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This book is the first of a projected five-volume study of the evidence relating to the reign of Pippin on which Alain Stoclet has embarked in the wake of his meticulous investigations of the properties and people mentioned in the Testament of Fulrad of Saint-Denis (1993), and of the grants of exemption from tolls and tonnage in the early middle ages (1999). Stoclet plans two volumes on Pippin’s career as mayor of the palace 741–751, another for his reign as king 751–768, and a further volume on the subsequent legend of Pippin after 768.

The introduction to this first stage of Alain Stoclet’s project offers a short survey of historiography on Pippin III, culminating in the volume edited by Matthias Becher and Jörg Jarnut, »Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung« (Münster 2004), and the study by Josef Semmler, »Der Dynastiewechsel von 751 und die fränkische Königssalbung« (Düsseldorf 2003). These two books are dismissed as a »faible mobilisation mémorielle«, though the point Stoclet is rightly anxious to stress is that there is so much more to say about Pippin’s reign than the usurpation of 751. He is not the only one to think this, as is clear from the recent work by Erik Goosmann on »Memorable Crises. Carolingian Historiography and the Making of Pippin’s Reign, 750–900« (Amsterdam 2013). In Chapter 1 Stoclet considers the first references to Pippin in the narrative sources. Chapter 2 emphasises the ambiguities of the references to Pippin’s education and his association with Saint-Denis since his boyhood, and Chapter 3 addresses the possibly limited nature of that education, with an extensive discussion of the famous subscriptions in the form of a cross credited to Pippin in charters of 759 and 768. Here more could have been made of the constructive ideas of Ildar Garipzanov, »The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751–877)« (Leiden 2008). The fourth chapter is largely concerned with the implications of Paul the Deacon’s tantalising allusion in the »Historia langobardorum« VI, 53 to Pippin being sent by Charles Martel to Liutprand king of the Lombards.

The book creates the impression of being primarily concerned to offer a dossier of contextualising information and to raise doubts about assumptions and apparent certainties about Pippin enjoyed hitherto. The questions include that of the origins of the names of the early Carolingians (Karl, Pippin, Carloman), whether Pippin was able to write (in the limited sense of form letters with a writing implement), the exact nature, as well as the timing, of the relationship established between Pippin and Liutprand king of the Lombards (the latter cutting the former’s hair), and overall whether there is any justification for conceptualising Pippin’s early years as in some sense an apprenticeship for rulership. Stoclet’s dossier certainly reflects the eighth- and ninth-century foundations of such a representation.
and how the characterisation of Pippin’s reign was developed by later historians. From some of these questions arise hypotheses and intriguing speculations, including a possible connection with the early Mercian kings in Anglo-Saxon England. The response to others highlights particular sources that can be brought into the discussion, such as Ermin of Lobbes’ prophecy about Pippin preserved in the »Vita Ermini« by Anso, Ermin’s »biographer« and successor, written between 776 and 800, though no manuscript containing the work is earlier than the turn of the tenth or early eleventh century. Discussion of some of the other issues, such as the literacy of the Carolingian rulers or representations of authority in later historical narratives, depend on too selective a choice among the wealth of modern scholarship thereon to be persuasive.

Alain Stoclet has made an effort to help his readers. He supplies a glossary of, mostly French, terms from »lay abbot« and »Adoptionism« to »Vetus Latina« and »Vulgate«. There are some clear maps of Austrasia and Neustria as well as the southern part of Gaul, England and Italy. Despite the copious number of indices, however, it remains very difficult to navigate this book. There are analytical indices of people, places, and topics, and further brief index of words divided by language, with the greater majority in Latin. A further addition is an elaborately subdivided index of sources cited, organized by categories that overlap in some respects: »Chartae Latiae Antiquiores«, Merovingian diplomas, diplomas of the Arnulfings and Pippinids, Carolingian diplomas, other kings, popes; diplomas of lay and ecclesiastical princes, private charters and »others«, formulae, documents on papyrus, non-diplomatic sources (bible, letters, epics, exegesis, genealogies, hagiography, historiography, liturgy, »normative sources«, »other«), manuscripts, material culture, coins and seals. Another index is supplied of modern authors referred to in the text or the footnotes. A full list of contents usefully includes all Stoclet’s subheadings. It is unfortunate that Brepols chose to print this book in such small type: the text is 10 pt. and the notes are 8 pt. Given that Stoclet conducts a great deal of his discussion – with evidence, explanations, quotations, further details and tangential thoughts – in the notes, it makes his book very laborious to read. The combative, longwinded and rhetorical prose throughout text and notes makes it even more so. This is a pity, for Stoclet is deeply familiar with his material and very learned; he has useful points to make and important questions to raise, and his work needs to be heeded.