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Rosamond McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*. Conway Lectures in Medieval Studies. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006. xi + 154 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$25.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0268035006.

Review by Bonnie Effros, Binghamton University (SUNY).

Based on the Robert Conway Lectures she delivered at the University of Notre Dame in September 2004, Rosamond McKitterick's newest book revisits the way in which the reading and writing of history in the Carolingian kingdoms were shaped by their authors' perceptions of the past — particularly the Roman past. Giving early medieval authors greater credit for their creative contributions than has traditionally been the case, McKitterick focuses on how Carolingian historians used elements from existing historical accounts to create a coherent narrative relevant to their projected audience's concerns and priorities. In other words, rather than dismissing Carolingian authors as mere compilers or copyists, she sets out to determine "why those texts in particular were selected, what new texts they create, and the implications of the ways in which particular texts provided a solid foundation for understanding of the past in the early middle ages" (p. 4).

In her opening essay, McKitterick assesses Frankish interest in chronicling history from the time of creation, a practice with formative precedents in Genesis and the Gospel of John. Christian authors had long deemed "universal" history essential since it pointed at man's progression toward the Last Judgment, and McKitterick teases out the way in which early Christian historians like Eusebius and Jerome integrated local and national history into this broader perspective. Although at first sight these works present a jumbled panorama of events and empires, their authors situated the Christian community at the apex of their narratives. The success of the *Chronicon* of Eusebius-Jerome in achieving these goals made the work standard reading for centuries. No less than twenty-eight manuscript copies are extant between the fifth and tenth centuries (p. 21). Among Carolingian historians like the author of the *Chronicon universale* (741), who was also familiar with Bede and other emulators of this historical tradition, the only logical starting point for a history was Adam. Like Ado of Vienne and Region of Prüm, each of whom composed his own chronicle (the first ending in 870, the latter in 908), early medieval scholars sought to integrate the Franks into this larger stream of human history. Each of these compositions was unique in its organization and objectives, and McKitterick provides a glimpse of how each of these works differed from one another and the framework of the earlier "universal" histories upon which they relied.

The next chapter of the book is dedicated to perceptions of imperial and Christian Rome from the time of the Eusebius-Jerome *Chronicon*. By the Carolingian period, chroniclers' interest had expanded to the city's apostolic past, martyrs, political history, and even its architecture. Their extensive knowledge of Rome's past and topography was bolstered by works like pilgrim narratives and *syloges*, the latter a genre that originated in the ninth century and essentially constituted notes on ancient and Christian monuments and their related inscriptions. These works did not just shed light on pilgrimage and the veneration of holy sites but also shaped their readers' understanding of the physical fabric of the holy city (p. 43). Another rich source for the history of Christian Rome was the *Liber pontificalis*, produced in two sixth-century recensions and augmented by accounts of successive popes until the ninth century. Not only did the composition describe the martyrdoms and burial places of the popes and the other saints who filled the cemeteries and churches that surrounded the city of Rome, but the compilation

suggests the degree to which certain popes sought to retain control over their cults to promote consensus in the Christian communities under their authority (pp. 48-49). In contrast to this work's mixture of sacred and profane history were other sources produced abundantly in the Carolingian period, such as martyrologies and translation accounts of relics — particularly those that passed into Gaul from Italy like Einhard's *translatio* of Marcellinus and Petrus (p.55). All of these sources impressed upon Carolingian authors a strong sense of the spiritual centrality of Rome to Christian history of which they were themselves a part.

Yet how did Carolingian authors paint Frankish history into the larger canvas of “universal” and Roman history? McKitterick dedicates the last chapter of the book to a discussion of the writing of annals in the Carolingian realm and their contribution to the contextualization of the Frankish past in Christian history. By focusing on the way in which “major” annals like the *Annales mettenses priores*, the *Annales regni francorum*, and their continuations in the *Annales Bertiniani* and the *Annales fuldenses*, as well as “minor” regional or local annals dealt with specific events, McKitterick highlights the varying historical and political perceptions that existed in different localities over time (p. 66). Authors, through their careful choice of chronological framework and vocabulary, could suggest subtly alternative interpretations of key events like rebellions and assemblies that suited the vision of their projected audience. McKitterick thus urges the reader to think of the “implications of context and perspective that the variations might suggest concerning different formations of memory by means of historical writing, and this perception of the Frankish past” (p. 80).

This brief work, which builds on McKitterick's previous publications — most notably *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* [1] — provides tantalizing glimpses of historical writing in a Carolingian age of “confidence and certainty” (p. 91). By pointing out the under-tapped potential of these often terse sources in revealing Carolingian perceptions of the past, McKitterick demonstrates the shortsightedness of the nineteenth-century editors' obsession with reconstructing the ur-text of early medieval manuscripts. Understanding Carolingian historical works as living and evolving narratives specific to a particular place and time allows modern readers some insight into the mindset of Carolingian authors and their changing interpretations of the Franks' role and significance in Christian history. These most recent essays suggest some of the directions that future studies will need to take to reassess properly the agency and important contributions of Carolingian authors.

NOTES

[1] Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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