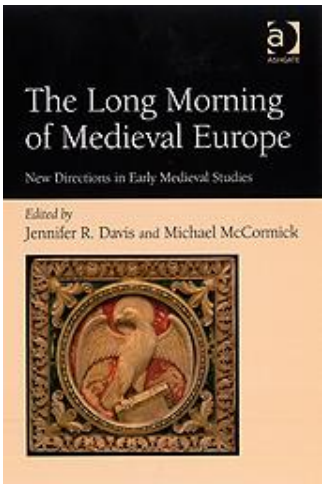

The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies, Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick (eds.), Ashgate: Aldershot 2008. xx + 346 pp.

The title of this book refers to the results in recent research that suggest that some of the stages we are used to regarding as fairly late in the development of European culture and history can actually be dated earlier – in the case of this volume, to the early Middle Ages. These results force us to view the patterns and the long continuation of European history from another perspective. Thus, the contributors to this book, who form an impressive assemblage of the leading scholarship on early medieval studies, feel that it is still important to state that the early Middle Ages were not dark, barbaric, stagnant, nor introverted. True enough, the statement is probably self-evident to scholars of the medieval field; then again, words like decline, death, disease and fear are still associated with the era in popular culture. With this in mind, the book examines the present state of early medieval research, which has been on the upswing for the past few decades. In the eyes of current scholarship which questions the applicability of sharp boundaries between different eras, value-laden terminology concerning them, or even the nature and existence of cohesive cultural continuums, this emphasis should no longer be the main point. However, not very surprisingly, by starting this review with this notion, I am also confirming this ethos of inconsistency – we want to be rid of these categories but find it hard to operate without them. Accordingly, it is acknowledged that the new approaches and viewpoints on social and mental constructions have changed the way we understand what medieval authors have written and why. The issue of how scholars themselves understand the past and how

this has affected the understanding of the Middle Ages (wherever the boundaries of this concept in each case lie) is an important part of the research.

The volume is a fruitful survey of current scholarship on the early Middle Ages. It has its origins in a conference held at Harvard University in 2004, titled "New Directions 2: The Early Middle Ages Today". Instead of being a forced collection of articles, the book has five themes through which it navigates and which bind the different chapters together. Each part begins with an introductory chapter, written by Michael McCormick, that reviews recent tendencies in early medieval studies. Each part concludes with synthetic essays by scholars specialized in the field dealt with in the preceding articles. The purpose of the book, as it is stated, is not to cover early medieval research entirely, but to enlighten it selectively. This statement is appropriate, as the focus of the book is Western Europe, especially the Carolingian empire, and less attention is paid to certain issues, such as Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, and Celtic studies, as well as Eastern European, Byzantine and Islamic areas. Thus, it seems that the new directions are still concentrated on the traditional fields. This also shows that the initial question – what is the state of current research on the early Middle Ages? – has led to new questions, new perspectives and new ambitions. It also demonstrates the questions and interests of contemporary research. In this the book succeeds; it clearly emphasizes the gaps of knowledge and questions that the new methodological possibilities have raised.

The contributors have selected five major themes to represent the new ways in which the era is approached: economy, holiness, representation and reality in literature, practices of power, and the intellectuality of art and architecture. In part one, "Discovering the Early Medieval Economy", the emphasis is on the need for collaboration – collaboration not only between historians, archaeologists, philologists and anthropologists, but also with the "hard sciences" (focusing on economics, biology, and computer science), which is seen as a way to achieve further results on the early medieval period. New scientific data and specialized methods have provided new interpretations of history; for example, palaeobotany, archaeozoology and soil investigations have rearranged some dates as much as several hundred years earlier, as a result of which the early medieval economy has to be considered anew.

Chris Wickham provides the first chapter of the book, "Rethinking the Structure of the Early Medieval Economy". Wickham presents a model for economy in which elite wealth is connected with bulk exchange complexity.

In his view, it is the aristocratic wealth that ties together the two main models in the study of economic history – "production and distribution models" – that so far have not been well enough combined. Wickham argues that the early Middle Ages are characterized by the causal relations between the elite and exchange complexity, and that these may have continued even further into the High Middle Ages, which are usually seen as a stage when exchange became independent from the choices of the aristocracy.

Joachim Henning's views on economy, however, differ from Wickham's. Henning questions the role of the strong, centralized power and its growing economic influence in his chapter "Strong Rulers – Weak Economy? Rome, the Carolingians and the Archaeology of Slavery in the First Millennium AD". Henning's material consists of archaeological data, and he examines the problem of productivity by reflecting on the relations between coercion (as regards slavery), the logic of farming organization, and technology. Henning suggests that it was actually Charlemagne who brought about the stagnation of the economy, the roots of which "lie in a problematic reorganization of the rural world which distorted the productive logic of small-unit agriculture and blocked its potential efficiency" (p. 52). Thus, he questions the view that strong power would have an important role in advancing rural production. Instead, when it comes to the important factors in promoting efficiency and innovation, Henning places more weight on the accessibility of advanced technology and sees the rural structures as self-directing and self-sufficient.

Professor Riccardo Francovich, who unfortunately passed away before the publication of this book, proposes a new settlement model for the interpretation of early medieval villages and their changing roles in the chapter "The Beginning of Hilltop Villages in Early Medieval Tuscany". He points out that archaeological data from the fifth to the tenth centuries does not seem to support the evidence found in written records, and that previous interpretations have relied excessively on written sources, taking their word too unquestioningly. Thus, he dates the nucleated hilltop settlements as existing already in the seventh or eighth centuries, which is 300 to 400 years earlier than has previously been thought. Accordingly, he points out the insufficiency of written records, and states that archaeological research would be of great help in defining the semantic meanings of varied and sometimes confusing terms concerning villages.

Michael McCormick reviews the latest scientific methods that can be applied to the study of the early medieval economy, and that have provided new and even somewhat controversial data. The chapter "Molecular Middle

Ages: Early Medieval Economic History in the Twenty-First Century" deals with the application of scientific technology to history and archaeology. The chapter provides good references for further study, and is in itself an introductory survey of possible and as yet untapped solutions to bring in new knowledge. It was very interesting to read, for instance, about molecular phylogenetics that can be combined with codicology to reach conclusions about the actual transmission of manuscripts. This method can thus offer more precise and faster results than traditional stemmatology. DNA, in many cases likely to have survived in parchments, can be compared with the genome of a particular area to gain information about both the economic history concerning cattle farming and the production of parchments and manuscripts in a certain area. It also provides data for the identification of relationships between different manuscripts. Even if the praise for scientific methods can sometimes be seen a bit effusive, the reader can easily endorse McCormick's views about the importance of collaboration between scientists and humanists, through which new results are at this very moment being achieved.

Part one ends with Angeliki E. Laiou's concluding chapter "The Early Medieval Economy: Data, Production, Exchange and Demand". In it Laiou considers the arguments presented in each chapter, pointing out that many adjustments are needed to get a more coherent picture. She also points out that since scientific methods are developing at an increasing pace, future generations of historians will need to not only learn the traditional tools of philology, archaeology and textual analysis, but also to familiarize themselves and keep up with the techniques of the scientific field. Of course, the use of these methods should not lead to the abandonment of conventional research and literary criticism; scientific methods are very useful for medievalists, but alone they do not offer a brave new world for the humanities.

Part two, "Sounding Early Medieval Holiness", proposes to offer some new viewpoints and techniques for the study of medieval religious life. In the chapter "Latin Hagiography Before the Ninth Century: A Synoptic View", Guy Philippart and Michel Trigalet present an ongoing project that comprises the whole Latin hagiographical corpus between 200 and 1500 AD. The result will be a database with ca. 10 000 works and 7 000 manuscripts, resulting in about 70 000 items, 1 500 authors, translators, patrons or addressees, 2 300 place names and 3 320 saints. The research conducted in order to build this database has proved that there are notable regional differences in the nature of hagiography, for example between Gallia and

Italy. There is still much work to be done and certain difficult questions have arisen concerning the definition and categorization of each item, but it will be interesting and without a doubt highly useful to see the full database when it is finished.[1]

In the next chapter, "Donationes pro anima: Gift and Countergift in the Early Medieval Liturgy", Arnold Angenendt uses various documents (wills, penitential books with tariff penances, Sacramentaries, price lists for masses) to study religious history, and examines the exchange of material gifts and spiritual countergifts in relation to social and ecclesiastical practices and, finally, in relation to the change and counter-reaction in monastic culture. Compared to part one, which comprises 91 pages, the second part with its 53 pages feels a bit short. The length of the parts is not the only reason for this feeling, however. Although the articles are both very good, to my mind this part does not comprehensively join the discussion of current new directions in the study of holiness or other religious phenomena.

As Thomas Head points out in the concluding essay "The Early Medieval Transformation of Piety", a small weakness of both of the chapters is that they leave out of the discussion the recent research in Anglophone scholarship, omitting certain arguments concerning hagiography and intercessory prayer. Thus, speaking about the volume as a whole, it seems that the parts are not all completely in balance, and that another chapter regarding the study of holiness would have been welcome. This might be a matter of taste, and is certainly not a factor that would diminish the quality of the chapters at hand.

Part three, "Representation and Reality in the Artistry of Early Medieval Literature", focuses on mentalities and literary treatises, and approaches the questions from a philological point of view. Following the path set by Curtius and Auerbach, the current scholarship appreciates the literary ambitions of early medieval authors for their own merits, and the contributors in this volume are said to be "among the first to sound the truly literary merits of the works they analyze, and surely the first to do so in English" (p. 166). This part consists of three chapters and the concluding essay. It begins with Paul Edward Dutton's "Observations on Early Medieval Weather in General, Bloody Rain in Particular", in which he distinguishes between narrative sources (about weather as a subjective

[1] The current version (in January 2009) with some preliminary material is available online at http://www.fundp.ac.be/philo_lettres/histoire/h221.htm.

human experience) and scientific ones (about climate as a scientific fact), and surveys the human view of the world through these observations. He examines how mentalities changed during the early Middle Ages and notes that, besides those of the Middle Ages, the study also reveals the positions of modern researchers and the ways in which we observe medieval weather reporters. The chapter's conclusion is that there was a change in the way red rain was perceived and what it was thought to mean, a change "from a mysterious sign of divine displeasure [...] to a historical commonplace and symbolical cipher [...], and finally, to the purely physical phenomenon" (p. 179). One problem with this interpretation is that to make generalizations, a wider range of source material should be examined. The nature of early medieval Europe makes it hard to draw wide, all-inclusive conclusions and lines of interpretation. It may be somewhat problematic to talk about the "medieval mind" as a whole (p. 171, 180) when it comes to details, just as it is problematic to conceptualize any era's all-embracing "mind". At the same time, studies of this kind are very important in opening up new viewpoints and further questions. Again, this is just a minor criticism, or rather a subjective opinion, that should not be read as a critique of the whole chapter, which is very stimulating and fresh in its approach and convincing in its argumentation.

The next chapter – "The King Says No: On the Logic of Type-Scenes in Late Antique and Early Medieval Narrative" by Joaquín Martínez Pizarro – examines stereotypic literature, which has rarely been appreciated for its formulaic nature, but instead has been seen perhaps as a boring literary feature that promotes "historical falsehood". Pizarro, however, approaches the text (he examines the theme through *Historia Wambae regis* by Julian of Toledo) with optimism. He sees opportunities in precisely these stereotypes, which on closer scrutiny are not constant, but are adapted and changed. He deals in this chapter with the critical methods that a researcher needs in studying stereotypic type-scenes, and reviews a deviance in a type-scene that deals with the liberation of captives. The author's departure – "a remarkably devious and adroit manipulation of the scheme" (p. 185) – from the conventional formula is explained by the context – by contemporary Visigothic laws on treason and rebellion, as well as by the ongoing consolidation of power. It can be agreed that "type-scenes and other narrative formulas constitute priceless documents of the political and historical imagination, and thus a crucial chapter in the history of mentalities" (p. 191), but in order to reach conclusions that can be used as evidence for historical explanation, careful scrutiny is required.

The chapter "Of Arms and the (Ger)man: Literary and Material Culture in the *Waltharius*", by Jan M. Ziolkowski, deals with texts together with material culture. Ziolkowski approaches texts as a textual web, and not only as the author's response to earlier writers. He pays attention to how the meaning of words is constructed in societies, and how the (literary) language is formed in connection with this. This leads to conclusions based on the contextualization of the meanings of certain words, which are often ambiguous and complicated, even more so in poetry. The chapter does not discuss medieval glossaries, marginal notes or word lists much (a subject for further research, perhaps?), but deals with manuscript illustrations and etymological explanations together with the language of the poem. The writer deals with the literary *loci* and type-scenes in a fruitful and masterly way, and considers the terms together with actual archaeological findings of ninth and tenth century armors whose names occur in *Waltharius*. In conclusion the writer states that the poet knew the Latin epic tradition well, as well as the armors of his own time and possibly also of the past, but that, despite this, the date of the poem remains undetermined until further study is conducted in which language, literature, history and material culture are examined in relation with one another.

Danuta Shanzer concludes the part with her essay "Representations and Reality in Early Medieval Literature", pointing to some problems in interpretation, suggesting alternative ways of reading the sources. She notes that all of the chapters in this part "aim to bridge disciplinary domains" (p. 209). She reminds us that texts, language, words, and classes of words are still very important in our field, and that computers cannot tell us what they actually mean or have meant in the past.

Part four, titled "Practices of Power in an Early Medieval Empire", examines the study of political power in Carolingian times, which is seen to have developed from the assumptions and conceptual frameworks of earlier (nineteenth-century) research towards understanding the many important factors which are tied to political life. Things such as rituals and symbolic performances of power, which were linked to other social processes, are found to have played an important part in politics. The present studies do not rely only on legal and administrative documents, but on other literature as well. The chapters in this volume deal with the Carolingian empire, but the viewpoints should be applied to, tested in, and the results then compared with, the study of political culture in other areas, too.

The chapter "Charlemagne and Empire" by Janet L. Nelson asks how Charlemagne's regime operated, by examining the concrete networks in

order to determine how people were actually reached. She examines the mechanisms of the practice of power through a list of Saxon hostages (*Indiculus obsidum Saxonum Moguntiam deducendorum*) compiled in Mainz in 805 or 806. Through this document she deals with questions of acculturation and alliances, procedures that bonded the empire together and ultimately led to an ideology that lasted for centuries, which is the ideology of the empire. In this respect, "Charlemagne's government would persist as an empire of the mind" (p. 232).

Jennifer R. Davis presents novel viewpoints in the study of patterns of rulership in her chapter "A Pattern for Power: Charlemagne's Delegation of Judicial Responsibilities". Her emphasis is on the use of a methodology that searches for repetitive models that can be seen to cover a broader set of principles for yielding power. The pattern for rule, which shows that the system in itself was flexible and adaptable, is used to provide an outline in which specific occurrences (in this case the judicial functions) can be placed. Charlemagne's approach to rulership is argued to have been characterized by an inclination to try to see problems from multiple points of view at the same time. This feature led to governmental solutions which overlapped in many cases, and as a result the practices of power were not dependant on only one way of action.

Matthew J. Innes continues with the Carolingian empire in the next chapter, "Practices of Property in the Carolingian Empire", in which he discusses the mechanics of control concerning land rights. The aim is to understand what property rights meant in the ninth century. He deals with the question through four example cases, which all show that Carolingian property laws cannot be truncated to a "legitimizing superstructure articulating raw social fact" (p. 262). Instead, they show vital argumentation and counter-argumentation that derive from many different sources, from outside the legal culture as well.

Stuart Airlie concludes the part with his essay "The Cunning of Institutions", in which he raises the question of the definition of the term "Carolingian" itself, and the need to reflect the role of the written word. Comparison with other cases and areas would be important, too, in the "polycentric world" of the early Middle Ages, where the polities were not homogenous.

The fifth and last part of the book, "The Intellectuality of Early Medieval Art", examines how people in the early Middle Ages constructed meanings of material realities. The part has two chapters, Mayke de Jong's "Charlemagne's Balcony: The *Solarium* in Ninth-Century Narratives" and

Herbert L. Kessler's "Image and Object: Christ's Dual Nature and the Crisis of Early Medieval Art". Thomas F. X. Noble concludes the part with his essay "Matter and Meaning in the Carolingian World". The chapters are tied together with a theme that can probably be labeled 'interpretation of meanings'.

Mayke de Jong deals with the concept of the *solarium* and examines its ninth-century connotations, starting with Notker Balbulus's account of Charlemagne's court. De Jong argues that the construction was used in literature to show hierarchical structures, and that it had strong royal connotations. She brings the semantic field into the discussion of the ninth century, with both the secular and religious layers, examining terms that were not neutral but which emphasized the notion of the legitimacy of Carolingian kingship, which was argued to be biblically founded.

Kessler, for his part, scrutinizes the efficiency of art in relation to matter. Kessler interprets artistic techniques, colors and substances as allusions to Carolingian theories about the spiritual contemplations which were aroused by matter. Kessler encourages current scholarship to take a step towards a new kind of study of art, which is more than an iconographic analysis; he challenges the research to discover "not only what a picture means or how it is perceived, but also what it does and what cognitive mechanisms it generates" (p. 319). This would lead to an understanding of how the relationship between *res et imago* influences the reception of art.

In conclusion, this volume is a fresh survey of the current state of research, introducing many new viewpoints and previously little-used research methods. The scholars from various fields of early medieval studies all emphasize the need for collaboration, and remind us of the dynamic and conversational nature of historical research. The book is recommendable and provides good references for further study. Regrettably, there is no bibliography at the end of the book, which would have been a great help for quick checking of references. The references found in footnotes are otherwise comprehensive and commendable, and the reader can easily also find additional reading for the fields that are not covered. The style of the book is dialogic throughout, and the writing refers reflectively to other scholarship, and also internally to other parts of the book. This feature made the book stimulating to read and showed the dynamics in the field of early medieval studies. The concluding essays at the end of each part reflected on and also criticized the results or suggestions presented in each preceding case study. The volume shows that it is not easy to form broad lines of development, and that research is by nature tied in each case to its own

context, making it hard to generalize a concept of the “early Middle Ages". Perhaps it also shows that the nature of historical research is conversational, in that each case arouses fruitful and innovative thoughts for further development.

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