



MICHAEL WALLACE-HADRILL

John Michael Wallace-Hadrill 1916–1985

JOHN MICHAEL WALLACE-HADRILL was born in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, on 29 September, Michaelmas Day, 1916: he was usually known by the second of his given names. His father, Frederic, for long second master at Bromsgrove School, was a deeply formative influence on his life. Frederic, despite his double-barrelled name (which he assumed) and his insistence on ‘gentlemanly’ behaviour, was a self-made man, the son of a junior clerk working in the naval yards at Chatham, Edward Hadrill, who died young leaving his widow, Louise, and young son penniless. Louise remarried Frederick Clayton, a technician who installed science laboratories in public schools. Frederic Hadrill (to his lifelong resentment) did not receive enough education to take him to university, but was able to take an external degree in science by correspondence at London University. Such family history fascinated Michael, who even wrote it up for his own interest. Frederic was determined that none of his three sons should suffer his disadvantages: all three were sent to Cheltenham School, and won places at Oxford. David Sutherland (born 1920) and Francis Gordon (born 1924) became, like their father, second masters of public schools (Aldenham and Cheltenham respectively). Like Michael, both had marked scholarly inclinations, and David, who after ordination into the Church of England took a doctorate in theology at Manchester, became a notable patristic scholar, working on Eusebius of Caesarea.

Michael always remembered his father with devotion: a strict disciplinarian and a mordant wit, he lavished affection on his sons and was determined to see them do well. But Michael also felt himself to be born with

a number of disadvantages, which included a hare lip (rather clumsily sutured), poor sight, and above all left-handedness, to which he attributed his hatred of the mechanical world. In addition he felt an educational disadvantage deriving from his schooling: he attended a small preparatory school, where no Greek was taught, which was run by a friend of his father's, a brutal man whom he later recalled with loathing. As a result, when he moved to Cheltenham School, he was not placed in the classical stream, and a feeling of inferiority to classicists was made stronger by his winning a scholarship to the classics-dominated Corpus Christi College, Oxford (1935). It is significant that he ensured that his two sons should be classically trained. His own (perceived) sense of not belonging to the classical world is a key to his ambivalent reading of the Early Middle Ages as both admiring and not belonging to the Ancient World, and also to his careful avoidance of the eastern Mediterranean.

At Corpus his proudest achievement as an undergraduate was winning the Lothian Prize in 1938 for an essay on 'The Abbey of St Denis in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century'. The energy which he expended on this first piece of research, which included a trip to the Bibliothèque Nationale, was a factor in his failure to achieve a First, though he also felt badly neglected by his tutor, Denis Brogan, and indebted for last-minute coaching to Max Beloff. The Second was a bitter blow, and it was something he kept hidden, even from members of his family. Nevertheless he immediately embarked on the study of the legendary history and posthumous reputation of Charlemagne, under the supervision of F. M. Powicke. Sir Maurice, by no means a specialist in the period that Michael was to make his own, was to remain a major influence. Shortly before death, in a conversation vividly recalled by one of his students, Michael talked of his fascination with an episode which occurred at Peatling Magna in 1265: Sir Maurice's influence can surely be seen in this interest in a minor episode in the days following the death of Simon de Montfort. Research on Charlemagne's *Nachleben* was soon curtailed by the outbreak of war, and it was never taken up again as a single topic of research, although the subject was to surface in numerous later publications: *The Frankish Church* of 1983, for instance, has several illuminating paragraphs on the matter, not least on the *Lives* of Charlemagne written by Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, while the historical traditions of the monastery of St Denis are considered in numerous of Michael's publications, from all periods of his scholarly life.

Corpus had elected him to a junior research fellowship in 1939, but in the event he joined up on day one of the war. Initially he served in the

intelligence corps. After Dunkirk he was transferred to the Foreign Office (MI6), where he rose to be a major. He was engaged in matters of some secrecy, working at one point under Kim Philby; he would never discuss in detail his war service, and was angered by others who subsequently ignored the Official Secrets Act. What is clear is that his fluency in both French and German served him well in interrogation. The brutality of the war distressed him deeply (interrogators were required to attend the executions of enemy agents they had questioned). Then in 1946 Michael returned to Corpus, this time as a Fellow of the College, before moving on after a year to neighbouring Merton, where he was Fellow and Tutor from 1947 to 1955. He was to retain a great attachment for his colleges, Corpus, Merton, and in later years All Souls, although he was never a college man in the sense of enjoying High Table (he disliked rich food, and would often ask for an omelette), and indeed could be critical of Senior Common Room extravagance. But the wit of his conversation ensured that his colleagues sought out his company. To Corpus and Merton he showed his affection in the dedication of two of his books, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent*, and *The Frankish Church*.

Michael's career would be marked by a series of distinctions, notably an Oxford D.Litt. in 1967, his election to the British Academy in 1969, and his CBE in 1982. He would also hold two prestigious chairs, in Manchester and Oxford. It is, however, through his publications that he is best seen. The first of these appeared during his first years at Merton. The earliest article was a piece for the *Manchester Guardian*, on 'Alfred the Great, 849–899, his European setting'. Although a slight piece, it already announced concerns that would recur throughout his work: Alfred would receive attention in *Early Germanic Kingship*. More important was the insistence on seeing English history in a Continental context.

Almost as notable as articles in Michael's output were the book reviews that started appearing in 1947. There were to be over seventy of them, not including the equally numerous short notices. Here, more even than in his books and articles, one can see Michael responding directly to the work of other scholars, at times—as for instance in the review of the Krusch–Levison edition of the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours—offering profound comments on the nature of texts and editions: on other occasions—as in the review of A. H. M. Jones's *The Later Roman Empire*—making crucially important deductions on points of detail. Reviewing for Michael was an activity to be taken very seriously: as Editor of the *English Historical Review* from 1965 to 1974 he was particularly well

placed to show how valuable a task it could be. He was also much concerned about the tone of reviews. He would recount to first-time reviewers his own salutary experience, when having reviewed two books of Francis Oppenheimer somewhat critically, he received a letter from the author, a clergyman and amateur scholar, lamenting that the reviews had destroyed his life's work. Thereafter, however much he disagreed with a scholar, or thought the work under par, he chose his words carefully. There is criticism of others in his writings, but it is usually of his peers, and it is expressed in such phrases as 'I can see no reason for', 'I cannot accept that', or 'It is difficult to believe, as some do, that'. Alternatively he will quote a whole sentence, agree with half, and disagree with the remainder. Academic courtesy was something he valued highly.

Michael's first substantial article, 'The Franks and the English in the ninth century: some common historical interests', appeared in 1950. It was a version of a paper delivered at the Anglo-French Historical Conference that had been held in Oxford the previous year. At this stage in his career Michael's Continental contacts were, perhaps understandably, Francophone rather than Germanophone—in later years it would be the reverse. As with the nearly contemporary *Manchester Guardian* article this early piece signalled several later interests. Again England is linked emphatically to the Continent. Equally important is the sense of what matters in a source: 'It does not seem to me to matter very much whether Charlemagne in fact lived as Einhard says he did.' This sense of almost Irenaic adiphora was to become a hallmark of Michael's writing. In many a subsequent piece one can find a comment indicating that certain lines of enquiry are a waste of time. Michael was concerned to understand the world as a ninth-century man would have understood it, and here most of all perhaps one can see the influence of Sir Maurice Powicke. If anything, Michael's earlier writings are more sceptical of twentieth-century readings than his later books were to be. Even two years later, in *The Barbarian West*, he was more inclined to accept the notion of epic tradition than he had been in 1950. It is still possible to think that the earlier scepticism was justified.

The matter of how to read a source was yet more central to Michael's subsequent piece on 'The Work of Gregory of Tours in the light of modern research'. The article, the first of two papers he gave to the Royal Historical Society, marks his earliest foray into the sixth century, and more specifically into the writings of Gregory—material which from now on he would make his own. For a while, indeed, he would become first and foremost a scholar of the Merovingian period: only towards the end of his career did his Carolingian interests come to predominate, before

being overshadowed by his growing attachment to Bede. This first essay on Gregory showed, once again, just how concerned he was to understand an author on his own terms, and not as a quarry for facts.

The Royal Historical Society lecture was followed up by his first book, *The Barbarian West*. Published in 1952, it was suggested by Sir Maurice Powicke, whose influence is readily acknowledged in the preface. In many respects it is an essay—as Michael himself was happy to acknowledge. It is most certainly not a text-book. Powicke thought of the readership as being ‘the man in the train’. It begins with a crucial statement about the Late Roman Empire. This introduction is followed by discussions of the earliest of the barbarian incomers, and then by a chapter on the Lombards and several on the Franks. As a tour of the barbarian world it left much out: whole peoples are omitted: for instance the Burgundians, and more curiously the Anglo-Saxons. In the first two editions Visigothic Spain was ignored, although it was to be the subject of a chapter added in the third edition of 1967. Despite the oddities of the coverage, the emphases of the book were carefully chosen. As in his later writings, Michael deliberately spent time on the Late Roman Empire, for, despite or because of his schooling, he had an acute sense of the extent to which Rome underpinned what followed: ‘The Roman West had become barbarized, and yet it looked back. It remembered Rome.’ Just as important as the late Empire itself were some of its leading thinkers: in particular Michael drew attention to Augustine, whose influence on the early Middle Ages he never underestimated. He would teach the Augustine Special Subject in Oxford for much of the 1960s until he felt that it was better left to Peter Brown. As in his previous articles, there is the same emphasis on what the sources say, as opposed to any narrative the historian might want to reconstruct: ‘We can never be certain what was happening. But we can often guess what contemporaries thought was happening.’ It is an approach that prompts sharp comments on such authors as Cassiodorus and Paul the Deacon.

Yet for all the emphasis on authors, the book shows a concern about social underpinnings, which is an issue that resurfaces regularly throughout Michael’s writings, and provides another of the pegs on which his imaginative understanding of the past was pinned. Thus Gregory the Great’s concern for the poor attracts surprising emphasis. Equally important for Michael’s own developing interests, *The Barbarian West* contains his first comments on feud, and its relation to written law, Roman or Germanic. The sense that a historian had to understand both the structure of society and the thoughts of its leading writers was one that was

central to Michael's approach. It was a sense that would be picked up deliberately in 1983 when a group of his students offered him a Festschrift in which the articles were dedicated to the theme of *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*—a title chosen astutely by Patrick Wormald.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the chronological scale of the work, other of the themes that would occupy Michael for much of the rest of his career were also signalled in *The Barbarian West*. The issue of kingship among the Franks inevitably attracts attention. The approach is, as ever cautious, indeed more sceptical than it would later be. The notion of sacral-ity is questioned to a greater extent than in subsequent writings—and justifiably so. More prosaically, the interpretation of the seventh century, or at least the first half, in terms of the rise of the Arnulfings or Carolingians is questioned. With regard to the Carolingian period itself, the notion of a Renaissance, a topic that would come to the fore in work of the late 1970s, is examined and carefully interpreted in its barbarian context. Typical of the approach and the tone is a comment on Charlemagne: 'What a recent scholar has termed his personality as a statesman does not and probably never did exist.'

Alongside his acknowledgement of his debt to Sir Maurice Powicke, in the Preface to *The Barbarian West* Michael also thanked his mother and his wife. The former meticulously typed and retyped his early works. The latter would type later works, as, in time, would his daughter-in-law. There had been a first marriage, to Ethel ('Tibby') Irving, contracted during the war, which ended bitterly after six years, in 1949, following his return to Oxford. His second marriage, to Anne Wakefield, in 1950, was the start of a new and lasting happiness: by the time of the publication of *The Barbarian West* in 1952 they already had one son, Andrew (born 1951), and a second, James, was soon to follow (1953). Both would follow in his footsteps to Corpus: the former as a classicist, the latter as a physicist. Michael's marriage to Anne was of immense importance. He would express his gratitude to her in his books on a number of occasions, and his 1975 collection, *Early Medieval History*, would be a very real present for their silver wedding anniversary.

Meanwhile, in 1952, Michael brought together his interests in the Merovingian and Carolingian periods in a piece on Hincmar and the *Lex Salica*. Published in the *Revue du Droit*, it is unusual, although not unique in Michael's oeuvre, in devoting considerable space to rebutting a single author, Simon Stein. Hincmar's use of history was to be a topic to which Michael returned on numerous occasions throughout his life. Michael's

own sense of the importance of manuscripts, which forms the other pole in this 1952 article, also recurs in later work, though with declining frequency. It is, perhaps, more noticeable in his reviews than in his other writings. Michael's sensitivity to manuscripts was something that Donald Bullough singled out in his appreciation, which prefaces *Ideal and Reality*. In time he came to look at manuscripts less often, rarely spending time in Continental libraries, although he talked with wonder at being served coffee in the library of St Gallen, while he still had a ninth-century manuscript open in front of him.

The second half of the 1950s saw a temporary interruption in Michael's otherwise unbroken Oxford career. In 1955 he moved to a chair at Manchester, where he remained until 1961. He felt obliged by the precedent of Tout and Powicke to accept the Manchester chair, but was never fully at his ease there, though there were attractions like the eventual new home in Higher Disley, on the edge of the Peak District, and the academic environment was stimulating. The university library was well stocked: some of its volumes of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* bear annotations which suggest that a scholar of a previous generation, perhaps Tout, had already been pondering Gregory of Tours. There was also the John Rylands Library, in those days not yet taken over by the university. The first fruits of this period, however, bear no mark of the new environment, but rather pick up on concerns that had already been signalled. 'Frankish Gaul' was Michael's own contribution to a volume, *France, Government and Society*, which he edited jointly with John McManners. It returns to the combination of Roman and Germanic, to *Lex Salica*, and also to the issue of feud. Again, Michael saw no mystique in barbarian kingship, stressing that Clovis's genealogy only extended back four generations. This particular scepticism would fade in subsequent work. There are, however, some new emphases in 'Frankish Gaul': Childeric's grave is briefly given prominence, and is read in the same hard-headed way as is Clovis's genealogy, suggesting 'the successful business man as much as the ruthless warrior'. The grave itself would feature again in Michael's works, and would also be presented in a different light. Another issue to make its first appearance was that of migration caused by the Vikings. Overall, however, the emphasis was one that appears nowhere else in Michael's writings in the same terms: 'The vital strand running through Gallo-Frankish society from the fifth to the tenth centuries is seigneurie, lordship.' Exactly what that meant he tried to pin down by envisaging a number of precise relationships.

If 'Frankish Gaul' was still a piece associated with Oxford, the next

works were more clearly attached to Manchester. Two were delivered as public lectures at the John Rylands Library, while a third, which had been given at the Anglo-American Conference in London in 1955 was published in the library's *Bulletin*. The London lecture concerned Fredegar, or rather the earliest Fredegar compilation, as preserved in a Paris manuscript of around the year 700. It is a remarkable musing on the author's sources, and on his view of his contemporaries. Looking at the factional fighting which closes the chronicle, Michael saw not Burgundian and Frankish regionalism, but rather a more complex interplay of local interests. This unquestionably marked a deepening understanding of the seventh century.

At the start of the Anglo-American paper Michael announced that the Paris manuscript of Fredegar should be the basis 'of any future edition worth the name'. When it came to editing Fredegar, however, this was not the version that he himself chose to concentrate on. Rather, he edited the fourth book of the eighth-century recension of Fredegar, with its Carolingian additions. Much of the work was done during family holidays in the Scilly Isles, as were many of the book reviews. One may lament the decision not to edit and translate the Paris manuscript: even now historians have to struggle either with the manuscript itself, or with a less than ideal edition prepared by Gabriel Monod in 1885. On the other hand, in terms of the value for the historian, and especially for the student historian there can be no doubt that the choice that Michael made was the right one. And, after all, students constituted the intended audience of the Nelson's Medieval Texts series, in which the volume was published. Essentially he put into the hands of generations of students and scholars a text full of extremely important information, which is by no means easy to understand without the help of a translation. One might even say that the translation is too good: it is sometimes necessary to go back to the Latin to be sure of the implications of Michael's elegant prose. Not everything in the introduction has stood the test of time: the matter of the authorship of the Fredegar chronicle has continued to be debated, and the brave discussion of the language of text has been overtaken by more recent work on Late Latin. But there can be no question that the edition as a whole opened up the seventh-century in Francia in a way that nothing had done before or has done since.

The next piece from this Manchester period was on 'The Bloodfeud of the Franks'. Published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, it originated in a lecture given there. The feud was an issue that had already attracted Michael's attention in *The Barbarian West*. In many ways it was

central to his imaginative understanding of early medieval society, and Manchester proved an ideal place to develop that understanding. Crucial was the influence of a colleague, Max Gluckman, Professor of Anthropology at the university, whose *Custom and Conflict in Africa* underpinned the approach adopted. It became possible to understand how an early medieval feuding society avoided falling into anarchy: even to understand how the feud and royal legislation were compatible. Michael was not the first historian to approach a social problem from an anthropological point of view. On the other hand 'The Bloodfeud of the Franks' predates the vogue for the use of anthropology by historians, and indeed helped create that vogue. Since 1959 feud itself has come to be more tightly defined: nevertheless, in its depiction of feuding society Michael's article remains the central text.

Between 'The Bloodfeud of the Franks' and the second of his lectures delivered at the Rylands Michael made his only visit to the major Italian gathering of medievalists, the *Settimane di Studio* at Spoleto. In Donald Bullough's words, 1960 was, 'the last year when both Paul Lehmann and F.-L. Ganshof were there to bring much-needed rigour to the notorious *interventi*'. Ganshof was already a friend, whose help had been acknowledged in footnotes. Michael's contribution, 'Rome and the Early English Church: some questions of transmission', once again set English history firmly in a Continental context. Central to the argument was the role played by the Gaulish Church and the Franks in relations between England and the Papacy. The word 'transmission' in the title is no minor addition. The article also pointed forward to the future development of Michael's work in one crucial respect. For the first time a spotlight was shone on Bede.

Concern with Anglo-Saxon England is again apparent in another piece of the same period also to find an Italian home, in *Studi Medievali*: 'The Graves of Kings'. Archaeology is not a constant in Michael's work. At times his approach to the field was overly dependent on a single archaeologist or a single site. Thus Eduard Salin dominated his understanding of Merovingian burial, while Pierre Demolon's excavation at Brebières was central to his view of settlement. For the archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England he tended to turn in later years almost exclusively to Charles Thomas and Rosemary Cramp. Yet he had astute points to make about the interpretation of archaeological material, and especially about unnecessary assumptions that underlay interpretations. Childeric's grave was something that intrigued him. So too did the burial in Mound One at Sutton Hoo. At the heart of his reading of Sutton Hoo is the

question of how kingship was represented, and how that might be reflected in the archaeological record. He was sceptical of the way that the finds at Mound One were thought to be self-evidently royal. In wicked moments he would suggest in conversation that the burial could be that of a Viking, and that the grave goods were loot plundered from the East Anglian kingdom. He particularly liked to joke that, given the problem of whether there had or had not been a body in the mound, the burial could have been that of Ivarr the Boneless. The article's scepticism did not carry the day, and he knew it. He even wavered in his scepticism over the years, but he rightly republished the article in 1975, with an appendix that amounts by no means to a full retraction. Methodologically his approach is as good as any to the problem of how to read Mound One, and its doubts are too rarely heeded.

As a last piece for Manchester there was a final lecture at the Rylands, 'Gothia and Romania'. This was a parting look at the fifth-century Goths, who had played a major role in *The Barbarian West*. On this occasion he was also engaging in debate of the most civilised kind with Edward Thompson. Settlement, particularly as evidenced in place-names, attracts attention. As in his earlier writings Michael was concerned with the nature of the law in the early Germanic kingdoms. At the heart of the article, however, lies the question of the integration of the Germanic incomers. Inevitably this meant a return to the question of religion. Arianism was approached with rather more sophistication than it had been ten years earlier. The question of integration also prompted a greater emphasis on the role of bishops, with Sidonius Apollinaris, Caesarius of Arles and Avitus of Vienne coming to the fore. The first two would receive similar emphasis in later works, notably in the opening chapter of *The Frankish Church*.

In addition to the publication of 'Gothia and Romania', 1961 saw Michael's return to Oxford with his election as senior research fellow at Merton. He had never succeeded in making Manchester a true home, and was deeply grateful to Merton for finding a way to bring him back, though the loss of a professorial salary meant sacrifices. He would take on the additional task of Sub-Warden for two years from 1964. He also accepted the editorship of the *English Historical Review*. His eventual new home (from 1967), Reynolds Farm at Cassington, was a house to which he was devoted, with its medieval origins, and its traces of medieval fishponds. A manor house had been built on the site, c.1120, by William Clinton, treasurer to Henry I. In 1317 a licence to crenellate was granted to a resident Montacute. The leasehold was bought by Edmund Reynolds

when he lost his fellowship at Michael's old college, Corpus, for popery, and it became a centre for recusants. In short, the house provided the ideal ambience for a medieval historian, and for an essentially private man. Equally important was the garden. At Cassington he could fall into a routine of an early trip into Oxford (driven in by Anne: he himself never learnt to drive), an intensive morning's work, followed ideally by a return home, work in the garden, and a return to scholarship in the evening. His passion for gardening, which he inherited from his father, was by no means confined to Cassington: Michael would take up the post of Garden Master with zeal, first at Merton and subsequently at All Souls.

The return to Oxford was almost immediately marked by the publication of *The Long-Haired Kings*, a collection of a sizeable proportion of his early articles, followed by a new, and extended essay on the Merovingians, from which the book took its name. As the title of the new essay suggests this is not a history of the Franks, but rather of their kingship, and it puts the theme of kingship firmly at the forefront of Michael's thought. It begins, necessarily, with fragmentary information. Michael still showed exemplary caution over sacral kingship, but he did introduce Woden for the first time into the picture—an indication that he was more inclined than he had once been to accept traditional interpretations of Germanic religion. After its opening section 'The Long-Haired Kings' sticks closely to individual texts, reaffirming the view that we may not know what happened, but we can discover what early medieval men thought had happened. The first major witness, inevitably, is Gregory of Tours: 'Like all good historical writing, Gregory's account of the great barbarian [Clovis] carries that kind of conviction from which the reader can never afterwards escape. Clovis is Gregory's Clovis, whether we like it or not . . .' Nevertheless, Gregory is not followed blindly: Clovis's conversion in particular prompted some searching questions and distinctions: indeed we are dealing with 'adhesion, not conversion': Christianity is merely 'an additional cult'. Over the disputed chronology of Clovis's change of religion agnosticism reigns. Less caution is expressed over the christianisation of the Franks as a whole. The picture is one of religious assimilation. Great emphasis is placed on the cultus of local saints, who are presented as the equivalent of demigods. Christ himself appears as a warrior on a gravestone from the Rhineland—an object that would again be the subject of comment in *The Frankish Church*. Assimilation is also seen in law. Cutting to the heart of a debate about the nature of the earliest Frankish code, Michael stated with accustomed concision: 'It is a waste of time to debate how narrowly "Salic", in a tribal sense, this law is.' 'Only lawyers

familiar with the practice of Vulgar Law in the West could have compiled *Lex Salica*.’

While the Merovingians of the fifth and sixth centuries had to be seen through Gregory’s eyes, those of the seventh, or at least of its first half, were observed by Fredegar. Chlothar II and Dagobert I are Fredegar’s Kings as much as Clovis had been Gregory’s. A study of Frankish kingship in the second half of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth meant a discussion of the *rois fainéants*, and thus a return to more fragmentary information, not least to charters. As in *The Barbarian West* Michael was insistent that the rise of the Carolingians should not be antedated. For all their weaknesses the Merovingians continued to have a function, above all a legal function, until quite late on. Their loss first of power and then of office had a good deal to do with shifts of allegiance within the Frankish Church, which occurred over a considerable period of time, and indeed some great institutions, notably St Denis, remained loyal until remarkably late. In dealing with the eventual deposition of the Merovingians Michael, still retaining his scepticism about sacrality, saw nothing obviously magical about the tonsuring of Childeric II. Nor was the anointing of Pippin and subsequently of his sons obviously a substitution of one magic for another: rather it addressed the need to overcome the oath-breaking involved in deposing a Merovingian.

With the publication of *The Long-Haired Kings* in 1962 Michael made the Merovingians his own. An indication of where his future thoughts would lie came in the same year, when he delivered his Jarrow lecture, ‘Bede’s Europe’. As in ‘Rome and the Early English Church’, the Anglo-Saxon was placed firmly in a European context. Again Michael set the mind of a civilised individual against an often-barbarous social reality. Equally Bede, like other thinkers whom Michael had considered, was treated on his own terms: ‘what Bede was looking for, and what he found, was not the unfolding of the story of Byzantine *Imperium*, nor yet, at least directly, of the Christian *regna gentium* of western Europe: nor even of the papacy; it was the story of the Sixth Age, the *Ecclesia Dei*’. The approach, when adopted by other historians in the 1980s, would be regarded as novel, but it was a lesson that Michael had learned, and had done so long before 1962.

The Jarrow lecture was followed in print with the one scholarly piece (on Aidan) written before 1975 not to be reprinted. Close on its heels was a contribution to Beryl Smalley’s Oxford volume on *Trends in Medieval Political Thought*. ‘The *Via Regia* of the Carolingian Age’ was essentially an extension of the subject of kingship, opened up in *The Long-Haired*

Kings. It pursued the matter through the eighth and ninth centuries, looking as usual at individuals, especially Smaragdus, Alcuin and Hincmar, the latter already a familiar figure in Michael's scholarship. It also put considerable stress on the influence of the Bible. The importance of the Old Testament, in particular, had always been acknowledged. Henceforth it was to be emphasised yet more. 'The *Via Regia* of the Carolingian Age' also sketched out much that would dominate the second half of *The Frankish Church*. From now on, indeed, Michael would more often than not be revisiting old concerns, sometimes refining a viewpoint (not always, one might think, for the better), sometimes adding, sometimes recasting, but essentially the boundaries of what interested him had been sketched. Thus 'Charlemagne and England', an article written for the massive four-volume collection, *Karl der Grosse*, showed, once again, the value of placing England in its European context. The theme would be picked up on yet later occasions, in *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* and subsequently in *The Frankish Church*.

Even the chapter on the Visigoths which Michael added to *The Barbarian West* in 1967, and which covered new material, is in many respects a chapter on kingship. The same theme is self-evidently central to 'Gregory of Tours and Bede, their views on the personal qualities of kings'. This last article combined a study of kingship, in typical fashion, with an analysis of the attitudes of the two writers. Once again the approach was a forerunner of much that others would see as novel in subsequent decades. The paper was originally written for the 1965 Anglo-French conference held in Dijon, but was reworked for a British Council tour of several German universities in 1967, and was indeed published in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* in the following year. The tour itself had highlighted the extent to which Michael's approach differed from that of his German peers. Nevertheless his relations with a number of those peers, among them Eugen Ewig and Peter Classen, was to become ever more cordial.

Many of the issues that concerned Michael in the late 1960s reached fruition in the 1971 Ford lectures, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent*. His concern, admirably expressed in the preface, was, yet again to balance ideal and reality: to 'relate early medieval thinking about kingship to the practice of kings'. The preface also singles out two colleagues: Walter Ullmann, in Cambridge, whose approach to some of the material covered by Michael was rather different, and Eugen Ewig, the only scholar of the Merovingians among his contemporaries who can fairly be described as his equal. The lectures not only juxtaposed English

and Continental material, but they also addressed Continental scholarship with rather unexpected directness. One might note the quiet put-down of a certain type of German scholarship that liked to classify kings 'as *Grosskönige*, *Heerkönige*, and *Kleinkönige*; which is as much as to say that some kings were more powerful than others. It can mark no distinction between the quality of one king and another, and possibly there was none. I therefore make no use of these classifications.' Back in 1962, in *The Long-Haired Kings* Michael had been rather more taken with such terminology. Unusually, this was a move further away from established scholarly traditions.

The first of the Ford Lectures returned once again to the matter of the Roman background to the Early Middle Ages, although here Michael drew on material that he had not discussed before. Tacitus, perhaps inevitably, is taken as the starting point for a discussion of Roman views of Germanic political structures, despite the acknowledged difficulties of so doing. In his subsequent discussions Michael is often less sceptical than he had been in earlier publications: thus the notion of sacral kingship is treated a good deal more positively, while the Scandinavian pantheon, and Woden in particular, is given more attention than had previously been the case. Perhaps in part this was the result of thinking more across the Merovingian and Carolingian periods, combining material from both. Only the issue of charisma is treated with caution equivalent to that to be found in Michael's earlier work.

With regard to other issues, old themes are combined with new examples. Æthelberht's code invites a reconsideration of the issue of legislation, which Michael had previously dealt with in the context of Merovingian legal codes. Lawgiving is presented, memorably, 'as a royal function; it is something that the emperors, through the Church, can give kings'. Law is to be read more as a guide to royal ideology than to social reality. This approach to the subject would be enormously fruitful, particularly at the hands of Michael's pupil Patrick Wormald. Yet, as before, the ideology of royal legislation is set firmly against a background of feud. Other themes would be picked up subsequently by Michael himself. The discussions of Bede, Charlemagne and Charles the Bald look forward as well as backwards. The kingship of the two Frankish monarchs had already been sketched out in 'The *Via Regia* of the Carolingian Age', and it would be discussed several times more in later work. The discussion of Alfred, meanwhile, harked back to that first *Manchester Guardian* essay.

The same year, 1971, saw one other exploration of the relations between England and the Continent in 'A background to St Boniface's

mission'. It was a Festschrift piece for Dorothy Whitelock, whose help Michael had acknowledged on numerous occasions in earlier writings. A study of what the Frankish Church had achieved on its eastern border before the arrival of Boniface, it is more detailed, and more fully annotated, than much of Michael's work. To a large extent it rearranged previous scholarship to redraw the model of the christianisation of the land east of the Rhine. Unlike many of the ideas from this stage in his career, its concerns were largely new ones within Michael's oeuvre, although inevitably his conclusions would come to underpin the discussion of the same issues to be found in *The Frankish Church*.

The 1960s had essentially been years of research. In the early 1970s Michael's administrative commitments became more significant. He became a Delegate to the Oxford University Press in 1971: a task he carried out with great assiduity, as indeed he carried out all tasks to which he committed himself, for eleven years. He was also to be a Vice-President of the Royal Historical Society from 1973 to 1976. There were other developments within Oxford as well. First, Peter Brown's undergraduate teaching, and in particular his lectures on 'Society and the Supernatural from Marcus Aurelius to Mahommed', had created a pool of potential graduate students. As research fellow at Merton, Michael had not been required to teach undergraduates, although he sometimes did. Nor had he gathered many research students, although there were a few: early on in his career, notably Donald Bullough, and in the late 1960s, Patrick Wormald. Now there was something like a queue of students wishing to work on the Early Middle Ages, whose knowledge of Greek (like that of Michael himself) was such as to discourage them from working on Byzantium. To these he became the obvious supervisor—and an increasing number of postgraduates visited his rooms, full of cigar smoke, first in Merton and then in All Souls. It was not a role that he always relished, although on the whole those students who demanded most of him got most in return—overseas students, who were less in awe of the great man than were Oxford graduates, could be the most demanding. At the same time Michael was acutely aware that some research students of other universities were in difficulties, and he provided staunch support. Indeed, when called upon he could be the most supportive of mentors, both to his own students and to those of others.

The second factor that altered matters was the Chichele Chair of Modern History. When Sir Richard Southern retired from the Chair in 1969, Michael professed no interest in succeeding to it, and supported the claims of his old tutor, Geoffrey Barraclough. In 1972 he was offered, but

turned down the Regius Chair in Cambridge. With the sudden retirement of Geoffrey Barraclough in 1973, however, he found himself at All Souls. As Chichele Professor Michael was not allowed to teach undergraduates, but, running a successful seminar, he was well-placed to continue and increase his supervision of research students. One final side-effect of taking up the Chichele Chair was that Michael gave up being editor of the *English Historical Review*, a post he had held since 1965.

Immediately before taking up the Chichele Chair Michael delivered the Birkbeck lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, on the Merovingian Church—a set of lectures that were to become the first chapters of *The Frankish Church*. At least in their published form, they revisit much that Michael had already explored, although the concern is now primarily the Church rather than kings or kingship. Beginnings are grounded firmly in the Gallo-Roman Church, or rather, as he noted, Churches—in a comment that presaged a key point of Peter Brown's subsequent elaboration of the notion of 'microchristendoms'. Community indeed is a major issue in the Merovingian chapters of *The Frankish Church*. The christianisation of the countryside (so far as it went) is considered, as (and this time following Peter Brown) is the cult of relics. Against this is set Frankish paganism. Here Michael puts yet more stress on Woden than he had in previous writings, though he does not stop to justify this new emphasis. At the same time he asks starkly, and startlingly, whether Gregory of Tours, when talking of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury should not be taken at face value. Had the Franks in their long period of residence on the borders of the Empire taken over the Roman gods? Childeric's grave is described in somewhat different terms than it had been on previous occasions: in place of 'the successful business man' we are introduced to 'a good pagan, to whom the gods have been kind'. In general the Merovingians appear as rather more sacral than they have done in earlier writings. Gregory of Tours gets perhaps the most far-reaching and nuanced appraisal that Michael ever gave him. This is certainly true of Merovingian monasticism, and the saints of the sixth and seventh centuries. Rather more of a slog is the discussion of Church councils in the Merovingian period, whereas relations with the papacy, a theme that Michael had touched on before, are eloquently treated.

The Birkbeck lectures almost mark a farewell to Michael's interests in the Merovingian period. *The Vikings in Francia* look forward. In 1971 he had already written an obituary for Frank Stenton: now in 1974 he honoured his memory with a lecture. The Vikings had made fitful appearances beforehand in discussions of Charles the Bald and Alfred, and

always Michael had stressed their brutality. Now he stressed their impact on society, and in particular on monastic communities forced to migrate across France—a picture not everyone would agree with. The interpretation stems naturally from Michael's concern with authors and how they saw the world. It also takes much from his growing emphasis on paganism, and particularly on Woden, an interest that had been stimulated by the work of his student Alf Smyth. Unusually, but not uniquely among Michael's works the Stenton Lecture is a direct response to current trends in scholarship, which are mockingly described as portraying the Vikings as 'long-haired tourists who occasionally roughed up the natives'. The critique was addressed not to Michael's own pupil, Peter Sawyer, the leading English proponent of the revisionist school, but to the Belgian scholar, Albert D'Haenens. Despite the joke about tourists, the disagreement is, as ever, courteously stated.

Envisaging the brutality of early medieval life is central to much of Michael's work—which may seem strange given his horror of blood, stemming perhaps from his wartime experiences. Those experiences, on the other hand, may in part explain the need to understand the violence. The thought-world of the best of those who lived at the time, their 'nobility of mind' as he called it, is central to much of the rest of his oeuvre. In his inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor, 'Early Medieval History', he balanced the two perhaps better than in any other piece he wrote. As in the Birkbeck lectures he presents the urban communities surrounding bishops, but then moves out to the countryside (admittedly using the somewhat misleading excavation of Brebières), to communities of monks, and communities of Jews, a group which would appear more in his last works. Against this background he set a cluster of figures, none of them new to his work, but all of them reimagined: Gregory of Tours, Gregory the Great, Isidore, Julian of Toledo, before finally reaching the stars of the Carolingian Renaissance.

Brutality is part of the theme of the Prothero lecture delivered to the Royal Historical Society during the same year: 'War and Peace in the Early Middle Ages'. That Germanic kings were warleaders had never been far from Michael's assessment of kings. And in that feud was a related issue, war had often been on the near-horizon of his thought. As so often he began in Late Rome, in this instance the *De Rebus Bellicis*, adding the Bible, and then the warrior ideas of the Germanic peoples, though he was careful not to make them mere warriors rather than agriculturalists. From this beginning he looked at what might constitute an acceptable, even just, war. As ever the conclusions were nuanced, and yet

they were also surprising: 'the chances of a peaceful life in the year 900 were somewhat less than in the year 500. The investment in war was greater, and its reach commonly more extensive . . . Warfare had been canalized in directions suitable to the Church, but not very efficiently.' No scholar who has specialised in the history of early medieval warfare has been more thoughtful or convincing.

The year 1976 saw a move back to noble minds: two of them, one early medieval, the other Victorian, Bede and Plummer, for the Bede centenary conference. Plummer clearly delighted Michael, not least because the two of them shared a college: but he also liked the man's mind. Plummer's Bede, a nineteenth-century divine, is carefully exposed. Equally important, more so in terms of work yet to be done, Michael sketched out what a good commentary on Bede would be like. Whether or not he already had his eye on supplying a companion volume to the Colgrave and Mynors edition of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, he indicated what he thought should be there. In its own way as telling was the publication history of the article itself, which appeared in the collection *Early Medieval History* before it appeared in the proceedings of the Durham conference, so that the collection might be a silver wedding anniversary present: family was at least as important as scholarship.

To Bede Michael was to return, but first there were two studies of the ninth century, and then the Carolingian half of *The Frankish Church*. First, in 1978, came the Raleigh Lecture to the British Academy on Charles the Bald, 'A Carolingian Renaissance Prince'. Michael had been elected to the Academy in 1969, and from 1977 to 1981 he was to serve as its Publications Secretary. The title of his lecture was no whim: Michael was convinced that Renaissance was an appropriate word. The detail of the argument drew largely from Rosamond McKitterick's work on the library of Charles the Bald: the overall picture returns to Michael's concerns with kingship. Out of the evidence for the king's books emerges a royal patron attempting to live up to a series of models, largely Biblical, presented to him by his clergy: Charles had tried to copy the models forced on him: Solomon, David, Constantine, Theodosius, Charlemagne. 'He was no mere warband leader. Still less was he a kind of monk or bishop. His models lay more in the Old Testament than the New.'

The next year, 1979, somewhat surprisingly, given his dislike of travelling, Michael went to Berkeley as Distinguished Visiting Professor. From there he was able to travel down to Stanford to deliver the Kates lecture, which was in fact a repeat of 'A Carolingian Renaissance Prince: Charles the Bald'. He found the visit to the United States enjoyable, but was not

sure exactly what he should be doing there, and he badly missed his house at Cassington.

Two years later, in 1981, he co-edited and contributed to a Festschrift to mark the seventieth birthday of Sir Richard Southern, his predecessor but one in the Chichele Chair, who was now retiring as President of St John's College. Michael's topic was again ninth-century: 'History in the mind of archbishop Hincmar'. He had already touched on the subject nearly thirty years previously in his 'Archbishop Hincmar and the authorship of *Lex Salica*'. His emphasis on the importance of Hincmar's period at St Denis, and the influence of Hilduin, suggests that the interest may have begun even earlier, in the Lothian Prize essay of 1938. What he learnt about history from Hilduin, Hincmar used in later life, and not just in his section of the Annals of St Bertin, but through much of his writing, culminating in his *Vita Remigii*. Here, and later in *The Frankish Church*, this hagiographical piece is singled out as the work that the archbishop himself regarded most highly.

The summation of much of this work came with the publication in 1983 of *The Frankish Church*. It was Michael's longest work, and like his *Early Germanic Kingship* it was dedicated to a college: this time Merton. It had been commissioned by Henry and Owen Chadwick, who had wanted something wider, on the early medieval Church in general, but Michael had set limits to what he was prepared to cover. In some ways even the title *The Frankish Church* is a misnomer, for, as the preface announces, 'I have attempted no more than a consideration of those aspects of it that have interested me over the years'. And, quoting Amalarius of Metz, *scripsi quod sensi*. This is as much as to say that there are gaps. It is certainly not a comprehensive history of the Merovingian and Carolingian Churches (though the first is more evenly covered than the second), because large areas of Carolingian Europe get little or no consideration. Eight pages on the ninth-century missions to the pagans will strike many as too few, although the eighth-century missions fare rather better. These were, in any case, a topic that had already engaged Michael in his contribution to Dorothy Whitelock's Festschrift, and in his commentary on Bede's account of Willibrord they would engage him again later. But having said all that, the work is perhaps rather closer to a text-book than Michael would have admitted. It is built up of small sections, thumbnail sketches of individuals or of individual councils, the former perhaps getting more sensitive treatment: such sketches are indeed the building blocks of much of Michael's writing, but in a book of this length the structure is more apparent than elsewhere. It is actually a book

to which one can turn to find a concise and sharp account on, for instance, Adoptionism or of the monk Gottschalk. In certain ways it is more of a handbook than it purports to be.

The first part of the book, devoted to the Merovingian Church, is essentially made up of the Birkbeck lectures of 1973–4. Thereafter *The Frankish Church* turns briefly to the reign of Pippin III, and then more substantially to those of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald. The first and the last of these three had already been the object of much study in Michael's oeuvre, Louis the Pious less so. Considerably less space is given to the older sons of Louis, and their descendants. The scale and the range of the book means that in its detail it far exceeds any of Michael's earlier works, yet the themes are often those sketched out elsewhere, and one of the chapters (on Charles the Bald) is essentially (and admittedly) a revised version of an earlier article. Indeed, while the book is called *The Frankish Church* it also has much to say about kingship. Yet, beyond the sketches of individuals who had previously not been studied in depth by Michael (Theodulf, Lupus of Ferrières, Hraban Maur, Walahfrid Strabo and Amalar to name only those subject to the most extensive treatment), one or two themes come to the fore more dramatically than in earlier work. As in the inaugural lecture a spotlight is shone on the Jews, examining them as a group both within society and at the same time challenging it. Completely new is a discussion of marriage, a difficult and fragmented subject, which concludes with the argument that Carolingians move beyond secular roots of marriage to a Christian dimension where it was good in itself. It is a discussion to which Michael refers on a number of occasions in his commentary on Bede.

The Frankish Church appeared in 1983, the year of Michael's retirement from the Chichele Chair, although he was to remain a Professor Emeritus. He was succeeded by Karl Leyser, who together with Peter Ganz was one of those friends to whom he had turned for advice on aspects of the Carolingian Renaissance. As a retirement project he had set himself a commentary on Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, which had been commissioned by Oxford University Press. The Bede commentary was the last of Michael's work to be published, and indeed was published posthumously. It was effectively complete at the time of his death on 3 November 1985, awaiting a final revision and an introduction. It had been intended that Thomas Charles-Edwards should see it through the press were Michael to die between the completion of the commentary and its publication. There was, necessarily, some discussion as to whether it was complete enough to be published, but fortunately it was agreed, not least by

his family, that it should be. In many respects commentary was the ideal form for the ruminative consideration of texts that had become increasingly central to Michael's approach. In place of an introduction 'Bede and Plummer' was added to the commentary, as were some addenda. 'Bede and Plummer' does indeed sketch out many of the issues which Michael chose to emphasise—although of course he might well have intended a very different kind of introduction, drawing together his observations on the structure of Bede's works and the issues which concerned him.

In 'Bede and Plummer' among a number of gaps he had noted in Plummer's commentary was an awareness of Bede's Eusebian sense of history, that is the extent to which he wrote an Ecclesiastical History which was concerned with salvation. So too he had commented on the lack of any reference to Gregory of Tours, that is to the Continental dimension of Bede's world, something already raised in the Jarrow lecture. These issues, of course, are much to the fore in Michael's own commentary. Time and again he draws attention to Frankish and other parallels. At times the parallels are exuberant: for instance one is drawn between the private churches described by Bede and surviving Visigothic examples, which one might guess is a reflection of a holiday he and Anne had spent visiting such monuments with his sometime pupils Roger Collins and Judith McClure. As frequent are references to the ecclesiastical nature of Bede's history. He is insistent that it is an ecclesiastical history not a history of the English Church. He stresses the extent to which Bede left unclear or omitted altogether issues that were irrelevant to his purpose. And he draws attention to the extent to which passages in Bede can be 'highly contrived'. It is an attitude towards sources that is present throughout his works—an interest in the author's purpose, rather than in a text as a store-house of fact.

The commentary is also a work which more than most of what Michael wrote reveals the range of his reading. He was not on the whole a scholar who used footnotes, sometimes admittedly because they were not required of him. By its very nature a commentary required references. What is interesting in the commentary on Bede is how much of the reference is to recent work, indeed how much is to work which had formed part of the *Festschrift* which had been offered to him by his pupils in 1983. Yet the commentary was also something close to a labour of love. His one-time student Michael Wood described what was to be the last meeting with his old supervisor, who remarked that he dreamed of Bede: 'He speaks to me. I feel as if I know him.' Michael was certainly committed to his task, and in many

ways it suited his style more than anything else that he attempted. He could ruminate on a single mind that he found congenial.

In the preface to the *Festschrift* presented to Michael in 1983 Donald Bullough tried to set his old supervisor in context. His place in the tradition of Bedan scholarship is not difficult to define, and not just because of Plummer: Michael himself, in his commentary, cites several ecclesiastical historians, rather more than Anglo-Saxonists, who approached Bede in ways to which he could relate. More generally, with regard to Old English legal history he looked back to Maitland, and not just because he revered his scholarship. He regarded Maitland's style as a touchstone, and research students would be sent to read and reread *Domesday Book and Beyond* to improve their style. His own writings are all distinguished by their elegance. At times the concision leaves some ambiguity. Indeed there are passages when it is possible to wonder quite how he is interpreting the writings in front of him. It is possible to read Michael in more ways than one, and, even on rereading him, to find one's own 'new' ideas prefigured in what he wrote.

With regard to European history he is rather harder to place. On the Continent there were scholars whom he had read extensively—indeed his reviews show just how extensive that reading was. On some scholars, among them Otto Höfler, he paused for rather longer than one would now. Others, for instance Reinhard Wenskus, whom he read in a rather different way than scholars have subsequently, he was among the first to recognise. To some, notably Peter Classen and Eugen Ewig, he was deeply attached. Perhaps the latter comes closest to Michael in range and interest. Of an older generation of English scholars there were Sir Samuel Dill, O. M. Dalton and Christopher Dawson (whose *Making of Europe* was to a large extent superseded by *The Barbarian West*, although it continued to be read on the Continent, and is still worth some time). None of them looked at the Franks as he did.

There were scholars of his own generation working in England who did look across the Channel: Philip Grierson (who is frequently thanked in footnotes) and Walter Ullmann (who interpreted the Early Middle Ages rather differently) to name two. But there was no one with his precise range of interest. Indeed, to a large extent he created a subject, although it should be said that his own canvas was quite limited. He returned again and again to the same themes, constantly making subtle adjustments. In the next generation matters would be different, but that was because he and to a lesser extent Walter Ullmann had created a new tradition of early medieval scholarship in England. It has rightly been

said of the two of them, 'If you seek their monument, look about you! Most of the earlier medieval historians currently working in this country are their intellectual children and grandchildren. Their influence nationally and internationally was and still is large.' Indeed, the expansion of early medieval studies in Britain has been closely associated with Michael's students. Not that he established a school, although his students learnt much from his reading of texts. To say that the Early Middle Ages look different as a result of his work is a truism. More than any other scholar he insisted that the period be taken on its own terms: brutal, yet peopled with extraordinary individuals who thought differently from us, but whose minds we could know.

IAN WOOD

University of Leeds

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