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INTRODUCTION

The title of this book needs some explanation. 'Carolingian economy' has to be understood here as 'the economy of the Carolingian empire'. The 'economy of the Carolingian period' would be too broad, not being limited to the empire within its borders under Charlemagne, which is the point of view adopted here. Countries and regions outside the empire, such as England, Scandinavia, the Islamic empire (including the bigger part of Spain), the Byzantine empire and eastern Europe, will be considered only in so far as their commercial relations with the Carolingian empire are at stake. The chronological terms, from the middle of the eighth century to the end of the ninth, are necessarily political, but they coincide by chance with the beginning and the end of an economic period, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 10. 'Carolingian economy' can also be understood as an economy directed by the Carolingian rulers. I do not reject this interpretation altogether, but it will be elucidated in Chapter 9 on 'The economy and the state'. 'Economy' is used in its singular form although the Carolingian empire was not an economically homogeneous area. Several regional 'economies' can be defined, each having different characteristics regarding population, the use of money, the presence of towns, the intensity of trade, etc. The territories between the Loire and the Rhine, between the Rhine and the frontier of the empire on the Elbe river and northern Italy are the most striking examples. Nevertheless an inquiry into the specificity of the Carolingian economy as a whole, compared with regions outside the empire or to economic situations before and after the Carolingian period,

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makes sense and is possible. Was it, to quote Chris Wickham,[1] 'a network of subsistence-based exchange', where consumption commanded production, or was it an economy producing surpluses brought to the market?

This alternative comes near to that of Pirenne, for whom the Carolingian economy was a closed agrarian-based economy without towns, merchants or trade. His views, most strikingly expressed in his book *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (completed after his death in 1935 and published, with documentary evidence by his pupil Fernand Vercauteren, in 1937),[2] were essentially a reaction to ideas advanced by Alfons Dopsch in the second edition (1921–2) of his two-volume book, written between 1911 and 1913, on the economic evolution of the Carolingian period (*Die Wirtschaftsentwicklung der Karolingerzeit*).[3] In this book Dopsch had reacted against the conceptions of what he calls the old nineteenth-century school of von Inama-Sternegg and Karl Lamprecht, who had proclaimed the primacy of the manor ('Grundherrschaft') in Carolingian economic life. Opposing their views on an agrarian-based economy, Dopsch stressed the role of towns, money and trade. This point of view might have been expected from Pirenne but he, paradoxically, just took the side of the old school, where Lamprecht, before the First World War, had been his model and closest friend. It is however not the place here to enter into the genesis of Pirenne's *Mahomet et Charlemagne*,[4] but rather to review the historiography since Pirenne on the economic evolution under the Carolingians.

The first phase of this historiography, from the late 1930s through to the 1950s, was driven by an attack on Pirenne's work and, in particular, his thesis about the role of the Arabs. The absolute masters of the western Mediterranean since 711, they had, according to Pirenne, forced the western Christian world to retreat to the north from what until then had remained the centre of the civilised world, imposing a continental character on the Carolingian empire. In this way it put an

[1] Chris Wickham, *Land and Power. Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London, 1994), p. 197.

[2] Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, English translation (London, Unwin, 1939). Paperback edition by Barnes and Noble (New York, 1955).

[3] Alfons Dopsch, *Die Wirtschaftsentwicklung der Karolingerzeit vornehmlich in Deutschland*, second revised edition, 2 vols. (Weimar, 1921–2).

[4] Paolo Delogu, 'Reading Pirenne Again' in Richard Hodges and William Bowden (eds.), *The Sixth Century. Production, Distribution and Demand* (Leiden, Brill, 1998), pp. 15–40.

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end to the circulation, mostly by Syrian merchants, from the shores of the Mediterranean to the north, of goods such as papyrus, spices, oriental wines and olive oil. Different studies re-examined the references to these products in Merovingian and Carolingian texts and concluded that their disappearance from Carolingian texts had never been so complete nor so early as Pirenne had believed or had had other causes.[5]

More fundamental than the discussions on documentary evidence for the presence of these goods, was the argument about the causes of the adoption by the Carolingians of the silver penny and their abandonment of gold coins, which Pirenne had also related to the Arab conquest of the western Mediterranean and to the economic regression which in his opinion had been its consequence in the west.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s Maurice Lombard developed a theory about the vast quantities of gold the Arabs had acquired through conquest in Persia and Africa and which they brought into circulation. With this gold, according to Lombard, they bought slaves, wood, furs and other wares in western Europe and vivified its economy.[6] Sture Bolin supported these unorthodox views but through different ways, tracing trade links between the Arab lands and Scandinavia that would explain the hoards of Arab silver coins found in Scandinavia which finally reached western Europe.[7] These theories did not stand firm: Grierson proved that no Arab gold coins circulated in western Europe in any significant quantities.[8] Moreover most of the Arabic coins found in Birka (near Stockholm, Sweden) date from the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth,[9] although a hoard of several thousand Arabic silver coins, the latest

[5] Bryce Lyon, *The Origins of the Middle Ages. Pirenne's Challenge to Gibbon* (New York, 1972), pp. 70–6.

[6] Maurice Lombard, 'Les bases monétaires d'une suprématie économique. L'or musulman du VIIe au XIe siècle', *Annales. Economies–Sociétés–Civilisations* 2 (1947), pp. 143–60; Maurice Lombard, 'Mahomet et Charlemagne. Le problème économique', *Annales. Economies–Sociétés–Civilisations* 3 (1948), pp. 188–99.

[7] Sture Bolin, 'Mohammad, Charlemagne and Ruric', *The Scandinavian Economic History Review* 1 (1953), pp. 5–39.

[8] Philip Grierson, 'Carolingian Europe and the Arabs: The Myth of the Mancus', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 32 (1954), pp. 1059–74.

[9] Björn Ambrosiani, 'Excavations in the Black Earth Harbour 1969–71', in Björn Ambrosiani and Helen Clarke (eds.), *Early Investigations and Future Plans*, Birka Studies 1 (Stockholm, 1992), p. 79.

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dating from the mid-ninth century, was concealed at Ralswiek, on the island of Rügen, off the north-German Baltic coast.[10] This does not mean that there was no direct commerce between the Arab world and western Europe in Carolingian times, as Pirenne, not without admitting some exceptions, notably concerning the slave trade, contended. But their economic impact must not be exaggerated, even if Grierson himself and other numismatists suppose a link between the Carolingian monetary reform of the mid-eighth century and an earlier Arab reform at the end of the seventh century.[11] Numismatic evidence, which in this case too is scanty, does not indeed, in the opinion of K. F. Morrison, tell anything certain about trade routes or about the volume of trade.[12] On the basis of documentary evidence however, F.-L. Ganshof, himself a disciple of Pirenne, demonstrated the year after *Mahomet et Charlemagne* had appeared, that in the eighth century the relations between East and West continued through the ports of Provence, particularly in Marseilles, be it on a minimal level.[13] H. L. Adelson has made Byzantium responsible for this state of affairs[14] and other authors also tried to prove that relations between the West and Byzantium and the East, mainly through Italian ports under theoretical Byzantine authority, like Venice and Tyrrenean ports in southern Italy, particularly Amalfi, depended in the first place on the military relations between Byzantium and the Arabs in the eastern Mediterranean.

As the essential part of Pirenne's thesis, the negative role of the Arabs, with as its consequences the absence of merchants, towns and trade in western Europe and the predominance of an agrarian economy based on the self-sufficiency of the big estate, has been rejected totally or partially by most of his critics, only the latter element, in a second phase of the historiography of Pirenne's critics, has been the object of new studies. That the attention shifted from trade to agriculture may be explained by the satiation caused

[10] Helen Clarke and Björn Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*, second revised edition (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), p. 109.

[11] Philip Grierson, 'The Monetary Reforms of Abd-Al-Malik', *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 3 (1960), pp. 241–64.

[12] Karl F. Morrison, 'Numismatics and Carolingian Trade: A Critique of the Evidence', *Speculum* 38 (1963), p. 432.

[13] François-L. Ganshof, 'Note sur les ports de Provence du VIIIe au Xe siècle', *Revue Historique* 184 (1938), pp. 28–37.

[14] H. L. Adelson, 'Early Medieval Trade Routes', *American Historical Review* 65 (1960), pp. 271–87.

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by the numerous critics during the first historiographical phase, all centred on trade, and the paradoxical situation that in his *Mahomet et Charlemagne* Pirenne himself had been very brief on the role of the manor, although he considered it the basis of the Carolingian economy. The prelude to the second historiographical phase in the 1950s and early 1960s, besides the roneotyped but important lectures by Charles-Edmond Perrin at the Sorbonne, was several fundamental studies by two German scholars, K. Verhein and W. Metz, on the sources for the study of the royal Carolingian estates, more particularly a capitulary of Charlemagne known as the *Capitulare de Villis* and inventories known as *Brevium exempla*.[15] To this phase belonged the 1965 'Settimana' in Spoleto on agriculture in the early Middle Ages, where I presented a new thesis on the origin of the classical bipartite estate, so typical for the Carolingian period. Its development in the eighth to ninth centuries was on the model of the royal estates between the Seine and the Rhine.[16]

Although my views were widely accepted, the real start of manorial studies centred on the Carolingian period were three international colloquia respectively held in Xanten (1980), Ghent (1983) and Göttingen (1987).[17] At Xanten I counted 109 studies published between 1965 and 1980 on that particular topic while Yoshiki Morimoto in 1988 numbered a hundred new titles between 1980 and 1986.[18] Meanwhile, at the Göttingen Academy, on the initiative of the archaeologist Herbert Jankuhn, a series of colloquia on the material

[15] Klaus Verhein, 'Studien zu den Quellen zum Reichsgut der Karolingerzeit', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 10 (1954), pp. 313–94 and 11 (1955), pp. 333–92; Wolfgang Metz, *Das Karolingische Reichsgut* (Berlin 1960).

[16] Adriaan Verhulst, 'La genèse du régime domanial classique en France au haut moyen âge', reprinted in Adriaan Verhulst, *Rural and Urban Aspects of Early Medieval Northwest Europe* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992).

[17] Walter Janssen and Dietrich Lohrmann (eds.), *Villa – Curtis – Grangia. Landwirtschaft zwischen Loire und Rhein von der Römerzeit zum Hochmittelalter. 16. Deutsch-französisches Historikerkolloquium, Xanten 1980* (Munich, 1983); Adriaan Verhulst (ed.), *Le grand domaine aux époques mérovingienne et carolingienne. Actes du colloque international Gand 1983* (Ghent, 1985); Werner Rösener (ed.), *Strukturen der Grundherrschaft im frühen Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 1989).

[18] Yoshiki Morimoto, 'Etat et perspectives des recherches sur les polyptyques carolingiens', *Annales de l'Est* 5–40 (1988), pp. 99–149; for the years 1987–1992: Yoshiki Morimoto, 'Autour du grand domaine carolingien: aperçu critique des recherches récentes sur l'histoire rurale du Haut Moyen Âge (1987–92)', in Adriaan Verhulst and Yoshiki Morimoto (eds.), *L'économie rurale et l'économie urbaine au Moyen Âge* (Ghent, Fukuoka, 1994), pp. 25–79.

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and archaeological aspects of prehistoric and early medieval agriculture began in 1977.[19] In the 1980s, a 'boom' of critical editions put at the disposal of specialists the annotated texts of nearly all the preserved Carolingian polyptychs and inventories: those of the abbeys of Prüm, Wissembourg (Weissenburg), Montiérender, St Maur-des-Fossés and last but not least St Germain-des-Prés, mostly at the initiative of Dieter Hägermann from Bremen University and all by German scholars.[20] Before that Belgian scholars had published other famous Carolingian polyptychs and inventories, namely F.-L. Ganshof that of St Bertin, J.-P. Devroey those of Reims and Lobbes and I myself a fragment of a Carolingian inventory of St Bavo's at Ghent.[21]

After this 'boom' of studies on Carolingian manorial organisation, which even touched Italy,[22] there was a need for evaluation and synthesis, especially as Robert Fossier in a fuss-making pamphlet at the 1979 'Settimana' in Spoleto had passed a very negative judgement on Carolingian economy.[23] Nearly ten years later, in 1988, a confrontation with Fossier was organised at the abbey of Flaran under

[19] Herbert Jankuhn, Rudolf Schützeichel and Fred Schwind (eds.), *Das Dorf der Eisenzeit und des frühen Mittelalters* (Göttingen: Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1977); Heinrich Beck, Dietrich Denecke and Herbert Jankuhn (eds.), *Untersuchungen zur eisenzeitlichen und frühmittelalterlichen Flur in Mitteleuropa und ihrer Nutzung* (Göttingen: Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979–80).

[20] Ingo Schwab (ed.), *Das Prümer Urbar* (Düsseldorf, 1983); Christoph Dette (ed.), *Liber possessionum Wizenburgensis* (Mainz, 1987); Claus-Dieter Droste (ed.), *Das Polytichon von Montierender* (Trier, 1988); Dieter Hägermann and Andreas Hedwig (eds.), *Das Polyptychon und die Notitia de Areis von Saint-Maur-des-Fossés* (Sigmaringen, 1989); Dieter Hägermann, Konrad Elmshäuser and Andreas Hedwig (eds.), *Das Polyptychon von Saint-Germain-des-Prés* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna, 1993).

[21] François-L. Ganshof (ed.), *Le polyptyque de l'abbaye de Saint-Bertin (844–859)* (Paris, 1975); Jean-Pierre Devroey (ed.), *Le polyptyque et les listes de cens de l'abbaye de Saint-Remi de Reims (IXe-XIe siècles)* (Reims, 1984); Jean-Pierre Devroey (ed.), *Le polyptyque et les listes de biens de l'abbaye Saint-Pierre de Lobbes (IXe-XIe siècles)* (Brussels, 1986); Adriaan Verhulst, 'Das Besitzverzeichnis der Genter Sankt-Bavo-Abtei von ca 800 (Clm 6333)', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 5 (1971), pp. 193–234.

[22] Pierre Toubert, 'L'Italie rurale aux VIIIe–IXe siècles. Essai de typologie domaniale', in *I problemi dell'Occidente nel secolo VIII* (Spoleto, 1973: Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 20), pp. 95–132; Bruno Andreolli and Massimo Montanari, *L'aziende curtense in Italia* (Bologna, 1985).

[23] Robert Fossier, 'Les tendances de l'économie: stagnation ou croissance?', in *Nascita dell'Europa ed Europa Carolingia* (Spoleto, 1981: Settimane di Studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 27), pp. 261–74.

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the presidency of Georges Duby, who himself in his book *Warriors and Peasants* in 1973 had made a similar judgement but who at Flaran did not commit himself. The major contribution to the Flaran meeting, which actually had as its central theme agricultural growth in the early Middle Ages, was that of Pierre Toubert on the role of the big manor in the 'take off' of the western economy during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries. It is still the best analysis of the 'minimalist' views on Carolingian economy and at the same time a thorough refutation of them, based on recent scholarship and on primary sources alike.[24]

In the eyes of the minimalists the very low rentability of the big estate was one of the essential characteristics of the manorial production system. This statement was in the first place supported by demographic conjectures about the low population density of most regions, except where one cannot escape documentary evidence of the reverse, as in the Paris basin. Their interpretation of the vast average dimension of the *mansus* was also used as a demographic argument, again with the exception of the Paris basin. Low yield ratios and the reservation of a large part of the production for seed for the next year, for the army and for the supply of the king's or the lord's court, did not leave big grain surpluses for the market. 'Autoconsumption' was the rule and there was no incentive for reinvestment. Agricultural technique was primitive and agricultural instruments were scarce and made of wood. This kind of statement, mostly made without the thorough support of texts or other evidence, will be refuted in Chapter 3, drawing on Toubert's masterly contribution to the Flaran debate.

After this long concern with Carolingian agriculture and manorial organisation, a subject somewhat neglected by Pirenne, scholarship in the 1980s – after a twenty-year gap – reverted, in a third phase of post-Pirenne historiography, to Pirenne's favoured subject of trade and towns, now however from a totally new point of view hardly known during Pirenne's lifetime and mostly ignored by him: archaeology. Since the Second World War medieval archaeology had been emancipated from classical archaeology and was practised by archaeologists

[24] Pierre Toubert, 'La part du grand domaine dans le décollage économique de l'Occident (VIIIe–Xe siècles)', in *La croissance agricole du Haut Moyen Âge* (Auch 1990: Flaran 10), pp. 53–86.

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who were at the same time historians or at least had this ambition.[25] Among them Richard Hodges is the most engaged in the economic and social history of the Carolingian period, more particularly in the problems initiated by Pirenne. Like Toubert and most specialists of the matter today, Hodges considers the age of Charlemagne a period of economic growth, about which he has written several controversial books.[26] One important aspect of this controversy is his strong belief in the Carolingian origin of towns, more particularly those towns that around the middle of the ninth century succeeded as *portus* to the so-called *emporia*. Both types, in his opinion, contain the seed of urban development in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This statement is more questionable concerning the *emporia* than with respect to the new *portus* of the ninth century. As contrasted with the former, most *portus* survived the Viking invasions without any significant break and gave birth, from the tenth century onwards, to important towns engaging in long-distance trade in the eleventh century. The *emporia* within the Carolingian empire, Dorestad, Quentovic and other minor ones (Medemblik, *Witla*), in contrast to places outside the empire, like London, Hamwic (Southampton) or Ribe, did not form the nucleus of a later town of some importance. This is our only point of discussion with Richard Hodges's recent views as exposed in his book *Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne*.[27]

Thus the recent new interest in towns, especially from the side of archaeologists like Hodges, Hill, Van Es and others, will surely reopen the debate on *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, which is still not closed and will perhaps never be.

For my part I hope that some ideas put forward in this book will prove a valuable contribution to it.

[25] Herbert Jankuhn, Walter Schlesinger and Heiko Steuer (eds.), *Vor- und Frühformen der europäischen Stadt im Mittelalter*, 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1975: Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften); Richard Hodges and Brian Hobley (eds.), *The Rebirth of Towns in the West AD 700–1050* (London, 1988: CBA Research Report 68); *La genèse et les premiers siècles des villes médiévales dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux. Un problème archéologique et historique* (Brussels 1990: Crédit Communal, coll. Histoire in-8°, no. 83); Clarke and Ambrosiani, *Towns in the Viking Age*.

[26] Richard Hodges, *Dark Age Economics. The Origins of Towns and Trade AD 600–1000* (London, 1982); Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe* (London, 1983).

[27] Richard Hodges, *Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne* (London: Duckworth, 2000).

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PART I

LAND AND PEOPLE

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I

LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

WOODLAND

The Carolingian landscape was for a large part, on the average for more than 40 per cent and in some regions up to 80 per cent, a natural landscape, consisting mainly of woods. The map of European forests in the early Middle Ages, made up by Charles Higounet, is still the best guide to study their geographical distribution.[1] He has localised and identified nearly 150 individual forests, some of which can be studied more in detail. Most of them lay east of the Rhine and along it, and also in the adjoining eastern parts of France and Belgium, a situation that lasted to the end of the Middle Ages and persists still today. In around 1500, one-third of Germany and a quarter of France were still covered by woodland. The larger part of these forests was royal land, protected by the king as hunting reserves, which is the original meaning of 'forest' (Lat. *forestis, forestum*). Some of these forests consisted not only of woods but included also uncultivated land, pasture, heath, moor and even arable land. In central Europe the Thuringian forest, in the middle of which the abbey of Fulda was founded in 742, may have been inhabited around that centre before the arrival of the monks. Clearances, named *capturae*, took place all around from the beginning of the eighth century and continued well into the ninth, perhaps related to the military operations of Charlemagne against

[1] Charles Higounet, 'Les forêts de l'Europe occidentale du ve au xie siècle', in *Agricoltura e mondo rurale in Occidente nell'alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 1966: Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 13), pp. 343–98.

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