CHARLEMAGNE

By the same author

BEDE'S ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE

(co-author with Judith McClare)

CHARLEMAGNE'S HEIR: New Approaches to the Reign of Louis the Pious

(co-edited with Peter Godman)

EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE, 300–1000

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FREDEGAR

LAW, CULTURE AND REGIONALISM IN EARLY MEDIEVAL SPAIN

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THE ARAB CONQUEST OF SPAIN, 710–797

THE BASQUES

CHARLEMAGNE

Roger Collins

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For Judith

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PREFACE

The current lack of a monograph-length treatment of the reign of Charlemagne in print in English is rather surprising in the light of the importance long attributed to the man and to his achievements. It may be that the approach of the millennium, which brings with it the 1200th anniversary of Charles's imperial coronation in Rome on 25th December 800 will generate renewed interest in that event and in its wider contexts. If so, it will be interesting to see if quite so confident or triumphalist a tone is struck as in the 1965 celebrations at Aachen. An early twenty-first century Charlemagne may prove to be subtly different to a mid-twentieth century one.

One consequence of the lack of easily available alternative treatments has been a sense that this book should try to cover as much ground as possible, without thereby failing to have new things to say. Even so, it has seemed better to avoid a strictly chronological structure, in favour of more analytical discussion of the various areas of interest and activity that marked Charles's reign. A structural debt to Einhard's *Vita Karoli* is happily acknowledged. This also has the virtue of making it easier to see the first Frankish emperor's achievements in the light of what had gone before. All too often this reign and this monarch have been taken as a starting point, and while there are many fine contemporary treatments both of later Carolingian history and of the legacy and memory of Charlemagne across the Middle Ages and beyond, very rarely have the man and his period been examined in terms of what was owed to both his Merovingian and earlier Carolingian predecessors and their times. This does seem to be required.

It is not really possible to write a biography of Charlemagne, in the sense of a work that uncovers its subject's personal hopes, fears, aims, ambitions, phobias and foibles, and tries to explain what he thought, rather than something of what he did. The latter may give some limited clues to the former but all interpretations may prove contentious. This is equally true for all but a handful of individuals before modern times. In the case of Charlemagne, or Charles as he will normally be called here, such a view might seem slightly too pessimistic. There is, after all, the *Vita Karoli* or *Life of Charles* mentioned above. But reasons will be given at various stages in this book for not placing quite as much trust in Einhard as he might have wished us to give

him. To be fair, most other Frankish historical writings of the time prove to be equally idiosyncratic, partisan and occasionally downright mendacious.

In general, what follows is as far as possible source-driven. Which is to say, it depends more upon the primary sources of evidence for the period, reference to which will be found in the notes, than upon modish or other methodologies. However, it is hoped that something of recent British, European and American scholarship will find itself reflected throughout. It may seem perverse to appear apologetic about using evidence, but these are strange times. Historians can be found muttering darkly in their prefaces about 'the tyranny of evidence' and the need to break free of its shackles. If by that they mean that they might earn better money writing fiction, they are probably right, but there is little point in thinking that what they thereby produce is history.

To make this book as comprehensible as possible, I have in general quoted original sources in translation, using several of the excellent modern versions that are listed in the bibliography. Their authors have served to render this period more accessible to students and general readers alike. Particular acknowledgement in this respect is owed to David King, whose monumental volume of translations of texts relating exclusively to the reign of Charlemagne is magisterial in its breadth and its depth and in its renderings of the far from easy language of the many literary and administrative texts that it includes. In a few cases I have made my own translation or imposed minor modification on those taken from the work of others.

I am enormously grateful to Janet Nelson, Tom Brown and David Ganz for reading through all or part of this book in typescript and for making numerous valuable comments and suggestions, and saving me from error at various points. I have also greatly benefited from generous gifts of stimulating off-prints relating to this period from many friends, not least from Jörg Jarnut and Janet Nelson. The latter kindly let me see her important article 'The Daughters of Desiderius' prior to its publication. The book was written during my time as a Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of Edinburgh. A more delightful context could not be imagined, and I am exceedingly indebted to the Institute's Director Peter Jones and to his Assistant Anthea Taylor for making my stay so pleasant and productive. The dedication to my wife, Judith McClure, a fellow hunter on the trail of Charlemagne, marks the greatest debt of all, and it is made not least as a reminder of Latin Vespers at Christmas time in the Palace Chapel in Aachen in its 1200th anniversary year.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARF	<i>Annales Regni Francorum</i> (see Kurze)
BEC	<i>Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes</i>
Boretius	Alfred Boretius (ed.), <i>Pippini, Carlomanni, Caroli Magni Diplomata</i> , MGN Diplomata, vol. 1
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, series latina</i>
CLA	Elias Avery Lowe, <i>Codices Latini Antiquiores</i> , 11 vols and a Supplement (Oxford, 1934–71)
DA	<i>Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters</i>
Dümmler	Ernst Dümmler (ed.), <i>Epistolae Alcuini</i> , MGH Epp., vol. 4
FS	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
Godman and Collins	Peter Godman and Roger Collins (eds), <i>Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious</i> (Oxford, 1990)
Halphen	Louis Halphen (ed.), <i>Eginhard, Vie de Charlemagne</i> (Paris, 1938)
KdG	<i>Karl der Große: Leben und Nachleben</i> , 4 vols (Düsseldorf, 1965), ed. H. Beumann et al.
Kurze	Friederich Kurze (ed.), <i>Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi</i> , MGH SRG, vol. 6.
MlöG	<i>Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung</i>
NA	<i>Neues Archiv</i>
NCMH	<i>New Cambridge Medieval History</i> , vol. II: c. 700–c. 900, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995)
Pardessus	Jean Marie Pardessus (ed.), <i>Diplomata, Chartae, Epistolae, Leges Aliaque Instrumenta ad Res Gallo-Francicas Spectantia</i> , 2 vols (Paris, 1849)
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J. P. Migne

Rev.	Revised version of the <i>Annales Regni Francorum</i> (see Kurze)
<i>Settimane</i>	<i>Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo</i> (Spoleto)
Wallace-Hadrill	<i>The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar</i> , ed. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1960)
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> , various series:
AA	<i>Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
Capit.	<i>Capitularia Regum Francorum</i>
Conc.	<i>Concilia</i>
Diplomata	<i>Die Urkunden der Karolinger</i>
Epp.	<i>Epistolae</i>
Leges	<i>Leges Nationum Germanicarum</i>
Poetae	<i>Poetae Latini Medii Aevi</i>
SRG	<i>Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum</i>
SRL	<i>Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum</i>
SRM	<i>Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum</i>
SS	<i>Scriptores</i>

Map 1 Saxons, Danes and Slavs, 772-814

Map 2 Lombard Italy, c. 770

Map 3 The Avar Wars, 791-6

Map 4 The Carolingian Empire in 814

Based on B. W. Scholz, *Carolingian Chronicles* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1970).