



Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages (ND Conway Lectures in Medieval Studies)

Rosamond McKitterick

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“What McKitterick calls the ‘explosion of historical writing’ in the Carolingian age marked the dawn of a radically new and lasting culture in Europe and disclosed the mind-sets of its creators. Yet, in many cases, published editions deform the texts, not least by omissions, and obscure what Frankish authors actually wrote. Building on her internationally acclaimed studies of oral and written communication in the early Middle Ages, McKitterick goes back to manuscript sources. As she advances a compelling new key to the catalysts of Europe’s historical identity, she discovers what Carolingians actually wrote and how they did their work.” —**Karl F. Morrison, Lessing Professor of History and Poetics, Rutgers University**

“As perceptive as it is learned, Rosamond McKitterick’s book unpicks the complex web of Frankish perceptions of the past. . . . McKitterick deftly transforms texts that previous scholars have usually dismissed into clues from which she draws cogent arguments. This study of historical imaginations in the past is itself a model of imaginative history.” —**Anthony Grafton, Princeton University**

Historical writing of the early middle ages tends to be regarded as little more than a possible source of facts, but Rosamond McKitterick establishes that early medieval historians conveyed in their texts a sophisticated set of multiple perceptions of the past. In these essays, McKitterick focuses on the Frankish realms in the eighth and ninth centuries and examines different methods and genres of historical writing in relation to the perceptions of time and chronology. She claims that there is an extraordinary concentration of new text production and older text reproduction in this period that has to be accounted for, and whose influence is still being investigated and established.

Three themes are addressed in *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*. McKitterick begins by discussing the *Chronicon* of Eusebius-Jerome as a way of examining the composition and reception of universal history in the ninth and early tenth centuries. She demonstrates that original manuscripts turn out in many cases to be compilations of sequential historical texts with a chronology extending back to the creation of the world or the origin of the Franks. In the second chapter, she explores the significance of Rome in Carolingian perceptions of the past and argues that its importance loomed large and was communicated in a great range of texts and material objects. In the third chapter, she looks at eighth- and ninth-century perceptions of the local past in the Frankish realm within the wider contexts of Christian and national history. She concludes that in the very rich, complex, and sometimes contradictory early medieval perceptions of a past stretching back to the creation of the world, the Franks in the Carolingian period forged their own special place.

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