

## CAROLINGIAN CORRECTIO RECONSIDERED

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- To what extent have our current notions of reform and *correctio* been shaped by the secondary literature on the subject?
- To what extent do contemporary sources reflect the terminology being used in modern historiography, and *vice versa*?
- To what extent do ideas about early medieval states, politics, histor(iograph)y etc. impinge on our idea of "reform" at the time?

This workshop hopes to take a fresh look at Carolingian *correctio* starting from these three issues, since they have strongly influenced, if not determined, the discussion about "reforms" over the past decades:

1. In the course of the past century and a half, many scholars have tried to interpret what it was exactly that started to unfold in the last decades of the eighth century. This has led to a preponderance of terms like Carolingian Renaissance; rationalism; renewal; *correctio* or reform all over modern historiography, and (given the long pedigree of this research) often as self-explanatory terms. Not everybody means the same with these terms, however (the concept of Contreni's Renaissance is very different from the one used by Giles Brown, for instance). If one unravels how exactly the discussion developed over time, it turns out that some strange things have happened, many of which still influence our thinking today. For instance, in the first decades after the Second World War – the time of authors such as Erna Patzelt and Paul Lehmann – copying Classical authors was an important argument for seeing a 'renaissance before the Renaissance'. Half a century down the road, however, the copying of Classical authors still looms large, even though ideas of 'renaissance' have been substituted by different concepts. Meanwhile, corpora of other texts and manuscripts have hardly been taken on board at all (see for instance Contreni). For authors such as Patzelt and Lehmann, the spectre of Classical culture still loomed large, and the strength of the early medieval period was measured in its ability to "illuminate" the "dark ages" – effectively latching on to a rhetoric similar to the one developed during the Enlightenment. These days, the myth of the Dark Ages has largely been abandoned by historians, but the copying of Classical works is still used as one of the characteristics of the Carolingian "reforms", even though the question that made this into one of the yardsticks of Western civilisation is not one that is explicitly asked today. This means, then, that bits and pieces of older discussions that tried to prove altogether different things have hitch-hiked their way into current debates – and we have to wonder if that is helpful at all. As a consequence, we have to think how the concepts in use today, such as reform and *correctio*, have come into the world, what they imply in contemporary discussions. We also need to wonder if the connotations of this terminology are actually rooted in solid source-based analysis or if they spring from the paradigms created by previous generations of historians.
2. A second problem is that of the concepts currently in use. Most *au courant* at the moment is the idea of 'Carolingian reform(s)' but Julia Barrow has demonstrated that this term is not at all helpful or even useful to describe what we are looking at. Her main argument is that our modern concept of reform is per definition forward looking, and means changing things for the better in some kind of evolutionary frame, always implying progress. This is,

according to Barrow, not at all what we are looking at. What we therefore need to do is re-examine the terminology of 'correctio' from the period itself throughout a wide range of sources and think very hard about their meaning, connotations and implications. Additionally, Timothy Reuter has, from another angle, argued that "reform" implies that certain institutions already have to be in place so that they can be overhauled, whereas contemporary sources more often speak in terms of "general improvement" or "usefulness" without explicating which "reforms" are necessary. In a recent monograph, Steven Vanderputten argued that (monastic) reform was not so much an activity that was undertaken when it was felt to be necessary, but rather a constant process – in effect a state of mind of the clergy and monks involved. While his work focuses on later centuries, his conclusions seem applicable to the Carolingian and even Merovingian times as well: *correctio* was not purely undertaken for political expediency – it was also part and parcel of the early medieval Church, built into the very fabric of Western Christendom.

3. Some ideas have nested themselves into our current understanding of Carolingian *correctio* although they are evidently wrong and need reconsideration or qualification. For example, Carolingian *correctio* is often thought to have envisaged uniformity in matters such as liturgy (and Latin, and rituals, and 'religion', and even writing), even though an in-depth reading of the sources reveals a high tolerance for and even embrace of diversity within the Church (as shown by Kottje; McKitterick; Hen). Added to this is the idea that these reforms may somehow be identified as typically "Carolingian" (i.e. it is usually taken for granted that the Carolingians took the initiative in these matters rather than latching on to a pre-existing discourse of perpetual improvement). Moreover, frequent references in the sources to "Rome" have often been taken literally to mean that things were consciously and willingly modelled after (what were perceived to be) Roman customs by the Carolingians. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is the persisting idea that a lot of what was envisaged in texts like the *Admonitio Generalis* got 'stuck' at court and could not go any further due to a lack of infrastructure or because the court did not have the means to enforce their ideas – an interpretation which hinges not only on our idea that these were things that needed enforcing in the first place, but also on a vision of the centralised court as the main instigator of these policies.

For this first workshop, we will focus on the widest range of primary sources possible, and discuss the terminology we find in there, the implications and echoes of such terms and ideas, in order to try and build from there. Every contributor will therefore adopt a hefty chunk of material and present the results from the perspective of their own expertise. Examples of sources may include (intelligent selections of) canon law, prescriptive texts, hagiography, conciliar proceedings, exegesis, theological treatises, hagiography and letters. The main goal of our discussions will be to compare notes, arrive at a more or less comprehensive overview of the emic terms, notions and ideas for "reform" we find in the sources, and formulate lines and questions to shape our future research.