



Book review

Networks of Bishops, Networks of Texts: Manuscripts, Legal Culture, Tools of Government in Carolingian Italy at the Time of Lothar I, Edited by Gianmarco De Angelis and Francesco Veronese. *Reti Medievali E-Book* 41. Florence: Firenze University Press. 2022. 232 pp. + 23 b/w figures. €29,90. ISBN 978 88 5518 622 3 (paperback); ISBN 978 88 5518 624 7 (ebook).

When studying the history of the Carolingian empire, one cannot escape the impression that, south of the Alps, everything just went slightly different. In the rural ecclesiastical landscape, for example, baptismal churches played a larger role than they did in the north and also documentary practices, such as the writing of charters, developed along different lines. It can be tempting, therefore, to exclude Italy as its inclusion often complicates the outcome of a project considerably or turns the focus of the project solely to its *status aparte*. The result is that the Italian kingdom of the ninth century is still relatively isolated in contemporary historiography. The authors of the present collected volume, edited by Gianmarco De Angelis and Francesco Veronese, address this issue head-on by examining bishops and their texts within the wider networks they were part of. As the role of the bishop has been pivotal in the study of the Carolingian Empire, where they feature as royal advisers or representatives of the *ecclesia* and aristocratic elites, the authors seek to continue this productive line of research. In doing so, they are doing a service to all scholars of early medieval Europe by showcasing a wealth of ninth-century connections between Italy and the rest of the empire through the careful study of manuscripts and texts.

The volume is the product of a conference organized in 2021 as part of the project ‘Ruling in Hard Times. Patterns of Power and Practices of Government in the Making of Carolingian Italy’, which consisted of scholars associated with the universities of Trento, Pisa, Padua, and Venice. The contributions provide new perspectives on the reign of Lothar I in Italy by focusing on networks of relationships and textual exchange that bishops, who were active in the kingdom, were part of or helped create. The volume opens with a brief introduction that provides a historiographical framework and highlights the shared questions of the eight chapters that follow. Each chapter is preceded by a useful abstract.

At the end of the volume, there is a conclusion providing a summary of the contributions and some useful reflections.

Chapters that stand out are those that focus on one person or the representation of a person and the networks they were part of while also staying close to the manuscript evidence. The first chapter worth mentioning here is written by Francesco Veronese and examines how Bishop Ratold of Verona used hagiographical and liturgical manuscripts and texts to integrate himself as a cleric of Alemannic origin into the city's local networks. The author convincingly demonstrates that via manuscripts that came from Reichenau, new texts appeared in Italy that were the product of Carolingian 'correctio'. This ideological framework was utilized by Ratold, who was actively involved in the production and promotion of new material, to secure for himself a place among the local clergy and, at the same time, integrate Verona into the wider networks of the empire. Also worth mentioning is the chapter written by Edward Schoolman, in which he examines the different representations of Lothar I in texts produced by Italian cities and institutions. He uses the *Liber pontificalis* of Ravenna to show how Lothar was remembered in the city and how this differed from other accounts of the ruler. Remembering Lothar in a certain way allowed Ravenna to strengthen its imperial connections and claim independence from Rome. Both Veronese and Schoolman are successful in their attempts to showcase how local actors sought to incorporate themselves via the production of texts in networks that were larger than just the Italian kingdom and extended beyond the Alps.

Conversely, chapters in the volume that do not have such a focal point tend to confuse the reader, as the connection between the presented source material on the one hand and networks that were to be influenced or used on the other can be rather unclear. Furthermore, the occasionally difficult English prose indicates that some chapters would have benefitted from additional proof-reading. Another critique would be that the image of a ruling bishop that appears from the pages is of one who is primarily concerned with his political authority within the diocese and in the empire beyond. While this is not surprising, as this was a key element of his office, research on the episcopate during the Carolingian period – for example, Steffen Patzold's *Episcopus* – has also shown that the contemporary understanding of the bishop's pastoral role should not be understated. It is, in fact, crucial if we are to grasp the motives for political manoeuvring through the texts produced by the bishops themselves or the people around them. A chapter on this particular subject would have been welcome. Unfortunately, as noted by the editors (p. 7, n. 30), two of the conference's contributions are

missing from the published volume, which might have remedied this issue.

The final chapter, by Steffen Patzold, which is confusingly named 'Conclusion' without providing any answers to the questions posed in the introduction, makes up for these shortcomings by providing a convincing synthesis of the previous chapters. Patzold frames the actions of the episcopal actors in their respective networks as soft power and shows that the attempts by Italian bishops to change ideas, beliefs, and values through their dealings with manuscripts and texts provide a valuable perspective on Carolingian rule in Italy and the empire-wide networks of exchange it was built on. Connecting manuscripts research and the study of networks in this way can contribute greatly to our understanding of early medieval structures of power and authority. The present volume is a commendable step towards this goal.

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