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University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

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Review of Periodical Literature for 2022: (i) 400–1100

Máirín MacCarron

University College Cork

The literature from the past year covered a range of themes including environmental history, cross-cultural connections, gender history, legal culture, and memory studies. We begin with gender. **Emily Winkler**'s assessment of Æthelflaed, ruler of Mercia in the early tenth century, challenges scholarly understanding of female power in this period. She argues persuasively that modern scholarship needs to distinguish between grammatical gender in Latin and gendered language. There are many examples of women ruling as lords where concerns about their gender do not arise in the sources. Of greater note to these women's contemporaries were practical matters such as their wealth, presence, and foreign relations. Winkler demonstrates that later historians, including the influential writers of history in twelfth-century England, were enamoured with Æthelflaed because of the nature of the challenges that she faced. She dismisses suggestions that they saw a link between Æthelflaed and Empress Matilda (1102–1167) because they were both women, and argues that it was Æthelflaed's triumphs for Mercia, not her gender, that separated her from other rulers. **Alex Traves** also considers royal women in his analysis of early medieval royal genealogies in Asser's *Life of King Alfred*. He argues that the two genealogies of royal women included by Asser – concerning Alfred's mother and wife – performed an important political function for Alfred's dynasty. Alfred used his ancestry to justify ruling an enlarged kingdom: his mother, Osburh helped in asserting his rights over recent additions to Wessex; his wife, Ealhswith gave Alfred's son, Edward (and indeed his daughter Æthelflaed, see Winkler), a legitimate claim to rule in Mercia. Traves concludes that male royal genealogies were concerned with tracing the origins and legitimacy of a dynasty's authority, while female genealogies were focussed on narrower and perhaps more pressing political objectives.

Georgina Pitt also turns her attention to Alfred the Great, asking why his elites supported his vast system of defence by constructing the burghal network in the ninth century. Through an analysis of the material record of fortifications alongside the sparse entries in the textual record (Asser's *Life of Alfred* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*), and using assemblage theory and social practice theory, she argues for the close connection between Alfredian ideology and military reform. Alfred was a good Christian king who led and protected his people, and those who obeyed him were protected; in contrast, the people who disobeyed his orders, for example, to construct burhs, were punished by the Vikings. Pitt hypothesises that Alfred's reforms created a 'feedback loop' that revealed the relationship between leadership and obedience in a Christian community which ultimately validated his methods.

A famous omission in Asser's *Life of Alfred* is the name of Alfred's wife, Ealhswith. However, **Julia Hillner et al.**'s study of female namelessness in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages argues that women could be left nameless for a variety of reasons which can be categorised as pragmatic, rhetorical or socio-cultural. In their analysis of sources from the late Roman world, Merovingian Gaul, and early medieval Northumbria, they have identified practices such as not naming women

who were still alive due to concerns about modesty and respectability, and 'delayed' naming where a character is at first unnamed to have their name revealed later in the narrative. They have noted that large numbers of characters are unnamed in late antique and early medieval story-telling (56% in the texts they examined) and argue that we should consider problematising when women appear with names, rather than without names. **Ulriika Vihervalli** reassesses our understanding of wartime rape during the depredations of the fifth century. She notes that a clerical tendency to use the reality of rape to explore other topics, such as free will and compromised consent, obscures the lived experience of rape in this period. In addition, she observes that when Christian writers are concerned with victims of rape following the sack of cities such as Rome, they singled out consecrated virgins leading to a 'victim bias'. Due to the special place of these 'holy women' in society, such attacks had a particularly damaging effect on their communities and may be why they were such a particular concern of male clerics.

Emma Brownlee's reassessment of bed burials as a funerary rite in early medieval Europe extends from Slovakia to Britain and Scandinavia from the fifth to early tenth centuries. Her analysis of '72 possible or definite cases' (p. 1) indicates regional variety, including examples of beds with roofs. There is a wide chronological range for bed burials on continental Europe while the burials in England are primarily dated to the seventh century. Brownlee argues that the English bed burials were associated with elite Christian women and hypothesises that the rite may have been used for women who migrated to England during this period. **Gjermund Kolltveit** also analyses connections across the medieval world with an engaging discussion of wooden lyres that extends to central Asia. He notes that the better preserved of two wooden lyres found at Dzhetyasar in Kazakhstan is almost identical in size, shape and method of construction to contemporaneous instruments in Western Europe, the most famous of which was found at the early seventh-century Sutton Hoo ship burial in England. This discovery dramatically expands the geographical range of 'European' lyre traditions and enriches our understanding of early Eurasian musical exchanges.

Pia Šmalcelj Novaković examines the material heritage of continental Croatia during the eighth century, or the late Avar period. She presents a list of the 66 known Avar-age sites in the region and discusses the rich archaeological findings which indicate supra-regional contacts and may suggest the region was a location for cross-border trade. Novaković speculates that the distribution of Avar-age sites in the area along the Danube may be linked to the Danube *limes* and identifies finds linked with the Carolingians, to whom the Avars lost their independence following the military campaigns of Charlemagne and his allies. Staying with material heritage, **Eleanor Blakelock et al.** consider the evidence for metalworking at Rendlesham in south-eastern Suffolk during the fifth to eighth centuries. Finds from the site included gold and gold-and-garnet jewellery, along with Merovingian and English gold coinage, suggesting it was a royal settlement and potentially the East Anglian *vicus regius* referred to by Bede (*Historia ecclesiastica* 3:22). The article outlines the unequivocal evidence for early medieval metalworking at the location and the team's close analysis of copper alloys presents a detailed account of the manufacturing process for copper alloy objects. Lead isotopic analysis indicated that the lead-ore came from continental Europe, rather than Britain, and are consistent with studies of late Roman period alloys, findings which indicate the widespread and long-term recycling of metal sources during this period.

Simon Coupland re-assesses the role of coinage in the Carolingian world following the discovery of a number of coin hoards and single finds over the last 20 or so years. The evidence suggests that there was a steady increased in the number of coins in circulation during the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, which reversed after 840. However, along with differences over time, there is also significant variation between different regions of the Carolingian empire,

suggesting we should think of 'Carolingian economies' rather than the 'Carolingian economy' (p. 395). Coupland argues that coinage was more widespread than previously thought and many ordinary Franks carried coins in daily life, raising the prospect that the Carolingian economy – or economies – could be seen as monetized. The sheer amount of surviving coins, which were the most commonly written objects in the Carolingian world, opens up opportunities for future, specifically interdisciplinary, research on questions relating to the economy, politics and society.

Gabriele Castiglia contributes to our growing understanding of cosmopolitanism in north Africa during the early Middle Ages in her examination of the evidence for religious change in the port-city of Adulis in modern-day Eritrea through a close study of two early Christian churches dated to the sixth and early seventh centuries. Building on the work of Timothy Insoll (2021), she argues for a less Western-centric understanding of the Horn of Africa and identifies evidence for the coexistence of pagan and Christian and local and non-local elements, which she terms 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (p. 1569). Religious change did not introduce a clear-cut break with the past in this region, rather, multiple influences led to new and distinct identities, which, Castiglia argues, allow us to see cosmopolitanism 'as the force that shapes past – and indeed present – societies' (p. 1570). **Erika Hermanowicz** also examines the church in Africa, though her concern is African ecclesiastical wealth. She disputes the prevailing view in much historiography that the church in Africa was wealthy, noting that the distinction between productive and unproductive wealth has received insufficient attention. She also argues that political instability in North Africa, which was usually followed by efforts to align religion to the current administration's tastes, made the long-term accumulation and consolidation of wealth by any Christian group very difficult. Following the forced unification of the Donatist Church with the Catholic Church after 411, both sides faced potential financial loss through merging their bishoprics. Hermanowicz notes that church figures on both sides may have resisted sharing their resources with poorer clerics through obfuscation or dispersal of their property using methods such as 'gifts' to non-family members when the transfer was not real or church wealth passing to a bishop's family patrimony. This fluidity in church finances may have been a factor in the persistence of the Donatist church.

Staying in North Africa, **Nicoletta De Troia** presents a reassessment of the oases of Egypt's Western Desert. She traces their history as part of Byzantine Egypt to becoming independent kingdoms in the early Islamic period. The oases were on several important trade routes through the Western Desert, including being the gateway to Egypt for the trans-Saharan route from Ghana to the Nile Valley. At the time they became independent kingdoms, the oases were experiencing population decline due to the increasing presence of nomadic groups, such as the Mazices, suggesting Byzantine control over the region was diminishing. The extent to which they had been part of the political and administrative life of Roman and Byzantine Egypt can be seen in the penalty of forced banishment to an oasis. Despite their later independence, these kingdoms maintained close ties with Arab Egypt.

Turning to environmental history, **Edward M. Schoolman** re-examines the impact of human activities on sixth-century landscapes through examining the Rieti basin in central Italy and a larger area of Sicily. Italy in the sixth century was greatly affected by warfare, conquest, pandemic, and climate change; however, Schoolman argues that the impact of these events was uneven and the communities in his two case studies continued to manage their landscapes effectively during this period. He highlights their resilience in response to multiple threats, including new economic and political models, by combining traditional practices with innovative approaches – such as adopting new agricultural products. The dominant drivers of environmental change at a local level continued to be human activities in this period: for example, landscapes that had previously been managed by

humans were reclaimed by forests. Although the surviving written sources present a picture of decline and catastrophe, reflecting the experiences of the elite and wealthy, the ecological data show that the rural communities – who represent the vast majority of the population – survived and adapted. **Marijke Van Der Veen** reviews archaeobotanical evidence to assess changes in farming practices on the island of Britain from the Roman to early medieval periods. The most significant change concerns the replacement of glum wheats (emmer and spelt) with bread wheat, which occurred during the fifth to mid-seventh centuries. Multiple factors may have caused this change, including the reduction of the heavy Roman tax burden after Rome's withdrawal, which allowed famers to take greater risks in their crop production, and that bread wheat was more desirable, especially to the elite and possibly to Christians due to the association of the Eucharist with white bread. The data indicate that there were differences between the north and west compared to the south and east, with further variations within these regions.

There were two studies of legal culture. **Ingrid Ivarsen** reassesses the evidence for early English law codes, all of which were believed to have been issued in Old English, and argues that the laws of King Ine of Wessex (688–726) were originally written in Latin. Ine's law-code survives as a form of appendix to the law-code of Alfred, which was compiled about 150 years after Ine's reign. In a close and compelling analysis of Ine's laws, as they have been transmitted to us, Ivarsen argues that the legal content is from the seventh century but the language is ninth century. She observes that Ine may have been inspired by copies of Frankish legal texts and proposes that Latin may have been the language of administrative and legal matters in Wessex in the late-seventh and early-eighth centuries, noting that surviving legal documents from the kingdom in this period were all written in Latin. A particularly important aspect of this article is her discussion of words like 'English' and *wealh*, meaning a 'Briton' or foreign/slave, in Ine's law-codes. These terms carry a lot of weight in analyses of identity and ethnicity in this period, but their significance is undermined if we are reading ninth-century rather than seventh-century terminology. **Stefan Esders** analyses the legal cultures of Catalonia and northern Italy in the period after the decline of the Carolingians. Both of his chosen regions had rich extant charters and high standards in notarial practice and administrative literacy despite their differing histories. He sees further grounds for comparison in that both regions received legal and other texts from external sources, managed by monasteries and ecclesiastical centres, which were combined with regional and pre-Carolingian law-codes to form a new-type of law-book: the *Liber Papiensis* in Pavia and the *Liber iudicum popularis* in Barcelona. The long-lasting impact of the Carolingian commitment to legal pluralism in the regions under their control is evident in both law-books, though more overtly in the Pavia *liber*. Moreover, the two case studies reveal the manner in which local authorities had to respond to multi-layered structures of legitimacy in balancing local or regional traditions within the wider horizons of Carolingian rule, and suggest that a new appreciation of 'old law' became apparent in the period around 1000.

We conclude with two studies of the role of memory in the writings of Gregory of Tours. **John Mellington**'s absorbing study examines Gregory's reconstruction work at Tours, which he notes took pride of place in the presentation of his works in the final book of the *Histories*. Indeed, he suggests that the *Decem Libri Historiarum* (*Ten books of Histories*) themselves could be understood as an 'archival building project' (p. 184). Gregory was particularly concerned with restoring the cathedral church of Tours and St Martin's Basilica after their destruction by fire during his predecessor's reign. As many of the objects in the churches of Tours had been presented as gifts to Gregory's predecessors, their existence served to remind those in the present of the networks and connections within which Tours was embedded. Consequently, Mellington argues, Gregory preserved information about these earlier gifts in his *Histories* to ensure that future bishops of Tours would continue to participate in these networks of obligations. For Mellington, shared memory is

understood as an ongoing process. Gregory's model for the *Histories* may have been works like the *Liber pontificalis* (*Book of pontiffs*) rather than Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical history*, and he therefore could be credited with creating a new hybrid of universal church history and episcopal history. **Rachel Singer** also re-examines Gregory's *Histories*, though her specific concern is his account of the famous nuns' revolt at Poitiers. Although the instigators were both Clotild and Basina, Gregory placed more blame on Clotild despite including the bishops' judgement from a tribunal which deemed them equally culpable. Singer argues that Basina's subsequent actions are key to Gregory's depiction of her, specifically her repentance – which is a major theme in the *Histories* – and led to her obtaining genuine forgiveness in his mind.

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