Jace Stuckey (ed.), The Legend of Charlemagne. Envisioning Empire in the Middle Ages, Leiden (Brill Academic Publishers) 2021, 320 p., 9 fig. (Explorations in Medieval Culture, 15), ISBN 978-90-04-33564-6, EUR 134,00.

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This volume from Brill complements an existing English-language literature on the medieval European legend of Charlemagne that has grown particularly over the last decade and a half. There is of course work by Jace Stuckey (the editor of this volume under review), books by Anne A. Latowsky and Matthew Gabriele[1], as well as a number of rich and varied publications from the »Charlemagne: A European Icon« project led by Marianne Ailes at the University of Bristol[2], among many others. In all of these cases, the focus is often not on Charlemagne the man but rather on something more nebulous and insubstantial – a ghost that moves across modern genres and linguistic barriers throughout medieval Europe.

The first two essays of the current volume consider aspects of the legend's genesis. Cullen Chandler writes on the 9th century, summarizing the development of the growing stature of Charlemagne in the decades after his death. All the standard texts are here, from Einhard and others composed under Louis the Pious, to Notker and the Poeta Saxo. Jace Stuckey then revisits the connections of Charlemagne to the East. This essay also covers well-trodden territory, beginning in the 10th century, moving through the narratives of the late 11th and early 12th centuries (including the narratives of the so-called »First Crusade«), and then concluding with a very quick survey of late 12th- and 13th-century mentions connecting Charlemagne to the Christian Holy Land.

The book moves quickly to the next section and to the history written in the later Middle Ages. Carla del Zotto examines Charlemagne's connection to Santiago de Compostella, in both Iberian and Norse traditions, finding similar types of myth-making at work. Next, Christopher P. Flynn considers Charles' representation in the »Speculum Historiale« of Vincent of Beauvais and finds his work, in compiling and expanding Charlemagne's fictional exploits, to have had massive influence on creating the Frankish king as »harbinger of an expanding Europe« (p. 105). The

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1 Anne A. Latowsky, Emperor of the World. Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800–1229, Ithaca, NY, London 2013; Matthew Gabriele, An Empire of Memory. The Legend of Charlemagne, the Franks, and Jerusalem before the First Crusade, Oxford 2011.
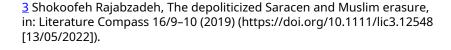2 https://www.charlemagne-icon.ac.uk/ (13/05/2022).

last essay in the section, by Jade Bailey, pulls back a bit to think with how Charlemagne became an exemplar for English kings in the 15th century. Here, focusing on the »Shrewsbury Book« in the British Library, Bailey moves through the five texts within the codex that feature Charlemagne, concluding that he figures as a moral lesson for the manuscript's readers – both role model and cautionary tale.

These essays in turn lead to another section of the edited volume on late medieval literature. Ana Grinberg's focus on the shape of Charlemagne in the romance »Mainet«, which she finds to be less like a crusader than might be previously imagined. In addition, the texts invert expectations of power in interesting ways that represent Charles as a rather unwelcome invader in Iberian affairs. Elizabeth Ponder Melick thinks with the »Saracens« as they were shown in Middle English romances featuring Charles, though this essay really should have engaged with the work of Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh who demonstrates the deep, structural problems of uncritically using the pejorative term in medieval studies[3]. The last essay in this section is by Larissa Tracy, who compares and contrasts Charlemagne and Arthur and how those figures became ciphers for a contested national identity in English romances.

The volume closes with a really wonderful essay by William J. Diebold on a 2003 exhibition at Aachen that featured, among other subjects, objects related to Isaac, Charlemagne's Jewish emissary to Caliph Harun al-Rashid and the elephant Isaac returned with. Diebold astutely guides the reader through the decisions made and impacts felt by this exhibition, how it subtly (and not so subtly) de-centered Charlemagne himself by naming only Isaac in its subtitle, and being »relentlessly presentist« (p. 244) in the objects it curated and their presentation. Despite these choices, the Charlemagne that a visitor to the exhibition found was quite familiar, building comfortably on tropes about his outlook and rulership that began even within his own early medieval lifetime.

It has been said many times before but edited volumes can be feast or famine – either tightly knit collections that subtly build upon one another and cohere into something magnificent, or they can be disparate and disconnected with only the meagerest threads to link the individual essays together. This collection fits neither extreme. There absolutely is a clear thread (the figure of Charlemagne himself) that links all the essays together and the individual sections work well on their own. The essays on individual manuscripts are in particular fascinating and well-supported in their arguments.

That said, the introductions of the essays tend to be repetitive with the same few pages offering an overview of »who Charlemagne

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3 Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, The depoliticized Saracen and Muslim erasure, in: Literature Compass 16/9–10 (2019) (https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12548 [13/05/2022]).

was« or »how the legend grew« occurring several times. On that latter point, almost all the essays follow a very direct (and very traditional) scholarly understanding of text-to-text connections and implicit argument from embellishment. Einhard influenced Notker, who then was used by the anonymous authors of the »Descriptio qualiter Karolus Magnus«, and so on. This is fine so far as it goes but demonstrates too little engagement with scholarship on medieval memory and nostalgia, narrativity, discussions of genre difference (or in many cases lack thereof), and the purpose of medieval history-writing[4]. We lose, in other words, a bit of a sense of the »how« and »why« related to the medieval Charlemagne legend. This is unfortunate.

Finally, it should be noted that the title »The Legend of Charlemagne: Envisioning Empire in the Middle Ages« harbors another ghost that troubles the volume. Certainly, all of the authors are talking about rulership but »empire« is more-or-less absent. This matters because that distinction – between king and emperor, between *regnum* and *imperium* – matters as well, one that the Carolingians themselves as well as those in succeeding centuries thought very hard about and worked to either elide or disentangle (depending on the specific historical context).

In the end, the volume is a solid addition to a still-expanding scholarship on the subject of the Charlemagne legend. It is, as with all Brill books, shockingly priced but will nevertheless find a home in many professional and personal libraries with individual essays within surely enjoying, not unlike Charlemagne, long afterlives.

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4 Mary J. Carruthers, The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture, Cambridge 2008; Svetlana Boym, The future of nostalgia, New York 2001; Marcus Graham Bull, Eyewitness and Crusade Narrative. Perception and Narration in Accounts of the Second, Third and Fourth Crusades, Woodbridge 2019; Felice Lifshitz, Beyond Positivism and Genre: »Hagiographical« Texts as Historical Narrative, in: Viator 25 (1994), p. 95–114; Matthew Gabriele, This time. Maybe this time. Biblical Commentary, Monastic Historiography, and Lost Cause-ism at the Turn of the First Millennium, in: Id., James T. Palmer (ed.), Apocalypse and Reform from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages, Routledge 2018, p. 183–203.