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978-0-521-88672-7 - Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity

Rosamond McKitterick

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## CHARLEMAGNE

Charlemagne is often claimed as the greatest ruler in Europe before Napoleon. In this magisterial new study, Rosamond McKitterick re-examines Charlemagne the ruler and his reputation. She analyses the narrative representations of Charlemagne produced after his death, and thereafter focuses on the evidence from Charlemagne's lifetime concerning the creation of the Carolingian dynasty and the growth of the kingdom, the court and the royal household, communications and identities in the Frankish realm in the context of government, and Charlemagne's religious and cultural strategies. She offers a completely fresh and critical examination of the contemporary sources and in so doing transforms our understanding of the development of the Carolingian empire, the formation of Carolingian political identity, and the astonishing changes effected throughout Charlemagne's forty-six-year period of rule. This is a major contribution to Carolingian history which will be essential reading for anyone interested in the medieval past.

ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK is Professor of Medieval History at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College. Her previous publications include *Atlas of the Medieval World* (2003), *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (2004) and *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (2006).

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*The Formation of a European Identity*

ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK

*Professor of Medieval History at the University of Cambridge  
and Fellow of Sidney Sussex College*



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521716451](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521716451)Originally published in German as *Karl der Große* by Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 2008

© Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 2008

First published in English as *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* by Cambridge University Press, 2008

English edition © Cambridge University Press 2008

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Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library**Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

McKitterick, Rosamond.

Charlemagne: the formation of a European identity / Rosamond McKitterick.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-88672-7

- I. Charlemagne, Emperor, 742–814. 2. France – Kings and rulers – Biography. 3. Holy Roman Empire – Kings and rulers – Biography. 4. Carolingians – History. 5. France – History – To 987. 6. Holy Roman Empire – History – To 1517. I. Title.

DC73.M38 2008

944'.0142092–dc22[B] 2008000621

ISBN 978-0-521-88672-7 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-71645-1 paperback

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*To the medievalists in the Attic, NIAS 2005–6*

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## *Preface*

In this book I have investigated both what we can know about Charlemagne and what we think we know. I have taken a fresh look at the beginnings of the Carolingian empire, and have tried to free Charlemagne's reign from the clutter of arguments, assumptions and hypotheses that have somehow become facts. In charting the formation of a European identity during Charlemagne's reign, I have explored the interaction between the practical consequences of the expansion of the Frankish empire into totally new territory and Frankish perceptions and uses of the past. The degree to which Charlemagne and the Franks at the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth communicated with the past in order to form or to inform their own contemporary concerns, to heighten their sense of identity and cultural affiliations and to shape their political purpose form the conceptual framework of this book. I have endeavoured to avoid ascribing without question a phenomenon loosely described as 'Carolingian' to his period of rule rather than to those of his successors. Instead, I have attempted to capture the dynamism of the reign and to document the astonishing changes effected throughout the period from 768 to 814. In all this I offer a critical reassessment of the sources first produced between 747/8 and 814, not because they may or may not be more truthful than accounts produced after Charlemagne's death, from Einhard's *Vita Karoli* onwards, but because they have at least the merit of being contemporary. They therefore reflect something of perceptions and conditions during his reign. I have been very conscious of parallel work in progress on the Carolingian period, with books in preparation from Mayke de Jong on the reign of Louis the Pious, Stuart Airlie on the Carolingian aristocracy, Jinty Nelson on Charlemagne, and David Ganz on Einhard. Consequently, I have endeavoured to avoid trespass or overlap. The book is divided into five sections, addressing narrative representations of Charlemagne, the creation of the Carolingian dynasty and the growth of the kingdom, the court and the royal household,

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communications and identities in the Frankish realm in the context of government, and Charlemagne's religious and cultural strategies.

I have benefited greatly from past scholarship on Charlemagne, most particularly the spate of books and collections of papers over the past decade devoted to different aspects of the man and his times. A simple list of these historical analyses would occupy a substantial book on its own, but I have tried both to be up to date and comprehensive in my treatment of all the topics tackled in this book and to pay due respect both to more recent scholarship and to the path-breaking work of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That I have disagreed with much of it, whether on points of detail or major traditions of interpretation, does not diminish my admiration and gratitude for all the work of my predecessors. Many, both among the departed and those I am fortunate enough to have as my colleagues, have been of enormous assistance in the endeavour to make sense of rebarbative, dispersed, lacunose, opaque, ambiguous but always fascinating primary sources. For practical reasons the references in the notes and the Bibliography have had to be selective, but those cited will provide the means for any reader to explore further. It is a testimony to the richness of Charlemagne's reign that study of it shows no signs of being exhausted. New texts are continually being added to the spectrum of material that needs to be taken into account, quite apart from the questioning of what has for too long been accepted without question.

An enterprise such as this can be completed only with a great deal of support. I am indebted first of all to the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, to Peter Herde, the editor of the series *Gestalten des Mittelalters*, and to the desk editor in Darmstadt, Harald Baulig, for inviting me to write this book, and for their encouragement and extreme patience during its long gestation. I am also very grateful to Cambridge University Press for suggesting that they might publish the English version, and especially to Bill Davies, Simon Whitmore and Michael Watson at the Press for all the interest they have shown in the project. Without the award of a Visiting Fellowship for ten productive and happy months during the academic year 2005–6, in the ideal and idyllic working conditions at the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Study in Wassenaar, the Netherlands, this book would certainly have taken very much longer. I am very grateful to the Directorate, staff and Fellows of NIAS 2005–6 for all their support and to the library and computing staff for procuring so much of what I needed. Most particularly I wish to thank the other medievalists among the Fellows there, both the research group on Carolingian political identity, namely Mayke de Jong, David Ganz, Els Rose and Helmut Reimitz, and

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Anu Mand, Joseph Harris, Arjo Vanderjagt and Jan Ziolkowski for inspiring discussions and help on many points. In addition, Mayke de Jong and Helmut Reimitz kindly read all my draft chapters and I have benefited immeasurably from their critical commentary and suggestions. Some of the preparatory work for this book was completed in 2002 while I was resident for three months at the British School at Rome as Hugh Balsdon Fellow. It is a pleasure here, therefore, to record my debt to the Director, staff and fellow scholars and artists of the School who contributed so much to the development of this book's arguments and perspective. In the Netherlands and Rome, I was fortunate to be able to explore the riches of Leiden Universiteitsbibliotheek and the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana respectively, and I am especially grateful to André Bouwman in Special Collections and Paul Hoftijzer in the Scaliger Instituut in Leiden Universiteitsbibliotheek and to Christine Grafinger in the Vatican library for all their help and hospitality. Visits to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, the Bibliothèque royale in Brussels, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich and the Stiftsarchiv and Stiftsbibliothek in St Gallen were similarly fruitful. At home in Cambridge the University Library and its staff were, as always, unfailingly helpful and the resources they made available were quite remarkable. In an earlier stage of work on the book, the Principal and Fellows of Newnham College, Cambridge, offered invaluable support. In the final stages of the book I have enjoyed the congenial company and excellent working conditions provided by the Master and Fellows of Sidney Sussex College.

Many friends, colleagues and students have assisted me in this enterprise, by generously sending me offprints or books, answering queries, listening (sometimes unwittingly) to sections of the book when I sought reactions to particular interpretations, and contributing a range of questions and reflections on major sources which were immensely stimulating. Among these I particularly want to mention David Bates, Matthias Becher, Philippe Bernard, Jesse Billett, François Bougard, Geneviève Bühner-Thierry, Caroline Burt, Guglielmo Cavallo, Benedict Coffin, John Contreni, Richard Corradini, Marios Costambeys, Georges Declercq, Philippe Depreux, Jean-Pierre Devroey, Alain Dierkens, Max Diesenberger, Bruce Eastwood, Peter Erhart, Arnold Esch, Nicholas Everett, Tom Faulkner, Michele Ferrari, Sarah Foot, Stefano Gasparri, Hans Werner Goetz, Carl Hammer, Wolfgang Haubrichs, Yitzhak Hen, Julian Hendrix, Paul Hilliard, Dominique Iogna-Prat, Tom Kitchen, Cristina La Rocca, Sally Lamb, Regine Le Jan, Uwe Lobbedey, Natalia Lozovsky, Federico Marazzi,

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Andrew Merrills, John Morrill, Larry Nees, Tom Noble, Eric Palazzo, Michael Reeve, Flavia de Rubeis, Jean-Marie Sansterre, Peter Sarris, Anton Scharer, Rudolf Schieffer, Elina Screen, Josef Semmler, Julia Smith, Francesco Stella, Wesley Stevens, Joanna Story, Benoît-Michel Tock, Chris Wickham, Annette Wiesheu, Herwig Wolfram and Ian Wood. I am especially grateful to those who joined the Carolingian ‘workshops’ in NIAS: Stuart Airlie, Carmela Vircillo Franklin, Matthew Innes, David Mitchell, Jinty Nelson, Walter Pohl, Christina Pössel, Janneke Raaijmakers, Irene van Renswoude, Carine van Rhijn, Mariken Teeuwen and Charles West. But as always my final thanks are to my husband David. The book could not have been written without his critical engagement with it, and his constant encouragement in every respect.

## Abbreviations

Apart from the following, all works are cited in full at the first reference to them and subsequently in short-title form in each chapter. Full details may also be found in the Bibliography.

<i>799 Kunst und Kultur</i>	C. Stiegemann and M. Wemhoff (eds.), <i>799 Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit: Karl der Große und Papst Leo III. in Paderborn</i> , 3 vols. (Mainz, 1999)
<i>Annales fuldenses</i>	<i>Annales fuldenses sive Annales regni francorum orientalis</i> , ed. F. Kurze, <i>MGH SRG</i> 7 (Hanover, 1891)
<i>Annales mettenses priores</i>	<i>Annales mettenses priores</i> , ed. B. von Simson, <i>MGH SRG</i> 10 (Hanover, 1905)
ARF	<i>Annales regni francorum unde ab. a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales laurissenses maiores et Einhardi</i> , ed. F. Kurze, <i>MGH SRG</i> 6 (Hanover, 1895)
BAV	Rome, Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
<i>Codex epistolaris carolinus</i> , ed. Gundlach	<i>Codex epistolaris carolinus</i> , ed. W. Gundlach, <i>MGH Epp.</i> 111, <i>Epistolae merovingici et karolini aevi</i> , 1 (Hanover, 1892)
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i> (Turnhout, 1952–)
<i>ChLA</i>	<i>Chartae latinae antiquiores, Facsimile edition of the Latin charters prior to the ninth century</i> , 1–, ed.

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- ChLAz* A. Bruckner *et al.* (Olten and Lausanne, 1954–98)  
*Chartae latinae antiquiores, Facsimile edition of the Latin charters*, 2nd series: *ninth century*, 1–, ed. G. Cavallo, G. Nicolaj *et al.* (Olten and Lausanne, 1997–)
- CLA* E. A. Lowe, *Codices latini antiquiores: a palaeographical guide to Latin manuscripts prior to the ninth century*, II vols. plus Supplement (Oxford, 1935–71)
- Clm* Codices latini monacenses
- Davis, *Lives* R. Davis (trans.), *The lives of the eighth-century popes (Liber pontificalis)* (Liverpool, 1992)
- Depreux, *Prosopographie* P. Depreux, *Prosopographie de l'entourage de Louis le Pieux (781–840)*, Instrumenta 1 (Sigmaringen, 1997)
- Deutsches Archiv* *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*
- DKar. 1* E. Mühlbacher (ed.), *Die Urkunden der Karolinger*, 1: *Urkunden Pippins, Karlmanns und Karl der Großen*, MGH *Diplomata karolinorum* (Hanover, 1906)
- Einhard, *Vita Karoli* Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, ed. L. Halphen, *Eginhard: vie de Charlemagne*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1947)
- KdG* W. Braunfels (ed.), *Karl der Große: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, 4 vols. 1: H. Beumann (ed.), *Persönlichkeit und Geschichte*; II: B. Bischoff (ed.), *Das geistige Leben*; III: W. Braunfels and H. Schnitzler (eds.), *Karolingische Kunst*; IV: W. Braunfels and P. E. Schramm (eds.), *Das Nachleben* (Dusseldorf, 1965)
- LP*, ed. Duchesne *Liber pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, *Le liber pontificalis: texte, introduction et commentaire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1886–92)

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McKitterick, <i>History and memory</i>	R. McKitterick, <i>History and memory in the Carolingian world</i> (Cambridge, 2004)
McKitterick, <i>Perceptions of the past</i>	R. McKitterick, <i>Perceptions of the past in the early middle ages</i> (Notre Dame, 2006)
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
<i>Cap.</i>	<i>Capitularia, Legum Sectio II, Capitularia regum francorum</i> , 1 ed. A. Boretius (Hanover, 1883)
<i>Conc.</i>	<i>Concilia, Legum Sectio III, Concilia</i> : II, ed. A. Werminghoff (Hanover, 1906–8); III, ed. W. Hartmann (Hanover, 1984)
<i>Epp.</i>	<i>Epistolae III–VII</i> (= <i>Epistolae merovingici et karolini aevi</i> (Hanover, 1892–1939)
<i>Epp. Sel.</i>	<i>Epistolae Selectae in usum scholarum</i> , 5 vols. (Hanover, 1887–91)
<i>Fontes</i>	<i>Fontes iuris germanici antiqui in usum scholarum ex monumentis germaniae historicis separatim editi</i> , 13 vols. (Hanover, 1909–86)
<i>Formulae</i>	<i>Formulae merovingici et karolini aevi</i> (Hanover, 1882–6)
<i>Leges nat. germ.</i>	<i>Leges nationum germanicarum</i> , ed. K. Zeumer ( <i>Lex Visigothorum</i> ); L. R. de Salis ( <i>Leges Burgundionum</i> ); F. Beyerle and R. Buchner ( <i>Lex Ribuarica</i> ); K. A. Eckhardt ( <i>Pactus Legis Salicae</i> and <i>Lex Salica</i> ); E. von Schwind ( <i>Lex Baiuvariorum</i> ), 6 vols. in 11 parts (Hanover, 1892–1969)
<i>Poet.</i>	<i>Poet. latini aevi carolini</i> , ed. E. Dümmler, L. Traube, P. von Winterfeld and K. Strecker, 4 vols (Hanover, 1881–99)
<i>SRG</i>	<i>Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi</i> , 63 vols. (Hanover, 1871–1987)
<i>SRL</i>	<i>Scriptores regum langobardicarum et italicarum saec. VI–IX</i> , ed. G. Waitz (Hanover, 1898)

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<i>SRM</i>	<i>Scriptores rerum merovingicarum</i> , ed. B. Krusche and W. Levison, 7 vols. (Hanover, 1885–1920)
<i>SS</i>	<i>Scriptores in folio</i> , 30 vols. (Hanover, 1824–1924)
<i>MIÖG</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung</i>
Mordek, <i>Bibliotheca</i>	H. Mordek, <i>Bibliotheca capitularium regum francorum manuscripta: Überlieferung und Traditionszusammenhang der fränkischen Herrschererlasse</i> , MGH Hilfsmittel 15 (Munich, 1995)
<i>NCMH II</i>	R. McKitterick (ed.), <i>The new Cambridge medieval history</i> , 11: <i>c. 700–c. 900</i> (Cambridge, 1995)
ÖNB	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , J.-P. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i> , 221 vols. (Paris, 1841–64)
<i>RVARF</i>	<i>Annales regni francorum unde ab a 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales laurissenses maiores et Einhardi</i> , ed. F. Kurze, MGH SRG 6 (Hanover, 1895)
Settimane	Settimane di Studio del Centro italiano di studi sull' alto medioevo (Spoleto, 1954– )