
H-France Review Vol. 14 (April 2014), No. 62

Anne A. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World: Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800-1229*. Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2013. xiv + 290 pp. Figures, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN978-0-8014-5148-5.

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Like many research projects, this one began with expectations that turned out to require radical revision. Anne Latowsky, a specialist in medieval French literature, had imagined that her material on Charlemagne's apocryphal encounters with the East would be in France. She soon became aware that the figure of Charlemagne *croisé*, that is, as proto-crusader, was more or less absent from the texts she studied, while the story, "portable, mutable, and enduring," of Charlemagne in the East was "the product of an imperial rather than a royal mindset" (pp. 2, 5). Hence, a full account of the story's post-Carolingian persistence and manifold forms across four centuries would focus on literary works produced in Germany, rather than France. In *Emperor of the World*, Latowsky traces the role played by the figure of Charlemagne in texts produced largely in Middle Francia and East Francia, and then Germany and Italy, from the imperial coronation of Charlemagne in 800 to Frederick II's journey to the East in 1229. She untangles the complicated processes of projection and reception whereby legend was transformed into ideology to become a significant and contested theme in cultural history. The results are original and illuminating. They also raise timely questions about methodology and interdisciplinarity which will be of interest to all medievalists whatever their affiliations in university departments.

The introduction broaches the problems involved in explaining how Charlemagne's legendary life was generated from the union of historical events with literary motif. The reception of foreign embassies and their gifts was a topos widespread in the ancient world, signifying the receiver's superiority over the sender. In the hands of Charlemagne's contemporary and biographer, Einhard (+840), whose knowledge of Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars* was exceptional for the period, "rewriting ... coronation [in chapter twenty-eight of the biography]... or diplomatic encounters [in chapter sixteen] constituted its own sort of political act" (p. 13). The extraordinarily large number of manuscripts of Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne* (Matthias Tischler has brought the tally to 134 [1]) helps account for the impact of chapter sixteen of the *Life* on the subsequent written tradition of Charlemagne in the East (investigating the role of chapter nine of the *Life* in spawning oral tradition of Charlemagne in the West was not part of Latowsky's agenda). Other important influences were "two conflicting medieval conceptions of apocalyptic Roman universalism" (p. 16): a coming age of peace foretold by Virgil's Cumean Sibyl, and an alternative sibylline tradition foretelling the Last Emperor's violent conquest of the enemies of Faith. Was the legendary Charlemagne "humble pilgrim or conquering emperor?" (p. 17). Though in practice, the two could often be reconciled and indeed intertwined, Latowsky's maintenance of a distinction between them pays dividends here and in the rest of the book, in indicating how prophecy in secular politics eschewed end-times in the interests of dynastic propaganda and "celebration of dynastic renewal."

"As medievalists," Latowsky writes, "we still wrestle with what to do with obvious fictions when they seem to invade an otherwise 'historical' document" (p. 18). It is no criticism of literary scholars, but, rather, an assertion of professional solidarity, to say that medieval historians in search of "the meanings of Charlemagne" find every document to have been "invaded." "Summary of a Report" on Holy Land churches, which Charlemagne intended should be supported by his alms, made on his orders in 808, and now admirably edited, translated and discussed by Michael McCormick in a book that must have appeared just too late for inclusion among Latowsky's

references, was in form and, at one level, in function a routine administrative document, but the places it enumerated were the product of centuries of assignments of meanings, making the text anything but routine.[2]

In a substantial first chapter on Carolingian origins in which Latowsky draws on excellent earlier work of her own, she shows convincingly how Einhard used the rhetoric of praise to enhance his account of Greek-Frankish relations, yet refused to exaggerate Charlemagne's glory, "a form of tacit praise" (pp. 34-7). Besides the pervasive influence of Suetonius, Einhard drew on Virgil and Orosius, and—an intriguing suggestion—perhaps indirectly on Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* (pp. 23, 29-30). It is Notker of St-Gall who has pride of place in this chapter (pp. 38-57). In his *Gesta Karoli*, he included the Persians in the picture of symbolic surrenders. In an interesting codicological observation, Latowsky notes that the *Gesta Karoli*'s presence in twelfth-century compilations of Charlemagne material brings Einhard and Notker (and others) into conversation with each other. Drawing deftly on a classic article by David Ganz and recent work by Simon MacLean, Latowsky pins down Notker as a writer for his own time in 885/6 when a monitory tone and tremulous optimism were both à propos.[3]

Perhaps Latowsky could have mentioned irony among Notker's rhetorical modes and commented on the royal virtue of humility, but her highlighting of the eschatological is spot on. Notker "showed far more interest in the theoretical problem of Carolingian empire as Roman *renovatio* than had Einhard" (p. 42). This helps to situate the *Gesta Karoli* midway between the *Life of Charlemagne* and tenth-century amplifications of the legend. Comparing Charles's symbolic defeats of Persians and Greeks brings out Notker's ambivalence and an "engagement with the discourse of Roman universalism [which] involved placing Charlemagne at the helm of a divided empire, to the detriment of the Greeks" (pp. 44-5, 48, 51). Notker's stark contrast between Charles *bellicosissimus* and the feeble Greek *rex* is a joke which Latowsky's comment, "petty, even snippy," suggests she doesn't quite get: when Charles hears from his returning envoy that the Greek had "offered" him Saxony, he replies that a more useful offer would have been a pair of pants for the envoy's long ride home. The Greeks are all mouth and no trousers. The Franks are real men. To be fair, Latowsky does entirely get the significance of Notker's use of the Paderborn Epic (also known as *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa*), and his subtly qualified response to its "unbridled praise" for Charlemagne's "new Rome" (pp. 41; 56-7). Suppose, as some scholars do, that the "anonymous" poem's author was Einhard? This would add a further dimension to Notker's reinterpretation, which included an element of subversion in its "humbling" of the emperor (p. 57).

Chapter two, "Relics from the East," moves to different territory and further transformations of the legendary Charlemagne. In a monastic milieu that harboured intensified enthusiasm for the cult of relics and deepening anxieties over Christian disunity, the monk Benedict of Monte Soracte's fusion of humble Holy Land pilgrim with the Last Emperor marked "a defining moment in the ongoing reframing of 'Charlemagne in the East'" (p. 69). Charlemagne's image acquired the portability of the relics he sought and brought home. Latowsky argues that Robert Folz was only half-right in stressing the peacefulness of the imperial mission here, for Benedict also drew on popular prophecies that "promised universal Christian domination through violent conquest," and "his" Charlemagne subjugated the Greeks in order to unite East and West (p. 69).[4] Older prophetic texts, especially the seventh-century *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, gained a new currency in the tenth century, not least through incorporation in new works like Adso's *De Antichristo*, produced as a *pièce d'occasion* for a particular West Frankish queen and her monastic confidants, but subsequently perceived as relevant to many more occasions too. Latowsky illuminates the ideological context of the late eleventh-century *Descriptio qualiter Karolus Magnus clavum et coronam Domini a Constantinopoli Aquisgrani detulerit*. Here as elsewhere, when assigning much-debated dates and provenances, Latowsky's instinct is to prefer possible both/and's to alternatives. She points to earlier legendary versions of the *Descriptio* that suggest a non-French context. She is just as inclusive in looking to Byzantium as well as the West for connections and shared influences, as in the case of the story of Constantine's vision. Her interdisciplinary insights are especially productive here. Only in the final pages of the chapter does a narrowing of the interpretative focus to "anti-papal intentions" (p. 96) betray a certain back-projection and generalization of attitudes found only at some moments and

only in a few authors during the so-called Investiture Contest. Pro-imperial need not be read as anti-papal.

Latowsky's account of Benzo's "virulently anti-Gregorian" *Book for Henry IV* is a case in point, as well as being something of a tour de force, especially because she shows so clearly the role of the eastern gifts and surrendering nations topos in Benzo's work (chapter three, pp. 99-138). Einhard and Benzo do indeed belong on the same page of this literary detective story (p. 133). Spotting Benzo's resemblance to Anselm of Besate, Latowsky locates Benzo's roots in a tradition of Italian invective that was paradoxically both esoteric and intended to shock. There's only Benzo's word for it that he ever met Henry IV. Who in the 1060s, which Latowsky rightly identifies as the context of Benzo's "universalizing rhetoric," could have imagined Benzo as, in Carl Erdmann's phrase, "a harbinger of the coming crusading movement"?[5] And who in 1084 knew that the pope who crowned Henry emperor was an anti-pope (p. 103)? Labeling is always a hindsight activity. That there is only one manuscript, possibly written by Benzo himself, suggests that his was a niche market, and his book's impact, if any, was minimal. The rest is noise.

Key to Latowsky's project are chapter four, "In Praise of Frederick Barbarossa," and chapter five, "The Emperor's Charlemagne," both tracing the vicissitudes of the Charlemagne legend through Barbarossa's reign (1152-1190) in a variety of authors and genres. Now, more than in any previous period, "the construction of imperial authority" seems an apt phrase, and the forms of it are inevitably plural. Latowsky's interpretations of these constructions are always subtle and thought-provoking. There is space here for just one example. Commenting on the third of three forged letters purportedly and apparently written soon after the assembly at Besançon in October 1157 to justify the papal origins of imperial authority, Latowsky first cites the pope's rhetorical question about the meaning of Barbarossa's coronation in light of Charlemagne's: "Whence therefore does [Frederick] hold the empire unless it is from us?" (the substance of this is in a genuine papal letter), and then quotes the following passage in which the pope depicts the *unconsecrated* Merovingian kings before the Carolingians: "Oh, how glorious was the king of the Germans sitting in an oxcart!" (p. 165) Latowsky draws attention to the reference here to Einhard's *Life of Charles*, then to the pope's lumping together of Charles, and by extension Barbarossa, with the Merovingians. Latowsky's conclusion resembles that of some literary scholars in treating this as "a pro-imperial send-up" of papal pretensions. It remains a little unclear exactly whom the forgery was intended to convince, and when. More recent investigations by historians have shifted the forgeries' origin away from the imperial chancery, and further, have revised understanding of the extent of conflict between what Latowsky regards as newfangled imperialism and what are very old beliefs. Literary texts can represent as sharp clashes between "papal pretensions" and imperialist discourse what strictly contemporary exchanges present in the form of uncontroversial assumptions whose "functionality" lies in blurring conflict.[6]

Chapter five has a lot more to say about Charlemagne's place in Staufer propaganda, especially as regards the canonization of 1165. The legendary *Vita Karoli Magni*, which justified this event, was not produced, Latowsky argues, to "recuperate Charlemagne from the French," but to define imperial authority against the papacy (p. 213). Again, some German historians see the canonization, no longer as anti-papal, but conciliatory.[7] Keeping up with the German historiography is no easy task, and Latowsky can hardly be criticized for missing some very recent work. What can certainly be said of chapters five and six is that they should be read not just by students of medieval literature but also by students of medieval history. There could be no more interesting moments in the twelfth century than those that witnessed the shifting shapes, and the shape-shifters, of imperialist ideology. There could be no better approaches than interdisciplinary ones. But interdisciplinarity should include other combinations too. Latowsky makes no reference to the discussions of the posthumous reputation of Charlemagne offered collaboratively by a social anthropologist, James Fentress, and a medieval historian, Chris Wickham.[8]

In chapter six, Latowsky returns to the problem she began with, namely, that the theme of Charlemagne in the East was "a relative absence" in francophone literary texts in the very period when Charlemagne as proto-crusader ought to have been a powerful presence. After discussing in

turn a series of texts, including *The Voyage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem and Constantinople* which indirectly inspired the writing of this book, Latowsky concludes that the attempt to disentangle truth from fiction is an unhelpful approach. Readers who have followed her thus far will not need further persuasion that myths have lives. Imperial eschatology “continued to be political and contemporary, not popular and apocalyptic” (p. 220); and Frederick II, in a “self-congratulatory” letter to Henry III of England in 1229, wrote of his peaceful reacquisition of Jerusalem as a miracle (p. 257).

Alternatives to “pro-imperialist discourse” (p. 236) had to be found by those who wrote propaganda for the French Capetian kings. The questions remain of what was grist for French myth-mills, and what (to borrow terms used by Gabrielle Spiegel and Timothy Reuter) was its “function” or “functionality.” [9] Answers are hinted at in Latowsky’s all-too-brief Epilogue, “The Remains of Charlemagne.” The panels on the “roof” of Charlemagne’s reliquary made at Frederick II’s behest for a second translation of Charlemagne’s relics in 1215 contain scenes that mostly come from the vernacular traditions incorporated in the twelfth-century *Chronicle of Pseudo-Turpin*. That is, they relate to events not in the East but in the West, in Spain. These themes are surely complementary and intertwined. Readers will happily suspect that Latowsky has the full answers up her sleeve for another book.

NOTES

[1] Matthias Tischler, *Einhard’s Vita Karoli. Studien zur Entstehung, Überlieferung und Rezeption* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2001).

[2] Michael McCormick, *Charlemagne’s Survey of the Holy Land: Wealth, Personnel and Buildings of a Mediterranean Church between Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Humanities), (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2011).

[3] David Ganz, “Humour as History in Notker’s *Gesta Karoli Magni*,” in *Monks, Nuns and Friars in Medieval Society*, ed. E.B. King, J.T. Schaefer, and W.B. Wadley (Sewanee, TN: Press of the University of the South, 1989), pp. 171-83; Simon MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 199-229.

[4] Robert Folz, *Le souvenir et la légende de Charlemagne dans l’empire germanique médiéval* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1973).

[5] Carl Erdmann, “Endkaiserglaube und Kreuzzugsgedanke im 11. Jahrhundert”, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 11 (1932), pp. 384-414.

[6] Timothy Reuter, “The medieval *Sonderweg*” and “Mandate, privilege, court judgement,” both in Reuter, *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, ed. Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 388-412, 413-31; Knut Görich, *Friedrich Barbarossa. Eine Biographie*, (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2011), pp. 268-82.

[7] Görich, *Friedrich Barbarossa*, pp. 633-7, 641-2, with further references.

[8] James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

[9] Gabrielle Spiegel, “Pseudo-Turpin, the crisis of the aristocracy, and the beginnings of vernacular historiography in France,” *Journal of Medieval History* 12 (1986): 207-23, and *idem*, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

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ISSN 1553-9172