

*Rome and the invention of the papacy. The Liber pontificalis.* By Rosamond McKitterick. (The James Lydon Lectures in Medieval History and Culture.) Pp. xviii + 271 incl. 2 maps and 2 tables. Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. £29.99. 978 1 108 83682 1

*JEH* (74) 2023; doi:10.1017/S002204692200238X

The title is explained at the beginning (p. 1) and end (p. 226) of Rosamond McKitterick's new book, but invention does not appear much in between. McKitterick intends the word in the Latin sense. For her, the anonymous authors of the unique collection of popes' biographies which scholars have called the *Liber pontificalis* since 1886 (when volume i of Duchesne's magisterial edition appeared) decisively shaped what readers, and everyone else, came to expect the papacy to be. In other terms, shadowy early medieval Lateran functionaries taught the rest of Europe, and then the world, to consider the bishop of Rome heir to the city's imperial heritage and a peerless authority on Christian doctrine, law and liturgy. For McKitterick, the *Liber pontificalis* also contributed key elements to medieval Europe's understanding of Rome as a Christian metropolis. This is the vast 'power of the text' to which McKitterick refers often (pp. xi, 1, 29, 36, 171). Despite her many illuminating comments on what one might call the 'power of the early medieval readers' who manipulated the *Liber* to suit their ends and, overall, proved unreceptive (there are few surviving manuscripts) to what the *Liber's* pontificators had to say, McKitterick thinks multiple unrelated authors sustained an unwavering, supremely confident view of what their writing would achieve over the roughly 350 years (mid-sixth to late ninth centuries) during which the series of biographies was compiled, edited and updated.

*Rome and the invention of the papacy* emerges from a series of lectures delivered in Dublin in 2018, and a preceding decade of teaching at Cambridge that involved several 'field trips' to Rome. Associated periods of research there and in Ravenna and, perhaps most important, journeys to inspect all the known manuscripts of the *Liber* written before 1000 (p. 173), further contribute to the great erudition in McKitterick's pages. The prose is clear and plain; the continuous summarising of what has been said and foreshadowing of what is about to be said probably reflects the author's effort to tie together components of a volume she wrote (and delivered) in instalments.

The book is divided into six chapters, plus conclusion. The first outlines McKitterick's view on the *Liber's* 'text and context' (notice the singular, significant for what remained essentially an 'open text' from the sixth century on). Chapter ii astutely reconstructs how the *Liber* Christianised early first millennium Roman history, and the city's inhabitants, while portraying the bishops as the city's tireless leaders. Then McKitterick turns attention onto how the *Liber's* interest in 'apostolic succession' created the impression of a solicitous group of Peter-imitators ceaselessly caring for Rome and Christian orthodoxy, from the beginning, and thereby also a new 'identity' for Roman Christianity. The fourth chapter instead analyses papal evergetism and its representation in the *Liber*. In chapter v the author returns to the leadership of Rome's bishops, and how the *Liber* depicts their contribution to Christian liturgy and law, thereby making a claim about their universal authority. After so much on the production of the *Liber*, McKitterick addresses the text's consumption in chapter vi, about the manuscript

evidence and the text's early medieval reception in Italy and Europe. This outstanding section of the book reveals how uninterested readers were in pontificates after 757, how many radically different versions of the *Liber* circulated, how scribes adapted the text to their purposes and intended audiences, and how huge a role the Carolingian court and its satellites in the last decades of the eighth century played in its dissemination. McKitterick's achievement is to demonstrate that the collated, seamless Duchesne text familiar today is a very different *Liber* from those people read before 1000. Yet precisely the multifarious manuscript versions created outside the Lateran make one wonder whether the *Liber* really advanced a 'comprehensive ... historical argument' (p. 31), and exhibits 'consistency' of form (pp. 13, 71) and one 'overall purpose' (p. 225).

McKitterick is an insightful contextualiser of the *Liber's* creation in the sixth and seventh centuries (the composition and circulation of post-715 biographies receive less attention in her book). Her study carefully sets its first redaction in the context of the opening Gothic Wars and contentious papal elections just decades earlier. She also sees the popes' desire to assert doctrinal and political autonomy from Constantinople as the *leitmotif* in the later sixth- and seventh-century continuations of the *Liber*.

In a history book about the assembly and reception of another history book, textuality naturally takes precedence. McKitterick delves beyond the usually-listed sources for the *Liber* (like Suetonius' *Historia Augusta*, Eusebius, Jerome's *On illustrious men*) to highlight its affinities with such unexpected texts as Cicero's *On the republic*, Strabo's *Geography*, the Roman martyrial *Acts*, Byzantine polemical writings, various sections of the New Testament, and a seventh-century Coptic history of Alexandria's patriarchate. Deep knowledge of first millennium historiography thus enriches her discussion. A subtle and penetrating interpreter of historical texts, McKitterick is perfectly aware of the 'problem' (p. 36) in having the subject of a representation of reality participate in that representation's creation as text. Nevertheless, she trusts those subjects and their representations more than a cynic would.

Arguably, such reliance on what texts say can also be a limitation, and material culture might be a more reliable guide to the papacy's rise than the text that 'invented' that rise. For instance, McKitterick's analysis of all the building that the *Liber* claimed the popes did tends to accept what the Lateran writers said, subordinating to the text's lush presentation of papal patronage the archaeological evidence (well summarised in Dey's 2021 *The making of medieval Rome*). The *Liber* 'cannot be regarded simply as propaganda' (p. 123), even when inscriptions or other material evidence suggest that papal 'monopoly' on postclassical construction in Rome is an 'illusion' (p. 60) wilfully manufactured in the Lateran. The marginalisation of Byzantine authority and patronage in the postclassical city throughout *Rome and the invention of the papacy* is likewise related to the book's deference to the *Liber's* maximalist presentation of papal authority. Both run against recent scholarly interpretation, which attempted to de-papalise early medieval Roman history by relying less on the *Liber's* account and more on the archaeological record.

Probably alluding to Duchesne's fulsome and meaty text, rather than to the partial, abbreviated lists of popes that actually circulated in the early Middle

Ages, McKitterick notes that *Liber* ‘enchanted readers with a vision of Rome’ (p. 38). Among the enchanted she surely includes herself. Her acute study of the genesis and spread of the *Liber pontificalis* is a tribute to the enduring enchantment.

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*History, Scripture and authority in the Carolingian empire. Frechulf of Lisieux.* By Graeme Ward. Pp. xvi + 255. Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press (for The British Academy), 2022. £70. 978 0 19 726728 8

*JEH* (74) 2023; doi:10.1017/S0022046922002512

Born in the late eighth century and raised at the abbey of Fulda, Frechulf became bishop of Lisieux in the mid-820s. This was a dubious distinction. Lisieux was a old but impoverished settlement in Normandy far from the heartlands of the Carolingians. Moreover, as Frechulf complained in a letter to his old friend Hrabanus Maurus, the bishopric lacked the tools necessary to undertake pastoral care, especially books. Undaunted, the bishop eventually gathered enough textual resources to compile one of the longest histories to survive from the ninth century: the *Twelve books of histories*. Completed around 830, this work provided an account of rulers, kingdoms and important events from the time of creation until the seventh century. Dedicated to Helisachar, Louis the Pious’s chancellor, part I comprised seven books from the creation of Adam to the birth of Christ. Part II, dedicated to the Empress Judith, proceeded from Christ’s nativity to the death of Gregory the Great in five books. Despite the popularity of Frechulf’s work in the Middle Ages – it survives in full or in part in forty-one manuscripts – historians have largely dismissed the *Histories* as an unimaginative patchwork of late antique sources with little bearing on the contemporary world of its author. Building on the foundation of Michael Allen’s 2002 *Corpus Christianorum* edition of Frechulf’s *Histories*, Graeme Ward’s monograph examines this work in the context of two Carolingian preoccupations – patristic writings and biblical exegesis – and argues that they have ‘a wealth to offer if they are examined with books and libraries, rather than politics and power, in mind’ (p. 24). The result is a useful companion to scholars interested in Frechulf specifically and early medieval historiography more generally.

*History, Scripture and authority in the Carolingian Empire* comprises six chapters that walk the reader through Frechulf’s sources and methods. The *Histories* were a compilation of historical material culled from Josephus, Eusebius, Jerome, Augustine, Cassiodorus, Jordanes and Bede, but Frechulf was far from a slavish compiler of excerpts (chapter i). Rather, ‘source extracts were often silently spliced together and paraphrased or reworked as Frechulf saw fit’ (p. 41). The first book of part I of the *Histories*, which treated pre-Abrahamic history, had many affinities with biblical exegesis, as Frechulf structured this book around questions and answers about passages of Genesis (chapter ii). The template informing the structure and chronology of the remaining books of part I was the *Chronicle* of Eusebius-Jerome, which Frechulf expanded from laconic notes to a discursive narrative. Coupled with information from Orosius and Josephus/Pseudo-Hegesippus, Frechulf’s work wove together two important themes from ancient history – the calamities of the