

Steffen Patzold, Presbyter. Moral, Mobilität und die Kirchenorganisation im Karolingerreich, Stuttgart (Hiersemann) 2020, 599 S. (Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, 68), ISBN 978-3-7772-2023-9, EUR 169,00.

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In his monumental *Habilitationsschrift*, published in 2008 under the title »Episcopus«¹, Steffen Patzold studied the rise of a new Carolingian model of Christian governance, in which episcopal authority played a central and most crucial role. Far from being mere agents of religious life and pastoral care, bishops in early medieval Francia, especially from the time of Louis the Pious onwards, emerged as a fundamental component of Carolingian polity. However, no matter how important and dominant bishops were in forging Carolingian politics and reforms, most of the pastoral duties in the early Middle Ages were carried out by local or itinerant priests.

Although by the time of Pippin III (the book's starting point), Canon Law had already laid down a clear cursus of priestly degrees, in actuality the situation was rather fluid and inconsistent, and *presbyter* became a generic term for any cleric who was not a bishop. Yet, albeit the fact that priests were by far the largest group of clergymen in the Carolingian world, Carolingian priests had fared badly in modern scholarship. Unlike Carolingian bishops, who received much attention in recent studies, the amount of literature on priests, their duties and their social role, is surprisingly small. Apart from Carine van Rhijn's remarkable book »Shepherds of the Lord«² and, to a certain extent, Julia Barrow's »The Clergy in the Medieval World«³ very little research has been dedicated to the study of Carolingian priesthood. The reasons for that anomaly are complex. On the one hand, the episcopal bias of our sources shifted the attention of scholars to bishops, and particularly to a select group of very active bishops, who appear larger than life. On the other hand, we find modern prejudices and condescending attitudes, fueled by the lurid image of the illiterate, mindless early medieval priest, so contemptuously portrayed by some

¹ Steffen Patzold, *Episcopus: Wissen über Bischöfe im Frankenreich des späten 8. bis frühen 10. Jahrhunderts*, Ostfildern 2008 (Mittelalter-Forschungen, 25).

² Carine van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord: Priests and Episcopal Statutes in the Carolingian Period*, Turnhout 2007 (Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, 6).

³ Julia Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World: Secular Clerics, Their Families and Careers in North-Western Europe, c. 800–c. 1200*, Cambridge 2015.



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contemporary sources. To these one may add the influential and poised model of the *Eigenkirche*, put forward by Ulrich Stutz at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. According to Stutz, throughout the early medieval West secular landowners had established small local churches (*Eigenkirchen*) as a kind of investment that can generate regular income (mainly through the tithe) and control over the rural population. They staffed these churches with poor and uneducated priests, many of whom were manumitted serfs, who consequently owed their loyalty and gratitude to their landowner and, in many respects, remained under his control. Hence, after Stutz, any attempt to study early medieval priests per se seemed more of a futile exercise than a serious engagement. Steffen Patzold's superb book under review here fills that gap.

The book contains nine chapters, framed by a short introduction at the beginning and a brief wrap-up at the end. In the first chapter (p. 25–47) Patzold lays the foundations for his unfolding argument by presenting Stutz's theory and arguing against it. He demonstrates how Stutz's model was imbued with 19th century notions, formulated mainly by scholars from the so-called *Rechtsschule*, and he endorses a different reading of the sources. Each of the subsequent chapters discusses a different aspect of the priestly life in Carolingian Francia, such as the formation of a new type of clergy under the emerging Carolingian Church order and *correctio* (p. 49–88); the priests in their local habitus (p. 89–158); reflections of priests in the legal sources (p. 159–239); the tithe (p. 241–303); the education and learning of local priests (p. 305–388); priests and their families (p. 389–417); and the social networks of local priests (p. 419–475). In the final concluding chapter (p. 477–502), Patzold ties the ends of the foregoing discussions and presents a nuanced and coherent picture of Carolingian *presbyteri* as powerful political and religious brokers, whose contribution to the formation of the Carolingian order must be taken seriously.

Patzold's book, in which Carolingian *presbyteri* take centre stage, is exemplarily argued and thoroughly researched. Patzold leaves no stone unturned, and his grasp of the sources (both primary and modern) is indeed impressive. One does not have to agree with everything Patzold says, but one must acknowledge the huge amount of scholarship and thought-provoking insights crammed into this book. »Presbyter« is written in a splendid flowing style, inlaid with the witty Patzold sense of humour. After all, the book is dedicated to »LSD«. I know it is not what it seems at face value, but nevertheless it put a silly smile on my face that even 599 pages of German prose did not manage to erase.



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