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David GANZ, *Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance*, Sigmaringen (Thorbecke) 1990, 176 p., 16 plates (Beihefte der Francia, 20).

David Ganz's long awaited study of the scriptorium and library of Corbie proves to be original and exemplary in conception. Combining many talents (as palaeographer he is not deaf, as philologist not blind) he remains first and foremost a historian. After ›The Cathedral School of Laon‹ of J. Contreni, published as long ago as 1978, now for the second time the surviving manuscripts of an important early medieval intellectual centre are studied for what they can tell us about the spiritual, intellectual and material needs which their production was hoped to satisfy. As Ganz puts it: ›To regard the scribe as no more than a scribe is to overlook his role as a participating member of the monastic community, present at the abbot's collations, at the frequent masses, trained at the school, involved in the administration of the abbey's estates. All such tasks required skills which might involve some recourse to books‹ (p. 44). ›To determine the origin and provenance of a manuscript is not enough: the conditions of its production involve finding out why it was thought useful. ... If we eschew the search for a scriptorium's functions we reduce our science to mere empiricism‹ (p. 56). The book is an eloquent plea for the possibilities offered to cultural history by the detailed examination of manuscripts. (Ganz's own acute observations on the Corbie manuscripts are detailed in chapter 7 [p. 124–158], which will long remain the first port of call for anyone studying the Corbie library.)

The novel approach of the book required a treatment in four parts. First a short history of the royal abbey from its foundation in 659 till the end of the ninth century is provided, in which an impression is given of the literary needs generated by the monastic ideal, politics, theology and the expansion of Carolingian christendom (the foundation of Corvey and, hence, the missionary activities of Ansgar in Scandinavia), all of which might occasion recourse to the written word (chapter 1, p. 14–35).

Next, the growth of the library through productions of the Corbie scriptorium and imports from elsewhere is dealt with. It is the story of the books and texts themselves: classical and patristic texts as well as texts of more recent date, which the Corbie monks might use in their attempts to find answers to the new questions contemporary reality put to them (chapter 2, p. 36–67). The treatment is chronological, dealing with the various groups of manuscripts which can be distinguished on palaeographical grounds, inferring changing interests of abbots and librarians from the changing contents of manuscripts copied (p. 67). A long section is devoted to the mysterious ›AB‹-scriptorium of the late eighth century. Ganz refutes its traditional localization at Corbie, which by that time had a scriptorium writing a beautiful early Carolingian minuscule, the Maudramnus script. However, in order not to preempt the conclusions of T.A.M. Bishop's work, he tantalizingly leaves us in doubt as to his opinion of its real whereabouts. The chapter starts with a very short *historique* of the dispersal of the library and earlier studies devoted to its history.

The third part of the argument discusses the evidence for the use of the library from annotations in the surviving manuscripts (chapter 3, p. 68–80). Something of the reading practices at Corbie is known from Hildemar's commentary on the *Rule* (p. 70–71). The annotations allow us to read over the shoulder of the Corbie monks themselves. In this highly original chapter, the first consistent attempt to show how a whole community struggled to master its heritage of classical and patristic authorities (p. 79), we are allowed an insight into the reading habits of those members of the intellectual elite who did not leave us texts of a length exceeding that of the occasional marginal note. Ganz provides us with a ›vocabulary‹ of annotations (p. 68–69) which helps to grasp the problems and possibilities of using this type of source.

The final part studies the use of quotations by Corbie authors: in theological works (chapter 4, p. 82–92), florilegia (chapter 4, p. 92–101) and biography (chapter 5, p. 103–123). The function of the quotations is discussed in relation to the genre of the works in which they

occur (cf. p. 81); the works themselves are discussed in relation to the questions exercising the minds of their authors and their contemporaries. We are therefore getting much more than we are accustomed to expect from a book which starts out as a study of a medieval library: extensive treatment of the theological works of Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus, the classical and patristic florilegia of Hadoard, and of the biographies by Paschasius Radbertus of Adalhard and Wala (the *Epitaphium Arsenii*). The study of quotations shows more than anything how the Carolingian Renaissance was meant: as the spread of learning (p. 92). At the beginning of this part a distinction is made between the ›working library‹ of individuals such as Hincmar of Rheims, used to search for texts of immediate utility, and libraries such as that of Corbie, meant to transmit a cultural heritage (p. 81–82). This distinction seems somehow at odds with the thesis of the book, and needs to be qualified: just as Hincmar's library cannot be equated with the library at Rheims, just so the selection of codices used by Ratramnus or Hadoard in the composition of their works cannot be identified with the whole of the Corbie library. As Ganz conclusively demonstrates, the Corbie library was instrumental in transmitting and editing the intellectual heritage of the past. But this was done to satisfy the needs of the present, and selections of texts were indeed ›quarried for evidence to resolve new problems‹ (p. 121).

As an encore Ganz prints several unedited texts from Corbie manuscripts (chapter 8, p. 159–162).

All in all, the argument of the book is convincing. The reconstruction of a major Carolingian library and the light it sheds on the ways in which the Carolingian Renaissance provided ›an available and comprehensive classical and patristic tradition‹ enables one – if one has the talents and endurance of a David Ganz – to study also how the ›tradition was accepted and assimilated subject to every form of fluctuation‹ (p. 11). Are there no criticisms to be made? There certainly are, and although they concern blemishes which are mainly matters of detail, it is a problem that there are quite a number of them. Clarity might often be enhanced by expanding the extremely compact and hence sometimes baffling formulations¹. This is indeed a very short book for the large subject it treats and the many noteworthy observations it contains. One would have liked some redundancy here and there. Here one might argue that ›le style c'est l'homme‹, but the many typographical errors certainly are not to be excused so easily. Usually they merely distract one's attention from the author's argument; sometimes, when they occur in quotations² or references³, they make one uneasy about the typographical accuracy of the observations on the manuscripts themselves. It almost seems as if a last set of corrections was not taken into account by the compositors prior to handing the book to the printers. Another problem are the indices. The three pages devoted to the ›general index‹ are insufficient to give references to all origins and provenances of the manuscripts mentioned in the book, let alone all names and topics covered. The reader is well advised to make copious notes as he reads. Worse, the ›index of manuscripts‹, the main key to unlock the treasury of Ganz's observations, is also incomplete⁴. We can only hope that these maddening disfigurements will be cured by the second edition, for the book certainly deserves better: it is not every day one reads a boldly original contribution in the field of early medieval cultural history.

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1 I give two examples: Why is ›the specific placing of Luxeuil at the end‹ of a clause in a charter (after three other churches) an argument for the thesis that ›this clause may emphasize that abbey's role as a model‹ (p. 17)? Why is the ›omission‹ of Hrabanus' commentaries ›evidence of the library's strength‹ (p. 67)?

2 At p. 71, 106, 111 and 115.

3 Two examples: p. 25 n. 87: for 9–10, p. 36–37 read 10, p. 37; p. 30 n. 125: the Astronomer does not occur here, but in the introduction of Dümmler, p. 15.

4 Several manuscripts mentioned on p. 59–60 do not figure in the index.