

The Mythification of Charlemagne

14 February, 2017

A joint workshop organized by the German Historical Institute London and the
Department of German and Dutch at the University of Cambridge

Venue: German Historical Institute London, Seminar Room
17 Bloomsbury Square, Holborn, London WC1A 2NJ

Charlemagne ruled as king of the Franks from 768 until his death in 814 and was crowned the first western Emperor by Pope Leo III in 800. He ruled over regions and territories that today form part of many European countries. As a result, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries his legacy was disputed, as both French and German historians claimed him as the father of their respective countries. Today, the Frankish ruler is praised as a father of a unified Europe, and as a patron of learning and the arts in the Carolingian Renaissance – even though the emperor was illiterate for most of his life.

However, it was not only in the modern world that Charlemagne became a historical figure. The mythification of the emperor began already in his lifetime. Especially in the high Middle Ages his memory was manipulated to serve a variety of needs: He was not only remembered as the first Christian Emperor whose palace at Aachen became the coronation site for over 30 German kings, but also became a literary figure at whose court Frankish and French heroes were assembled, and who could even be seen as a crusading hero himself. In 1165, in the beginning conflicts between French and German claims to his tradition, the emperor was even declared a saint.

The workshop assembles several specialists on the reign and the historical image of Charlemagne in the high Middle Ages from Germany, Britain and the United States. They will discuss the memory and the myth of Charlemagne in this time and its importance for the history of Europe. The seminar will be followed by a public reading from the new English translation of the *Kaiserchronik*, the first vernacular verse chronicle in Europe, and a central source for twelfth-century historical memory in general and the image of Charlemagne in the Holy Roman Empire in particular.

Programme

14.15 Welcome and Introduction

14.30-16.00 Section I

- Anne Latowski: Angels and Emperors: Charlemagne, Heraclius, and the Poetics of Imperial Victory
- Knut Görich: Herrschen mit dem Heiligen? - Die Staufer, Karl der Große und Aachen

16.00-16.30 Coffee Break

16.30-18.00 Section II

- Alheydis Plassmann: Charlemagne and the three magi: The use of saints for Frederick Barbarossa and Rainald of Dassel
- Thomas Foerster: Godfrey of Viterbo, Gervase of Tilbury, and the Disputed Tradition of Charlemagne

18.00-18.30 Break

18.30 Evening Event

- Mark Chinca and Christopher Young (Cambridge): The Mythification of Charlemagne: An Introduction to and Reading from the *Kaiserchronik*
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