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A Saving Science: Capturing the Heavens in Carolingian Manuscripts

Eric M. Ramírez-Weaver

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In *A Saving Science*, Eric Ramírez-Weaver explores the significance of early medieval astronomy in the Frankish empire, using as his lens an astronomical masterpiece, the deluxe manuscript of the *Handbook of 809*, painted in roughly 830 for Bishop Drogo of Metz, one of Charlemagne's sons. Created in an age in which careful study of the heavens served a liturgical purpose—to reckon Christian feast days and seasons accurately and thus reflect a "heavenly" order—the diagrams of celestial bodies in the *Handbook of 809* are extraordinary signifiers of the intersection of Christian art and classical astronomy.

Ramírez-Weaver shows how, by studying this lavishly painted and carefully executed manuscript, we gain a unique understanding of early medieval astronomy and its cultural significance. In a time when the Frankish church sought to renew society through education, the *Handbook of 809* presented a model in which study aided the spiritual reform of the cleric's soul, and, by extension, enabled the spiritual care of his community.

An exciting new interpretation of Frankish painting, *A Saving Science* shows that constellations in books such as Drogo's were not simple copies for posterity's sake, but functional tools in the service of the rejuvenation of a creative Carolingian culture.

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