

The Carolingian renaissance and human capital formation in eighth- and ninth-century Europe

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preliminary abstract

In recent debates on human capital formation and the causes of economic growth, a number of scholars have introduced, or elaborated on, the indicator of book production per capita to measure human capital formation. The rate of book production, it is argued, is related to the advanced literacy skills of the population and in turn reduces the access costs to ‘scientific knowledge’, thereby aiding the growth of human capital and, ultimately, of the economy (Baten and van Zanden 2008) and (Buringh and van Zanden 2009).

The factor ‘book production’ invites students of human capital formation to look beyond the (early) modern period and include data from as early as the time of the emergence of the book (at least, in its modern form as ‘codex’). This extends the discussion to the early Middle Ages. My contribution to the debate aims to focus on the comparability of the early medieval data on book production with that from later periods. It especially addresses the distinct circumstances of the rise in book production in the Carolingian period, and the possibilities and limitations for its use in the study of human capital formation.