

Conference Report

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CONFERENCE TITLE: EAST AND WEST IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES: THE MEROVINGIAN KINGDOMS IN MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVE

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This conference was a milestone in the joint research project led by Prof. **Stefan Esders** (Freie Universität, Berlin) and Prof. **Yitzhak Hen** (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Be'er Sheva) under the auspices of the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (GIF). The conference brought together an impressive number of internationally renowned academics, early career scholars, and doctoral students from many corners of the world to reconsider the intriguingly complex relations between the Frankish, Byzantine, and Islamic worlds in the Early Middle Ages. Drawing on an impressive variety of Western and Eastern sources as well as archaeological findings broadly dated from the sixth to the tenth centuries of the Common Era, this four-day symposium, comprised of twenty nine papers, sought to shed new light on the economic, cultural, religious, and political aspects of Merovingian Gaul's connections with its contemporary polities in the East so as to offer a new perspective on this historical period. The conference proceedings will be

published at a later date and when done will undoubtedly constitute an exceptionally important contribution to the existing state of knowledge. In view of the forthcoming publication, the following review will only recap each session and paper in brief and according to their chronological order.

WEDNESDAY, 17 DECEMBER

STEFAN ESDERS (BERLIN), *INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME*

The opening paper of the conference followed an inaugural introduction in which Stefan Esders, the host organiser, addressed the problematic character of the sparse and fragmented nature of the evidence that poses challenges to every historian dealing with the Merovingian kingdoms, society, and politics. He also explained the primary questions that gave rise to the conference: How should the Merovingian kingdoms be studied and understood in their broader Mediterranean context? What was their interconnection with the East, how did it incubate and what forms did it take? What did it mean for contemporaries, and how does the historian go about reconstructing it? With the premise that contemporaries had their local identities coexisting side by side with trans-regional perceptions – an intricate picture in need of thorough investigation and further elucidation – Esders suggested that we see the politics of the age as a frame within which all contemporary actors played as they wielded their wide ranging personal experiences. Indeed, many of these were to be explored and subjected to close scrutiny throughout the conference as soon as Esders invited the first speaker to the rostrum; the unresolved questions which he enumerated moulded and kept reverberating throughout all of the following sessions.

BONNIE EFFROS (UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA), *MEROVINGIANS AND THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE ENDURING ATTRACTION OF THE PIRENNE THESIS*

An up-to-date examination of the Henri Pirenne thesis in its own context and its ‘afterlife’ from the archaeological and historiographical perspective was the crux of the opening paper of the conference. Interested in the ideological implications of postcolonial archaeology on the origin and establishment of nationalist ideas, Effros set about her task of re-reading the Pirenne thesis with great sensitivity, ‘against the grain’, considering its silences in order to stress their significance and convincingly argue why they are as crucial as his pronounced claims about past empires. Effros demonstrated how Pirenne’s downplaying of the unique features and importance of the Merovingian period and his attribution of the disruption of a

Mediterranean unity to the Islamic conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries in fact reflected developments in the scholarship of his own day.

More than anything else, Pirenne's *Mahomet et Charlemagne* seems to have given voice to some of the most profound biases, fears, and assumptions of twentieth-century scholars that flourished in colonial and postcolonial France, reflecting the ideologies of French historians living in the first three decades of the twentieth century. This was the immediate context in which Pirenne himself lived and thought. Pirenne's work importantly captures the transition from the Roman Empire to the post-Roman states that had not only changed the conditions of political and economic activities but also strikingly altered psychological attitudes. One must, therefore, consider the impact of Western Europe's connection with the rest of the world in the Merovingian period to see how such processes affected Mediterranean cultures.

Among other areas of investigation that have changed and developed profoundly since the days of Pirenne, Effros focused on the field of archaeology, discussing the scientific turn in archaeological research in terms of the new forms of analysis, the new techniques of inquiry, and the largest sources of new data that have been discovered and made readily available for scholars working on the Early Middle Ages. All of these methods combined have unearthed some deep flaws in the claims and assumptions in Pirenne's thesis. Thinking beyond its constraints and building upon the important methodological developments introduced and employed in the ground-breaking work of Chris Wickham, Paolo Squatriti and others, Effros delineated how we can and should broaden our source base as well as our ways of processing the wealth of existing data to expose the anachronisms in our models, notwithstanding the tremendous influence they bear on scholarship to this day. She concluded that, 'it seems well overdue that we embrace the uncertainty and messiness of complexity and variation in the Merovingian Mediterranean in preference to the simple beauty yet dangerous pitfalls of a flawed grand narrative'.

ANDREAS FISCHER (VIENNA), *MONEY FOR NOTHING: FRANKS, BYZANTINES AND LOMBARDS IN THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH CENTURY*

The first of two papers in the session titled 'Shared Traditions and Forms of Exchange' called attention to curious accounts by Gregory of Tours, Procopius, and Paul the Deacon referring to a period of peace achieved between the Merovingian king Sigibert I and the Lombards in Italy after Byzantine gold had been received as an incentive from Constantinople around 589/90. Fischer posed the question, what was Byzantine gold meant to do if it was not introduced to the sixth and seventh-century West to affect political stability? Fisch-

er carefully analysed the different early medieval sources in order to reach a better understanding of how the use of money and distribution of wealth served as a powerful political tool in the hands of the Byzantines in their attempts to exert authority and influence over the Franks. He revealed how rather than having been merely an integral part of Byzantine policy in the West and elsewhere during this period, subsidies, tributes, gifts, and other forms of fiscal payment also expressed the ways in which the Merovingian kingdoms related to other *gentes* around them. By means of examining how payments were reflected in contemporary historiography and concentrating on Lombard Italy both as a contested area of influence and as an interface between East and West, Fischer shed fascinating light on the role of the flow of money as a political instrument. In particular, his paper successfully clarified the impact these financial efforts had on the relations between Francia and Byzantium.

JÖRG DRAUSCHKE (MAINZ), *COMMUNICATION AND TRADE BETWEEN THE MEROVINGIANS AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES*

Complementing and supporting the arguments made in both of the previous papers, the archaeological findings presented by Drauschke tellingly showed how contacts and exchange between the eastern Mediterranean and the Merovingian kingdoms was established and developed from the end of the fifth to the beginning of the eighth century. Drauschke discussed and analysed a massive group of identifiable objects, most of which were found in the West, that must have been transported over the Mediterranean, from East to West, and that in all likelihood originated either in the Byzantine empire or in regions stretching beyond its borders. From textiles combined with silk as parts of attire; pieces of jewellery such as *fibulae* and brooches, Byzantine silver spoons discovered in seventh-century Frankish graves, silver plates, pilgrim flasks, 500 coins of Byzantine origin which were distributed in Frankish territories, and weapons of Mediterranean origin – not only the quantity of the objects is surprising but also the fact that they continued to appear in the West in the eighth century. Drauschke’s explanation maintains that the artefacts in question testify to a continuity of economic exchange between the Merovingian kingdoms, the eastern Mediterranean, and Byzantium at least until the end of the seventh century. Thenceforth, clear signs of gradual decline as well as changes in the broader general circumstances are discernible. Unquestionably, a very large number and variety of finished products travelled far beyond Byzantium’s boundaries with the West into the Merovingian kingdoms. It is now more evident than was ever previously thought or imagined that there was also a circulation of raw materials from as far as India and Sri Lanka in regions of southern Germany settled in the sixth and seventh centuries.

JAMIE KREINER (UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA), *A GENERIC MEDITERRANEAN: HAGIOGRAPHY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES*

Given *in absentia*, Jamie Kreiner's paper was concerned with the strategies used by Merovingian hagiographers to persuade and influence their principal audiences in Gaul. While more often than not these hagiographers' arguments looked inward to the particular politics of their kingdoms, Kreiner sought to prove how their strategies of writing often mirrored the rhetoric, aesthetics, and cognitive theories that their contemporaries across the Mediterranean were deploying in Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Middle Persian, and Arabic compositions. Kreiner identified three different yet recurrent lines of thinking across hagiographical cultures in East and West: the concept of persuasion, the importance of memory and unconscious cognition, and political sociology, which encompasses entire social classes and change. She showed how, among other techniques, Frankish hagiographers of the Merovingian period adopted the legal procedures of Merovingian law, sometimes echoing the language of charters, in order to convince their audiences that their literary accounts were truthful and legitimate.

Explaining how hagiographers designed their texts in ingenious ways to convey deliberate impressions, Kreiner argued that writers employed strategies to put to rest any doubts about their works, for writing about miracles in Gaul of the sixth and seventh centuries was a sensitive matter. Some doubts common in the West and East of the Mediterranean during this period related to the authenticity of the miracles reported, and the attribution of said miracles to the saints. By means of forceful demonstrations, such as the use of weeping and tears as an intellectual act and as a sign of an ongoing transformative process, as well as vivid scene setting, the hagiographers aimed not to fool the doubtful reader, but rather, to provide him with a reassuring vision of a plan or evidence of how various miracles *could* work. Kreiner highlighted some of the significant similarities in strategy between hagiographic works across the Mediterranean to argue that the many ideas as well as the generic features that hagiographers shared in common were a sign of a shared conception of culture, shared ideas of how culture worked, and how ideas were communicated and transformed over time.

YITZHAK HEN (BEN GURION UNIVERSITY), *DEFENSOR OF LIGUGÉ'S LIBER SCINTILLARUM AND THE MIGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE*

Taking a fresh, meticulous look at the so-called *Liber scintillarum* ('Book of Sparks') from a cultural perspective, Hen began his paper by introducing the audience to the contents and historical context of this fascinating compilation of Biblical and patristic passages, put together towards the end of the seventh century by a mysterious Defensor, a monk of Ligugé

near Poitiers whose identity remained unknown until the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The prologue to the work, a calculated piece revealing both Defensor as the compiler as well as his intellectual skills, foreshadows a highly intelligent tour de force of carefully chosen texts tacked together for didactic purposes.

Hen argued that in spite of Defensor's somewhat conservative choice of material, the *Liber scintillarum* is perhaps the most eloquent witness to late Merovingian intellectual activity, wherein considerable time and effort were invested in selecting the passages and in developing a comprehensible skill of presenting them to their seventh-century audience. While half of the 2,505 citations in the codex (of which only 9 are yet to be identified) are biblical, both the *Vetus Latina* and the Vulgate were in front of Defensor's eyes and it is hard to tell why he sometimes preferred one version to the other. The rest of the material was drawn from thirty early medieval authors, some of whom lived and operated in the East. The wide range of sources used by Defensor – from Spain in the West to Syria in the East and from Britain in the North to North Africa in the South – clearly reflects an attempt to integrate Merovingian culture into a broader Mediterranean intellectual orbit. A late Merovingian desire for authority and correctness seems to resonate throughout the book, as it contains crucial authoritative texts that a priest might need in order to carry out his pastoral responsibilities.

THURSDAY, 18 DECEMBER

CHRISTIAN STADERMANN (UNIVERSITÄT TÜBINGEN), *PASSIO SANCTI VINCENTII AGINNENSIS: A DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION OF THE FRANCO-VISIGOTHIC WAR 507/508*

The *Passio Sancti Vincentii Aginnensis*, a hagiographical text written in southern Gaul sometime in the first half of the sixth century, stood at the heart of this paper, which aimed to examine the specific interpretation of the conflict between the Frankish king Clovis I (c. 482–511) and the Visigothic king Alaric II (484–507) offered in this Merovingian source. Since there was no single, unified way the 507/08 war was remembered in the sixth and the seventh centuries, the particular interpretation of the reasons, the course, and the aftermath of this war as presented in the *Passio Sancti Vincentii Aginnensis* was but one of several different accounts. Each account promoted a mode of commemoration that was determined by local needs and, in turn, influenced local identities.

Stadermann strove to unravel the content and immediate context of his chosen source in a fourfold manner. Firstly, he delineated the manuscript tradition of the text preserving four

different versions that came down to us from the Early Middle Ages. Secondly, he discussed the debated dating of the text, stressing that it was probably available to both Gregory of Tours and Venantius Fortunatus in the 570s. Stadermann suggested a *terminus post quem* of the 530s, as the text contains references up to the death of the Ostrogothic king Theoderic in 526, and surmised that in all probability the text was composed before 570. Placing the *Passio* in the context of the mid-sixth century, and in light of its content which emphasized pagan cults practiced in the area of St. Vincent, martyrdom, and the veneration of Vincent as a saint in the place where he was killed, Stadermann averred that the text in fact reflects a struggle waged between a Catholic priest and an Arian priest. This, according to Stadermann, was disguised as a narration purportedly designated to commemorate the Franco-Visigothic war of 507/08.

YANIV FOX (OPEN UNIVERSITY, RA'ANANA), *ANXIOUSLY LOOKING EAST: BURGUNDIAN FOREIGN POLICY ON THE EVE OF THE RECONQUEST*

Beginning with the ascent of Sigismund to the Burgundian throne in 516, Fox described the positive state of the realm which this king inherited from his father, the promising relations that Burgundy had cultivated with Byzantium and Ostrogothic Italy, and how dreadfully fast it all went downhill soon thereafter. In the years following Sigismund's murder in 523, his younger brother, Godomar, seemed to have done all in his power to protect the Burgundian kingdom from external threats, to no avail. Therefore the aim of this paper was to analyse the foreign policies of Sigismund and Godomar in the relatively short time span between Avitus of Vienne's death *circa* 518 and the Burgundians' final military defeat in 534, in an attempt to explain the fate that befell the Burgundian kingdom and why it was due to challenges which both of the kings under examination were ill-suited to meet.

Recounting the series of unfortunate events propelled by the lethal combination of regional challenges and external pressures up to the point where the Gibichung kingdom of Burgundy came to an end with the Frankish occupation of 534, Fox sought to explain the choices made and actions taken by the Gibichung rulers as they most probably meant them to be seen. Incorporating Ostrogothic connections and interests, on the one hand, and the Frankish threat and Byzantine influence, on the other, into his account of the Sigistrix affair and its aftermath, Fox unmasked the problematically confused chronology in Gregory of Tours' clearly biased report and showed how the bishop was resourcefully trying to justify the Frankish occupation of Burgundy in his description of events. By touching upon matters such as the Franks' readiness to cooperate militarily with Ravenna in the early 520s; the possibility of recruiting troops from Italy; and Theoderic's complicated task of rebuilding his

realm in the face of challenges on several fronts, Fox reconsidered the nature of the relationship between the Burgundians and the Ostrogoths in the years prior to the dawn of trouble and offered some valuable insights in that direction.

SEBASTIAN SCHOLZ (ZÜRICH), *THE PAPACY AND THE FRANKISH BISHOPS IN THE SIXTH CENTURY*

This paper opened the session on ‘the Pope as a Mediterranean player’ and aimed to inspect the relationships between popes and Frankish bishops in the time of the so-called Three Chapters Controversy. One of the main sources providing important insights into reciprocal relationships between the Pope, the Frankish king, the Byzantine Empire, and the bishop of Arles, for example, are the *Epistolae Arelatensis genuinae*, which Scholz analysed to show how communication took place between these main characters all around the Mediterranean. Scholz systematically demonstrated how the Frankish king Childebert I and the bishops of his realm closely observed the dispute of the Three Chapters Controversy right from its beginning. Scholz then turned to analyse a particular letter sent in 545 from Pope Vigilius to Bishop Auxanius of Arles, which asked the recipient to aid the continuation of the positive relationship between the Frankish king and the Byzantine emperor Justinian. Only one year later, the same pope admonished Bishop Aurelian of Arles to do all in his power to secure the treaty between Childebert and the emperor. The two letters show how immensely important the Three Chapters Controversy was to the political actors of the age. Nevertheless, the correspondence also reveals that the Frankish bishops in the kingdom of Childebert criticized the behaviour of Pope Vigilius and forced his successor, Pope Pelagius, to position himself more precisely. A picture emerges of a highly autonomous and important Frankish church, which may teach a tellingly fascinating lesson in and of itself.

ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK (CAMBRIDGE), ‘*PERCEPTIONS OF ROME AND THE PAPACY IN LATE MEROVINGIAN FRANCA: THE CONONIAN RECENSION OF THE LIBER PONTIFICALIS*’

This paper examined the perceptions of Rome and the papacy in Merovingian Francia in light of the evidence offered by the manuscript transmission of the *Liber pontificalis* in the seventh and eighth centuries. In particular, the paper focused on the evidence offered by Paris BnF lat. 2123, usually dated to the late eighth or the early ninth century. This codex contains an abridged version of the canon law collection known as the *Herovalliana*, and raises questions about the redaction of the *Liber pontificalis* in Merovingian Francia as well as about the possible origins and purpose of the so-called Cononian recension. The entries are

quite full concerning Pope Conon, but thereafter the entries are brief up to Pope Stephen II. From there to Pope Hadrian I, only a list of years, months and days is provided. However, the codex also points to the ways in which the Pope's role in the church may have been perceived. As this abridgement is usually regarded as having been made in the eighth century, its date needs to be confirmed before one can thoroughly address the many conundrums hiding between the leaves. In any event, what is evident is that the *Liber pontificalis* was received in late Merovingian Gaul and was epitomized there; it is noteworthy that the recensions are Frankish, not Roman. Thus they attest to a Frankish interest in and dissemination of selective knowledge about the popes. The Frankish recensions bear important witness to early Carolingian use of Merovingian texts in the process of creating new compilations in the ninth century. They highlight liturgy and hierarchical ecclesiastical authority, and therefore provide crucial evidence for the forging of late Merovingian links with Rome being extended into the Carolingian period, tracing special characteristics of the links between Francia and Rome.

CHARLES MÉRIAUX (LILLE), *FROM EAST TO WEST: CONSTANTINOPLE, ROME, AND NORTHERN GAUL IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY*

At the end of 649 or perhaps at the beginning of 650, Amandus, the bishop of Maastricht, received a roll of papyrus containing the acts of the council held in the Lateran to condemn monothelism from Pope Martin I. In a long letter, Pope Martin asked Amandus as well as the Frankish king of Austrasia, Sigebert III, to support him against the Byzantine emperor. This paper analysed this particular papal letter with the aim of reaching a better understanding of the kind of knowledge that people in Merovingian Gaul had of the East Mediterranean world in the middle of the seventh century. The question of whether Amandus could provide any assistance to the Pope in such a turbulent time, however, remains open.

LAURY SARTI (BERLIN), *KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND PERCEPTION OF THE EASTERN EMPIRE IN THE LATE MEROVINGIAN WEST*

The aim of this paper was to examine a peculiar digression included in the *Life of Saint Eligius of Noyon* in order to discuss its potential significance as testimony to an exchange of knowledge between the Byzantine East and the Merovingian West in the later part of the seventh century, challenging the prevailing notion that the relations between the two superpowers almost came to an abrupt end after the reign of emperor Heraclius. By comparing the *Vita Sancti Eligii* to other source material dating from the same period, Sarti showed why further investigation into what was actually known of the East in the West, in the sense of

how the Byzantine world was construed in Merovingian Gaul, should be pursued. She addressed the *Vita's* dubious and debated date of composition that led to a relative neglect of the text in modern scholarship. Taking on board Clemens Bayer's re-evaluation of the existing version of the text as a work composed before 684, Sarti stressed the necessity and importance of reassessing the *Vita's* significance in the context of the late seventh century rather than the previously assumed one of the eighth century. She concluded that although the digression in the text seems to be an original account of Audoin, the view of the Byzantine emperor provided in the text is not markedly different from that which can be found in papal sources dated from the same period, and that this could, in turn, attest to the strong bonds which may have existed between Christian clergy in the West and the Byzantine emperor in the East.

WOLFRAM BRANDES (FRANKFURT), 'THE BYZANTINE BACKGROUND TO THE SO-CALLED 'DONATION OF PEPIN''

Given *in absentia*, Brandes' paper was concerned with the polemical nature of Eastern and Western sources from the eighth century, and wished to examine the reliability of Theophanes' account of the shift that occurred in 731, when papal patrimonies in Sicily were subjected to Byzantine administration. This went unmentioned in the contemporary *Liber pontificalis* in the West. Brandes explained this awkward silence in the Western source by describing how 'the Byzantine sources tend to be associated with iconoclast policies whereas the *Liber pontificalis* was concerned with iconography'. He then examined what happened to the relationship between the papacy and the Byzantine Empire in the 750s, in light of the reforms the Byzantine Empire underwent during those years. The paper concluded that the background to the *Donation of Pippin* was when Byzantine emperors appeared strong, whereas the conflict of iconoclasm reached its climax only later, wherefore one must treat the papal patrimonies and iconoclasm separately.

ERIK GOOSMANN (UTRECHT), *NEW DYNASTY, NEW FRONTIERS? PIPPIN'S POLITICS AND THE WIDER MEDITERRANEAN WORLD*

This paper explored the political circumstances that led to the diplomatic activities during the reign of king Pippin the Short (741-768), arguing that this period saw an intensification of diplomatic activity between East and West, within the context of the long history of Frankish-Byzantine relations. In the course of the 750s and 760s, delegations travelled back and forth between the courts at Constantinople, Baghdad, and Francia, which begs the question, why? Goosmann argued that this phenomenon was a direct consequence of Pippin's

political involvement in Northern Italy on behalf of Rome. Additionally, Goosmann sought to explain how these exploits were subsequently represented in Frankish historiography in order to deliberately downplay the Merovingian kings by making them appear ‘provincial’ in comparison to the new and ‘cosmopolitan’ ruling dynasty of the Carolingians.

Friday, 19 December

PHILIP WYNN (BEN GURION UNIVERSITY), *CULTURAL TRANSMISSION CAUGHT IN THE ACT: GREGORY OF TOURS AND THE RELICS OF ST SERGIUS*

This paper argued that a particular incident reported in Gregory of Tours’ *Histories* provides an insight into the cultural transmission which took place in his lifetime. Wynn endeavoured to illustrate the transmission of one specific element, namely the use of relics on the battlefield, which he believes originated in the Byzantine East and was later spread into the Merovingian West from the mid- to the late sixth century. Wynn terms this period of time wherein said cultural transmission occurred as a ‘Christianized culture of war’. Looking at the transmission of saints’ relics from East to West; the transformation of Byzantine culture in the sixth century which underlay the origins of a ‘Christianized culture of war’; the cult of St Sergius; and the passage itself, Wynn examined the extent to which the transmission of this saint’s relics introduced a novelty in the late sixth-century West of relics being used on the battlefield.

WOLFRAM DREWS (MÜNSTER), *HERMENEGILD’S REBELLION AND CONVERSION: MEROVINGIAN AND BYZANTINE CONNECTIONS*

Concerned with the diverse interpretations and representations of the Visigothic prince Hermenegild, his rebellion against his father and his questionable conversion to Catholicism in different early medieval sources, Drews’ paper looked at the various ways in which Hermenegild crops up in the writings of Gregory of Tours, Isidore of Seville, and other contemporary or near-contemporary sources from Spain, in order to make better sense of this prince’s alleged connections and relations with other political entities of his time, such as the Frankish rulers and Byzantine emperors. While Isidore and other sources written in Visigothic Spain grimly accuse Hermenegild of usurpation and rebellion against his father, he is depicted in non-Spanish Christian Catholic sources, such as Gregory of Tours, in a much more positive way – as one who died as a martyr. According to the Frankish bishop in Gaul, Hermenegild converted to Catholicism before rebelling against his father, as a result of

which his actions from thence are justified in terms of just war against Arianism.

BENJAMIN FOURLAS (MAINZ), *EARLY BYZANTINE CHURCH SILVER OFFERED FOR THE ETERNAL REST OF FRAMARICH AND KARILOS: EVIDENCE OF 'THE ARMY OF HEROIC MEN' RAISED BY TIBERIUS II, CONSTANTINE?*

This paper dealt with objects made of Byzantine silver which were discovered inside a six-piece treasure, now kept in the Baden State Museum at Karlsruhe, in Lebanon in 1983. The silver objects examined by Fourlas bear resemblances to early Byzantine silverware, especially of silverware that was made in Syria during the period of the mid-sixth century to the early-seventh century. Two of the objects, bearing the Greek votive inscriptions of 'Karilos' and 'Framarich', were designated for the commemoration and eternal rest of two people who were called by these names and both belonged, undoubtedly, to the Latin speaking realms of the age. Fourlas' paper, therefore, discussed the significance of the presence of men from Western Europe in the region of Greater Syria and their possible connection to the extensive recruiting campaign initiated by the Byzantine emperor Tiberius II, also known as 'Constantine', among the Germanic people in 574/75.

HELMUT REIMITZ (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY), *PAX INTER UTRAMQUE GENTEM: THE RE-EVALUATION OF FRANKISH IDENTITY IN MEROVINGIAN ENCOUNTERS WITH THE EMPIRE DURING THE LAST DECADES OF THE SIXTH CENTURY*

Focusing on the transformation of collective identities in post-Roman Gaul in the time of Gregory of Tours, this paper surveyed some remarkable studies conducted in the course of the last two or three decades, which explored Gregory's *Histories* as testimony to the desire of their author to promote and advance a radical Christian *ordo rerum* in the history of the Merovingian kingdoms. Reimitz built on these studies' insights in his pursuit of a certain aspect of Gregory's work that has received relatively little scholarly attention hitherto, namely, the energy and effort Gregory put into challenging alternative conceptions of community in his *Histories*. Reimitz discussed some traces of these alternative conceptions of history and identity in Gregory's work, as well as in other texts written by contemporary authors, in order to decipher their attempts to negotiate the meaning and salience of different forms and concepts of social identity. The paper concluded with a demonstration of how literary and social 'room for manoeuvre' was shaped and transformed by the intensified interaction between the rulers and elites of the Merovingian kingdoms and those in the Byzantine Empire in the last decades of the sixth century.

GALIT NOGA-BANAI (THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM), *RELOCATION IN THE WEST: THE RELIC OF THE TRUE CROSS IN POITIERS*

Opening the sixth session of the conference, on 'Religious Landscapes and Spiritual Connections', Noga-Banai's paper dealt with the *translatio* of the True Cross relic from the Byzantine emperor Justin II and his wife Sophia to Radegund's monastery in Poitiers. Noga-Banai focused on the reputation of Queen Helena as the ultimate source of the relic responsible for its translation to Constantinople by examining Baudonivia's biographical account of Radegund. She concentrated especially on the Chapel of the Holy Cross built for the relic of the True Cross in Poitiers, and used Baudonivia's literary description of Radegund's efforts to obtain the relic as a point of departure into further exploration of the chapel's model and its contribution to the field of architectural history.

MAXIMILIAN DIESENBERGER (VIENNA), *MARTYRS AND APOSTLES FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN IN EARLY MEDIEVAL FRANCE*

The cynosure in Diesenberger's paper was MS Munchen, BSB, Clm 4554, an intriguing compilation put together in the last quarter of the eighth century. The result of an ambitious plan to gather and distribute more than ninety texts in a one single codex containing the *Acts of the Apostles*, bishops' *Vitae*, and *Acta martyrum* among other compositions of a hagiographical nature, the manuscript provides a rich panorama of Late Antique sanctity. It is noteworthy that although it was compiled a generation after the last Merovingian king was deposed, the codex contains texts relevant to Merovingian society. Diesenberger thus sought to explain the transmission and distribution of the Apostle Acts and Late Antique *passiones* of Mediterranean saints to and in Frankish Gaul in order to appreciate their possible impact on this society.

ORA LIMOR (OPEN UNIVERSITY, RA'ANANA), *WILLIBALD IN THE HOLY PLACES*

This paper offered a comprehensive analysis of the pilgrimage account of Willibald, an English monk from Sussex who undertook a journey to the Holy Land in the 720s and later became a bishop in Bavaria. Undertaking a long, eastward journey from his homeland, Willibald spent a total of seven years in the East, during which he sojourned in the Holy Land between 724 and 726. The story of Willibald's life, including his transformative experience away from home, was written in the West c. 728, two years after the protagonist returned and settled in Eichstät. Whereas the composition gives a lively account of the conditions in the Holy Land after the Arab conquests, it poses many problems pertaining to memory, selection and transmission, which Limor addressed in her paper. By comparing the text with

other Holy Land descriptions, Limor revealed the many lacunae in the account provided by Willibald's hagiographer, as well as his schematic and relatively shallow information. In pursuit of the work's aim, deliberate design and heroic dimension, Limor showed how the anonymous author's emphasis on the marvels and miracles envisioned and experienced by Willibald in the East determined the general tone of the composition and was at one with its hagiographic purpose.

ANN CHRISTYS (LEEDS), *SONS OF ISHMAEL, TURN BACK!*

This paper was concerned with two Latin chronicles, written in Spain in 741 and 754, that provide a near-contemporary record of Andalusī campaigns, culminating in battles with the Franks in 721 and 732 as a result of which Islamic expansion was halted in the West. Putting together the brief references to the Islamic campaigns and examining them closely, Christys demonstrated how the chroniclers in question paid considerably less attention to the Merovingian world than to the eastern Mediterranean. Then, she turned to the accounts of two ninth-century Muslim historians: Ibn Habib (d. 853) and Ibn Abd al-Hakam (d. 870), in order to evaluate their respective treatment of the campaigns. Christys showed that these Arabic sources, though written more than a century after the historical events they described took place, acknowledged the Muslim failure to advance into Francia with a variety of explanations. She concluded that, 'in retrospect, it is inevitable that the Arabic conquest stopped where the historians did.'

SATURDAY, 20 DECEMBER

DAVID GANZ (NOTRE DAME), *GETTING TO KNOW THE LATE MEROVINGIANS: WHAT BERN 611 REVEALS*

The last day of the conference was dedicated to 'Rethinking the Late Merovingians' and began with this fascinating paper by Ganz about MS Bern 611, a collection of booklets from the library of Fleury which was copied in 727. Whereas the manuscript contains Latin texts, Ganz argued that it seems to have also been about learning the Latin language, since it bears rare witness to a Latin script written in Merovingian shorthand. In addition to computistical materials which make a precise dating of the manuscript possible, Bern 611 includes *formulae* associated with Bourges that allow a localization of the codex. Ganz's paper explored the contents of the collection, putting special emphasis on the earliest copy of the *Physiologus* and a text of the Latin *Pseudo-Methodius*, with the aim of reconstructing the activities of an

episcopal chancery in the first third of the eighth century.

IAN WOOD (LEEDS), *CONTACT WITH THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN IN THE LATE MEROVINGIAN PERIOD*

This paper surveyed and analysed the evidence for Merovingian cultural contact with the Byzantine and Syriac world in the period from 650 to 750, in an attempt to provide a context for the arrival of the text of Pseudo-Methodius in the Frankish kingdom by looking not only to the evidence of the work itself and its influence on the *Cosmographia* of Aethicus, but also by looking back to the Merovingian interest in the East reflected in the Chronicle of Fredegar. Addressing the apparent gap in communication between Francia and the East in the years between the Chronicle of Fredegar and the account of Willibald, Wood discussed a possible citation of Procopius in the Frankish composition *Transitus beati Fursei* (c. 655), as well as evidence from the 680s and 690s concerning efforts of the papacy to gain support from the Byzantine emperor. Then, against the background of papal contacts with the Frankish church in the early eighth century, the paper's main focus turned to the Latin translation of Pseudo Methodius. An abridgement of the *revelationes* in the text was made before 632 (as attested in Zurich, Zentralbibliothek C 65), whereas the translation of Pseudo Methodius was undertaken in 727 by a man who identifies himself as 'Petrus', a Greek intermediary who lived in the 720s, who had access to the Greek source and was interested in it.

Seeking to delineate the line of contact between the East Mediterranean and Francia in this period, Wood argued that Willibald cannot be held responsible for carrying the Pseudo Methodius text from East to West with him, since Willibald arrived in Italy only in 729. Moreover, he clarified why although we have no firm provenance of the first manuscript of the Pseudo Methodius in Latin, there is no reason either to associate it with an Anglo-Saxon centre on the continent or to think the school of Canterbury was involved in the circulation of the text. Since the Latin translation was made before 632, it is significant that the translated version is more hostile towards the Ishmaelites than the original text, providing the earliest account of Muslims in Aquitaine. Wood convincingly showed how another text, the mid-eighth-century *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, fits well with the intellectual world of the translation of Pseudo Methodius. This drives home the point that there was a continuous Western interest in the East throughout the first half of the eighth century, supported by additional works such as Defensor of Ligugé's *Liber scintillarum*, the anonymous *Vita Abrahae*, and Adomnan's *De Loci Sanctii*.

LAWRENCE NEES (DELAWARE), *'MEROVINGIAN' ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS AND THEIR LINKS WITH THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN WORLD*

This enlightening art historical paper examined some of the earliest examples of Islamic manuscripts dating from roughly the eighth century, wherein increasingly elaborate marks were used to indicate breaks within verses in the Qur'an. Some of these show striking similarities in colour and design to those in Frankish manuscripts produced in the West during the later seventh and early eighth centuries. Moreover, a prominent motif seems to have also been employed both in Byzantine early medieval Greek manuscripts and in early Islamic manuscripts of the Qur'an, appearing in columns on the page or, rather, in illustrated frames for pages of text in the form of an ornamental pattern of a star in a square frame. The evidence suggests that the different artists working on different manuscripts in the Frankish, the Islamic, and the Byzantine worlds responded to similar challenges, and that their works played a similar function throughout the sixth to the ninth centuries in East and West. Nees stressed that the relationship between these forms of art, neither of which has attracted sustained scholarly attention, deserves to be explored, especially in the historical context of contact between the Franks and the Islamic world during the Merovingian period.

STEFAN ESDERS (BERLIN), *UNPLUGGING THE MEROVINGIANS FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE CASE OF EBROIN*

The appearance of the 'Neustro-Burgundian' mayor of the palace, Ebroin, as a highly controversial figure in seventh-century narrative sources, stood at the heart of this paper, in which Esders aimed to reveal interesting insights into the nature of the politics in later seventh-century Francia as constituting part of a wider world by means of investigating Ebroin's rule. Esders focused on the religious and economic aspects of Ebroin's rule in order to illuminate it against the background of the Frankish kingdoms' foreign relations with Visigothic Spain, Anglo-Saxon England, Lombard Italy, the papacy, and Byzantium between roughly 660 and 681. This could serve to explain to some extent why Ebroin's Carolingian successors eventually proved more successful in using the position of *maior domus* as a power base.

FEDERICO MONTINARO (COLOGNE), *BYZANTIUM, THE MEROVINGIANS AND THE HOG: A WELL-KNOWN PASSAGE FROM THEOPHANES' CHRONOGRAPHIA REVISITED*

This paper sealed the sessions of the conference and was designated to complement the recited short version of Wolfram Brandes' paper given earlier *in absentia* by adding a Byzantinist perspective. In his paper, Montinaro discussed the Greek Chronicle attributed to The-

ophanes the Confessor (d. c. 818), which constitutes an important source for Byzantine and Near Eastern early medieval history. Among its later parts displaying snippets of information about Rome, Italy, and the Franks in the eighth century, there is an excursus on the end of Merovingian rule which avers, among other details, that the Merovingian kings ‘had hair growing out of their back, like hogs’ and were therefore called *kristatai* (‘crested’), in a derogatory manner. Montaniro aimed to place this isolated passage in the broader context of knowledge of Western affairs in ninth-century Byzantium and to identify its possible sources, as well as channels of communication. In reply to a question from the audience with regard to Theophanes’ relation to the papacy, Montaniro confirmed that Theophanes seems to have been well informed about the *Liber pontificalis* due to a reference he made to this work in his Chronicle. Possibly through a network of monasteries, Theophanes had access to Western information or, at least, a strong connection to it.

CLOSING REMARKS

The conference closing remarks and comments were given by **Mayke de Jong** (Utrecht), **Philipp von Rummel** (Berlin), and **Yitzhak Hen**. De Jong praised Bonnie Effros’ reading of the Pirenne thesis ‘against the grain’ highly, stressing the importance of exposing anachronisms in our models and adopting more precisely coined terms and concepts than ones which now seem overdue for reconsideration. The emergence of the papacy as a broker between East and West, from several papers, also made an impression on de Jong, who remarked that in light of the non-universal Church and the intricate state of affairs in which kings ruled not bishops, but *with* bishops, we might better reconsider Peter Brown’s term, ‘Latin Christendoms’.

Additional main themes and arguments drawn out by de Jong included the movement of saints and hagiography which revealed common patterns of thought, action, and clever strategies of persuasion, discussed mainly in the paper of Jamie Kreiner. The papers of Andreas Fischer and Jorg Drauschke concerning exchange and communication prompted de Jong to think and say how crucial it is to teach more of Fredegar as a valuable source for early medieval history in the West, not only Gregory of Tours. The examinations of early letter collections, their manuscript tradition, and Hen’s decoding of Defensor’s *Liber scintillarum* made de Jong ponder the identity of the intended readers of such works in their immediate contexts, as well as later in the ninth century, and left the question open. Concerning worries about the transformation of the Roman world, she concluded that we all need to talk more often, and more effectively, with colleagues who disagree with us about the way new findings are being presented.

Von Rummel argued that rather than seeing the connections between the Merovingian kingdoms and Byzantium as an innovation of the Merovingian period, they were, in fact, a continuation of patterns that stretch back to the third century CE and thus should be treated as one. Von Rummel touched upon past material culture, strong economic activity, Western interest in the East and vice versa, objects and texts connecting people to each other, archaeological finds as evidence for processes of communication, as well as uses of symbolic language and complex processes of interpretation. He expressed an avid interest in what contemporaries actually thought of the material objects circulating in their region, recommending it as a subject for further investigation. In relation to reading and understanding the archaeological evidence, von Rummel commented that Pirenne's thesis was indeed based on limited and flawed data as this was all that was then available. Nevertheless, Pirenne was wrong in claiming that an immense change took place in the seventh century; as far as von Rummel is concerned, it was the first half of the eighth century in which Mediterranean trade changed dramatically.

Yitzhak Hen, who led the organization of the conference together with Stefan Esders and their respective teams of research students as part of a broader collaborative project sponsored by GIF, animatedly concluded the closing remarks by outlining the concise history of how the said German-Israeli collaboration came to be and made this exquisite conference a reality. Gratitude and appreciation were paid to the hard working members of the project's teams, especially **Pia Bockius** (Berlin) and **Tamar Rotman** (Ben Gurion University), **Yaniv Fox** (Ra'anana) and **Laury Sarti** (Berlin).

Participants and attendants would like to thank both organisers and the entirety of their teams for crafting and carrying out such an excellent and awe-inspiring scholarly event. We hope that the volume of articles will be published soon.