

Weeds and the Carolingians

Why did weeds matter in the Carolingian empire? What was their special significance for writers in eighth- and ninth-century Europe and how was this connected with the growth of real weeds? In early medieval Europe, unwanted plants that persistently appeared among crops created extra work, reduced productivity, and challenged theologians who believed God had made all vegetation good. For the first time, in this book weeds emerge as protagonists in early medieval European history, driving human farming strategies and coloring people's imagination. Early medieval Europeans' effort to create agroecosystems that satisfied their needs and cosmologies that confirmed Christian accounts of vegetable creation both had to come to terms with unruly plants. Using diverse kinds of texts, fresh archaeobotanical data, and even mosaics, this interdisciplinary study reveals how early medieval Europeans interacted with their environments.

Paolo Squatriti is Professor of History at the University of Michigan. His previous publications include *Water and Society in Early Medieval Italy* (Cambridge, 1998) and *Landscape and Change in Early Medieval Italy* (Cambridge, 2013).

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-316-51286-9 — Weeds and the Carolingians
Paolo Squatriti
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Weeds and the Carolingians

*Empire, Culture, and Nature in Frankish
Europe, AD 750–900*

Paolo Squatriti

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-316-51286-9 — Weeds and the Carolingians
Paolo Squatriti
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316512869
DOI: 10.1017/9781009072328

© Paolo Squatriti 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-316-51286-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Esse autem omnia quae fecit deus bona valde: mala vero non esse naturalia.

Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram Liber Imperfectus* 1, ed.
J. Zycha (Vienna, 1893), 460.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-316-51286-9 — Weeds and the Carolingians
Paolo Squatriti
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1 Weeds, Nature, and Empire	27
2 Weeds on the Ground	53
3 The Time of Weeds	73
4 The Worst of Weeds	101
5 The Botany of Paradise in Carolingian Rome	129
6 The Uses of Weeds	158
7 The Politics of Weeding in the Carolingian Empire	176
Epilogue: Sorting Weeds Out	192
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	200
<i>Index</i>	220

Figures

4.1 Aachen, palace chapel, bronze railing, detail	<i>page</i> 106
4.2 Vienna Dioscurides, fol. 71v	117
5.1 Godescalc Evangelistary (BNF lat. 1203), fol. 3v	132
5.2 San Paolo Bible, fol. 7v	135
5.3 Moutier-Grandval Bible (BL Add. MS 10546), fol. 5v	136
5.4 S. Cecilia, apse mosaic, detail	142
5.5 S. Prassede, triumphal arch mosaic, detail	143
5.6 S. Zeno chapel, mosaic, detail	144
5.7 S. Stefano Rotondo, chapel of SS. Primo and Feliciano mosaic	145
5.8 S. Maria in Domnica, apse mosaic	146
5.9 SS. Nereo and Achilleo, interior	149
5.10 SS. Nereo and Achilleo, triumphal arch mosaic, detail	150

Preface

It took far longer than expected to write this book: weeds turned out to be a tangled subject. Consequently, my attempts to impose some order on it came to rely on the help of many friends and colleagues, on attentive audiences at academic presentations, as well as on the support of several institutions. My research was made possible by an American Council of Learned Societies fellowship, and a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship: I am deeply appreciative of both. I also owe a great deal to my employer, the University of Michigan, which allowed me time off to research the history of weeds in the first millennium AD, and to the Office of the Vice President for Research for supporting the publication of color images. Cathy Pense Rayos and Birgit Bucher helped me way beyond the call of duty in securing images, too. Thanks are due to groups of listeners at the University of Illinois, at Princeton University, at the University of Colorado, at Cal Tech, and at Yale University, who both egged me on and pointed out weaknesses in earlier versions of my weed studies.

For their willingness to read half-germinated drafts of chapters, for their saintly patience, and for suggesting numerous improvements, I must single out Alison Cornish, Deborah Deliyannis, Rich Hoffmann, Megan Holmes, Peggy McCracken, Laura Motta, Ellen Muehlberger, Tom Noble, and Marijke van der Veen. Vincenzo Binetti read a version of one chapter and encouraged me to iron out some of its wrinkles. My Michigan History colleagues Sue Juster, Val Kivelson, and Helmut Puff deserve a separate thank you for gamely including my writings in our reading circle, and for their helpful critiques. Thanks also to Noah Blan and David Patterson for teaching me much about Carolingian history. Cambridge University Press's three anonymous referees plowed through (and harrowed) the book with both acuity and kindness, proposing several ways to make it better. I am also indebted to Liz Friend Smith for overcoming her initial skepticism and loyally supporting the project as it evolved over several years. Finally, Hans Hummer was exceptionally generous with his time and wisdom, and swiftly read the entire

x Preface

manuscript at a critical juncture, producing a rich harvest of observations on how to turn it into a more coherent text.

I dedicate this book to someone who had nothing to do directly with its production, beyond listening occasionally to my ruminations on weeds. Yet long ago Jack Ullman showed me the great interest in unexpected histories, and the great beauty of historical landscapes. He also introduced me to early medieval Europe's past. More than forty years on, a book that examines some of the complexities of first-millennium agroecosystems is also a tribute to his infectious passion for comminglings of environment and history.

Abbreviations

CISAM	Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
PL	J. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina</i>

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-316-51286-9 — Weeds and the Carolingians
Paolo Squatriti
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)
