The eighth century in western Europe was a time of new developments, an expansion of Christendom and fresh beginnings. It was a period of a remarkable efflorescence of culture, especially in the Frankish realm. This culture was based securely on the intellectual and cultural achievements of the preceding four centuries as well as the legacy of the Roman world. Yet, in the Frankish kingdom, very considerable impetus from the 780s onwards would appear to have been provided by the ruler, Charlemagne, himself.

Charlemagne’s patronage of learning should be seen, first of all, in the context of the promotion and endowment of learning and culture by powerful and wealthy men and women in late antiquity and the early middle ages. The patrons of culture in this period were usually the rulers. Thus there was the encouragement of poetry in the time of the Roman emperor Augustus; the interests in learning cultivated by the Theodosian rulers in the Roman empire in the fourth century; the elaborate programme of public building and architecture conducted by the Byzantine emperor Justinian, Thrasamund, the Vandal king in North Africa, and Theoderic, the Ostrogothic ruler of Italy in the late fifth and sixth centuries; the cultural activities of the Merovingian rulers of Frankish Gaul such as Chilperic of Neustria and Dagobert I in the sixth and seventh centuries, as well as the achievements of the Lombard rulers Liutprand and Desiderius in the eighth century and the Byzantine emperor Theophilus; similarly, scholarship and the acquisition of books were promoted by such Anglo-Saxon rulers as Aldfrith of Northumbria, Offa of Mercia, Alfred of Wessex and Æthelstan of England.

All these instances indicate that it was clearly accepted, perhaps even expected, behaviour on the part of a ruler to evince an active interest in intellectual and cultural matters. Indeed, the patronage of learning could be regarded as one of the obligations of royalty. Yet Charlemagne’s patronage of learning was combined
with a legislative programme for reform and renewal within the Frankish church and society. In his reign we see an organised and determined assembly and deployment of resources to carry out specific aims.

The aim of learning

Charlemagne’s own legislation, in conjunction with a story told by Notker Balbulus (The Stammerer) in his Gesta Karoli, helps us to identify what these aims were. Notker was from the monastery of St-Gallen in present-day Switzerland and was writing for the Emperor Charles the Fat (Charlemagne’s great-great grandson) at the end of the ninth century:

At the moment when Charlemagne had begun to reign as sole king in the western regions of the world, two Scots from Ireland happened to visit the coast of Gaul in the company of some British traders. These men were unrivalled in their knowledge of sacred and profane letters at a time when the pursuit of learning was almost forgotten throughout the length and breadth of Charlemagne’s kingdom and the worship of the true God was at a very low ebb. They had nothing on display to sell, but every day they used to shout to the crowds who had collected together [in the market] to buy things: ‘If anyone wants wisdom let him come to us and receive it; for it is wisdom which we have for sale.’

They announced that they wanted to sell wisdom because they saw that the people were more interested in what had to be paid for than in anything given free. Either they really thought that they could persuade the crowd who were buying things to pay for wisdom too; or else, as subsequent events proved to be true, they hoped that by making their announcement they would become the sources of wonder and astonishment. They went on shouting their wares in public so long that in the end the news was carried by the onlookers, who certainly found them remarkable and maybe thought them wrong in the head, to the ears of King Charles the Great himself, who was always an admirer and great collector of wisdom.

He ordered them to be summoned to his presence immediately and he asked them if it was true, as everyone was saying, that they had brought wisdom with them. They answered, ‘Yes indeed we have it and in the name of God we are prepared to impart it to any worthy folk who seek it.’ When Charlemagne asked them what payment they wanted for wisdom, they answered, ‘We make no charge, O king. All we ask is a place suitable for us to teach in and talented minds to train; in addition of course, to food to eat and clothes to wear, for without these our mission cannot be accomplished.’

Charlemagne was delighted to receive this answer. For a short time he kept them both with him. Later on, when he was obliged to set out on a series of military expeditions, he established one of the two, who was called Clement, in Gaul itself. In his care he placed a great number of boys chosen not only from the noblest families but also from middle-class and poor homes; and he made sure
that food should be provided and accommodation suitable for study should be made available. Charlemagne sent the second man, Dungal, to Italy and put him in charge of the monastery of St Augustine near the town of Padua so that all who wished might join him there and receive instruction from him.

Notker associated learning with the worship of the true God, and stressed the role of teachers and students in the cultivation of learning. Charlemagne himself, in a letter (the De litteris colendis, 'On cultivating letters') sent c. 800 to the bishops and abbots of his vast empire, reinforced the association of learning and the Christian faith:

We exhort you not only not to neglect the study of letters but also with most humble and God-pleasing application to learn zealously for a purpose, namely, that you may be able the more easily and the more correctly to penetrate the mysteries of divine scripture. And since figures of speech, tropes and such like are to be found embedded in the sacred pages, there is no doubt that the more fully anyone reading these is instructed beforehand in the mastery of letters, the more quickly he will gain spiritual understanding. But let such men be chosen for the work as have both the will and the ability to learn and the desire to instruct others. And let it be carried out with a zeal matching the devotion with which we order it.

In an earlier decree, the Admonitio generalis (General Admonition) of 789, moreover, Charlemagne had insisted that 'schools should be established for teaching boys the psalms, not as (scholars dispute whether this means writing, shorthand, or musical notation), singing, computation, and grammar in every monastery and episcopal residence'. The books were to be corrected properly 'for often, while people want to pray to God in proper fashion, they yet pray improperly because of the uncorrected books. And do not allow your boys to corrupt them, either in reading or copying; if there is a need to copy the Gospel, Psalter or Missal, let men of full age do the writing with all diligence'. Not long after 786, Charlemagne had addressed a letter to the lectors or readers in the churches, pointing out how 'We long ago accurately corrected, God helping us in all things, all the books of the Old and New Testaments, corrupted by the ignorance of the copyists'. Charlemagne, as a Christian ruler, was ensuring that the word of God in a proper and correct form was disseminated to all his leading monasteries and cathedrals. In the schools, correct language was to be taught by teachers – such as the two Irishmen in Notker's story – from correct texts, in order to achieve a correct and orthodox understanding of the Christian faith.

This extraordinary effort made by Charlemagne, his scholars and their pupils is the cultural and religious achievement that modern scholars have labelled the 'Carolingian Renaissance'. Nor was it an ephemeral achievement; this vibrant new culture of the late eighth and the ninth centuries provided the essential foundation for European culture thereafter. It must be stressed, though, that the Franks
were Rome's heirs. They made Roman and Christian ideas and techniques of art
and scholarship their own. The Christian church provided both the spiritual and
moral framework, and the specific educational and liturgical needs which the
Carolingians strove to fulfill. Yet the Franks in the Carolingian period were also
intensely creative; they built on what they had inherited and made vigorous use
of it to create something new and distinctively Carolingian that provided the
bedrock for the subsequent development of medieval European culture.7

The most obvious symbol of cultural continuity with the Roman past is that
the Franks used Latin as the language of government, education and worship, and
thereby ensured the survival of Latin as a living, universal language in religion,
statistics, law and scholarship in Europe throughout the middle ages and into
the early modern period. In those areas under Carolingian rule which we now
know as France and northern and central Italy, Latin was in any case the vernacular
language of the Franks and the Lombards, although east of the Rhine Germanic
dialectic were current. In the Carolingian period, moreover, efforts were made to
refine and correct written Latin in relation to the classical texts of Roman anti-
quity. This increasingly created a division between the spoken tongue and the
written language; in the course of the later ninth and the tenth centuries, these
modified spoken vernaculars developed their own written forms and emerged as
French, Spanish and Italian.8

In the Carolingian period most of the extant books on all subjects are in Latin,
but east of the Rhine a few glossaries, translations of religious texts and poetry,
and some riddles and charms survive from the ninth century in various forms of
Old High German. Writing and literacy, furthermore, were fully integrated into
Frankish society – though there undoubtedly remained various levels of prag-
matic literacy and scholarly accomplishment; and many, such as a freed slave,
may have been able to do little more than grasp the importance of the written
document that granted his or her freedom. Although Carolingian civilization was
largely dependent on the written word in Latin and German for its religion,
government, learning, education and recording of the past, it was a society in
which written and oral modes were fully interdependent. Thus texts could reach a
wider audience by being read aloud or sung.9

**Bibles and other books**

It is with texts that any study of the Carolingian *renovatio* of learning and art has to
be concerned; even the illustrations in Carolingian art spring primarily from inter-
pretations and pictorial representations of texts, most notably that of the Bible.10

The text of the Bible itself was corrected and edited in the early Carolingian period.
As we have seen, the *Admonitio generalis* of 789, issued by Charlemagne, had iden-
tified a need to correct the texts used for the catholic religion. Many centres in the
Frankish realms thereafter worked to produce a correct Bible text within the
means at their disposal. That of the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin at Tours was largely a matter of careful correction of the orthography and comprehensive attention to the layout and organisation of the text. The Visigothic scholar Theodulf of Orléans, on the other hand, produced a scholarly edition. These two Carolingian editions of the Bible are the most famous, but many more appear to have been produced, combining Old Latin versions of different books of the Bible with the Vulgate translations made by Jerome in the early fifth century.

Not only was the Bible corrected, but authoritative versions of other books were also prepared for use in the churches and monasteries, such as the liturgical books for the mass, the Homiliary or book of sermons, the Antiphonary, canon law and the Rule of St Benedict, as well as the secular laws, including Roman law and those of the peoples under Frankish rule. We are able to document from surviving manuscripts how these corrected texts – and those copied from exemplars regarded as authoritative – were produced and disseminated under the auspices of Charlemagne and his son and successor, Louis the Pious. In other words, it is clear that extraordinary and successful efforts were made to carry out the intentions of the rulers and their advisers with respect to the production of books to assist the reforms of education and the church.

The aim was to establish uniform religious observance throughout the Frankish realm, and the copies of the approved and authorised versions of liturgical and ecclesiastical texts were widely disseminated. Some centres even appear to have specialised in the production of particular categories of these books. Tours, for example, became famous for its magnificent large-format one-volume Bibles, though the Bible at this time was more commonly copied and distributed in separate books or small groups of books, such as the Heptateuch, the Prophets, the psalter, the gospels, the epistles of Paul or the Apocalypse/Book of Revelation. St-Amand produced sacramentaries or mass books on commission from many other centres. From a writing centre associated with the royal court came a number of law books. Despite these efforts to promote a standard religious observance, harmony rather than uniformity was achieved; a great diversity of practice prevailed and many local communities persisted in the use of versions of texts to which they had become accustomed.

The output of books from the scriptoria of the Carolingian realm was prodigious. Even taking the problems of survival into account, the volume of book production was clearly far greater and more systematic than in the Merovingian period. These books served not only the needs of religious worship but also government and administration, spiritual discipline, intellectual endeavour, education and literary activity. In response to the need for texts, the distinctive caroline minuscule that had begun to evolve during the Merovingian period, based on Roman uncial, half-uncial and cursive letter forms, was refined and disseminated throughout the empire. In due course it was also introduced into Italy, England and Spain, along with many Carolingian texts. Many centres in
Carolingian Francia, Germany and Italy developed ‘house styles’ of script. Scribes were trained and scribal discipline was imposed to an unprecedented level.

Books were supplied for monastic and cathedral libraries, for both liturgical services in the churches and for individuals. The copying activities of the ateliers and the professional techniques developed for the efficient reproduction of texts were essential for the Carolingian achievement and the dissemination of ideas in Carolingian Europe. Every category of book was included, from sumptuous Gospel books, psalters, mass books and copies of the Church Fathers to canon and secular law, Carolingian royal capitularies, devotional texts, collections of saints’ lives, martyrologies and manuals on all manner of practical subjects. Some new categories of book were created as well, such as Libri memoriales or confraternity books, cartularies containing copies of an institution’s legal records organised geographically, episcopal handbooks which combined legal and devotional texts, history books comprising selections from more than one historical work and prayer books designed for particular individuals, the most famous of which is the Prayer Book of Charlemagne’s grandson, Charles the Bald (840–77).12

Information also circulated, mostly in the form of library catalogues and lists, about what books the properly-educated should aim to possess, and where one might acquire exemplars in order to make copies of such texts. Thus Lupus of Ferrières referred to a list of Einhard’s books that he had seen, and asked to borrow a copy of Cicero listed in it.13 Books were lent to other centres for copying or reading. In c.800, for example, books were lent from Würzburg to Fulda and Holzkirchen and there are instances of connections in the form of books borrowed between St-Denis, St-Gallen, Rheims, St-Amand, Corvey, Corbie, Auxerre and Lorsch. Some centres simply acquired them from other scriptoria, but most copied and created their own books. Even the royal court had groups of scribes and artists associated with it. The work of two groups is attributed to the Hofschule (‘Court school’) of Charlemagne, producing art in very different styles from each other and writing the texts in uncial (a script used for Christian books in the late Roman period) and in the new caroline minuscule.14

Education

Both the Admonitio generalis of 789 and the De litteris colendis issued c.800 also placed great emphasis on schools and education. The latter stressed that bishoprics and monasteries should not only devote themselves to the practice of the religious life and the observance of monastic discipline, but should also cultivate learning and educate the monks and secular clergy so that they might achieve a better understanding of the Christian writings. Information about the physical location and organisation of Carolingian schools is sparse, but the monasteries and cathedrals certainly educated children in their schools and these included those who were not necessarily destined for the religious life or ecclesiastical careers. Some
schools, such as those of Fulda, Tours, St-Gallen, Auxerre, Liège, Metz, Laon, Salzburg and Rheims, became particularly famous for their masters and for the teaching offered in such subjects as chant, music, philosophy, arithmetic or astronomy. These schools attracted many pupils who afterwards became prominent in public life and the secular church. Many centres became celebrated for the learned writings of certain scholars, such as Hadoard, Ratramnus and Paschasius at Corbie, Milo and Hucbald of St-Amand, Hraban Maur of Fulda, Martin of Laon, Heiric of Auxerre, Lupus of Ferrières or Walahfrid Strabo of Reichenau.

In the early Carolingian period not all these places had yet achieved prominence. A crucial role in the late eighth century was played by scholars from many countries who congregated briefly at the royal court and were thereafter established in various abbeys and bishoprics within the Frankish realms. These included the Franks Angilramm, Wigbod, Einhard and Angilbert; Alcuin the Northumbrian from York; Theodulf, a Visigoth from Septimania; Paul the Deacon, Paulinus of Aquileia and Peter of Pisa from the Lombard kingdom; Joseph and Dungal from Ireland; and many more. The court coterie is depicted in many of the poems written by these creative scholars.

Theodulf of Orléans in his poem on the court, for example, describes Charlemagne, the sight of whom ‘is more brilliant than thrice-smelted gold’, and his sons ‘youthful and strong, of powerful build’ and daughters ‘lovelier than any other’. Many of the men at court are described, not always very kindly, and some are given evocative nicknames, though Theodulf’s most vicious darts are reserved for the nameless ‘Irishman’: there is Wibod the brawny hero with the bloated belly, Eppinus the cupbearer, Flaccus (Alcuin), ‘a stimulating teacher and a melodious poet’, Riculf with his ‘strong voice, alert intelligence, and polished speech’, Ercambald taking notes on his tablets, Einhard, ‘small as an ant’ though ‘greatness dwells in the caverns of his little heart’. The ‘fine deacon Fridugis’ is ‘in company with Oswulf, both of them experts of Grammar and highly learned’ and ‘Menalcas’ lays down the law ‘as though at a synod’.

The intellectual interests of the scholars at court embraced Christian theology as well as the metrical forms of classical antiquity. Major works such as the Libri Carolini by Theodulf of Orléans concerning the place of art in the Christian church and the issue of iconoclasm, or the varied responses to the Spanish heresy of Adoptionism, were the direct outcome of the intense theological and philosophical discussion at court, which involved the king himself. A dramatic expression of the theological preoccupations of the Carolingian court was the Council of Frankfurt convened in 794. It responded to the Second Council of Nicaea of 787 which had condemned iconoclasts and defined the veneration to be accorded images. However, due to the Franks’ misunderstanding of the Greek arguments about images and the veneration that was due to them, the Acts of Nicaea II were condemned, along with the issue of iconoclasm. As well as the Libri Carolini on images, a dossier of treatises about Adoptionism was prepared.
Both compilations are impressive witnesses to the range of learning of early Carolingian scholars, the resources on which they were able to draw, in terms of earlier theological discussions and commentaries from the patristic period, and the independent views they were able to formulate.¹⁶

Many of the court scholars subsequently joined or set up monastic and cathedral schools and taught throughout the realm. Among these, Alcuin taught at Tours (having first acted as personal tutor to Charlemagne and his daughters) and numbered many leading scholars of the next generation among his pupils, not least Hraban Maur of Fulda. He also continued his theological and pastoral discussions with Charlemagne's daughters, by then established at the convent of Chelles, in a series of letters and biblical commentaries. Theodulf of Orléans' poem on the court suggests that Gisela, Charlemagne's sister and abbess of Chelles, sometimes came to court, and that should Charlemagne 'request that the ways of Scripture be revealed to her, may the king himself, taught by God, teach her'.¹⁷ Alcuin's interaction with Gisela's nieces at Chelles and the letters he exchanged with them highlight not only the extended circle of royal patronage in which scholars continued to enjoy the favour of members of the royal family, but also the high level of attainment of the royal women themselves — far greater, from the evidence of Alcuin's letters, than the poem of Theodulf implies.¹⁸

We know nothing about Charlemagne's education as a boy, apart from a passing reference to Charlemagne's belief that 'his daughters and sons should be educated, first in the liberal arts, which he himself had studied'. Then the boys were trained 'to ride, fight and hunt'. Again this presumably is also what Charlemagne was taught to do.¹⁹ Later, Einhard tells us that he was entertained while he was eating by listening to someone read the histories and deeds of the ancients, and that he was fond of the books written by St Augustine, particularly the City of God. As well as his native tongue he 'learned Latin so well that he spoke it as well as his own native language, but he was able to understand Greek better than he could speak it'. Einhard then adds this crucial comment on the king's own intellectual interests:

He avidly pursued the liberal arts and greatly honoured those teachers whom he deeply respected. To learn grammar, he followed [the teaching of] Peter of Pisa, an aged deacon. For the other disciplines he took as his teacher Alcuin of Britain, also known as Albinus, who was a deacon as well, but from the Saxon people. He was the most learned man in the entire world. [Charles] invested a great deal of time and effort studying rhetoric, dialectic and particularly astronomy with him. He learned the art of calculation [arithmetic] and with deep purpose and great curiosity investigated the movement of the stars. He also attempted to [learn how to] write and for this reason used to place wax-tablets and notebooks under the pillows on his bed, so that, if he had any free time, he might accustom his hand to forming letters. But his effort came too late in life and [he] achieved little success.²⁰
Thus Charlemagne himself received instruction from the gathering of scholars at court. Letters exchanged between the king and Alcuin, in particular, indicate that instruction and advice to the king continued even after Alcuin had retired to Tours and was teaching his pupils in the school there.

It is in the structure and emphases of the educational curriculum in Tours and other Carolingian schools that the revival and promotion of the classical heritage, as well as the enduring legacy of the Carolingians, may best be seen. The divisions of knowledge, for example, were those of late antiquity. The writer Martianus Capella - in his work *On the Marriage of Mercury and Philology*, written in the late fifth century - had established the categories known as the seven liberal arts. These comprised the *trivium* - grammar, rhetoric and dialectic - and the *quadrivium* - geometry, music, astronomy and arithmetic. The emphases of the Carolingian school curriculum, though similar to those of the schools of Merovingian Gaul and Anglo-Saxon England, were Christian. Basic arithmetical knowledge was taught by means of the *computus*, which gave instruction in understanding the calendar, calculating the phases of the moon (and thus the date of Easter and other feasts of the Christian year) and rules of simple arithmetic. Astronomy was related to this, for one could use it for calculating time and the seasons and it was also useful for navigation, agriculture and even medicine.

The first reading-matter for any school child was the psalter and probably almost everybody who went to school would know the psalter by heart by the time they had completed their education. Instruction in language was provided from the grammars of the late Roman grammarians, Donatus and Priscian, designed for those for whom Latin was a native language. With some knowledge of the psalter, grammar and arithmetic, a pupil might then proceed to study Christian didactic texts and manuals of the patristic writers, and also those written by Carolingian school masters, including those of Alcuin himself.

Education, therefore was designed to inculcate Christian learning and understanding. Although classical texts were drawn upon (especially those relating to language and its use), the Carolingian scholar would aim to perfect him- or herself in Christian learning and theology and would study the writings of the great Church fathers of late antiquity such as Augustine, Gregory, Jerome, Ambrose, Leo the Great and many more. These early Christian authors were as important a part of the Roman heritage as the pagan classical works of Cicero, Virgil, Tacitus and Suetonius, or the practical manuals concerning medicine, warfare, agriculture, surveying and the like. The Carolingians passed on an astoundingly rich collection of the learning of earlier centuries.

We should remember the processes by which such learning may have survived and been passed on. Before the Carolingian period there had no doubt been changes in taste so that a process of natural selection would have meant many texts going out of fashion and ceasing to be copied. In late antiquity, moreover, the official recognition of Christianity and its establishment as the religion of the
Roman Empire had had a marked impact on culture, with an increasingly Christian emphasis from the fifth century onwards. There were changes in the educational curriculum, and the fifth century saw the production of many epitomes or summaries of earlier works. Christianity was on the whole positive towards pagan culture and absorbed much of its emotional commitment and intellectual drive. Before the eighth century, moreover, many distinct contributions to learning had been made by such scholars as Boethius and Cassiodorus in Italy, and Isidore of Seville in Spain. Both Boethius and Cassiodorus had either themselves translated or commissioned translations of major Greek works. Isidore provided a compendium of antique knowledge known as the Etymologiae ('Etymologies') which was widely disseminated throughout early medieval Europe. Whereas learning in late antiquity was largely the province of secular schools and individual scholars, in the course of the early middle ages learning became increasingly the prerogative of monastic and episcopal centres and communities of scholars, teachers and pupils.

Classical texts

These same ecclesiastical centres did not jettison classical learning. On the contrary, it is to the Carolingians that we owe the survival of classical texts. From the years 550 to 750, we know of 264 books containing writings from classical antiquity that survive and only 26 of these are secular works, most of them of a technical kind embracing subjects such as Roman law, gromatic texts (used for surveying and land measurement), grammar, medicine and military matters. By the end of the ninth century, however, the major part of the Latin literature of classical antiquity, that is, the works of about seventy classical authors, including thirty-five works by Cicero, had been copied and were being circulated. Further, other texts translated from Greek into Latin – such as Aristotle’s Categories, Plato’s Timaeus, Galen on medicine, and many astronomical and mathematical treatises – preserved much of the wisdom of the Greeks in the west even though ever fewer people had the ability to read Greek. If one considers texts from classical antiquity, notably the literary and historical works, it should be remembered that the earliest manuscripts of nearly every known classical author are copies made in the Carolingian period; and two-thirds of these were written in the north Frankish, Rhineland and Alemannian monasteries of Corbie, Rheims, Tours, Fleury, Auxerre, Fulda, Lorsch, the Reichenau and St-Gallen. As far as we can determine from the evidence, indeed, the Carolingians made a determined effort to seek and salvage what they could of the classical heritage.21

As an explanation for the extraordinary concentration of classical text production in the Carolingian period, it has been surmised that Charlemagne himself may have sent out an appeal of some kind in about 780 asking for remarkable or rare books. There is also a famous list of arcane classical works associated with the
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royal court (Berlin, Preussische Kulturbesitz Diez B Sant.66). Bernhard Bischoff, the great palaeographer, conjectured as long ago as 1957 that the Berlin list, one of the oldest surviving book lists from the early middle ages, was a list of some of the books in Charlemagne's library, on the basis of the position that the Berlin manuscript occupies in the transmission of the Carolingian poetry composed at Charlemagne's court. The main grammatical texts in the book were written by a Frank and the additions, including the poems and the book list, by an Italian. Although Bischoff argued that this Italian was at Charlemagne's court, a more recent argument has proposed that the list stems from northern Italy and possibly Verona.

Whatever the outcome of this, as yet unresolved, debate, the list witnesses to a very wide range of texts from classical antiquity available in the early Carolingian period. It may also reflect the close links between the courts of Charlemagne and of Pippin of Italy, after the conquest of Lombard kingdom in 774 and the establishment of Pippin as sub-king of Italy in 781. Many of the classical texts no doubt were in Merovingian or North Italian libraries. All the same, only some copies of Virgil, Cicero and Livy, and scraps and fragments of a few other classical authors, survive from before the Carolingian Renaissance. Italian copies of classical works for the most part postdate the Carolingian conquest of the Lombard kingdom in 774, so that again it would appear to have been from the Frankish court that the stimulation of new interest came. If we consider the distribution of classical and patristic manuscripts in the Carolingian period and where particular types of text were concentrated, we might surmise that Tours and Lyons had been centres of patristic learning and Roman law, while classical texts were available at Corbie and Rheims and were copied for newer foundations such as Lorsch, Fulda, Reichenau and St-Gallen.

Early medieval writing

To a considerable extent we are observing, in the extant manuscript evidence of the eighth and early ninth centuries, the transmission and augmentation of existing knowledge. The manuscripts witness furthermore mastery of the technical skills of writing, book production and decoration. We can see how these skills of literacy were disseminated, how libraries were formed and how centres capable of copying books were established. The Franks appear to have been very conscious of their role in preserving their Roman heritage and moulding it for their own purposes. One crucial aspect of ninth-century culture, indeed, is the formation of a canon of knowledge, reflected above all in the extant library catalogues of the ninth century. The libraries and their inventories, together with the bibliographical guides produced in the ninth century, contributed substantially to the definition of a canon of knowledge and the organisation of this canon and its approved works and authors in relation to the perceived needs of the schools, the church and the administration.
The library catalogues in particular document the acquisition, whether from other centres or by copying in their own scriptorium, of all the texts perceived to be essential. The St-Gallen catalogue can be taken as representative: it lists biblical texts, the works of the fathers of the Church and important early medieval authors — with Gregory the Great, Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Prosper, Tichonius, Priscianus, Isidore of Seville, Origen, Pelagius, Cassiodorus, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Alcuin predominating. There are also *florilegia* (collections of extracts from major authors organised under subject headings), monastic rules, lives of the fathers, and lives and passions of the saints and martyrs, conciliar decrees of the Church, expositions on the mass, canon law, secular law, history books, sermons, biblical exegesis and school books, which contain many classical literary texts.

The bulk of the surviving manuscripts dating from before 800 and those of the ninth century are in fact those of patristic, biblical and liturgical books, with Augustine, Jerome and Gregory the Great predominating among the patristic authors, and an increasing number of early medieval English, Italian and Frankish authors being introduced. These patristic and early medieval works are of real importance as far as the formation of European culture and the Carolingian *renovatio* are concerned. For one thing, the patristic authors were themselves well versed in the classics and passed on many of their cultural assumptions and allusions to succeeding generations. For another, their work in itself formed Christian life and thought, and — together with that of their scholarly successors from Anglo-Saxon England, Italy, Spain, Francia, Saxony, Alemannia and Bavaria — proved an enduring legacy.

It is of the utmost importance to appreciate not only what the Carolingians revived and passed on, but also their own achievements. Carolingian scholars wrote learned commentaries on the Bible, treatises on grammar, spelling, philosophy, rhetoric, poetry and theological doctrine. Alcuin, for example, dedicated his commentary on St John's Gospel to Gisela and Rotrud, Charlemagne's daughters; and his treatises on orthography, dialectic and rhetoric were used in the schools. Wigbod's commentary on Genesis and Alcuin's own commentaries were the precursors of the comprehensive exegesis of the Bible provided by Alcuin's pupil Hraban Maur later in the ninth century.

The Franks devised new genres of writing history, such as biography (of which Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne* is the most obvious example), annals and historical epics in verse, such as *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* (also known as 'The Paderborn Epic'). The Royal Frankish Annals in particular — first composed in the 780s and deploying the dating system according to the year of the Incarnation in order to structure the narrative — provided a distinctive and powerful affirmation of Frankish identity and of the success and greatness of the Carolingian rulers. They are as close to an official history as we can get. Unlike the many other annals (which witness to local history writing on an unprecedented scale within the Carolingian world to an extent still not fully appreciated), moreover, the Royal Frankish
Annals were widely disseminated throughout the Carolingian realm, from Brittany to eastern Bavaria and from Saxony to Italy. It was a dissemination in which the royal court itself played a role, as indicated by the evidence of a fragment of annals in the script of the scriptorium of Louis the Pious, now in Cologne. These diverse types of historical writing were continued and developed throughout the ninth century, as we can see in the biographies of Louis the Pious by Thegan and 'the Astronomer', Ermold the Black's epic poem in honour of Louis the Pious, and the extraordinarily rich narrative of the Annals of St-Bertin and Annals of Fulda.

Paul the Deacon from Italy appears to have been the first to take up the idea of the Liber Pontificalis or history of the popes and adapt it to provide a history of a Carolingian see, namely the history of the bishops of Metz; that bishopric was of fundamental importance to the Carolingian family itself, for it was there that their saintly ancestor Arnulf had been bishop. The new genre of Gesta episcoporum and Gesta abbatum became very popular and provided a vehicle for the inclusion of the documents relating to ownership of land by a see or a monastery, as well as for the narrative of the major events in an institution's past. Paul also wrote a History of the Lombards in the early 780s, which is a very skilful piece of image-making about the Lombards' past and identity. I have argued elsewhere that this history was written on behalf of the Lombards for the Franks, either in Francia itself or for the Franks and Lombards at the court of Pippin of Italy. It was designed to instruct the Franks about the Lombard past and provide some measure of legitimation for Carolingian rule in northern Italy.24

The Carolingian scholars, especially those at the court of Charlemagne from the 770s onwards, were highly versatile. They acted as advisers to the king, as ambassadors, teachers, theologians and experts on liturgy and biblical exegesis. Courtiers such as Alcuin, Paul the Deacon, Theodulf of Orleans, Angilbert of St-Riquier and Modoin composed poems in many different poetic forms. Some were adapted from classical metres, such as the complicated acrostic poems inspired by Porphyrius and the pastoral poetry modelled on Virgil's Eclogues and the later pastoralists Calpurnius and Nemesianus; other types, such as adonic verses, were adapted from fifth- and sixth-century writers, and still more types, such as rhythmic historical and riddle poems, were newly devised. Many of these poems evoke the Carolingian renovatio and revival of antiquity, and allocated classical nicknames to many members of the court as if to reflect their cultural aspirations. In the Paderborn Epic, for example, Aachen is called a new Rome, and Charlemagne himself is likened to Aeneas. The poetry gives us a strong sense of the personalities at court and their response to their historical situation.

Carolingian scholars also compiled compendia of knowledge on all manner of topics, such as mathematics, astronomy, geography and the computus. Dicuil's De mensura orbis, for example, provided a description of the world that relied on ancient works such as Pliny's Historia naturalis, only occasionally modernising his material by contemporary references.25 One instance is his reference to the
elephant sent as a present to Charlemagne by Harun-al-Rashid in 803 where he says that, contrary to the views of Solinus, the elephant can indeed lie down. A Cologne manuscript (Dombibiothek Cod. 83.II) preserves a tract on time first composed in about 737, subsequently extended, improved and added to the manual on time compiled by Hildebald, archbishop of Cologne in 805. A Carolingian 'Encyclopaedia' on time was also produced in about 793 and a revised version was compiled at Aachen in 809.

Music

The Franks were creative musicians, though it is not until the later part of the ninth century that notated manuscripts and the new tropes and sequences enable us fully to appreciate what the Carolingians achieved in the musical sphere. Modern discussion has focused on the relationship between the existence and maintenance of Roman chant in Rome throughout the early middle ages and the development of Frankish and Carolingian chant in the Frankish kingdoms. There remains doubt about the extent of the 'Roman' contribution to the music and liturgy of the Franks in the early Carolingian period, though liturgy, music and chant were undoubtedly matters in which both Pippin III and his son Charles were closely concerned. Einhard tells us, for example, that Charlemagne was very interested in music and what was being sung in his chapel. Whether musical notation (in the form of neumes as a way of graphically recording musical settings of texts) actually developed during Charlemagne's reign or later in the ninth century is still being debated. Whatever the chronological development of neumes, their existence is to be understood in relation to the Carolingian attitudes to the written word and to texts. Neumes document a musical performance practice of extraordinary subtlety; they articulate a reading of texts with dimensions of colour and rhythm, which enhance the impact of the words to far greater an extent than if it were merely spoken.

Royal patronage

The capitularies and conciliar decrees, not least those of the Synod of Frankfurt in 794 or the reform councils of 813, make it clear that the king himself played a part in theological discussion and in the reform of the clergy, ecclesiastical organisation, and the liturgy. In whichever resplendent new palace it was temporarily based (at Frankfurt, Paderborn or Aachen) as the king moved on the royal itinerary round the kingdom, the central role of the court as a place where scholars could congregate is indicative of the crucial role of the ruler as a patron of culture. When we observe other powerful early medieval polities where the kings did not play such a role, our appreciation of the Carolingian rulers' achievements and intellectual energy is greatly enhanced. There is no evidence, for example, of the
tenth-century Ottonian rulers' systematic patronage of particular centres, no group of schools associated with the court, no royal role in the dissemination of particular texts, no direction or impetus provided for the cultivation of contemporary scholarship, no court atelier for the production of fine books for use by the royal family, and little sign of even occasional sponsorship of individual scholars or craftsmen.

Charlemagne and his immediate successors, on the other hand, expended their wealth and exploited their superior position in order to serve their intellectual interests, enrich their libraries and enhance their pleasure. Yet Carolingian royal patronage (on the part of both the king and the queen, as well as other members of the royal house), as I have explained in this chapter, was not solely directed towards selfish ends. Close examination of the king's personal intervention and promotion of scholarship – and the particular texts and activities with which he can be associated – indicate that the patronage of learning was an obligation for the king. Royal patronage was not random aesthetic pleasure, but an organised and determined assembly and deployment of resources to carry out the specific aims articulated in the royal capitularies. The court school, for example, created a new edition of the gospels and disseminated it to major monasteries within the kingdom. Other corrected texts, as remarked above, were also disseminated from the court or under its auspices. Rather than acting as an occasional benefactor, the Carolingian ruler sustained groups of artists, scribes and craftsmen over a long period of time in order to create artefacts for his particular objectives. His patronage was designed to promote his royal power as a Christian king and to consolidate the Christian faith by disseminating the key texts on which that faith was based. Patronage is therefore inextricably bound up with correctio and emendatio, which were so fundamental a part of the Carolingian renovatio.

Notes
1 Clement the Scot was at Louis' court in c.817.
2 Dungal, monk at St-Denis 784–811, may have been teaching in Pavia in 825.
7 McKitterick, ed. (1994).
9 Nelson (1990); McKitterick (1989).
11 Bischoff (1998) and Bischoff (2004). When complete, Bischoff's three-volume catalogue of extant ninth-century manuscripts will list more than 7,000 items.
12 Now Munich, Schatzkammer der Residenz, on which see Henderson (1994).
14 Köhler (1958); Braunfels, ed. (1965); Contreni (1992).
18 Alcuin, Epistolae; for translations of many of Alcuin’s letters to the ladies of the Carolingian court, see Allott (1974).
19 Einhard, VK, c. 19.
22 Bischoff (1965).
25 Dicuil, Liber de mensura orbis terrae, ed. Tierney (1967); Dicuil, Liber de astronomia, ed. Esposito (1907); Stevens (1997).
26 Borst (1993) and (1998); Bullough, ch. 8 (pp. 136–50) in this volume.
27 Einhard, VK, c. 26.