CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

Introduction

Rosamond McKitterick

This book aims to investigate the respects in which literacy and orality were important in early mediaeval Europe. It examines the context of literacy, its uses, levels, and distribution, in a number of the societies of early mediaeval Europe, that is, the area from Ireland to Byzantium and the eastern Mediterranean between *c.* 400 and *c.* 1000. None of the contributors has attempted a comprehensive survey, nor is it intended that any chapter should be regarded as an attempt to be definitive. Rather, we hope to open up a topic in relation to the early middle ages that has already been treated extensively for earlier and later periods and in modern societies. We aim to indicate some of the areas for debate and argument and make new research available to scholars and students.

In many ways the book represents, therefore, an introduction to the subject of literacy in the early middle ages. Its basic premise is that literacy is a subject with which early mediaevalists should be concerned. Our studies set out to provide the factual basis from which assessments of the significance of literacy in the early mediaeval world can be made, and to offer some suggestions about what that significance might be. In other words, the significance of literacy and why it is important to observe its uses and implications in the early middle ages have to be established on the basis of the evidence available; they cannot be assumed before we start. It is, after all, only from a firm knowledge of the evidence, its implications and its limitations as far as degrees of literacy are concerned in any one region or society at a particular time that one may build further and explore the significance of literacy, its implications and its consequences for the societies in which we observe it.

Concentration on the uses and functions of literacy, and thus primarily on literacy as a tool, in a great variety of contexts has the advantage of providing knowledge about the ways in which uses of literacy might change over time and place and thus more about the societies that changed them. It matters where literacy was applied simply because, as will be clear from the essays in this book, it was applied in different ways from a whole range of

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

different assumptions and convictions about the written word. Establishing when and where literacy is used, for what purposes and in what contexts, and what kind of literacy it is, may actually tell us about the ways in which literacy was regarded as important in early mediaeval society, and why.

It is with these considerations in mind that we embarked on our work. We were also prompted to focus on the early middle ages, however, from a sense that assumptions were being made too readily about the levels, ranges and significance of literacy in the early middle ages by those who concentrate on the eleventh and twelfth centuries and later periods. Stock's work, for example, is a subtle and illuminating exposition of the implications of literacy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[1] But that is one of its major drawbacks; it begins too late and is too categorical about the irrelevance of the earlier period. In his survey of literacy in Europe, Cipolla offers a theory of the close association of mercantile development and urban life and the consequent increase in literacy from the eleventh century onwards. In doing so he dismisses northern Europe in the period before the eleventh century with the words: 'from the fifth to the tenth century all evidence of literary culture based on the written word comes from the area south of the Loire'.[2] In a large survey of the kind attempted by Cipolla, detail is difficult, but such a statement is at odds with the evidence. Other surveys have fallen back with evident relief on the concepts of 'restricted literacy' or 'craft literacy' confined to clerics in early mediaeval Europe as a whole.[3] Even if these concepts were valid for the early middle ages, to invoke them in this way is merely to identify a context in which literate skills were exercised. It tells us nothing about the role of literacy and its importance for the people who used literate modes.

A further problem to tackle is the definition of literacy itself. Does literacy need to be variously defined according to circumstances? Does it invariably mean the ability to read and write, or just the ability to read, and what levels of accomplishment are conceded as indicating literacy as opposed to illiteracy? Does it not cover to some degree both the content of the written tradition and the levels of individual achievement in it? We take

---

[1] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983).

[2] Carlo Cipolla, *Literacy and Development in the West* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 41. For a further example of blinkered vision see J.W. Thompson, *The Literacy of the Laity in the Middle Ages* (New York and London, 1939 and 1960). An idea of the range of approaches to literacy can be gauged from the bibliography provided by Harvey J. Graff, *Literacy in History: An Interdisciplinary Research Bibliography* (New York and London, 1981).

[3] The terms are defined by Jack Goody, 'Introduction', in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 11–20. A welcome exception to this kind of approach was provided by Patrick Wormald, 'The uses of literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and its neighbours', *TRHS* 5th series 27 (1977), 95–114.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

the view that it is impossibly narrow to define literacy strictly in terms of the ability to read and write. For one thing, in terms of mediaeval terminology, *litteratus* referred to one who was learned in Latin, not someone able to read.[4] Consequently, an *illitteratus* was someone not learned in Latin. *Illitteratus*, in other words, is a term which says very little about the rank, education, ability and importance of the person concerned in any sphere of activity in the early middle ages other than Latin literature.[5] As Susan Kelly points out, indeed, in many cases one is obliged also to register the complication of the existence, in Anglo-Saxon England, for example, of a separate literary language (Latin) entirely different from the vernacular.[6] In England, the use of the vernacular for documentation and literary purposes was already common in the ninth century, a very early date in the European context, but Latin continued to have priority in literature and formal communications. In the east and south of Europe, Greek or Arabic rather than Latin fulfilled this function.

It is necessary, moreover, to allow for many levels of competence in both reading and writing. It should be remembered that one can learn to read without being able to write. Reading ability can range from the recognition of a limited number of simple words to the comprehension and enjoyment of a complex philosophical treatise. A scribe might be trained to copy out an existing text, or to take dictation, while being totally incapable of composing a text himself or herself. Reading aloud and memorization, in any case, were far more important adjuncts to education in the early middle ages than they are today.

Writing is a skill far more difficult to acquire than reading.[7] It comprises several levels of competence, ranging from the ability to copy an existing text to a capacity for literary composition in both the vernacular and in the

---

[4] The terminology was exhaustively examined by Herbert Grundmann, '*Litteratus-illitteratus*: der Wandel einer Bildungsnorm vom Altertum zum Mittelalter', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 40 (1958), 1–66, and compare his earlier 'Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 26 (1936), 129–61. Further nuances are provided by Franz Bäuml, 'Varieties and consequences of medieval literacy and illiteracy', *Speculum* 55 (1980), 237–65.

[5] A point emphasized by Karl-Ferdinand Werner, 'Bedeutende Adelsfamilien im Reich Karls des Grossen', in *Karl der Grosse, Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, ed. Wolfgang Braunfels, 4 vols. (Düsseldorf, 1965), I, pp. 83–142, at p. 129, and English translation in *The Medieval Nobility*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Amsterdam, 1978), pp. 137–202, at p. 182.

[6] A point stressed by Kelly, below, pp. 51–61.

[7] Petrucci tackles the fundamental problem of how one learnt to write. He insists that writing and literacy were not confined to those who could write books in a technical or professional way: Armando Petrucci, 'Alfabetismo ed educazione grafica degli scribi altomedievali (secc. VII–X)', in *The Role of the Book in Medieval Culture*, ed. Peter Ganz, 2 vols., Bibliologia, Elementa ad librorum studia pertinentia 3 and 4 (Brepols, 1986), 3, pp. 109–32.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

common language of Christianity in the west and east, Latin and Greek. In Umayyad Al-Andalus and in the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean, bilingualism and trilingualism in Latin/Romance and in Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic, respectively, are assumed. Writing in the early middle ages was probably practised by only a small proportion of those able to read. One must also note the special function and status of the scribe and secretary in relation to the social status of those whom he served. The strong element of professionalism in the skills of literacy made it unnecessary for the higher groups in society to practise them on their own behalf. That a man or woman used a secretary may tell us nothing about their own ability either to write or read but it does tell us that they were accustomed to use literate modes, even if indirectly, to conduct certain of their affairs. A king or nobleman or royal official could call upon the services of a secretary to take dictation or read out documents or books. The secretary might be a cleric or a specially trained servant or even a slave. When King Alfred, for example, ordered all his judges to immerse themselves in study, he conceded that those who were too old or too knuckle-headed to learn could order someone else to read aloud to them, and implied that they might already have made provision for this.[8]

The problem of literacy is thus partly one of technical skill and the popular acquaintance with what can be done with an alphabet. It is also one of education and social custom and includes a commitment of traditions to writing. More importantly, for mediaeval studies, Stock has proposed a further sophistication in his notion of textuality. He argues that a text does not have to be written; it can be spoken aloud as a structure and coherent discourse, and within a 'textual community' such texts can influence the illiterate and quasi-literate as well as those who can read and write.[9] For Stock, the primary importance of literacy is not as a personal skill so much as a mode of communication. Thus there is a distinction to be made between the reception of texts (which need not demand literacy) and the creation of texts and their dissemination beyond the range of the human voice.

Literacy therefore clearly has different connotations according to the context in which it is considered, whether political, social, anthropological or historical. Clanchy's exposition of the shift 'from memory to written record' in post-Conquest England, firmly embedded in its historical and

---

[8] *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. W.H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), c. 106, p. 95, translated in Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 110. The requirements of pragmatic as opposed to learned literacy are made clear by Malcolm Parkes, 'The literacy of the laity', in *Literature and Western Civilization: The Medieval World*, ed. David Daiches and A. K. Thorlby (London, 1973), pp. 555–77, especially p. 555.

[9] Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, p. 7.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

social context, is exemplary in its demonstration of this.[10] It is also the work, above all others, which is regarded as free from the technological determinism that Goody in his anthropological–ethnographical study of literacy in 'traditional societies' allegedly encouraged with his concept of literacy as a 'technology of the intellect'.[11] Clanchy does not treat social and intellectual changes in mediaeval England as consequences of literacy, due to the inherent qualities of writing, so much as he exposes changing literate practices in a particular society which imply particular attitudes towards the written word and its use. In part, Clanchy is reacting against Goody and his followers. So, too, Street is persuasive in his characterization of the logical flaws in Goody's 'autonomous model'. Street prefers to define literacy as a 'shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing' and proceeds according to what he labels the 'ideological model'.[12] This is preferable to Havelock's insistence that it is a 'social condition that can be defined only in terms of readership' or Pattison's unhelpful 'potent form of consciousness'.[13] Yet without Goody's identification of literacy and its uses as a vital key to the understanding of any society, much subsequent work would have been the poorer. Goody's notion of the 'consequences' or, at least, 'implications' of literacy in the process of historical change is also much more useful than some of his critics have been prepared to acknowledge.

For all their different emphases, studies of literacy in a wide variety of historical contexts reveal a common theme. It is that literacy in any society is not just a matter of who could read and write, but one of how their skills function, and of the adjustments – mental, emotional, intellectual, physical and technological – necessary to accommodate it. It is this understanding of literacy that underlies the various studies in this book.

The functions of literacy need, furthermore, to be established in relation to a particular society's needs. As those needs change, so do the particular contexts in which literate modes are required. In the essays which follow, we explore the extent to which literate modes were established in the centuries between late antiquity and the millennium. How much survived, not only of Roman patterns of literacy but also of the motivation for

---

[10] Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (London, 1979).

[11] *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Goody, p. 1. On technological determinism, see Brian V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 9 (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 19–66. Apart from the work of the social anthropologists, Street is also implicitly criticizing the theoretical basis for such works as Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York, 1982).

[12] Street, *Literacy*, p. 1.

[13] Eric A. Havelock, *Origins of Western Literacy* (Toronto, 1976), p. 19, and R. Pattison, *On Literacy: The Politics of the Word from Homer to the Age of Rock* (Oxford, 1982), p. x.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

choosing literate modes of cultural expression and legal business? What was the role of the church and the Christian faith? What, indeed, was the role of religions dependent on written revelation, such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, in relation to literacy? How important are questions about the number of people who could read and write? Is it not more important to establish who was literate, what role in society they performed and what the likely repercussions of that role may have been? What is the relationship between writing and other means of communication such as oral discourse and pictures in the early middle ages?

Although these are the principal general questions with which we have each been concerned, inevitably consideration of particular contexts has thrown up special problems, the discussion of which in turn opens up more general issues. The contexts in which literacy is considered in this book in any case are only a few among many feasible. It did not prove possible, for example, to discuss fully the uses of literacy in late antiquity in this book. The work in preparation by Meyer, however, promises a trenchant examination of the subject, particularly in relation to law in the late Roman world. Meyer examines the initiatives which create documentary practice in the Roman world, the voluntary use of documents, and the extent to which this leads to the growing prestige of a literate system of legal practice.[14] The degree to which Egypt, from which the most papyri evidence survives, is representative of the late Roman Empire as far as the uses of literacy is concerned is also receiving attention,[15] as are the changing character of writing, the cultural context within which writing was produced, and the complex interrelationship between writing and other elements of social and cultural practice in the late Roman world.[16]

The legacy of Rome and the problems of continuity nevertheless are a constant preoccupation in many of the essays which follow. In Gaul, for example, discussed by Ian Wood, what was the status and nature of the Latin language in the centuries of Merovingian rule? Is there any truth in the traditional picture, from the classical viewpoint, of literary degeneracy approaching widespread illiteracy among the Frankish and formerly Gallo-

---

[14] Elizabeth A. Meyer, 'Literacy in late antiquity', PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1988, now in preparation for publication.

[15] Keith Hopkins, *Roman Egypt* (forthcoming), and see also the studies by Tonnes Kleburg, *Buchhandel und Verlagswesen in der Antike* (Darmstadt, 1969); G. Cavallo, *Libri, editori e pubblico nel Mondo antico* (Rome, 1975); and Roger A. Pack, *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt* (Michigan, 1952; 2nd edn 1965). See the new dimension to studies of literacy in antiquity provided by the Vindolanda tablets, studied by Alan Bowman and J. David Thomas, *Vindolanda: The Latin Writing Tablets* (Gloucester, 1984).

[16] Some of this has already been published by Mary Beard, 'Writing and ritual: a study of diversity and expansion in the Arval Acta', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 53 (1985), 114–62. There are also comments of relevance in C.H. Roberts and T.C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London and Oxford, 1983).

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

Roman populations? Does the evidence available reveal literary continuity and an underlying social and cultural continuity? What differences can one detect in the literary style of the seventh century as opposed to that of the fifth? What happened also to late antique educational traditions? As in Meyer's identification of the importance of the law in late antiquity, is it primarily in the spheres of legal transactions and administration that a continuity in practice and assumptions about the usefulness of literate modes is to be observed? Further, in the consideration of literacy in Merovingian Gaul is there any substance to the customary divide between levels of culture north and south of the Loire? In what sense, above all, can the society of Merovingian Gaul be described as literate?[17]

The papacy can also be considered as an heir to Rome in terms at least of its administrative structure, for it was based in important ways on the use of the written word. How was literacy assured and transmitted within the Lateran administration? To focus on the papacy does not preclude wider consideration of the roles played by literacy in the history of the early Christian church, but, as Thomas Noble suggests, the examination of the enormous range of the kinds of records the papal administration produced and conserved can provide us with the necessary exactitude to assess how literacy was exploited by the Christian church generally.[18]

If the papacy can be regarded as the conservator of both the Roman and the Christian traditions to perhaps a far greater degree than can the barbarian successor states, the combined impact of the Roman world and the Christian church is nevertheless a preoccupation of all but one of the papers in this book. The exception, included precisely because its parallels and contrasts are both salutary and illuminating, is Stefan Reif's study of early mediaeval Jewish literacy.[19] His paper seeks to complement the other essays not only by providing an external yardstick against which to measure the significance of developments in literacy in Christian Europe, but also to draw attention to certain similar developments. The accurate evaluation of these will become possible only once the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Christian Europe have been more fully investigated.

Ireland, on the other hand, potentially presents contrast of another kind, for it appears to have supported extensive and sophisticated learned activity by its native learned classes without the use of writing at all. The Irish were aware of writing, as the ogam inscriptions attest, but they did not at first have much use for it. On this culture is imposed Christianity, requiring not only literacy but latinity. This at least is the traditional picture whose validity is tested by Jane Stevenson in the context of the Patrician documents relating to Armagh and the way literacy may have served the uses of

---

[17] Wood, below, pp. 63–81.

[18] Noble, below, pp. 82–108.

[19] Reif, below, pp. 134–55.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

illiteracy, expressing the values, needs and interests of the native culture, virtually untouched by Roman traditions, as well as those of the new religion.[20]

Contact with a non-Roman and non-Christian culture and problems of continuity of a different kind are provided by Roger Collins' study of literacy and the laity in early mediaeval Spain, for the principal question at issue is whether the evident literacy of Arab Spain was influenced by the survival of an educated laity from the Visigothic period.[21] What role did literacy, written records, book buying and book reading play in the society of late Umayyad Al-Andalus? What are the consequences of the lack in Islamic society of a separate priestly caste? How does the degree of literacy in Umayyad Spain compare with that evident in the Visigothic period?

The Roman and Christian heritage as it was filtered into early Anglo-Saxon England, on the other hand, has to be considered within the framework of a vigorous vernacular and oral culture to which the written word is introduced by the Christian missionaries. Susan Kelly explores the conditions attendant upon the introduction of the written word into a pre-literate society.[22] She assesses the success of literacy in England by considering the extent to which the use of the written word superseded, or was accommodated within, the established oral procedures of early Anglo-Saxon government and society and takes as her starting point the significance of the use of charters, the attitude towards written titles to property and whether the symbolic function of the diploma is more important than its value as a written record. But the relation of the vernacular to Latin literacy has to be considered. What does the appearance of vernacular documents tell us about literacy in Anglo-Saxon England? What was the extent of lay literacy? How high was the quality of ecclesiastical literacy, and what were the methods of instruction? These questions are pursued also in later Anglo-Saxon England by Simon Keynes but the focus is on the role of literate modes in government and the evidence for pragmatic literacy.[23] What evidence is there that there is a routine resort to bureaucratic methods and use of writing in the government and administration of Anglo-Saxon England before the Conquest? Keynes explores the relationship between the monarch and literacy and in particular the effects Alfred's initiatives had on tenth-century royal government. Why were the laws produced in written form and what relation does this have to their publication and implementation? Could royal officials in later Anglo-Saxon England read, and were they required to read the law in written form? What role did literacy play in the administration of the realm and communication with the royal officials?

[20] Stevenson, below, pp. 11–35.

[21] Collins, below, pp. 109–33.

[22] Kelly, below, pp. 36–62.

[23] Keynes, below, pp. 226–57.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

The use of the written word in government and administration also provides the focus for Janet Nelson's discussion of the Carolingians, and constitutes a useful means of comparing practices and assumptions on either side of the Channel.[24] How much evidence of the practical use of writing, as a means of communication and record, is there? But she also asks who produced the documents and what role laymen played in this. Was lay literacy, active as well as passive, even in Latin, far more widespread than has often been assumed? What can be said about the symbolic uses of literacy and to what degree do they qualify the ostensibly practical ones? The function of literacy in the Frankish kingdoms under the Carolingians has to be considered within a cultural context in which the use of writing associated with the Christian and Roman past was a privileged mode of communication among other modes.

Further aspects of literacy to be considered in this book are the visual impact of letter forms and their relation to pictures. Margaret Mullett tackles the manifestations of writing and their significance in Byzantium in the ninth and tenth centuries, invoking a rather different and more continuous Roman past than that which we encounter in the germanic kingdoms of western Europe.[25] It has been customary hitherto to assess Byzantine literacy very positively and to stress the supreme power of the written word in Byzantine society and the ability of the Byzantines to appreciate it on the grounds that continuity in levels of literacy, literary production and education from the Roman period is clear. While acknowledging that there is some truth in it, Mullett challenges the impregnability of this view and examines afresh the use of literate modes in Byzantium. She points out that because of its prolonged period of iconoclasm, the place of art in relation to words was exhaustively discussed; visual material is thus as important in a study of Byzantine literacy as words. How should one assess the relationship between art and writing? Do words and pictures say the same thing? Or do pictures perform a function that words cannot? Similar preoccupations are relevant for western Europe and Rosamond McKitterick examines the relationship beteween image and word and the cultural and social context within which writing was produced in the Carolingian period.[26] What were the Carolingian views on the relative value of writing and pictures? What were the reasons and possible consequences of the Carolingian conviction of the superiority of writing to pictures? She considers the impact on the Franks of the gift of writing bestowed by the Christian faith and the law of God, and the degree to which the written word and the book had a symbolic as well as a practical role in Carolingian

---

[24] Nelson, below, pp. 258–96.

[25] Mullett, below, pp. 156–85.

[26] McKitterick, below, pp. 297–318.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42896-5 - The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe
Edited by Rosamond McKitterick
Excerpt
More information

society. Both these papers are complemented by John Mitchell's, for he looks in detail at the extravagant use of inscriptions – painted inscriptions on the walls, elaborate painted texts on scrolls held by life-sized standing figures, finely carved funerary inscriptions, the extensive use of inscribed tiles on the floors of rooms and passages, monumental gilt-bronze inscriptions with letters about a Roman foot high on the façades of the buildings of the monastic complex and the prominent display of any old Roman inscriptions the community was able to acquire – at the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno in central Italy in the first half of the ninth century.[27] What are the implications of this amazing richness of literacy displayed?

To our lasting regret it was not possible to include studies of either Byzantine or Lombard Italy. This is greatly to be lamented, not least because in Byzantine Italy one has a remarkable survival of Roman traditions which would perhaps enable one to assess continuity much more precisely than elsewhere as well as to work out the degrees to which literacy in Ravenna and the Roman areas of early mediaeval Italy was unique in comparison with the other areas we have studied. Such a study is in preparation by T.S. Brown. As far as Lombard Italy is concerned, it is clear that literacy and its uses deserves a wholescale study, but much has been published already by Chris Wickham; there is also work in preparation by Ross Balzoretti which has much of great value on the subject.[28] Ideally, therefore, both Byzantine and Lombard Italy should have been included in this volume. Similarly, a study of the Islamic world and its sets of contrasts and parallels would have been illuminating. Other areas of western Europe and, of course, the multitude of other aspects of the uses of literacy in the areas we have looked at, remain to be investigated.[29] Nevertheless, the questions raised in this book, and the particular contexts in which they were discussed, represent a deliberate selection rather than a random one. We felt that the areas chosen and the diverse uses of literacy we discuss in them, would serve to introduce the theme in all its complexity and variety as one of vital importance for study in relation to the early middle ages.

---

[27] Mitchell, below, pp. 186–225.

[28] C.J. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society 400–1000* (London, 1981), pp. 124–7; *idem*, 'Land disputes and their social framework in Lombard–Carolingian Italy, 700–900', in *Settlement of Disputes*, pp. 105–24, especially p. 112, and see in the same volume Roger Collins' pertinent comments in his section of the Conclusion on 'The Role of writing in the resolution and recording of disputes', *ibid.*, pp. 207–14. See also Ross Balzoretti's University of London PhD thesis in preparation on 'The lands of Saint-Ambrose: the acquisition, organization and exploitation of landed property in north-west Lombardy by the monastery of Sant'Ambrogio c. 780–1000', where he establishes the widespread use of documents and preservation of legal records as well as the existence of a sophisticated notarial tradition centred on Milan.

[29] Simon Franklin, 'Literacy and documentation in mediaeval Russia', *Speculum* 60 (1985), 1–38.