
H-France Review Vol. 13 (June 2013), No. 81

Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. xx + 399 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography and index. \$99 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-107-00674-4.

Review by Valerie L. Garver, Northern Illinois University

Rachel Stone's book examines the moral expectations of male aristocrats in the Carolingian Empire. The bulk of *Morality and Masculinity* explores the picture of the male elite that emerges from normative and prescriptive texts of the eighth and ninth centuries. Stone limits her study to perceptions and expectations. Employing texts, composed both by clerics and lay people, that proffered advice or ideals to lay nobles, she writes that she will "use these texts to study not so much how early medieval Franks behaved, as how they imagined themselves, particularly their masculinity and nobility" (p. 2). Limiting her study to the Carolingian world proves an effective way of digging deep into rich sources. By focusing on evidence solely for the male elite of this western European empire, she avoids false assumptions of a broad early medieval male ethos or a general conception of the aristocracy.

Stone's is a book of specifics drawn from remaining Carolingian writings on morality. One is struck by the manifest ways in which her examples underline the desire for order in the Carolingian world, especially among the elite who sought to bring uniformity and right action to a sometimes chaotic world. At the end of the book the author returns to the question of masculinity and suggests that Carolingian moralists offered an achievable vision of masculinity, one that anyone "prepared to live a moral life, whether lay or religious, male or female" could achieve (p. 338). Although I remain unconvinced that Carolingian men generally expected women to achieve a state of masculinity, Stone is certainly correct in arguing that some Carolingian women could at times be perceived as masculine. Carolingian men, however, were only very rarely perceived to be feminine. Indeed she makes a compelling case that in the Carolingian Empire, all men clerical or lay, rich or poor, ideally could be perceived as masculine so long as they acted in a moral manner.

Building on earlier works concerning masculinity and the male elite in the Carolingian world, including those by Lynda L. Coon, Mayke de Jong, Eric J. Goldberg, Thomas F. X. Noble, Julia M. H. Smith, and Janet L. Nelson among others, Stone offers an expansive treatment of what was expected of a moral man in Carolingian lands.[1] She continually underlines the variety and complexity of the views of Carolingian moralists, contributing to the increasing emphasis on Carolingian creativity and variety in a wide range of scholarship on this important early empire. Stone examines three areas that helped to define and shape male elite lay life: warfare, power, and sex. Carolingian moralists often concerned themselves with these issues, and the author explores both their discussions and silences on aspects of these three subjects. Because these sorts of moral discussions had a long history in the West, she is able to draw upon the differences and similarities of other eras to comment upon the particularities of these debates in the Carolingian world.

Her chapter on her sources is, as she notes, essentially a summary of prior scholarship. She excludes penitentials (handbooks of penances meant for priests' use) as useful sources for her study by noting quite rightly that they do not provide sufficient evidence for conceptions of morality and that there is no

evidence that they were meant to instruct the laity. In turn, she then discusses each genre she examined: lay mirrors (advice books for lay men), moral advice for rulers (which she uses sparingly because she wishes to focus on the nobility), histories, biographies, poetry, letters, and “regulatory texts” under which she includes secular and church legal texts as well as capitularies (normative documents issued mainly by kings and bishops).

Her ensuing chapter on warfare argues that all laymen could be warriors in Carolingian society and that conceptions of warfare remained relatively uniform across the period of Carolingian rule. Carolingian moralists generally seem to have embraced the lay elite culture of warfare. Plunder was perfectly acceptable as were a range of tactics—at least for heroes. Only when Carolingian rulers fought among themselves did moralists show any discomfort.

Stone spends much more space on power. A chapter on conceptions of power in the texts of Carolingian moralists ends with few clear results. Agreeing with other scholars that Carolingians seemed to accept the existence of social hierarchy with little question or explanation, the author goes on to suggest that “lay nobles” used the term *nobilis* to “[hint] at a more secular linking of birth and virtue” (p. 134). The results of this chapter support Stone’s contention that much moral discussion remained vague in the Carolingian Empire and that different moralists could come to varying conclusions on the same subject. The next chapter covers central power. Much recent scholarship has debated the nature of power at the center and periphery, on imperial, regional, and local levels in the Carolingian world. Following the lead of earlier scholars, especially Matthew Innes, Stone separates these spheres of influence to some degree, while recognizing that such divisions were indistinct.^[2] In turn, she examines expectations of the royal court, of counts, and of justice and the legal system, demonstrating effectively that moralists expected that courtiers, counts, and judges would carry out their duties in an orderly manner and in harmony with the desires and goals of the king. Further, they should not be subject to outside influences such as bribes, and they should carry out their duties effectively.

In the next two chapters, Stone examines two key markers of a male noble: wealth and vertical personal bonds. Chapter six explores “personal power,” here the bonds and relationships that male lay nobles had to others including their unfree dependants, their households, and their own lords. The section on the unfree is original and fascinating. Stone takes an innovative approach to the unfree by examining their relationship to their lords in terms of morality. Emerging from this view is the widespread acceptance of slavery and control over the bodies of the unfree with little effort to explain why this practice was acceptable. Her sections on male nobles’ relations with their family members and friends underline the long recognized importance of fidelity and outline expectations of a “familial morality” common to both clerics and laity. As for the wealth of the male elite covered in chapter seven, Stone discusses ideas of wealth as well as the morality of acquiring and using riches. She notes that one could argue that Carolingian moral writings advocate plunder as the sole acceptable means of increasing wealth, for the texts consistently indicate the one could only acquire riches at the expense of another. It was far better to gain wealth from foreigners than to create internal strife and disorder. In general this chapter is the best in the book as it is the most tightly argued and most original in its conclusions. Rather than making assumptions based on a broader Christian morality, by focusing solely on Carolingian cases, the author makes a strong case that in the Carolingian world “being rich was rarely problematic, but becoming rich was still often morally dubious” (p. 246).

Stone then turns to the subject of sexual behavior. By the end of the chapter on marriage, she argues that laymen may have wanted some of the restrictions that Christians had long enforced as well as new ones in the eighth and ninth centuries, such as limitations on incestuous marriages, divorce, and marriage by abduction. Her exploration of the sources’ discussions of these matters is rich and fascinating, but it does not support her conclusion that the laity necessarily desired this sort of marriage. Rather, it underlines the marital morality that prescriptive sources of the era advocated and that Stone outlines here. Following that chapter is one on sex. Stone makes a strong case that

Carolingian moralists advocated an achievable restraint in sexual behavior for the lay male elite. They were to be chaste prior to marriage, faithful during marriage, and able to abstain from sexual activity during certain times and under particular circumstances.

This well-researched book offers sensitive analysis of many Carolingian texts, both well-known (Dhuoda's handbook for example) and relatively understudied (sermons). Experts in the early Middle Ages, especially Carolingianists, will want to read Stone's work. The book appears written with such scholars in mind. Stone often makes shorthand references to figures, events, and places likely unfamiliar to non-experts. She is quite thorough in her explorations of moral ideas and makes many apt references to classical background or contrasts. While these aspects of the book may make it hard-going for an undergraduate or non-expert, graduate students will rejoice to see the concise explanations of a number of long-running historiographical debates (on the nature of early medieval power, for example) and the rich citations. Cambridge University Press is to be commended for allowing such bountiful footnotes when so many presses are insisting that references and bibliography be cut to the minimum. There was only one significant omission from this reviewer's standpoint. In her discussions of the moralizing texts dating to or in response to crises during the reign of Louis the Pious, she never cites the work of Courtney Booker, which discusses a number of her sources in substantial and helpful detail.^[3] A further quibble relates to Stone's repetitions of ideas and evidence. For example, on p. 268 Stone discusses Ambrose's justification of Abraham's relationship with Hagar, essentially repeating information discussed on p. 184, but these are minor criticisms of a useful book.

In sum, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* reveals a great deal about moral conceptions of the male elite in the Carolingian world and suggests a conception of masculinity open to all men. This book will be of interest not only to early medievalists but also to scholars interested in the history of masculinity.

NOTES

[1] Lynda Coon, "Gender and the Body," in *Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600 - c. 1100*, edited by Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith, 433-52 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Lynda L. Coon, "'What is the word if not semen?' Priestly Bodies in Carolingian Exegesis," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, edited by Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith, 278-300 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Mayke de Jong, "*Imitatio Morum*. The Cloister and Clerical Purity in the Carolingian World," in *Medieval Purity and Piety. Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, edited by Michael Frassetto, 49-80 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998); Eric J. Goldberg, "'More Devoted to the Equipment of Battle Than the Splendor of Banquets': Frontier Kingship, Military Ritual, and Early Knighthood at the Court of Louis the German," *Viator* 30 (1999): 41-78; Eric J. Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817-876*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006; Janet L. Nelson, "Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c. 900," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, edited by Dawn M. Hadley, 122-42 (London: Longman, 1999); Thomas F. X. Noble, "Secular Sanctity: Forging an Ethos for the Carolingian Nobility." In *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, edited by Patrick Wormald and Janet L. Nelson, 8-36 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Julia M. H. Smith, "Gender and Ideology in the Early Middle Ages," in *Gender and Christian Religion*, edited by R. N. Swanson, 51-73 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998).

[2] Matthew Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400-1000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[3] Courtney Booker, *Past Convictions: The Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

Valerie L. Garver
Northern Illinois University
vgarver@niu.edu

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ISSN 1553-9172