

THE ARTS
OF MANKIND

*EDITED BY ANDRÉ MALRAUX
AND ANDRÉ PARROT*

CAROLINGIAN ART



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CAROLINGIAN ART

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Contents

Introduction. JEAN HUBERT xi

PART ONE. Architecture and Its Decoration

JEAN HUBERT	1
<i>Characteristics and Sources of Carolingian Architecture.</i>	5
<i>Examples and Models from Northern Italy</i>	15
<i>The Imitation of Antiquity</i>	35
<i>A New Urban Development: Towns, Monasteries and Palaces</i>	39
<i>A New Church Design.</i>	50

PART TWO. Book Painting

JEAN PORCHER	71
<i>The Court Ateliers</i>	71
<i>Unofficial Painting</i>	171

PART THREE. Sculpture and Applied Art

W. F. VOLBACH.	207
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Conclusion. JEAN HUBERT 263

PART FOUR. General Documentation

Supplementary Illustrations	271
Plans	293
List of Manuscripts Reproduced	307
Chronological Table	309
Bibliography.	321
List of Illustrations.	341
Glossary-Index	367
Maps.	383

A LAST FAREWELL TO JEAN PORCHER

Now that Carolingian Art is going to press, we cannot but evoke anew, with gratitude and admiration, the memory of our colleague Jean Porcher. On this volume, as on its predecessor, Europe in the Dark Ages, he collaborated heart and soul. Manuscript painting was one of the domains of art history in which he felt supremely at ease and took a special delight. And it was, naturally, to him that the chapter dealing with Carolingian painting was assigned.

Rereading this chapter signed by Jean Porcher, we seem to hear the very voice of the man we knew so well; full of enthusiasm for the subject he knew and loved most of all. We could almost believe that he had lived in some previous form in the entourage of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald (of whom we are told, despite the sobriquet, that he had a thick shock of hair, a fact confirmed by one of the earliest portraits of the king), so convincingly does he bring to life the milieu over which these kings presided. After reading Jean Porcher, we can no longer doubt that the ornamentation of Carolingian Gospel Books and Bibles reflected a court art. Lavish patronage was needed to make such works feasible and it is clear that the art centres of Rheims, Metz and Paris were strongly influenced by Aachen and took their lead from it. This is evident when we compare the work emanating from these centres with the 'marginal' productions from St Gall, Salzburg and Fulda.

At the end of the litanies in a Sacramentary entirely written in gold and dating to the reign of Charles the Bald, we find an inscription: 'Hic calamus facto Liuthardi fine quievit' ('here, its task accomplished, Liuthard's pen has come to rest'). If called on to choose his epitaph, Jean Porcher might well have made these words his own; with his contribution to this volume his pen, too, has come to rest. Too soon, alas; far too soon. Fortunately, so far as The Arts of Mankind series is concerned, his work was done, and the pages by him in this volume are, indeed, his last will and testament.

ANDRÉ PARROT

October 1967



Introduction

IN OUR preceding volume, *Europe of the Invasions* (or, as it was published in Great Britain, *Europe in the Dark Ages*), we drew attention to the long survival of the art of the Late Roman Empire. We also pointed out that from the sixth to the eighth century attempts were often made to imitate the Roman buildings which formed the setting of daily life in the Merovingian period. But these praiseworthy efforts had only a very limited scope. There was as yet no set purpose to further progress by drawing inspiration from the past. This was to be the task of Charlemagne and his associates.

During the first part of the early Middle Ages any effective progress of the arts had been hindered by the chaotic conditions then prevailing in almost all parts of the Frankish kingdom. Fortunately the monastic institution was soon to establish itself as a powerful instrument of order, counteracting the excesses of cruel kings and a bellicose nobility. Once the monks abandoned the eremitical state and took to residing in groups, first in 'lauras,' then in organized monasteries, it was easier for them to devote themselves to study and to take an interest in the arts. Towards the beginning of the eighth century the first monasteries built on a regular plan made their appearance in the West. As a result of the reforms introduced about 754 by Chrodegang, bishop of Metz, a new way of life, resembling that of the monks, was enjoined on the cathedral clergy. Thus the order which already reigned in Benedictine monasteries was extended to a large section of the clergy. Charlemagne was instrumental in this change. One of his chief ambitions was to give to the theocratic society on which his heart was set an ambiance worthy of it. Thus the layout of many cathedral towns was profoundly modified.

Charlemagne did not himself supervise the changes made in the monastic establishment, nor did he initiate the creation of cathedral chapters, but it was he who gave these reforms a wider, almost a universal application. The same applies to the reform of the liturgy. Pepin, crowned king at Saint-Denis in 754 by Pope Stephen II, was the first to prescribe in Gaul the imitation of the usages of the churches of Rome for the singing and celebration of divine service. The church books had to be changed, and cathedrals and monastery churches were even made to face west, like the pontifical church of St John Lateran and St Peter's in Rome.

An exact imitation was achieved at Fulda, and there were others, less literal, in the form of churches with two sanctuaries, one at each end. Though these drastic changes took effect only after Charlemagne's rise to power, we must not forget that it was Pepin, his father, who inaugurated them. Nor must we overlook the fact that the flourishing state of architecture, as evidenced in the late eighth century by Saint-Riquier, Aachen and Germigny-des-Prés, was clearly the fruit of previous endeavours. The advance of architecture preceded that of literature; it was not till 787 that Charlemagne enjoined that schools should be established in every diocese. All the same we are bound to recognize that but for Charlemagne's personal initiative and the enormous resources at his disposal no great building programme could have been carried out. It is important today to emphasize the complexity of the 'Carolingian renaissance,' for rather too simplified a picture of it has gained currency. The genius of Charlemagne is great enough not to suffer by being given its proper place in history. Provided we leave eighth-century architecture out of account, there is every justification for speaking of a Carolingian 'miracle' when we observe the sudden appearance in the early ninth century of illuminated manuscripts, gold-work and enamelling, ivory carving and gem engraving—diverse arts practised with a perfection that in some cases has never been surpassed.

Charlemagne died in 814. The renascence of the arts continued in the reigns of his successors, Louis the Pious (died 840) and Charles the Bald (died 877). Soon, however, many workshops in Gaul were compelled to close down. Internecine conflicts within the empire put an end to the patronage of the arts and the Norse invasions (recorded in the Chronological Table, Part Four) dispersed the craftsmen or forced them to take refuge in outlying regions unoccupied by the invaders. Such unusual works as the abbey church of Saint-Michel de Cuxa and the statue of St Foy at Conques are not original tenth-century creations but rustic versions of forms invented by the best Carolingian ateliers of the second half of the ninth century. To this time, too, belongs the magnificent Gospel Book of Saint-Martial of Limoges, dated to about the year 1000 until the excellent study of it recently made by Mme Danielle Gaborit-Chopin. The high qualities of Carolingian works were maintained and even improved on at the court of the Ottonian emperors, where patronage of the arts was on almost the same scale as at the court of Charlemagne.

By the end of the reign of Charles the Bald, the Carolingian renaissance had lost its initial impetus. It was thus of short duration, but it played a decisive role, shining out like a beacon in the surrounding darkness. It bore fruit in a large part of Europe and lay at the origin of medieval humanism. To it, indeed, modern times owe something of their own humanism; our writing, for example, is based on the calligraphic script of those magnificent illuminated ninth-century manuscripts, which scholars of the sixteenth century had taken for antique works.

PART ONE

Jean Huet