St Petersburg manuscript of Einhard (pp. 21, 112) is regarded by Mathias Tischler as having no evident link with a putative copy made for Charles the Bald, and Tischler also sees the assembling of the 'Lorsch annals' and Einhard in a single volume (Vatican, Pal. Lat. MS. 243) as later than the Carolingian period, in contrast to what is stated on page 204.[\(12\)](#) No evidence is given to support the assertion on page 240 that the manuscript of Eusebius Rufinus in Copenhagen was made in St Amand: I am happy to attribute it to St Germain des Près as Bischoff did. The manuscript of the *Wessobrunner Gebet* was reproduced in a superb complete facsimile (Munich, 1922) which students might wish to consult. The detailed account of ONB, MS. 515, the contemporary copy of the 'Lorsch annals', nowhere reveals that Bischoff thought the manuscript to be copied by two rather than four scribes, and that Hoffmann was convinced that the text was not autograph, which surely modifies the picture presented.[\(13\)](#) The Leipzig manuscript of the *Annales Fuldenses* (pp. 34–5) has the correct shelfmark (Rep. II 4 129a) and was supposedly copied in Niederaltaich in Bavaria c.900 (not 'of the last quarter of the ninth century').

As I have suggested above, the treatment of surviving Carolingian manuscripts of texts discussed is sometimes selective, and I am not clear what governed the selection. Not even a footnote alerts readers to Munich Clm. MS. 23618, a copy of the Revised Frankish Annals (Kurze's E version) for 806–821 written at Fulda. Has McKitterick consulted Vatican, Reg. Lat. MS. 617, another important ninth century manuscript of the *Annales Regni Francorum*? It is asserted that surviving copies of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* come from 'the westerly and Rhineland area of the Frankish empire' (p. 14). Does this include Vatican, Reg. Lat. MS. 913 from St Gall, Brit. Libr., Arundel MS. 375 from Southern France, the Hague, MS. 921 from North Eastern France, or Leiden Voss, Lat. MS. Q 86 from Paris?

The footnotes refer, with characteristic and exemplary generosity, to two unpublished Oxford DPhil

dissertations, to three unpublished Cambridge MPhil essays, one unpublished Cambridge MLitt dissertation, two unpublished Cambridge MPhil dissertations, and two unpublished Cambridge PhD dissertations.[\(14\)](#)

This volume, as I have tried to suggest, raises central questions about the conscious and implicit functions of Carolingian historical texts, their setting in a broader and more fluid historical narrative, and the evidence for how they circulated. There are important demonstrations of how the manuscripts provide an amplification and a check on what a printed edition can reveal. To take a particularly telling case, Rosamond McKitterick was the first to examine the Sankt Maria im Kapitol fragment of the *Annales Regni Francorum*, which Bischoff had noted as copied close to the court of Louis the Pious (pp. 21–2, 130, 271). What it has to teach can now be supplemented by a fragment of the *Annales Regni Francorum* from 825–826, in Leiden, MS. BPL 2391b. This has readings found only in ONB, MS. 473, it is written in a clear small script with long f and a distinctive g which I would date to the second quarter of the ninth century and which may also relate to the court or a Rhineland centre. The dialogue with manuscripts, as presented here, will not fail to instruct.

Notes

1. Christian of Stavelot, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (221 vols., Paris, 1844–1903) (hereafter *PL*), cvi, col. 1253.[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. D. A. Bullough, 'Ethnic history and Carolingians: Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*' in ed. C. Holdsworth and T. Wiseman, *The Inheritance of Historiography* (1986).[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. M. Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft. Untersuchungen zum Herrschaftsethos Karls des Grossen* (Sigmaringen, 1993).[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. Joseph Semmler, *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751 und die fränkische Königssalbung* (Düsseldorf, 2003).[Back to \(4\)](#)
5. Hrabanus Maurus, 'Expositio in librum Esther', *PL*, cix, col. 651.[Back to \(5\)](#)
6. Walahfrid Strabo, 'Ad Grimaldum capellanum de Morte Wettini', *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini II* (Berlin, 1884) p. 334.[Back to \(6\)](#)
7. Hrabanus Maurus, 'Expositio in librum Esther', *PL*, cix, col. 657.[Back to \(7\)](#)
8. C. F. von Halm, *Rhetores Latini Minores* (Leipzig, 1863), p. 588.[Back to \(8\)](#)
9. Hrabanus Maurus, 'Commentariorum in Ecclesiasticum', bk. 2, *PL*, cix, col. 827.[Back to \(9\)](#)
10. V. von Büren, 'Livy's *Roman History* in the 11th-Century catalogue from Cluny: the transmission of the first and third Decades', in ed. C. A. Chavannes-Mazel and M. M. Smith, *Medieval Manuscripts of the Latin Classics: Production and Use* (Los Altos Hills, Calif. and London, 1996) pp. 57–73.[Back to \(10\)](#)
11. H.-W. Goetz, 'Vergangenheitswahrnehmung, Vergangenheitsgebrauch und Geschichtssymbolismus in der Geschichtsschreibung der Karolingerzeit', in *Ideologie e pratiche del reimpiego nell'alto medioevo* (Settimane di studio, 46, Spoleto 1999), 177–225; Gertrud Simon, 'Untersuchungen zur Topik der Widmungsbriefe mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreiber bis zum Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts', *Archiv für Diplomatik* 4 (1958), pp. 52–119, and 5 (1959) 73–154; Marie Schulz, *Die Lehre von der historischen Methode bei den Geschichtsschreibern des Mittelalters VI–XIII Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1909); H.-W. Goetz, 'Die "Geschichte" im Wissenschaftssystem des Mittelalters', in ed. F. J. Schmale, *Funktion und Form mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreibung. Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt, 1985) and 'Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit im früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Geschichtsbewußtsein', *Historische Zeitschrift* (255, 1992), 61–97; G. Melville, 'Wozu Geschichte schreiben? Stellung und Funktion der Historie im Mittelalter', in ed. R. Koselleck, H. Lutz and J. Rüsen, *Formen der Geschichtsschreibung* (Beiträge zur Historik, 4, Munich 1982), pp. 86–146; *La littérature historiographique des origines à 1500*, dir. H.-U. Gumbrecht, U. Link-Heer and P.-M. Spangenberg (Grundriss der Romanischen Literatur des Mittelalters, xi, Heidelberg, 1986).[Back to \(11\)](#)
12. M. Tischler, *Einharts Vita Karoli. Studien zur Entstehung, Überlieferung und Rezeption* (Hannover, 2001), pp. 154–47.[Back to \(12\)](#)
13. B. Bischoff, *Lorsch im Spiegel seiner Handschriften* (Lorsch, 1989), pp. 120–21; H. Hoffmann, *Untersuchungen zur karolingischen Annalistik* (Bonn, 1958), pp. 87–88.[Back to \(13\)](#)
14. The PhD dissertations may be consulted in the Cambridge University Library, however the Seeley

librarian tells me that not all MPhil and MLitt work is on deposit in libraries, and suggests that prospective readers e-mail seeley@hist.cam.ac.uk [2]. [Back to \(14\)](#)

The author has read this review and does not wish to comment on this occasion. Many of the points raised in the review have in the meantime been addressed in the Robert Conway lectures she delivered in the Medieval Institute, University of Notre Dame, in September 2004, which are to be published shortly by the University of Notre Dame Press as a monograph entitled *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*.

Other reviews:

[3]

Source URL: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/474#comment-0>

Links

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/2496>

[2] <mailto:seeley@hist.cam.ac.uk>

[3] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews>