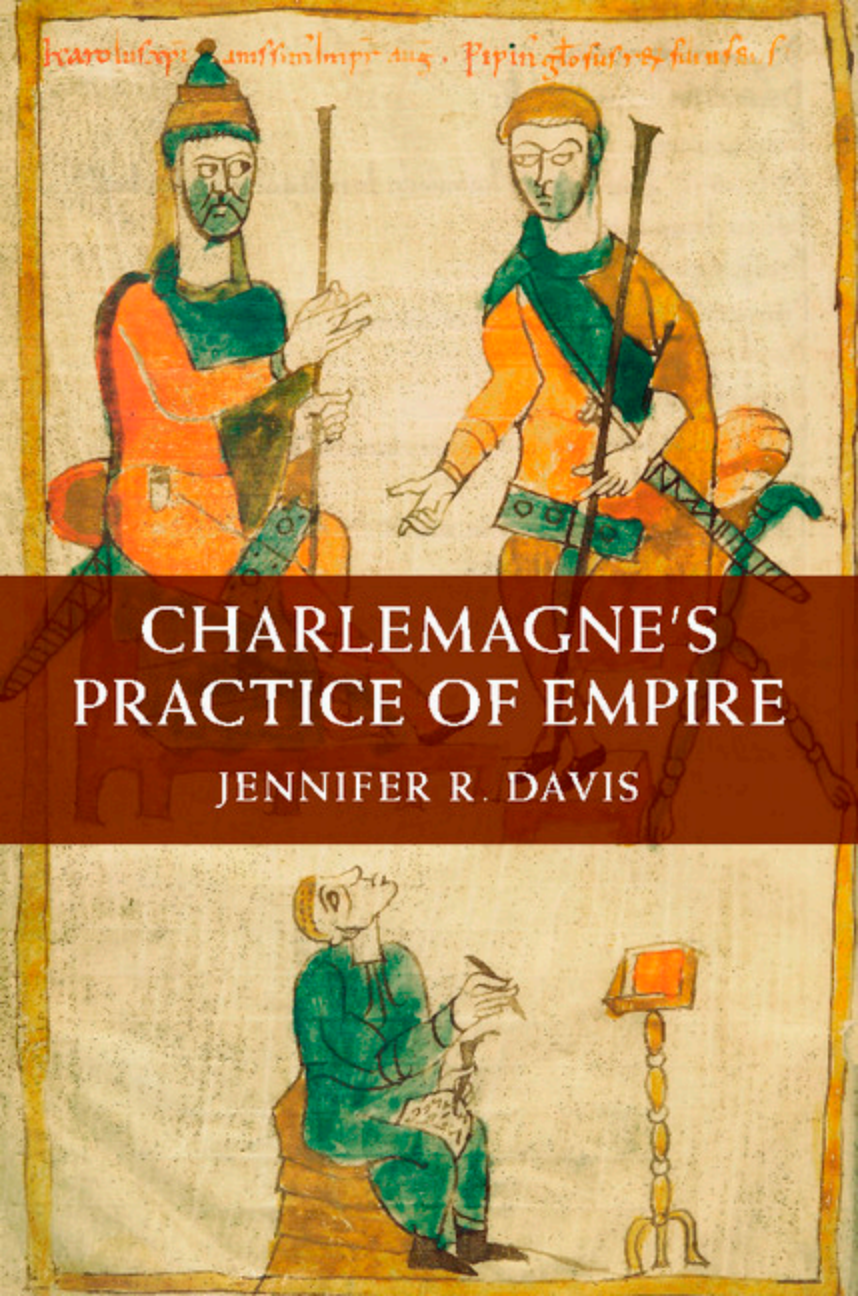

CHARLEMAGNE'S PRACTICE OF EMPIRE

JENNIFER R. DAVIS

Charlemagne's Practice of Empire

Revisiting one of the great puzzles of European political history, Jennifer Davis examines how the Frankish king Charlemagne and his men held together the vast new empire he had created during the first decades of his reign. Davis explores how Charlemagne overcame the two main problems of ruling an empire, namely, how to delegate authority and how to manage diversity. Through a meticulous reconstruction based on primary sources, she demonstrates that rather than imposing a pre-existing model of empire onto conquered regions, Charlemagne and his men learned from them, developing a practice of empire that allowed the emperor to rule on a European scale. As a result, Charlemagne's realm was more flexible and diverse than has long been believed. Telling the story of Charlemagne's rule using sources produced during the reign itself, Davis offers a new interpretation of Charlemagne's political practice, free from the distortions of later legend.

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107076990

First published 2015

Printed in Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Davis, Jennifer R., 1975–
Charlemagne's practice of empire / Jennifer R. Davis (Catholic University of America).
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-07699-0 (Hardback)
1. Charlemagne, Emperor, 742-814. 2. Political leadership–History–To 1500. 3. Imperialism–History–To 1500. 4. Franks–History–768-814. 5. Europe–Politics and government–476-1492. I. Title.
DC73.D263 2015
944′.0142092–dc23 2014050249

ISBN 978-1-107-07699-0 Hardback

In memory of my grandfather
Irwin Isroff
1920–2014

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Acknowledgments

About ten years ago, Rosamond McKitterick told me that what I thought was a dissertation about Charlemagne founded on an analysis of the capitulary (royal law) manuscripts really needed to be two separate books, one analyzing Charlemagne's rulership and a second on the capitulary tradition as it emerges from the manuscript evidence. I did not take her advice at the time, but I have now done as she so sagely suggested, and turned my overstuffed dissertation into a book on Charlemagne and a book on capitularies. It seems then a fitting place to begin my thanks to those who have helped shape this book with Rosamond. From the time I first came to work with her at Cambridge, she has often seen the contours of my work more clearly than I did. Both this book and, even more so, the capitularies volume depend on an analysis of the manuscript tradition that I could never have undertaken without her guidance.

I have benefitted tremendously from having excellent teachers in addition to Rosamond. I first took a class with Michael McCormick as a sophomore in college. It was Mike who introduced me to Charlemagne, and trained me to be a medieval historian. His incisive and extensive comments on my work have spurred me to do better and to think more carefully. I am grateful for his support, his insistence on clarity of thought, and his friendship. I also learned a great deal from others at Harvard, in particular Tom Bisson. I am not sure I have succeeded in convincing Tom that Charlemagne actually governed, but I am certain that his careful probing of how one analyzes political power has improved my work. Tom always prompts me to think again about how to characterize and analyze political history. Mark Kishlansky served on my dissertation committee, and generally acted as a voice of reason during my graduate studies. I am especially grateful for his encouragement to write something comprehensible to those who do not specialize in the Carolingian period. Dan Smail arrived at Harvard as I was leaving, but made a point to get to know me and to learn about my work. I particularly owe to Dan the suggestion that I needed to think more about what

Charlemagne got wrong. My years at Harvard were eased and enriched by the friends I made there. I thank Genevieve Abravanel, Jonathan Conant, Alan Cooper, Justine Firnhaber-Baker, Heather Kopelson, Liz Mellyn, Lauren Ratcliffe, Gregory Smith, and Debbie Tor for all their support along the way.

This book is significantly different from my dissertation. A number of people and institutions have helped me in the process of revising and reworking the dissertation. I began the process while I held a postdoctoral fellowship at Caltech. I am very grateful to the faculty and staff of the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences for their advice, and for giving me the time and space to think again about what I was trying to do. I came to Caltech to work with Warren Brown, and it was a very good life choice. I am not sure at this point how many drafts of this book Warren has read, and I am too embarrassed to count. I can only say that I am deeply grateful for his thoughtful comments on just about everything I write and for his friendship. I would also like to express my thanks to Louise Brown and the Brown boys for their hospitality and welcome to Southern California. I next moved to Washington, D.C., to join the History Department of the Catholic University of America. It is a pleasure to thank my colleagues in History and in the Center for Medieval and Byzantine Studies for their support, congeniality, and advice. I am particularly grateful to Dean Larry Poos and to my Chair, Jerry Muller, for making it possible for me to accept several fellowships. I must also single out Jerry Muller for his apt advice about political theory, and Kate Jansen and Philip Rousseau for useful discussion of my research. Much of the work of rewriting the book was done during my year as a fellow at the American Academy in Rome. The Academy provided an ideal atmosphere in which to work, and I will always treasure the year I spent there. I am also very grateful for the advice and encouragement I received from other scholars and fellows at the Academy, in particular Aaron Allen, Meg Andrews, Benjamin Brand, Bea del Cueto, Albertus Horsting, Sandro La Barbera, Camille Mathieu, Jackie Murray, Liz Robinson, Brian Rose, Kailan Rubinoff, Jenny Snider, and Carly Jane Steinborn. Before arriving in Rome, I spent a profitable summer working in Munich. I am very grateful to Professors Gerhard Schmitz and Rudolf Schieffer for enabling me to use the unparalleled resources of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica library. I returned to Munich as I was completing work on the book, and I thank Martina Hartmann for welcoming me back to the Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Further revisions were undertaken while I was a Kluge Fellow at the Library of Congress, a setting that enabled me to profit from the extensive collections at the Library, in multiple languages.

This book has also benefitted significantly from the advice and suggestions of many people. Parts of the main argument were presented as lectures and conference papers at St. Andrews (with particular thanks to Justine Firnhaber-Baker, Simon MacLean, and James Palmer), Dumbarton Oaks (with thanks to Margaret Mullett), the Freie Universität in Berlin (with thanks to Philippe Depreux and Stefan Esders), the American Academy in Rome, and Harvard University. I am grateful to all of these audiences for questions and suggestions. I have also been given advice, encouragement, and pdfs by many colleagues, among whom I owe a particular debt to Peggy Brown, Sam Collins, David Ganz, Patrick Geary, Martin Gravel, Joachim Henning, Matt Innes, Scott Johnson, Mayke de Jong, Lilla Kopár, Paul Meyvaert, Tom Noble, and Josh Westgard. Adam Kosto has been a constant source of advice and read the entire book in draft. Chris Wickham also read a complete draft, and, in addition to reading the sections on Italy with an eagle eye, offered extensive comments on the whole. Jinty Nelson has been a model of the kind of scholar and kind of person one should strive to be: She has read the whole book, parts of it twice, and discussed its main ideas with me repeatedly. Marios Costambeys and Max Diesenberger both read sections of the book for me, and offered useful suggestions and comments. All of these people have sharpened the book's arguments and saved me from various errors; those that remain are mine alone. I owe a particular debt to Meg Andrews and Greg Smith for helping design the maps for this book, to Aaron Allen for help with the graphs and charts, and to Sandro La Barbera for checking the Latin translations. I gratefully acknowledge the support I have received from the Harvard University Department of History and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, the American Philosophical Society, the Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, the American Academy in Rome, and from a Fulbright grant to France. I have worked in more manuscript libraries than I can name here, but I am grateful to the librarians and curators who made their manuscripts available and shared their knowledge with me.

Liz Friend-Smith has been incredibly supportive of my work and patient far beyond the call of duty. The anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press offered constructive comments, which have greatly improved the book. I am grateful for their time and attention to detail.

The final debts I must record are those to my family, including Debie, Paul, Marcy, Lexi, Gary, Nana, Don, Chris, Lissy, and Mike. Rachel Albert has been my friend long enough to count as family. My sister Jillian knows me better than anyone and keeps me sane. My father Joel

believes in me enough that he usually convinces me too. It is profoundly insufficient, but I can only thank my mother, Judy Isroff, for her constant love and support. My grandfather, Irwin Isroff, passed away while I was completing final revisions of this book. It is dedicated to his memory, with love.

Note on terminology

I will consistently refer to King Charles the Great as Charlemagne, given that this is traditional English usage. I will also typically call him "king" rather than "emperor," as I will argue below that the royal title is the one which was used most consistently by the court itself and is the title that best expresses Charlemagne's sense of his own power.

I will refer to places by their common English names, when such exist: For example, Cologne, rather than Köln. When there is not a familiar English equivalent, I will use the modern name employed in the country in which the place is now located, for instance, Reisbach. I will use a hyphenated form to distinguish a religious institution from the saint for which it is named, in countries where such usage is typical. So, for example, Saint-Denis refers to the monastery, and St. Denis to the saint. This does not hold for manuscript shelfmarks, which are cited using the standard form for each institution.

For personal names, I will employ traditional English usage, when such exists, for example, Alcuin or Wala. Figures with names which can be easily translated into English will be referred to as such, for example, William of Gellone. Other names will be left in the form in which they are found in the sources. When alternate spellings are used for the same individual, I will choose one form that seems to best fit the sources. All references to a given individual will therefore be consistent, but alternate spellings of the same name for different people may be employed. I have also standardized, for the sake of consistency, certain words regularly spelled in alternate ways, for example, I persistently use medioevo, rather than medio evo or Medio evo, and so on.

All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated. There are English-language translations of many of the sources for the reign of Charlemagne; these are indicated not in the Notes, but in the Bibliography.

Abbreviations

AfD	*Archiv für Diplomatik: Schriftgeschichte Siegel- und Wappenkunde*
BdF	Beihefte der Francia
CC	*Corpus Christianorum* *CM: Continuatio Medievalis*
CDL	*Codice diplomatico longobardo* (with volume number) Vol. 1, ed. L. Schiaparelli, Fonti per la storia d'Italia LXII (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1929) Vol. 2, ed. L. Schiaparelli, Fonti per la storia d'Italia LXIII (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1933) Vol. 3.1, ed. C. Brühl, Fonti per la storia d'Italia LXIV (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1973) Vol. 4.1, ed. C. Brühl, Fonti per la storia d'Italia LXV (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1981) Vol. 4.2, begun by L. Schiaparelli and C. Brühl and completed by H. Zielinski, Fonti per la storia d'Italia LXV (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 2003) Vol. 5, begun by L. Schiaparelli and C. Brühl and completed by H. Zielinski, Fonti per la storia d'Italia LXVI (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1986)
CdV	*Capitulare de Villis. Cod. Guelf. 254 Helmst. der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel.* ed. C. Brühl (Stuttgart: Müller und Schindler, 1971)
ChLA	*Chartae Latinae Antiquiores: Facsimile Edition of the Latin Charters*, ed. A. Bruckner, et al., (Zurich: Urs Graf Verlag, 1954–)
DA	*Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*
EHR	*English Historical Review*
EME	*Early Medieval Europe*
FMS	*Frühmittelalterliche Studien*
HJ	*Historisches Jahrbuch*

HZ	*Historische Zeitschrift*
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
	AG: Die Admonitio Generalis Karls des Grossen, ed. H. Mordek, K. Zechiel-Eckes, and M. Glatthaar, MGH, *Fontes iuris germanici antiqui in usum scholarum separatim editi* XVI (Hanover: Hahn, 2012)
	Diplomata: Die Urkunden Pippins, Karlmanns und Karls des Grossen, MGH, Diplomata Karolinorum I, ed. E. Mühlbacher, with A. Dopsch, J. Lechner, and M. Tangl (Hanover: Hahn, 1906): Diplomas of Charlemagne: DK; of Pippin: DP; of Carloman II: DCarloman
	EP: Epistolae
	LL: Leges
	Capit. I: *Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. I, ed. A. Boretius (Hanover: Hahn, 1883)
	Capit. II: *Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. II, ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause (Hanover: Hahn, 1897)
	CEP with volume no.: *Capitula Episcoporum*, vol. 1, ed. P. Brommer (Hanover: Hahn, 1984); vol. 2, ed. R. Pokorny and M. Stratmann, with W.-D. Runge (Hanover: Hahn, 1995); vol. 3, ed. R. Pokorny (Hanover: Hahn, 1995); vol. 4, ed. R. Pokorny with V. Lukas (Hanover: Hahn, 2005)
	Conc. II: *Concilia: LL* III, *Concilia*, vol. II, part I, *Concilia Aevi Karolini*, vol. I, part I, ed. A. Werminghoff (Hanover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1906)
	SS: Scriptores
	SRG: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum
MIOG	Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung
NCMH	The *New Cambridge Medieval History*
OAWD	Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften philosophisch-historische Klasse Denkschriften
	FGM: Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus . . . series . . . ecclesiae latinae*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris: 1844–64)
QFIAB	*Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*

RH	*Revue historique*
Settimane	Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo
TF	*Die Traditionen des Hochstifts Freising*, vol. 1 (744–926), ed. T. Bitterauf, Quellen und Erörterungen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte, neue Folge IV (Munich: Rieger, 1905)
TP	*Die Traditionen des Hochstifts Passau*, ed. M. Heuwieser, Quellen und Erörterungen zur bayerischen Geschichte, neue Folge VI (Munich: Verlag der Kommission für bayerische Landesgeschichte, 1930)
TRHS	*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*
VIOG	Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung
ZSSR	*Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*

Map 1 The Carolingian Empire in 814 (drawn by Margaret Marshall Andrews)

Introduction

In a capitulary, or royal law, probably issued in 810, Charlemagne noted a topic for discussion: "About those claimants [or shouters] who make a big racket in the palace [which reaches] the ears of the lord emperor."[1] This rather elliptical reference encapsulates much that is particular about Charlemagne's rulership and its representation in the sources. First, the reference is not entirely clear: We do not know what was decided should be done about those flocking to the palace, although the language of the law suggests they were in search of justice. While incomplete, the passage is evocative in its indication of direct royal interaction with a range of justice seekers, and its reflection of the successes and limits of imperial power. Charlemagne tried hard to insist on the importance of justice, of his own role as the ultimate arbiter, and the necessity for the protection of the weak. Yet, one consequence of Charlemagne's reforms was to at times overwhelm the court with more business than it could handle. The regulation also underscores the novelty of Charlemagne's rulership: There is no good precedent for this comment in any earlier Frankish legislation. We thus see in this capitulary chapter both the fruit of Charlemagne's often innovative efforts to expand his governance, and the limits and problems associated with those attempts, points conveyed by sources which do not tell us everything that we want to know. All this is characteristic of Charlemagne's rulership.

These features of Charlemagne's political practice – its novelty and success, its limits, and its problematic source base – make it worthy of attention, but also difficult to study. Charlemagne conquered the majority of Western Europe in about twenty years and spent the next twenty trying to rule it, with consequences which persist to this day. That was a political achievement, whatever else it was. The central question examined by this book is how Charlemagne and those who worked with him managed to control the majority of Western Europe for several decades without the

[1] *Capit.* I, no. 64, c. 1, p. 153: "De clamatoribus qui magnum impedimentum faciunt in palatio ad aures domni imperatoris." For the date, see Mordek, *Bibliotheca*, p. 1087.

benefits of modern tools and technology. Charlemagne fascinated his contemporaries, and he has continued to fascinate historians from the time of his death to the present. Studies on every aspect of the man and his reign are extensive; merely listing them would require a volume of several thousand pages. Yet, despite the extent of historical analysis, essential aspects of this pivotal European reign remain unclear. This book is an attempt to clarify at least some of those questions, as they pertain to how Charlemagne, and the men and women who worked with him, exercised power. I aim to offer here a new interpretation of how Charlemagne tried to rule and to what ends, of how he held together the vast and diverse empire he conquered so quickly, of the kind of legacy he left for the rest of the Middle Ages. Charlemagne built on Frankish, Roman, and Christian traditions, but in so doing he created a new kind of empire, one which would have a profound impact on the subsequent history of Western Europe.

The contention that the reign of Charlemagne was pivotal to the course of medieval history is generally accepted; he has not become known as Charles the Great for nothing.[2] The claim that his reign was a turning point for the development of modern Europe is perhaps more questionable.[3] Despite the EU's interest in Charlemagne as a symbol of European community, his brand of unity – forced conversion, violent conquest, intrusive and inefficient legislation – seems hardly useful as a model for a democratic society.[4] Yet, despite the fragility of his achievements and the short lifespan of the polity he created, Charlemagne transformed the post-Roman West into a world which was, arguably for the first time, recognizably medieval Europe. Charlemagne has been called many things, by many people: The "new David" by his favored Anglo-Saxon adviser Alcuin[5]; undoubtedly something much less complementary by the Saxon leader Widukind if we had any access to his reactions.[6] But what Charlemagne called himself, consistently and regularly (and this in a reign where consistency and regularity were notably

[2] On the memorialization of Charlemagne as the "great," see Noble, "Greatness Contested," and Dutton, "KAROLVS MAGNVS."

[3] For one sensitive attempt to discuss clearly Charlemagne's ties to modern Europe, see Nelson, "Charlemagne: 'Father of Europe?'"

[4] See www.karlspreis.de/en/home.html, accessed September 12, 2014, for the City of Aachen's vision of what the legacy of Charlemagne means.

[5] For example, see Alcuin, letter 171, pp. 281–3. For analysis of the use of nicknames in general, see Garrison, "The Social World of Alcuin." Also helpful is Garrison's work on the Franks' conception of themselves as the "new Israel": "The Franks as the New Israel?"

[6] For Widukind's role in the Saxon wars, see Royal Frankish Annals s.a. 777, p. 48; s.a. 778, p. 52; s.a. 782, pp. 60–2; s.a. 785, p. 70. For analysis, Lintzel, "Die Unterwerfung Sachsens."

lacking) was king, king of the Franks to be precise.[7] Charlemagne's influence on religion, on art, on the linguistic boundaries in Europe is not to be denied. But his primary influence, his primary preoccupation, was political: His approximately forty-six year effort to rule Western Europe. Studying Charlemagne's rulership then is to study the activity that the man himself most prized.

This analysis of Charlemagne's rulership is built on two foundations. The first of these is the difficulties with the sources and the approach they necessitate to achieve a systematic analysis of political practice. The second is the voluminous historiography on early medieval politics, which has shaped the field thus far and which provides essential tools for a reassessment of a particularly important early medieval ruler. In order to prepare for the examination of rulership to follow, I will look at each of these issues in turn.

Patterns of power

The sources for a political history of the reign of Charlemagne present two primary difficulties. The first of these is the uneven distribution of sources, the second the emphasis on normative evidence. An example can help illustrate the conundrum posed by the sources. A famous capitulary from 802 required all free male subjects over the age of twelve to swear a new oath of loyalty to Charlemagne as emperor, in the wake of his imperial coronation in 800.[8] There had been previous oaths of loyalty to the king, some prompted by concern about specific moments of disloyalty.[9] Charlemagne's concentration on the duties and responsibilities of rulership in the years around 800 prompted the imperial coronation, and also gave rise to the new oath.[10] The new oath, as the king's agents, the royal *missi*, were meant to explain, encompassed a deeper vision of loyalty than had been understood previously.[11] One of

[7] See full discussion of Charlemagne's use of the *rex Francorum* title in Chapter 7, pp. 347–8.

[8] *Capit.* I, no. 33, c. 2, p. 92: "De fidelitate promittenda domno imperatori. Precepitque, ut omni homo in toto regno suo, sive ecclesiasticus sive laicus, unusquisque secundum votum et propositum suum, qui antea fidelitate sibi regis nomine promisissent, nunc ipsum promissum nominis cesaris faciat; et hii qui adhuc ipsum promissum non perficerunt omnes usque ad duodecimo aetatis annum similiter facerent."

[9] On earlier use of the oath: M. Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft*, pp. 78–85, 195–201.

[10] See analysis of M. Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft*, pp. 201–11; and see further Chapter 7, pp. 347–50, 359–62 on the imperial coronation.

[11] *Capit.* I, no. 33, c. 2, p. 92: "Et ut omnes tradetur publice, qualiter unusquisque intellegere posset, quam magna in isto sacramento et quam multa conprehensa sunt, non, ut multi usque nunc extimaverunt, tantum fidelitate domno imperatori usque in vita ipsius, et ne aliquem inimicum in suum regnum causa inimicitiae inducat, et ne

the new obligations attendant on all subjects as a result of this oath was the need to swear truthfully in court and avoid perjury.[12] While the imprecation to avoid perjury is common in Frankish legislation, the linking of such a requirement to the oath of fidelity is unprecedented. We have the court records from a case heard in Bavaria by Charlemagne's loyal servant and the local archbishop and *missus* Arn of Salzburg later in 802.[13] In this case, the witnesses are explicitly told that they must tell the truth because of the oath they have sworn to the lord emperor that very year.[14] Royal order, local implementation: As far as we can see, the capitulary was made effective locally.[15]

Such clarity is rare indeed in the early Middle Ages. The exceptional nature of this case highlights our two persistent problems with the sources for the reign of Charlemagne. First, when we have uneven evidence, how do we generalize? Is the 802 oath situation typical or exceptional? We cannot usually get our evidence to match up sufficiently to analyze particular actions fully, although the cases where we can will figure in the pages to follow. For the more typical situation when we cannot trace the evidence completely, what can we conclude? The second problem relates to implementation of royal commands: Much of the evidence for the study of rulership consists of normative sources (which will be considered in more detail later). Scholars have persistently debated the extent to which the commands issued by Charlemagne were ever put into effect.[16] Royal capitularies in particular demand all sorts of things, but whether any of this ever actually happened is another

alicui infidelitate illius consentiant aut retaciat, sed ut sciant omnes istam in se rationem hoc sacramentum habere." See also Nelson, "Charlemagne and Empire," pp. 229–30.

[12] *Capit.* I, no. 33, c. 4, p. 92: "Secundo, ut nullus homo neque cum periuri neque alii ullo ingenio vel fraude per nullius umquam adolationem vel praemium neque servum domni imperatoris neque terminum neque terram nihilque quod iure potestativo permaneat nullatenus contradicat neque abstrahere audeat vel celare; et ut nemos fugitivos fiscales suos, qui se iniuste et cum fraudes liberas dicunt, celare neque abstrahere cum periurio vel alio ingenio presumat"; see also c. 9, p. 93 and c. 36, p. 98 of the same capitulary.

[13] See also further discussion of the career of Arn of Salzburg in Chapters 1 and 5, pp. 69–77 and 243–59 respectively.

[14] TF no. 186, pp. 178–9: "Tunc praedicti missi dominici Arn archiepiscopus et Aduluuinus episcopus atque Orendil iudex ipsos homines qui hoc testificaverunt in medium vocaverunt et per sacramentum fidelitatis quem domno Karolo magno imperatori ipso praesente anno iuraverunt adtestati sunt eos, ut omnimodis absque ulla fraude vel ingenio ita ut veracissime de ipsa causa scirent ita in palam adnuntiarent."

[15] See also my discussion of this example: J.R. Davis, "A Pattern for Power," pp. 235–6.

[16] For example, Wormald, "Giving God and King Their Due," especially pp. 549–50 (pp. 333–5 in the reprint); Innes, "Charlemagne's Government," pp. 77–80, 82; and Mordek, "Karolingische Kapitularien," pp. 44–9 (pp. 74–9 in the reprint), to name just a few.

question entirely.[17] While we have much evidence for rulership under Charlemagne, it is often normative and frequently uneven.

There is a solution to the conflict between the limitations of our evidence and the desideratum of a more complete analysis of what Charlemagne did and why he did it. This solution is to look for patterns of rulership in the evidence, that is, trends in how Charlemagne and his advisors approached the political issues they faced.[18] Working across different kinds of sources, across the involvement of different individuals, and across time, we can discern persistent trends in how the king and his court handled political affairs. In approaching the sources for the reign of Charlemagne, I have tried to search out such patterns, that is, tendencies in how king and court responded to political situations. To return to the example of the oath: The new oath expresses a broad vision of royal responsibility, which we can also see elsewhere, such as in the capitulary legislation more generally, letters written in the name of the king, histories, theological investigation undertaken at royal direction, and so on.[19] By finding the same political response in so many places, we can begin to hypothesize that this is more than just a politically expedient decision at one moment in time, and is rather a characteristic response from Charlemagne and his advisers to the problems of rule they faced. Such a tool of analysis cannot entirely change the normative bias of the sources, but it does provide a window into practice by offering a sense of the structure of political behavior. This study builds on such tendencies of political response to formulate the interpretation of political practice offered here.

In attempting to elucidate patterns of rulership, I have focused on tendencies that we can link to the king himself, on consistent trends, and on broad directions in how the king and his closest advisers exercised power. To that end, I have looked not just for characteristic tools, such as the oath, but for the deeper forces behind it, such as concern about loyalty, the broad conception of the oath and what this implies about

[17] On the challenges of the sources, see Schieffer, "Die Einheit."

[18] Despite the similarities in terminology Wendy Davies' excellent study takes a different approach to the investigation of political questions: W. Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*. The collection Hill and Swan (eds.), *The Community, the Family and the Saint. Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe*, despite the title, is not especially focused on issues of the exercise of power.

[19] In other capitularies (or in this case, texts related to the capitularies): *Capit*. I, no. 121, pp. 239–40 and discussion of Buck, *Admonitio und Praedicatio*, pp. 157–68; in letters written in the king's name: for instance, Alcuin, letter 93, pp. 136–8; in histories: for example, the Annals of Lorsch s.a. 794, *SS* 1, pp. 35–6; part of the text is also available in: *Codex Vindobonensis 515*, ed. Unterkircher, p. 33 for a partial entry: this is one of the most extensive discussions of legislation in court histories, discussed in Chapter 4, pp. 197, 203–4; in theological investigations at royal order, for instance: Keefe, "An Unknown Response."

royal visions of Frankish society, and so on. I have also attempted to look for patterns we can link to Charlemagne himself by isolating trends that are reflected in many kinds of sources, are not linked to specific individuals, and are reflected consistently throughout the reign. This does lead to an emphasis on the structural rather than the personal in the evaluation of governance undertaken here, but has the advantage of allowing us to discern patterns in uneven sources. I use here any source which can shed light on political practice, from laws, to archaeology, to court poetry. I have, however, almost entirely focused on sources actually contemporary with the reign itself; this is a study of Charlemagne's rulership constructed from the sources produced during that reign.[20] The implication of this methodology is that patterns that we can see in so many sources from so many places can be tied to the king, for he was the one factor that was consistent as all else – author, genre, location, and so forth – changed. Thus, I argue that the patterns I will analyze in the pages that follow can be fairly claimed to reflect the king's actions and ideas, and not just those of his advisers. This does not of course mean that such patterns reflect *only* the king's actions and ideas, but that we can use them as a way to approach the rulership of Charlemagne himself.

I have sought out patterns that are consistent throughout the reign, as one of the ways to make sure that the patterns discussed here are indeed fully attested and linked to Charlemagne. This is the ideal situation in the discernment of a pattern, but it is subject to a persistent complication in the sources. They improve radically around the year 790, with a further increase in certain kinds of material around 800.[21] I will argue that this is not just a matter of source survival, but a real change in rulership that occurs in 790.[22] This does mean that many of the patterns we will examine in this study cannot be seen before the years around 789. I will point out cases where we can in fact detect the patterns earlier in the reign and I will discuss the early years of the reign as a prefiguration of

[20] There will of course be exceptions, such as archaeological material that is difficult to date precisely, or Einhard, whose biography postdates Charlemagne's death, but whose testimony cannot be ignored, or occasional information from the Astronomer on Southern events we otherwise would not know much about.

[21] This is evident in the capitularies (with the *Admonitio generalis*, *Capit*. I, no. 22, pp. 53–62 and *AG*, inaugurating the process of religious reform and much else that will be characteristic of the capitularies), the (possible) beginning of the Royal Frankish Annals, the compilation of the *Codex Carolinus* and the *Opus Caroli*, changes in how charters are given, and so on. See further discussion of the chronology of the reign in Chapter 7.

[22] For an important argument about documentary change rather than social change, albeit in a later period, see Barthélemy, *La société dans le comté de Vendôme*, especially chapter 1; Barthélemy, *La mutation de l'an mil*, chapters 1 and 2.

what was to come.[23] Nonetheless, most of the evidence applicable to a study of governance comes from the quarter century beginning around 790, and thus, while I will insist on consistency for a royal action or idea to be considered characteristic, this often inevitably means consistency from 790 or so on.

Of course, the people who made up the court also varied over time. I am endeavoring to use sources that are not linked to any one person alone. The Carolingian court which advised Charlemagne was composed of a constantly shifting combination of people, as we will see further later.[24] Even if a particular person at court was frequently involved in one issue, looking for patterns across time and genre allows us to minimize the danger that an identifiable tendency of rule is due to just one person. The effort to discover patterns of rulership linked to the king and court and not just to individuals is facilitated by the fact that most texts emanating from the court were the product of collaboration rather than the fruit of a single author's individual work.[25]

In sum, then, the methodology of this study is predicated on identifying patterns of political response, which can turn the scattered and often normative sources surviving from the period into a firmer foundation on which to build our analysis of Charlemagne's political practice. In considering here how Charlemagne tried to rule, I will use these persistent patterns of power as a tool to structure the investigation of political practice. This methodology for studying political history allows us to make full use of the available evidence while still taking account of the irregular survival of sources and their prescriptive bias. Analyzing patterns of power as a window into the sources will enable this book to offer a systematic political evaluation of Charlemagne's rulership despite the lack of systematic evidence.

The historiography of early medieval politics

The time is ripe for a reassessment of Charlemagne's rulership because of the many achievements in the field of early medieval political history over the last few decades. In order to situate this book within the development of the field and in relation to recent historiography, we must first step

[23] See especially Chapter 8, pp. 381–96.
[24] Nelson, "Was Charlemagne's Court a Courtly Society?" and discussion later.
[25] One of the clearest examples of such a process of collaboration is the composition of the *Opus Caroli*; on which see von den Steinen, "Entstehungsgeschichte der Libri Carolini"; Freeman and Meyvaert, "*Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*: An Introduction," pp. 17–33. While Theodulf composed the core of the text, the court, the king included, also weighed in.

back a bit to older interpretations of the reign of Charlemagne and how these have evolved, before widening our lens to include scholarship on the early Middle Ages more broadly.

Unsurprisingly, for a king called Charles the Great, much scholarship on Charlemagne sees him as the high point of Carolingian or early medieval rulership, extolling his cultural achievements, his military successes, his political competence.[26] A reaction to the glorification of Charlemagne set in, particularly with the publication of Heinrich Fichtenau's *Das Karolingische Imperium* in 1949.[27] Written by an Austrian in the devastating years of National Socialism and its aftermath, the book took a far darker view of Charlemagne's leadership. Rather than seeing Charlemagne's rule as setting the foundation for later states,[28] Fichtenau conceived of Charlemagne as a limited, often ineffective, king, whose few military achievements had overshadowed a reality of minimal political success. There is much in Fichtenau's portrait of Charlemagne to be valued. For instance, his depiction of Charlemagne as the heart ("Mittelpunkt") of the empire is excellent.[29] And the moral stance of a scholar in his circumstances rejecting the myth of a cultic leader can only be celebrated. Yet, Fichtenau often went too far in minimizing both what Charlemagne attempted and what he actually achieved.

However, it is Fichtenau's Charlemagne that has been most persuasive in the second half of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first. Some of this has to do with a broader move away from political history, which stemmed from, among other causes, a distrust of political power.[30] For a post-Foucault, post-Holocaust academy, the kind of royal power Charlemagne claimed to wield could only be suspect. As Stuart Airlie has aptly observed, there is something of the "panopticon" in a king who could add as an agenda item to be discussed at an assembly the question of whether the Franks were truly Christian.[31] Even in the

[26] The generally positive approach to Charlemagne continues to be a feature of serious works, such as Barbero, *Charlemagne: Father of a Continent*.

[27] Fichtenau, *Das Karolingische Imperium; soziale und geistige Problematik eines Grossreiches*.

[28] For example, Fichtenau, *Das Karolingische Imperium*, pp. 87–8; in English trans. pp. 77–8.

[29] Fichtenau, *Das Karolingische Imperium*, p. 38; in English trans. p. 29 (my translation here).

[30] See, for instance, the approach to power adopted by Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, emphasizing its transgressive and violent aspects.

[31] On the panopticon-like qualities of Carolingian governance, see Airlie, "The Palace of Memory," p. 5. The discussion of whether the Franks are truly Christian can be found in *Capit.* I, no. 71, c. 9, p. 161.

context of the long-standing concern with baptism at the court,[32] this is a remarkable issue to address in a legislative format, not to mention the impossibility of the assembly reaching any kind of useful conclusion on the matter (we have the notes from the subsequent discussion; the lay aristocrats and clerics the king had gathered chose not to address that particular question).[33] Another factor behind the scholarly embrace of Fichtenau is the terms in which earlier historians celebrated Charlemagne's actions, not just the celebration itself. Previous scholarship, which tended to assume consistent state structures, delegated authority, and a quasi-modern bureaucracy, has now been, rightly, rejected.[34] More recent work on political history has emphasized ritual over institutions, and the analysis of individual textual accounts rather than an effort to reconcile them (developments we will return to). All of this has been seen to be contradictory to a view of Charlemagne as an active and effective ruler. Some would go so far as to suggest that the imputation of effectiveness in and of itself presupposes modern concepts of political control that are inappropriate in an early medieval context.[35]

These concerns about modern concepts have had a deep impact on the field. Much early medieval political history of late has been shaped, explicitly or not, by wider academic debates, especially about power and marginality. One of the impacts of literary theory and postmodernism on historical scholarship has been to inculcate a distrust of central power, and to encourage in its stead a focus on how margins can illuminate the center, how the odd, the grotesque, the divergent, can best reveal a society.[36] In the case of early medieval political history, these academic currents have produced work that aims to explore political life without reference to constitutions, structures, institutions, and normative sources.[37] This is a reasonable goal, given not only trends in other disciplines, but as a reaction to previous historiography that created a vision of bureaucratic power that was out of place in a medieval context.

The problem of using a too bureaucratic frame to understand Charlemagne has been a frequent critique of the work of François-Louis Ganshof. Ganshof knew more about how Charlemagne ruled than any

[32] On the concern about baptism at the Carolingian court, see now Keefe, *Water and the Word*. I would like to thank Jinty Nelson for discussing with me the links between this capitulary chapter and the court's sustained interest in baptism.
[33] *Capit*. I, no. 72, pp. 162–4.
[34] See the useful discussion in Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 5–9.
[35] See further pp. 412–13.
[36] There is a helpful exploration of these issues in the context of medieval history in: Freedman and Spiegel, "Medievalisms Old and New."
[37] For some useful observations on the development of the field, see Warner, "Reading Ottonian History."

other modern historian.[38] His work and its implications therefore warrants some sustained attention here. Ganshof argued that Charlemagne had a vision of empire that he attempted to enforce.[39] This vision was shaped by a deep sense of the responsibilities of Christian kingship, but found its political expression in efforts to regularize, centralize, and standardize power, to develop clear standards of office holding, and to carefully and piecemeal build on tradition, not as a matter of a precise plan, but as a general trend in his rule.[40] In Ganshof's view, this vision eventually failed,[41] but it animated much of what Charlemagne tried to do, even as the king and his men scrambled to respond to the succession of everyday events and frequent crises.[42] Underlying Ganshof's work were the assumptions that power needed to be exercised regularly in

[38] Several of Ganshof's most important studies are gathered in his *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy*, but there is not a complete collection of all his articles, as useful as that would be. There is a good, though not exhaustive, bibliography in *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy*, pp. 303–11.

[39] See in particular, Ganshof, "Charlemagne's Programme of Imperial Government"; Ganshof, "The Impact of Charlemagne"; Ganshof, "The Institutional Framework."

[40] Perhaps best summed up in Ganshof, "Charlemagne," pp. 526–7 (pp. 24–5 in the reprint, which I cite here): "To have a clear line of conduct and keep to it is one thing, but it is quite another to follow out a complete and detailed programme. Charlemagne had, indeed, certain lines of conduct that he followed persistently. The facts presented are sufficient to this as regards his foreign policy. It is also true as regards political, administrative, and juridical institutions. Charlemagne wanted to improve their efficiency so as to bring about a more complete fulfillment of his wishes and to achieve greater security for his subjects. But one cannot make out a real programme in his actions. He resorted to shifts; he adopted and improved what was already existing. This is true of the institution of the *missi*, true also of the royal court of justice, of the royal vassality and of the 'immunity'. Occasionally he created something new, but without troubling about a general scheme. His reforms were empiric and at times went through several stages of development as in the case of the organisation of the *placita generalia* which was roughly outlined at the beginning of the reign but did not assume a definite shape until about the year 802, and also the use of writing in recording administrative and juridicial matter, prescribed by a series of distinct decisions relating to particular cases ... One is often tempted to turn Charlemagne into a superman, a farseeing politician with broad and general views, ruling everything from above; one is tempted to see his reign as a whole, with more or less the same characteristics prevailing from beginning to end. This is so true that most of the works concerning him, save for the beginning and the end of his reign, use the geographical or systematic order rather than a chronological one. The distinctions that I have tried to make between the different phrases of his reign may, perhaps, help to explain more exactly the development and effect of Charlemagne's power; they may help us to appreciate these more clearly. Perhaps, also, the features that I have noted bring out the human personality in the statesman and lead to the same results." Ganshof's emphasis on adaptation is also important and will be followed here.

[41] In particular, Ganshof, "The Last Period of Charlemagne's Reign"; "Charlemagne's Failure," and full discussion later.

[42] See, in particular, Ganshof, "Charlemagne" for the impact of daily events and constant problems.

order to be effective, that there was a general direction to Charlemagne's rule even if not a full program,[43] that standardization and centralization went hand-in-hand and that Charlemagne sought both in an effort to create a unified empire. The problems with this view are fairly clear and have been oft noted; it is too bureaucratic, modern, and statist in its expectations of political life.[44]

The goal of this book is to find a way to evaluate Charlemagne's rule, learning from Ganshof, but without incorporating his assumptions about political life. To that end, this book tries to reinterpret Charlemagne's political practice by appreciating its centralizing and organizational efforts, but without assuming that these efforts entailed modern attempts to rule in a regular or even fashion. I have tried to study Charlemagne's political practice by extracting a sense of political patterns from the sources, rather than by assuming any particular model of how political power worked. The methodology of studying patterns of power adopted here allows us to recognize the consistency and coherence of Charlemagne's rule that Ganshof correctly noted, but without interpreting the reign in the frame of modern conceptions of how power can be exercised. The patterns thus leave room for the irregularity which so marked Charlemagne's exercise of power, and which Ganshof felt doomed his political project. Where Ganshof believed irregularity and consistency could not combine, studying patterns of power allows us to analyze both together. Ganshof appreciated, perhaps more than any other scholar, the ambitions of Charlemagne and his men, the coherence of political will, and yet the irregularity and lack of planning in his rule. For Ganshof, this understanding of Charlemagne implied a contradiction: The irregularity undermined the coherence. I argue that by focusing on patterns of power we can examine how the coherence and irregularity Ganshof rightly observed did not conflict, but in fact combined in such a way as to define the nature of Charlemagne's governance.

In the decades since Ganshof wrote, scholars studying early medieval politics have shifted focus to rulers other than Charlemagne. Nonetheless, Charlemagne continues to be the subject of significant research. The contributions of three scholars in particular require special attention here. The work of Rudolf Schieffer builds on the issues of the nature of the imperial achievement raised in Ganshof's work. We will have cause to address many of Schieffer's specialized studies in the course of this book, but for now the key issue is his vision of unity and accident in the shaping

[43] Ganshof, "Charlemagne," pp. 526–7 (pp. 24–5 in the reprint) and discussion in Chapter 8, pp. 404–5, 424–5.

[44] The critiques are clear and have been frequently reiterated. The basic point is well summarized in Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 5–9.

of the empire. In two important articles, Schieffer has argued that the empire and whatever unity it evinced was a somewhat accidental construction, which emerged from chance and the king's ability to take advantage of happy accidents.[45] I will address these arguments most fully in Chapter 8, but a few introductory remarks can help situate the rest of the historiography. Schieffer's work illuminates the importance of contingency, of events shaping the realm in ways never predicated, as he (correctly) claims happened with the construction of Aachen, first as a personal home, but which became an administrative center.[46] However, I would contend that his emphasis on accident, while essential, does not leave enough room for strategy and consistency. The coherence of the empire was not only a function of the unity encouraged by religious reform, as Schieffer's account implies.[47] As suggested in the remarks about Ganshof, there was a political vision to the reign (in addition to a religious vision), albeit one carried out irregularly. There was also a strategy of rulership revealed in the reliance on patterns of political response. My interpretation thus draws on both Ganshof and Schieffer's understandings of the nature of the polity Charlemagne created, but walks a middle path between them.

Important work on Charlemagne has also been produced in recent years by Rosamond McKitterick and Jinty Nelson. McKitterick's 2008 book on Charlemagne[48] is a synthetic study of how the reign contributed to shaping a new kind of European polity. To that end, her work ranges much more widely than the tight focus on political practice adopted in this book. Nonetheless, her arguments on specific issues, like Charlemagne's charters, will frequently be drawn on, as will her earlier scholarship on history-writing and literacy (especially Chapters 4 and 6, respectively). Another major contribution has been made by Jinty Nelson, especially in her studies of Charlemagne's personal history and family life.[49] Part III of this book, in particular, will build on Nelson's work on the impact of family and the human trajectory of a life on the reign. In sum, this book returns to many of the questions Ganshof posed, armed with a new methodology for studying patterns of power and fortified by recent scholarship, which has encouraged a wider, nonbureaucratic, contingent, and personal approach to thinking about Charlemagne.

[45] Schieffer, "Die Einheit"; Schieffer, "Karl der Große—Intentionen und Wirkungen." These arguments are now summarized in his "Karl der Große und Europa."
[46] Schieffer, "Vor 1200 Jahren," and discussion in Chapter 6, pp. 333–4.
[47] Schieffer, "Die Einheit," especially p. 47. [48] McKitterick, *Charlemagne*.
[49] Most of these studies are now available in the collections of her essays: *Politics and Ritual*; *The Frankish World*; *Rulers and Ruling Families*; *Courts, Elites, and Gendered Power in the Early Middle Ages*.

This book also responds to several other developments in the historiography of the early Middle Ages. One important context for an effort to reconsider Charlemagne's exercise of power is recent research on other Carolingians. The last few decades have seen a resurgence of interest in Carolingian history, especially in the United Kingdom. One factor prompting this new work is the abandonment of an older, often nationalistic, progressive narrative of Carolingian history.[50] This view posited the creation of an empire by Charlemagne and then its slow dissolution into political disarray, to be eventually followed by the building of what would become modern European nation states.[51] This interpretation is unsustainable, both in its teleological expectations about nation states, and in its vision of the trajectory of Carolingian power.[52] Most historians today are uncomfortable with the expectation that the nation state is the natural outcome of historical development and with the vision of the Carolingian empire as subject to slow decline after reaching its pinnacle under Charlemagne. One happy consequence of the abandonment of the old narrative of Carolingian history is the new attention to the study of other Carolingians, which in effect means anyone not Charlemagne. Thus, we see analysis now of Louis the Pious, Charles the Bald, Charles the Fat, Louis the German, even the oft-neglected Lothar I.[53] This work, which portrays other rulers as effective Carolingians, has offered new insights on early medieval political culture, but also provides for the student of Charlemagne a richer and more realistic context in which to situate analysis of the Carolingian "founding father."[54] In particular,

[50] A key work helping to pave the way for this reorientation was Sullivan, "The Carolingian Age."

[51] For the broad context: Geary, *The Myth of Nations*.

[52] For instance, Booker, *Past Convictions*.

[53] The literature on Louis includes: Godman and Collins (eds.), *Charlemagne's Heir*; Booker, *Past Convictions*; Conant, "Louis the Pious and the Contours"; Coupland, "Money and Coinage under Louis the Pious"; Depreux, "L'absence de jugement"; Depreux, "Louis le Pieux reconsidéré ?"; Depreux, *Prosopographie*; Depreux, "Le rôle du comte du Palais"; Goldberg, "Louis the Pious and the Hunt"; de Jong, *The Penitential State*; de Jong, "Power and Humility"; Noble, "The Monastic Ideal"; Noble, "Louis the Pious and his Piety Re-Reconsidered"; Romig, "In Praise of the Too-Clement Emperor"; on Charles the Bald: Deshman, "The Exalted Servant"; Diebold, "The Ruler Portrait of Charles the Bald"; Gibson and Nelson (eds.), *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*; Nelson, *Charles the Bald*; and many of the studies collected in her *Rulers and Ruling Families*; Staubach, *Rex Christianus*; on Charles the Fat: MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*; on Louis the German: Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*; Airlie, "True Teachers and Pious Kings"; W. Hartmann, *Ludwig der Deutsche*; W. Hartmann (ed.), *Ludwig der Deutsche und seine Zeit*; on Lothar: Screen, "The Importance of the Emperor"; de Jong, "The Emperor Lothar and his *Bibliotheca Historiarum*"; Jarnut, "Ludwig der Fromme, Lothar I. und das Regnum Italiae."

[54] On Charlemagne as the father of Europe, see Conclusion, pp. 433–6.

some of the ways in which Charlemagne's political practice differed from that of other Carolingians prove especially interesting. Moreover, the scholarship on Louis the Pious helps us better understand the consequences of how Charlemagne tried to rule, an issue I will return to in the Conclusion to this volume.

Scholarly interest in moving beyond study of just Charlemagne is also evident in a series of books that address the Carolingian period or the early Middle Ages as a whole, looking at political and social change as it played out on the ground in particular contexts.[55] Such work is an essential component of our understanding of the Carolingian period. It is a reflection of a move away from the heavily bureaucratic flavor of some earlier political history[56] and it draws on renewed interest in "practical" expressions of how people's daily lives were arranged.[57] Much of the specific work on the exercise of power in a regional context builds on the recent reemphasis of the value of charters, especially in English-language scholarship,[58] and on the related exploration of dispute settlement or more broadly conflict resolution.[59] The older German-language literature that provides the foundation for this work tended to situate local studies in a strongly regional context, emphasizing landscape, local resource management, and family ties.[60] Some of the more recent, usually English-language, work, on the other hand, focuses on power networks, often centered on monasteries, and how these local

[55] Notable studies of this sort include: Borgolte, *Die Grafen Alemanniens*; Borgolte, *Geschichte der Grafschaften Alemanniens*; W.C. Brown, *Unjust Seizure*; Clavadetscher, "Die Einführung der Grafschaftsverfassung"; Hannig, "Zentrale Kontrolle"; Hannig, "Zur Funktion der karolingischen '*missi dominici*'"; Le Jan, "Prospographica Neustrica"; Nonn, "Probleme der frühmittelalterlichen Grafschaftsverfassung."

[56] There are some useful comments on this point in Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 5–6.

[57] For some of the considerations behind this research see Wormald, "Introduction," to W. Davies and Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes*.

[58] One example of recent reconsideration of the value of charters is: Heidecker (ed.), *Charters and the Use of the Written Word*. The topic always continued to receive more attention in continental languages, for instance: Gockel, *Karolingische Königshöfe*, and many of the works cited in Note 55.

[59] Important work on Carolingian conflict resolution includes: The essays collected in W. Davies and Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, and in its follow-up volume: W. Davies and Fouracre (eds.), *Property and Power*; Fouracre, "Carolingian Justice"; Geary, "Extra-Judicial Means of Conflict Resolution"; Geary, "Moral Obligations"; Hammer, "*Lex scripta* in Early Medieval Bavaria"; McKitterick, "Perceptions of Justice"; Wormald, "Giving God and King Their Due." Also useful are the edited collections: Bossy (ed.), *Disputes and Settlements*; W.C. Brown and Górecki (eds.), *Conflict in Medieval Europe*.

[60] Examples include: Bosl, *Franken um 800*; Jahn, *Ducatus Baiuvariorum*; Schulze, *Die Grafschaftsverfassung*; Staab, *Untersuchungen zur Gesellschaft*; Störmer, *Adelsgruppen*; Störmer, *Früher Adel*; M. Werner, *Adelsfamilien im Umkreis der frühen Karolinger*.

power constellations intersected with imperial ones.[61] All of this literature, regardless of its focus on resources or power, builds on a massive reorientation in early medieval history to emphasize family relations and aristocratic history.[62] The fruit of generations of work, going back to Gerd Tellenbach, on the nature of aristocratic family ties has provided the evidence base for much of this literature.[63] The shift in emphasis to prosopographical research continues to inform early medieval political history today. While this book focuses on the king and thus on central power, it regularly grounds such study in particular regional contexts and in the dynamics of aristocratic politics. The results of these regional and prosopographical studies will thus be regularly drawn on to provide a fuller understanding of how power was played out locally.

The focus in this literature on networks of aristocrats as the window into early medieval society intersects with concerns about what held early medieval polities together. A body of literature which argues that rituals shaped early medieval Europe, and particularly Ottonian Germany, has been deeply contested but also opens up a wider debate about political coherence in early medieval polities. While German historians have examined rituals as the structuring element of the post-Carolingian world, French historians have more often focused on issues of dispute resolution and the dissolution of Carolingian institutions. Both literatures question how statist and governed the post-Carolingian world was; a question which is now increasingly asked of the Carolingian era itself. A look at the development of this historiography on Ottonian Germany and Capetian France will help situate current research on political structures in the Carolingian period.

Let us begin with the study of ritual, which has been a marked feature of research on Ottonian Germany, but which is also relevant for the history of the early Middle Ages as a whole. One of the most influential

[61] For instance: Costambeys, *Power and Patronage*; Hummer, *Politics and Power*; Innes, *State and Society*; Jarrett, *Rulers and Ruled*.

[62] In particular, in terms of the study of *memoria*. Foundationally: Wollasch and Schmid (eds.), *Memoria*. See also studies ranging from: Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, to Oexle, *Forschungen zu monastischen und geistlichen Gemeinschaften*.

[63] The foundational study was Tellenbach, *Königtum und Stämme*. Some key work on the early medieval aristocracy can be found collected in: Reuter (ed.), *The Medieval Nobility*. Other important studies include: Bullough, "Early Medieval Social Groupings"; Bouchard, "Family Structure"; Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir*; Leyser, "The German Aristocracy"; Murray, *Germanic Kinship Structure*. Also important are the studies of Stuart Airlie: "The Aristocracy"; "The Aristocracy in the Service of the State"; "Bonds of Power and Bonds of Association"; "Charlemagne and the Aristocracy"; "*Semper Fideles?*" The work on elites directed by Régine Le Jan and published in the Haut moyen âge series at Brepols is now also essential; see overview at: www.brepols.net/Pages/BrowseBySeries.aspx?TreeSeries=HAMA.

lines of research is the investigation of the role of ritual in political life, with related studies of relationships among groups of people behind the basic hierarchical links that were once the typical object of attention in medieval history.[64] In its strongest formulation, the idea behind studies of early medieval ritual is that these moments were the glue that held political society together, that the performance of rituals reveals the unspoken rules which governed medieval political life.[65] This view of ritual has been challenged, notably by Philippe Buc.[66] Buc argues that the concept of ritual itself is too historically contingent to be applied to medieval sources which helped shape the conceptual understanding of the word. He also warns that studies of ritual tend to reify rituals, to turn textual arguments into more transparent depictions of political life. He argues that all we can do is try to interpret particular textual depictions of events we have chosen to call rituals. His critics in turn have noted that what Buc seems to advocate is a close reading of sources not unlike what scholars have already been doing, and that his deconstruction of the concept gets us no closer to deciphering medieval texts, which do in fact emphasize such ceremonial moments.[67] If nothing else, the interest in ritual, particularly among historians of Ottonian Germany, where such rituals are seen to be constitutive of political structures, has illuminated the many noninstitutional bonds that structured early medieval political life.

In a French context, research has focused on the problems of conflict resolution and of what happened when the old Carolingian order faded. An older historiography, preeminently associated with Jan Dhondt, identified post-Carolingian France as a period of disruption, out of which the nation state of France would eventually emerge, but which was marked by profound interruption of the previous Carolingian order (an order most Carolingian historians would consider overstated).[68] Georges

[64] This literature is perhaps best approached via the collected studies of Gerd Althoff, *Spielregeln der Politik*. See also: Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale*; Althoff, Fried, and Geary (eds.), *Medieval Concepts of the Past*; Leyser, "Ritual, Ceremony and Gesture"; Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*; Paxton, *Christianizing Death*; Theuws and Nelson (eds.), *Rituals of Power*. And in a French context see Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor*. On studies of relationships: Althoff, *Amicitiae und Pacta*; Althoff, *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue*; arguing from a very different perspective, see also S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*.

[65] This is preeminently the view of Gerd Althoff; see works cited in Note 64.

[66] Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual*.

[67] For some important critiques of Buc, see Koziol, "The Dangers of Polemic"; Pössel, "The Magic of Early Medieval Ritual"; Walsham, "Review Article: The Dangers of Ritual." And see Buc's reply to some of his critics: Buc, "The Monster and the Critics."

[68] Dhondt, *Études sur la naissance*.

Duby's work introduced a fundamental shift. Duby still recognized systematic interruptions of order in central medieval France, but was more concerned to trace the social and cultural shifts that gave rise to the transformation of judicial structures.[69] Building on Duby's insights, a new literature on dispute settlement in post-Carolingian France has offered a much more positive assessment of medieval French justice. Rather than bemoaning the lack of clear procedures and the frequency of feud, such literature sees in negotiated settlements and processes of violence sources of order of a different kind.[70] Such techniques might not bear much relation to modern expectations of justice, but in a medieval context they were reasonable methods of regulating conflict even if they lacked any state sanction.

Despite their significant differences, this scholarship on tenth- and eleventh-century France and Germany has in common that both schools of historiography have questioned the validity of seeing these societies as states, their rulers as effective governors, and the exercise of power in them as public.[71] Even though much of this literature assumes a Carolingian past marked by order and stability, Carolingian historians have begun to question just how public, statist, and governed Carolingian Europe was as well.[72] A recent book by Charles West returns to the

[69] Duby, "The Evolution of Judicial Institutions"; translation of "Recherches sur l'évolution des institutions judiciares," published in 1946 and 1947.

[70] Cheyette, "*Suum cuique tribuere*"; Geary, "Living with Conflicts in Stateless France"; Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*; Martindale, "*Conventum inter Guillelmum Aquitanorum comes et Hugonem Chiliarchum*"; Weinberger, "Les conflits entre clercs et laïcs"; and fundamentally, the work of Stephen White, including: *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints*; "Feuding and Peace-Making in the Touraine"; "*Pactum . . . legem vincit et amor judicium*"; "Politics of Fidelity"; "Proposing the Ordeal and Avoiding It"; most of White's articles are reprinted in his *Feuding and Peace-Making*. This literature has also frequently intersected with the discussion of the "Feudal Revolution"; on which see Bisson, "The Feudal Revolution"; with responses of Barthélemy, Reuter, White, and Wickham, and reply of Bisson.

[71] There is an excellent overview of the basic problems in the German context in: Keller, "Zum Charakter der 'Staatlichkeit"; also for an overview of the discussion of states in a medieval context, see S. Reynolds, "The Historiography of the Medieval State," especially pp. 122–8 on post-Carolingian France and Germany.

[72] One excellent, and provocative, critical examination of these issues is: Fried, "Der karolingische Herrschaftsverband," which argues against the applicability of concepts such as state and office in the early Middle Ages. Other works downplaying the effectiveness of the state in the Carolingian period include: Struve, *Die Entwickung der organologischen Staatsauffassung*, pp. 87–98; Beumann, "Zur Entwicklung transpersonaler Staatsvorstellungen." See also the overview of the literature in Goetz, "Regnum," pp. 110–16 (pp. 219–23 in the reprint); although Goetz has a more positive view of Frankish institutions, his overview of the literature on the topic is cogent and even-handed. Goetz's positive evaluation of the extent of a concept of state in the early Middle Ages is also repeated in his: Goetz, "The Perception of 'Power' and 'State'," and see further pp. 20–2.

question of the "Feudal Revolution," the idea that there was a significant disruption in political and cultural life around the year 1000,[73] informed by knowledge of the Carolingian past.[74] In setting the stage for his review of the "Feudal Revolution" debate, West offers a significant assessment of Carolingian political life. West argues that we must break away from a seeming contradiction between evidence for effective top-down political control and bottom-up evidence of political practice little touched by royal power or expectations. There is ample support for both in Carolingian sources, but how to balance them? West's solution is to argue that the real project of the Carolingian empire was to seek to shape social order, to communicate messages about political life, a model which leaves room for both royal interventions and more independent local practices. This interpretation is important, and certainly helps clarify dispute over the Feudal Revolution, which is of course West's main purpose. The message for the student of Charlemagne is somewhat different, however. First, I agree entirely with West that we must incorporate evidence of both effective royal power and local indifference to such. The former is more obvious in this book, as it seeks to investigate how Charlemagne and his men sought to exercise power, but the book also addresses instances where that effort failed or did not penetrate local societies. Second, I too try here to avoid positing a dichotomy between royal rulership and local practice, which often emerges only when we conceptualize rulership in too bureaucratic a context. Charlemagne's exercise of power was not meant to eliminate local power, rather it built on it. Similarly, Charlemagne's use of literacy in governance was not an effort to construct a Weberian administrative structure, but rather was an attempt to fashion a system of political communication in which both literate and oral communication were essential.[75] Where this book differs from West is in his emphasis on social order, which is not a primary focus of this volume. Social order was a major concern during the Carolingian period, evident in multiple areas, including incest legislation, which, in Karl Ubl's treatment, is one context for reworking elite structures in the course of early medieval state formation processes.[76] However, such efforts to shape symbolic communication and reimagine the nature of Carolingian society largely postdate the reign of Charlemagne. During the reign of Charlemagne itself, we can best appreciate the contours of political life in two ways: First, by recognizing that tools of royal power do not imply a dismantling of local autonomy; and second, by noting that

[73] See references in Note 70. [74] C. West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution*.
[75] See also C. West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution*, pp. 97–105.
[76] Ubl, *Inzestverbot*, especially pp. 274–87.

some of the conflict between the two, which certainly is there, was minimized by the patterns of power Charlemagne employed. Much of the situation West addresses only emerged out of the ways in which Charlemagne ruled, so the tensions were not yet as fully obvious. Moreover, the dynamic of change and the rhythms of political life in the reign of Charlemagne were such that conflicts between royal imperatives and local prerogatives could be glossed over by the rapid speed of events and the momentum of success. Similarly, the studies of ritual and dispute settlement methods noted in this section often depend on types of evidence that rarely date from the reign of Charlemagne (such as depictions of ritual). These studies thus help us pose some important questions, but also highlight some of what made the reign of Charlemagne distinctive.

West's discussion of social order also brings up the issue of how to conceptualize the early medieval political world. Here too much recent work provides an important perspective. But first a few words about vocabulary are necessary. The word "political" itself is not entirely straightforward. I use the word to refer to matters of power, both at the court and regionally. One might argue that this is too vague a definition, especially given the development of a more delimited understanding of political in the later Middle Ages.[77] However, such a broad definition is, in my opinion, the only one possible for a world where the boundaries of royal action and interaction with the population were in the process of being reworked.[78] My understanding of power is similarly broad. By power, I refer to ways of exerting force, control or influence, shaped by the agency of all parties involved, in the imperial context. How Charlemagne ruled was highly variable, and often innovative. I have preferred therefore to focus on the practice of power, by which I mean the multiple, shifting ways in which the king and his men sought to shape political activity in the Carolingian world, rather than on ideologies of power, medieval or modern. My use of the word practice is meant to evoke not a particular anthropologically informed interpretation of society, but rather the *ad hoc* process by which Charlemagne and his men learned how to rule an empire. The construction of an ideological vision of empire was really the task of the next generation. Accordingly,

[77] Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century*.

[78] Carolingian historians tend not to problematize the word "political," as opposed to "state" or "public" or other such concepts. While the question requires further attention, we should also note that the term should not be taken to imply any kind of stark distinction between secular and religious power in the early Middle Ages, both of which can be political in the broad definition I employ here. I would like to thank Thomas Bisson and Warren Brown for their advice on this point.

this study is structured around the idea that a broad definition of political power and practice can best help us interpret a world where so much about political life was in flux.

One might make a similar point about the concept of the state and its utility in early medieval history.[79] The scholarship that emphasized non-institutional aspects of political power was a necessary corrective, as we have seen, because older literature sometimes imagined a Carolingian world far too similar to our own in its political expectations and structures. Yet, more recently, scholars have returned to concepts of political life and argued strongly for political coherence in the Carolingian period. In particular, debates over the concept of the "state" have had a large impact on Carolingian studies. In an important article building on older German literature, Johannes Fried argued that what held the Carolingian world together was essentially concepts of church and family, that there was no overarching political definition that shaped the Carolingian empire.[80] His work has been deeply contested, especially by Hans-Werner Goetz, who insists on using the terminology of contemporary sources and who has illustrated the importance of the concept of a *regnum* in the early Middle Ages.[81] Two recent collections of essays addressed to the topic of the early medieval state, edited by Walter Pohl, have largely followed Goetz's lead, at least in terms of his insistence on political coherence, if not always his choice of vocabulary.[82] Although the essays in the volumes reflect a range of views, most of the authors argue that while we must recognize significant divergences between modern states and medieval polities, there were nonetheless viable states in the early medieval period.[83] The definitions used vary, but the weight of the conclusions suggests that early medieval polities demonstrated sufficient coherence and continuity to count as states. A strong, but loose, understanding of the concept is most appropriate for studying the political forms of the early Middle Ages.

This is not unlike the verdict scholars have reached about understandings of public and private in the early Middle Ages. Most of these studies

[79] For the broader context in medieval history: R. Davies, "The Medieval State"; S. Reynolds, "The Historiography of the Medieval State."

[80] Fried, "Der karolingische Herrschaftsverband."

[81] For Goetz's articles on this topic see Note 72, and also: Goetz, "Erwartungen an den 'Staat'." See also the overview of the debate in Jarnut, "Anmerkungen zum Staat des frühen Mittelalters." Positing a stark difference between "*ecclesia*" and "*regnum*" does not help; see Patzold, "'Einheit' versus 'Fraktionierung'."

[82] Airlie, Pohl, and Reimitz (eds.), *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*; Pohl and Wieser (eds.), *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat*.

[83] The conclusion to the second volume offers an overview of the project as a whole and some major results: Goetz, "Versuch einer resümierenden Bilanz."

contend that the terms public and private continued to have meaning in the early Middle Ages.[84] This does not mean that the lines between public/private or relevant to the king/not relevant to the king were inevitably sharp; they were not.[85] But it does mean that the frequent reference to "public" matters in royal documents is not just a linguistic holdover, but a reflection of political views.[86] Thus, a turn in the historiography away from royal or imperial power to local power is now nuanced by an emerging consensus that there were still state structures and conceptions of public and private that shaped early medieval political life. But rather than debate terminology, most early medievalists prefer to study the actual exercise of power in particular times and places.[87]

The desire to do so has led scholars to develop various models for thinking about the exercise of power. In addition to those already indicated earlier, another recent intervention should be singled out. Steffan Patzold's work on bishops is important for what it has to say about the political roles of such figures, a point we will address in Chapter 1.[88] It also offers a model for how to think about political history, in that Patzold frames his work as an effort to investigate not just the powers bishops claimed, but how much knowledge of those powers was shared and then acted upon by others.[89] The theoretical frame helps Patzold, because so much of our evidence on bishops is in quite theologically inflected writings, which may not have been generally accessible. Moreover, the political roles of Carolingian bishops had not been fully conceptualized in the scholarship.[90] The insistence on referring to the impact of power is similarly a guiding principle in this study, but I do not explicitly frame

[84] For instance, Innes, *State and Society*, pp. 255–9.

[85] On the complexity of this terminology, see, for example, Nelson, "The Problematic in the Private."

[86] Two interesting analyses, from different angles, on how concepts like "public" were used in the early Middle Ages are: de Jong, "What was *Public* about Public Penance?"; Hoeflich, "The Concept of *Utilitas Populi*." On the terminology itself: See, for instance, Genicot, "Sur la survivance de la notion d'état"; compare with the assessment in Halphen, "L'idée d'état sous les Carolingiens." Halphen's approach is challenged on other grounds by Sassier, "L'utilisation d'un concept romain," and see overview of Wehlen, *Geschichtsschreibung und Staatsauffassung*, pp. 33–4, with a survey of meanings of state-related concepts on pp. 33–56, with emphasis on the reign of Louis the Pious, but with attention to earlier and later examples. For the related issue of the use of the word *administratio*, see Busch, *Vom Amtswalten zum Königsdienst*, with discussion of the use of the word "public" in an appendix, pp. 114–40.

[87] See also the useful comments on the historiography in Fouracre, "Comparing the Resources of the Merovingian and Carolingian States," pp. 287–8 (pp. 1–4 in the reprint).

[88] Patzold, *Episcopus*.

[89] Patzold, *Episcopus*, pp. 37–45.

[90] See also review of Theo Riches. I would like to thank Theo Riches for sending me his review and discussing the book with me.

this investigation in such theoretical terms, for several reasons. First, knowledge of the king is not really the problem for this book; if anything, too much is attributed to Charlemagne, who is often held personally responsible for everything that occurred in his realm during his rule. Second, I will endeavor to measure impact using several indicators: Such as how what the king expected changed the very terms of debate, or the reflection of imperial power locally, or how the reign developed over time. As the very building blocks of political practice were often in flux during the reign of Charlemagne, I have preferred to use multiple ways of measuring impact. One of these, drawing on the recent work of Martin Gravel as well as Patzold, is thinking about networks of knowledge and communication, and the distances that shaped them.[91]

These developments in historiography make this moment a good one to return to analysis of Charlemagne. The work on other Carolingians has deconstructed an unhelpful periodization of the era and provides a richer context for interpreting Charlemagne, both what he shared with other Carolingians and where he differed. The local studies allow us to better understand the effect of central power on the regions. The recent return to questions of statehood and public and private helps underscore the political coherence of the Carolingian era. The emphasis on ritual and socially constructed power enables us to study central power as it emerges from the society that created it, rather than assuming that central power engenders social structure. By building on all of these trends, the student of Charlemagne can ask again some important questions about how Charlemagne ruled and what those political choices meant.

A final key intervention in the historiography is the role of the concept of empire in the study of the reign of Charlemagne. In her article on empires and comparative history, Susan Reynolds defines an empire as a polity of (relatively) large size that includes both a metropolitan center and some kind of regional peripheries accumulated by force.[92] If we employ this loose definition of empire, every such polity will face two primary challenges, namely, delegation, as one cannot control a territory of significant size without it, and the balancing of imperial unity and regional diversity, as both must of necessity exist, and territories added (typically) against their own volition will not immediately accept outside control. Charlemagne's realm is not always conceived of as an empire, largely because of historiographical pressures toward understanding it as a kingdom, as for much of its history the Carolingian world was divided

[91] Gravel, *Distances, rencontres*.
[92] S. Reynolds, "Empires: A Problem of Comparative History," p. 158.

into kingdoms.[93] But Charlemagne's realm was in fact an empire in Reynolds' sense, and we can only analyze how it worked politically by examining these two primary problems of empire, namely, the handling of agents and the management of diversity.

This book will analyze these two problems of empire in turn, considering first how Charlemagne wanted his agents to behave and then what he did when they failed to do so. The second part of the book will examine the realities of regional diversity and the tools by which the Carolingians created an overarching imperial unity that worked with, rather than against, the inevitable regionalism. Finally, the book will conclude by evaluating change over time, and how this imperial structure emerged out of Charlemagne's political practice. Rather than focusing on the imperial title itself or a supposed disintegration of high ideals of rulership that Ganshof argued characterized the end of the reign, our analysis of the problems of empire will reveal the rhythms of change that powered an empire of practice, an empire shaped by pragmatic political concerns within the framework provided by some consistent ideals. Rethinking Charlemagne's empire in this way will allow us to understand better the dynamics of the reign itself as well as the legacy Charlemagne left to subsequent medieval rulers.

The history of the reign as context for the practice of empire

This book is meant to analyze the process by which Charlemagne and his men learned how to rule the empire they created. While the book will address this question thematically, we must begin with a brief overview of certain elements of the reign and the structure of the empire that will be essential for the analysis to follow. The narrative of Charlemagne's years as king has been oft told, and will not be repeated here.[94] These introductory remarks will simply seek to highlight some key events and structures which will frequently recur in the course of the following thematic analysis.

Despite some dispute over the date, Charlemagne was likely born in 748 to Pippin III and his wife Bertrada.[95] Pippin was the mayor of the palace, a sort of regent for the figurehead Merovingian ruler, an office

[93] See further p. 338.

[94] There are new scholarly biographies of Charlemagne at the rate of several per decade, all of which provide an overview of the events of the reign. The notes in this section of the introduction are meant simply to indicate some basic works on the topics covered and make no pretension to completeness.

[95] M. Becher, "Neue Überlegungen zum Geburtsdatum."

he had inherited from his father and shared with his brother.[96] When his brother retired from secular life in 747, Pippin was king in practice if not yet in name.[97] This changed in 751 when Pippin deposed the last Merovingian ruler and made himself king of the Franks in his place.[98] Charlemagne and his younger brother Carloman played at least some role in political life, such as the famous events of 754 when Pope Stephen III traveled to Francia, anointing Pippin and his sons, and proclaiming that henceforth the Franks should always choose their kings from this family.[99] Charlemagne's biographer Einhard claims he knew almost nothing of his childhood.[100] The claim seems preposterous; Adalhard, for example, Charlemagne's cousin and close adviser, could easily have told Einhard a thing or two.[101] Nonetheless, our sources have preserved few details about Charlemagne's youth for the benefit of posterity.

The situation changes radically when Charlemagne himself became king in 768. Charlemagne succeeded in conjunction with his brother Carloman, an uneasy condominium of power we will address at greater length. As we will also see in due course, the evidence for governance, for Charlemagne's efforts to do more than simply command military service, tends to date from around 790 onward. However, the first years of his reign were far from empty. The great wave of conquests that earned him the approbation of his contemporaries and of posterity began almost immediately. His first important conquest was that of Aquitaine.[102] The campaigns are sometimes conceived of as a mere mopping up of his father's project.[103] Given the complex political situation in the Southwest, it seems to me we would do well not to understate the extent of Charlemagne's achievement in finally pacifying a region that had deeply troubled the last years of Pippin's reign and would continue to pose problems for Charlemagne for quite some time.[104]

The 770s were a decade of virtually continuous warfare. The brutal campaigns in Saxony, which would last until 804, began; the conquest of Italy was completed; and an unsuccessful campaign was launched in

[96] On the office of mayor see, for instance, Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, pp. 28, 154, 166. On its origins, see Haar, *Studien zur Entstehungs- und Entwicklungsgeschichte.*
[97] On the slow process of transition, see, for example: Richter, "Die 'lange Machtergreifung'"; M. Becher, "Drogo."
[98] For some recent perspectives, see M. Becher and Jarnut (eds.), *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751.*
[99] Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*, pp. 71–94. [100] Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 4, pp. 6–7.
[101] For basic orientation on Adalhard, see Kasten, *Adalhard.*
[102] Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 5, p. 7.
[103] For instance, Collins, *Charlemagne*, pp. 38–9, playing down this campaign.
[104] The best synthesis remains Auzias, *L'Aquitaine carolingienne.*

Spain.[105] The major expansion of the 780s was the incorporation of Bavaria, achieved largely without bloodshed.[106] By the 790s, the king's attention more and more moved to governance: The compilation of the *Codex Carolinus*, the collection of correspondence between the Carolingians and the papacy; the efforts to grapple with the succession; the beginning of the process of church reform; the great theological statement encoded in the *Opus Caroli* (earlier known as the *Libri Carolini*); the frequent composition of historical texts.[107] All these developments, among others, date from the years around 790. Conquests, of course, remained: Most notably the incorporation of the Avars in 796, which brought a vast hoard of treasure into the empire,[108] and continued struggles with Danes and Slavs.[109] Yet, from 790 onward, a kind of governmental work, the day-to-day efforts to rule the massive territory accumulated in the previous decades, comes to dominate the evidence for the reign of Charlemagne.

I will argue in this study that this shift to more intensive governance in the years around 790 marks the primary political transition in the reign. Scholars usually have assigned such a status to the imperial coronation in 800. While I will address the reasons why I contest the political significance of the coronation, it was undoubtedly an important symbolic moment during the reign, and requires some brief introduction here. The Franks had established a close relationship with the papacy during the mayoralty of Pippin III and his brother Carloman I, culminating in the aforementioned anointing of Pippin and his sons in 754, and the promise by the pope that henceforth the Franks should always choose their kings from the Arnulfing-Pippinid line.[110] For his part, Charlemagne invaded Italy at papal request, although the denouement was not what Pope Hadrian had originally intended. When Pope Hadrian died in 795, he was replaced with Leo III, who had a fraught relationship with various factions at Rome. Leo was attacked by his enemies while processing

[105] M. Becher, *Charlemagne*, includes a concise and clear narrative of these campaigns. While Charlemagne did eventually establish a foothold in Spain, the first campaign did not go well, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, pp. 414–15.

[106] See further Chapters 1 and 5 on Bavaria.

[107] On the *Codex Carolinus*, see now Hack, *Codex Carolinus*; on the succession, Chapter 8, pp. 415–23; on church reform, McKitterick, *The Frankish Church*; on the *Opus Caroli*, *Opus Caroli Regis contra synodum*, ed. Freeman with Meyvaert, and the studies in Freeman, *Theodulf of Orléans* and Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, chapter 4; on historical texts, McKitterick, *History and Memory*.

[108] For orientation on the Avar conquest: Pohl, *Die Awarenkriege*.

[109] See now the overview of expansion in McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 103–34.

[110] The classic study of the development of this relationship is: Angenendt, "Das geistliche Bündnis."

through the streets of Rome in 799. He was dragged to safety and later escorted by royal agents to Charlemagne, who was currently based at Paderborn, while fighting in Saxony. In 800, Charlemagne headed to Rome to oversee a meeting where Leo purged himself of all accusations against him, without the king sitting in judgment on him directly. A few days later, on Christmas day, Leo crowned Charlemagne as the first emperor in the West since the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476. Henceforth, Charlemagne was both emperor and king, although it was the royal office that continued to shape his political behavior.[111]

Charlemagne's political and military achievements have been long recognized, and tend to attract most scholarly attention. But the reign is notable for economic, social, and cultural changes as well. The phenomenon often called the Carolingian Renaissance[112] may have borne its most abundant fruit subsequent to the reign of Charlemagne, but the roots go back to a conscious and concerted effort by Charlemagne and his men to raise the quality of religious life in the Carolingian world.[113] The cultural changes can thus not be fully disentangled from religious ones, as the ultimate impetus was spiritual: The Franks had to pray better to earn God's favor.[114] Yet from this spiritual concern sprang a movement of diverse cultural striving. More religious art has survived than secular, but developments in many realms of artistic production define the Carolingian Renaissance.[115] What is perhaps most notable about the changes associated with the first phase of the Carolingian Renaissance is their variety: There was no one Carolingian style. Carolingian writers and artists borrowed from multiple sources and came up with new artistic techniques and new forms of writing, as well as preserving and adapting the productions of the past. While we now know that the court did not diffuse the new Caroline minuscule handwriting, which helped the spread of literacy and literate production,[116] the basic patronage of culture and religion was a royal decision,[117] which flowed from the top down to reform cultural and religious life in the empire.

[111] For full discussion of these issues, with references, see pp. 347–50, 359–62.
[112] On the history of the term "Renaissance" for the Carolingian era, there are some useful comments in Sullivan, "Introduction: Factors Shaping Carolingian Studies," pp. 3–7.
[113] For overviews, see Contreni, "The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture"; McKitterick, "The Carolingian Renaissance of Culture and Learning."
[114] *Capit.* I, no. 29, p. 79, lines 30–7; also edited in T. Martin, "Bemerkungen zur 'Epistola de litteris colendis'," the edition is on pp. 231–5, with citation at pp. 233–4. See also discussion in Chapter 6, pp. 299–300.
[115] For a convenient introduction, see Nees, "Art and Architecture." See also Braunfels and Schnitzler (eds.), *Karolingische Kunst*.
[116] Ganz, "The Study of Caroline Minuscule."
[117] G. Brown, "Introduction: The Carolingian Renaissance."

The political, military, religious, and cultural realms thus all experienced extensive changes during the Carolingian period and more specifically during the reign of Charlemagne. This extent of change likely marked social and economic life as well, though the changes are more difficult to trace in these contexts. An older literature was deeply concerned with possible social transformations during the Carolingian period. These shifts were usually conceptualized in terms of the nature of the aristocracy, social stratification of the peasantry, and possible variations in the status of free men. In terms of aristocratic social structure, older work investigated the extent to which the Carolingians depended on a new aristocracy, which they in essence invented, rather than older families who had Roman roots or who had supported their Merovingian predecessors.[118] The best verdict we can reach is that the aristocracy under the Carolingians was composed of families of variable origins, and often of untraceable descent, but that the Carolingians themselves did not differ much from other noble families.[119] What the Carolingians did do was encourage the spread of the so-called *Reichsaristokratie*, or families with estates and influence spread throughout the Carolingian world.[120] This was more likely the effect of the growing size of the Carolingian empire, rather than a conscious effort on the part of the Carolingian kings to reshape aristocratic life.[121] More recent work is less concerned with possible changes surrounding the make-up of the aristocracy, and has focused instead on exploring secular culture, the nature of aristocratic involvement in politics, and the local societies in which aristocrats played a major role.[122] Such research allows us to better understand how aristocrats functioned in the Carolingian world, rather than getting stuck in fruitless debates about what percentage of the aristocracy was composed of "new men" rather than older families.

The question of the status of peasants and free men is even more fraught. One of the changes which marks the transition from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages is the shift from a slave society to a peasant society.[123] When exactly this took place, and what the

[118] An English-language entry into the question is provided in Reuter (ed.), *The Medieval Nobility*. And see the other works cited in Note 63.
[119] For an excellent *status questionae*, see Airlie, "The Aristocracy."
[120] The classic discussion is Tellenbach, *Königtum und Stämme*.
[121] See, for example, the studies of Stuart Airlie, cited in Note 63.
[122] In addition to the works already cited, see Nelson and Wormald (eds.), *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*; Stone, *Morality and Masculinity*.
[123] See, for instance, Rio, "Freedom and Unfreedom"; now incorporated in her *Legal Practice and the Written Word*, as chapter 9.

consequences of the change were, is still debated. Similarly, scholars have disputed the status of "free men" in the Carolingian world.[124] The effort is stymied by regular use of outdated vocabulary to describe new circumstances.[125] Attempting to define the roles of such people seems doomed to failure; surely this is one area where regionalism mattered, and our evidence does not at this stage permit an overview. Virtually all aspects of these changes in social structure are contested, and the details cannot detain us here.[126] However, there are two points that are essential for our purposes. First, regardless of the timing or extent of the changes in the nature of rural society, there clearly were changes. This means that rural social structures, as was true of so much else during the Carolingian period, were in transition. This book will examine in detail the *ad hoc*, improvised nature of Charlemagne's rulership and the extensive innovations that marked the nature of that rulership. The widespread changes occurring in Carolingian society helped make such an erratic style of rulership not only possible but necessary. Second, the Carolingian period was a time of economic growth, much of which clearly depended on agricultural change.[127] The economic and social changes of the period were interconnected, even when we cannot fully untangle the different transitions taking place.

This context of economic dynamism provides the background for an understanding of Charlemagne's reign. While this book will focus on the political developments of Charlemagne's reign, not on economic processes with a much longer term chronology, the economic shifts made the political changes possible. The relatively good climate,[128] the freedom from disease,[129] the extensive use of water mills,[130] and so on all helped provide the financial and biological wherewithal for Charlemagne's reign. So did the revival of trade,[131] perhaps fueled by the selling of slaves to the Caliphate.[132] While the political economy of the early Carolingian period requires further attention, it is clear that booty alone could never

[124] For instance, Müller-Mertens, *Karl der Grosse, Ludwig der Fromme und die Freien*.
[125] On the complex language of social status, see, for example, Devroey, "Men and Women in Early Medieval Serfdom."
[126] One recent synthesis is Devroey, *Puissants et misérables*.
[127] There is a useful overview of the evidence, emphasizing agriculture as a motor of economic development, in Costambeys, Innes, and MacLean, *The Carolingian World*, chapters 5 and 7.
[128] McCormick, Dutton, and Mayewski, "Volcanoes and the Climate Forcing."
[129] McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, pp. 107–17.
[130] Böhme, "Wassermühlen im frühen Mittelalter"; Lohrmann, "Le moulin à eau."
[131] Overview in McCormick, *Origins*.
[132] McCormick, "New Light on the 'Dark Ages'."

have powered Charlemagne's reign.[133] Economic phenomena will only appear occasionally in these pages, but the general upturn in the economy of the early medieval world was an essential precondition for Charlemagne's new style of governance.

Charlemagne lived and functioned in a world far more open than scholars have usually appreciated.[134] He had important ties to many of the societies that surrounded his empire. The Carolingian alliance with the papacy is a traditional subject of historical research,[135] and we will have cause to address the papacy at multiple points during the course of this book. Similarly, the testy relationship of the Carolingians with the Byzantines has been long studied.[136] Perhaps more important, although harder to document, are ties to the non-Christian societies of the early medieval world. The fiercest enemies the Carolingians faced were all pagans: Slavs, Saxons, and Danes.[137] The Danes also participated in a North Sea world that helped shape economic connections: The Caliphate may have been the Carolingians' most important trading partner, a link sustained by Viking mediation.[138] Charlemagne's interest in the Holy Land will capture our attention at times, an interest now made much clearer by the research of Michael McCormick.[139] In short, Charlemagne lived in an age of transition and in a period marked by extensive changes in virtually all areas of life. Charlemagne himself had nothing to do with some of these phenomena, but they created the backdrop against which he invented a new style of ruling to suit his new empire.

A final preliminary concern we must address before beginning our analysis of how Charlemagne ruled is to say something about the basic structure of the empire. This book will frequently examine the numerous changes in how the empire was run, but some preliminary orientation will help situate our analysis of Charlemagne's innovations. Let us begin with the people who surrounded Charlemagne. When speaking of Charlemagne, one of course means not just the individual man, but those who worked with him and made up his court. The traditional view of the Carolingian court is of the place of educated conviviality described

[133] On the limits of plunder, see Nelson in the "Introduction" to her *The Frankish World*, pp. xxviii–xxix, and further discussion on pp. 368–9.
[134] J.R. Davis and McCormick, "The Early Middle Ages."
[135] Angenendt, "Das geistliche Bündnis," with further literature.
[136] Classen, *Karl der Grosse*; McCormick, "Byzantium and the West."
[137] For important new reflections on the Carolingian encounter with paganism, see Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World*; Wood, *The Missionary Life*.
[138] McCormick, *Origins*, chapter 25.
[139] McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey of the Holy Land*.

in the literature of the so-called court poets.[140] However, the idyllic world of family philosophy discussions, sophisticated intellectual exchange, and learned nicknames sketched in the poetry is at best a highly limited picture of one part of court society for a few short years.[141] Not only did much else happen at the court, but this ostensibly jocular group was in reality small, usually foreign born, fraught with the usual tensions and rivalries of academics, short lived, and almost entirely dependent on the king for continued support and their standard of living.[142] This highly literary society did exist: We can see them not just in their verse, but in letters exchanged between the poets and others in their circle including members of the royal family.[143] It is only one aspect of court society, however.[144] Moreover, the image of a court populated by a group of poets is misleading, as by the time the court really settled down at Aachen, the poets were dispersed across the empire tending to other matters.[145]

If these traditional denizens of court society were only a small and temporary component of the Carolingian court, who else was there? The first group we must mention is the king's family.[146] If nothing else, the Carolingians had learned well from the Merovingians that it is essential to control the members of your own family, who are often the greatest threat to a king.[147] To that end, Charlemagne worked to remove

[140] On the problems with this viewpoint, see Bullough, "*Aula Renovata*," p. 269 (p. 124 in the reprint).

[141] Useful here is Bullough, *Alcuin*, pp. 433–7; see also Garrison, "The Social World of Alcuin."

[142] On the foreign birth of the poets: Fleckenstein, "Karl der Grosse, seine Hofgelehrten," pp. 34–5. On rivalry among poets, see, for example: Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, pp. 53–6 on the switch from an Italian to an Anglo-Saxon milieu at court. On the short life of the court: There is a persistent misunderstanding in the literature, assuming that most court poetry was written at the Aachen court. This is clearly not the case, as has been shown by, among others, Bullough, "*Aula Renovata*"; Bullough, *Alcuin*, pp. 332–41; and Schaller, "Vortrags- und Zirkulardichtung." Godman argues that productions not actually written at the court should not count as court literature (Godman, "Louis 'the Pious' and his Poets," p. 240), but I think this goes too far, and I prefer, with Nees, to focus on the factors linking this as a literature even if it is essential to note that it was not all composed in the same time or place (Nees, *A Tainted Mantle*, p. 123). On dependence on the king: Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, pp. 50–1. These works also make clear the small numbers involved in this cultivated literary circle.

[143] And in particular, royal women, see Nelson, "Women at the Court of Charlemagne," pp. 54–8 (pp. 236–40 in the reprint).

[144] For an evocative portrait of the busyness characteristic of the Carolingian court see Nelson, "Was Charlemagne's Court a Courtly Society?" pp. 40–2.

[145] Amply demonstrated by Schaller, "Vortrags- und Zirkulardichtung"; see also Bullough, *Alcuin*, p. 435.

[146] Nelson, "La cour," pp. 180, 184.

[147] Airlie, "Charlemagne and the Aristocracy," pp. 99–100.

alternate sources of legitimate kings, whether by naming patterns, baptismal godparents, monastic confinement, or perhaps even murder.[148] Nonkingworthy relatives, on the other hand, were highly useful. They had immediate reason to benefit from Charlemagne's success and could, at least ideally, be trusted to be loyal servants.[149] We indeed see many of Charlemagne's family members working in this way, such as Adalhard of Corbie.[150] Another example is Adalhard's father, Bernard, who led one of the two armies that invaded Italy.[151] As the reign progressed, Charlemagne's sons, and in particular Charles the Younger, led more campaigns.[152] The work of Janet Nelson has done much to elucidate the role of women in the reign, from the traditional intercession of royal wives to the royal daughters who replaced the queen in the later years of the reign.[153] Family via marriage was important, too.[154] We need only point here to Gerold, prefect of Bavaria, who was the brother of Queen Hildegard, and to Angilbert, lover of Charlemagne's daughter Bertha, who filled a number of significant, if often *ad hoc*, posts.[155] The Carolingian court, then, was populated by the king's family as well as the educated scholars who came and went.

In addition to the poets and relatives, there were the more basic supports for the king's rule: The aristocrats, secular and ecclesiastic,

[148] Naming: Such as the baptism of Pippin in 781, sharing a name with the son of Himiltrude, Pippin the Hunchback, who already bore this important Carolingian moniker and godparents: Such as having the pope stand godfather to the king's son (not itself a means of exclusion, but a way of marking out those not so honored); see the Royal Frankish Annals s.a. 781, p. 56; analyzed in Angenendt, "Taufe und Politik," especially pp. 144–5, 148–9; Angenendt, "Das geistliche Bündnis," pp. 70–90; monastic confinement: For example, Pippin the Hunchback; see Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 20, pp. 25–6; revision of the Royal Frankish Annals s.a. 792, pp. 91–3; see also: Krah, *Absetzungsverfahren*, pp. 36–40; K. Brunner, *Oppositionelle Gruppen*, pp. 62–6; on possible murder, see discussion of the sons of Carloman in Chapter 3, pp. 160–1.

[149] Nelson, "La cour," p. 180 on the role of the king's relatives at court.

[150] On Adalhard, see Kasten, *Adalhard*, for orientation on his career.

[151] See account in the Royal Frankish Annals s.a. 773, pp. 34–6.

[152] For example, the Royal Frankish Annals record Pippin of Italy leading a campaign in 787 (p. 78), 796 (pp. 98–100), 800 (p. 110), 801 (p. 114), 810 (p. 130); Louis in 809 (p. 127); and Charles the Younger in 784 (pp. 66–8), 794 (p. 94), 799 (p. 106) in conjunction with his father, and alone in 805 (p. 120), 806 (pp. 121–2), and 808 (p. 125). The sons were kingworthy of course, just not yet. While many Carolingian kings struggled with their sons, the revolt of Pippin the Hunchback was the only filial rebellion Charlemagne faced.

[153] Nelson, "Women at the Court of Charlemagne," pp. 51–4 and 56–60 (pp. 232–6 and 238–42 in the reprint), on wives and daughters respectively.

[154] See, for example, Airlie, "*Semper Fideles?*" p. 131.

[155] On Gerold, see Ross, "Two Neglected Paladins"; Borgolte, *Die Grafen Alemanniens*, pp. 122–6. See p. 417 for the details of Angilbert's career. Angilbert did also hold more permanent positions as the lay abbot of Saint-Riquier/Centula and potentially the primicerius of Pippin of Italy.

who were essential for the success of the reign. We cannot imagine Charlemagne's advisers as an unchanging group; most of these people, if not indeed all, had local power bases and spent much of their lives there.[156] They were not physically at the court all the time.[157] They would die and be replaced, come and go with their own affairs, and devote more or less attention to empire-wide matters.[158] Thus, while they were a group in motion, they were also a constant pool from which the king drew as he tried to manage his realm.[159] We can see these people most clearly when they are high aristocrats, but there were also of course other lower level scribes, vassals, and assorted hangers-on who did form a more permanent staff of servants.[160] The image of a precious and cultivated court is not without merit, but it represents only one small slice of Carolingian court society.[161] We are better off imagining several overlapping and constantly shifting court societies: Populated by poets, bishops, clerks, scribes, counts, visiting aristocrats, ambassadors to the realm, family, servants, vassals.[162] This was a court society that was never fixed.[163] Carolingian governance is sometimes faulted for its inconsistency and inefficiency; given that these wandering aristocrats and motley hangers-on were its primary implementers we should perhaps be more amazed that there was any consistency at all.

Many of the aristocrats who visited the court, as we noted earlier, also had roles locally as Charlemagne's men on the ground. The primary royal servants in the realm of Charlemagne were counts, bishops, and *missi*. The main roles assigned to such agents are easily stated. The count's job was to ensure local administration, for which his responsibilities included giving justice, mustering the host, and maintaining the peace.[164] The *missus*, at least the regular *missus*, was a royally delegated

[156] Innes, "Charlemagne's Government," p. 86.
[157] The constant travels of high level aristocrats are revealed incidentally in allusions to such travels in, for example, Theodulf's poem on the court (Theodulf, no. 25, in *Poetae* I, here p. 487, line 143 for reference to Riculf's travels and line 146 on the absence of Angilbert; on which see also Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, p. 7).
[158] Cubitt, "Introduction," to her edited collection *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 9–10.
[159] Innes, "A Place of Discipline," p. 61.
[160] On the high aristocracy: K.F. Werner, "Important Noble Families," pp. 178–9. On other court figures: See here comments of Nelson, "Was Charlemagne's Court a Courtly Society?" pp. 41–2.
[161] Garrison, "The Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature," p. 111 on the small numbers involved in literature.
[162] See also Nelson, "Was Charlemagne's Court a Courtly Society?" pp. 41–3.
[163] See also the observations of Bullough, *Alcuin*, p. 437.
[164] Ganshof, "The Institutional Framework of the Frankish Monarchy," p. 91; Nelson, "Kingship and Royal Government," here pp. 410–11. For instance, giving justice and

supervisor, meant to oversee the conduct of governance generally in the empire.[165] The bishop was the steward of his diocese, tasked preeminently with directing religious life in his area of responsibility and secondarily for managing the wealth of the church and accounting for what it owed to the king.[166] These men supervised local officials who served under them, and whom we will meet in more detail when we examine judicial activities in Chapter 1. Charlemagne, if one may generalize, chose his own *missi* and potentially some bishops;[167] the selection of counts is less clear, and it is a problem we will return to. Counts and bishops obviously had long existed in the Frankish world. I will argue later that Charlemagne's treatment of counts entailed a massive reorientation in what was expected of them. His treatment of bishops was less blatantly innovative, but here too the king's interactions with these agents changed some Frankish precedents and is a topic worthy of further research.

The fact that Charlemagne's treatment of *missi* was a marked innovation in the reign has long been recognized.[168] A *missus* is simply a person delegated by the king to achieve a particular task. Frankish, and other early medieval, rulers had long employed such *missi*. The elaboration of the office associated with Charlemagne was the shift from the use of occasional *missi*, who were sent out to fulfill a defined and limited task, to the use of regular *missi*, who were agents sent out in teams to review the status of life in the empire generally and to act in the name of the king. In addition to continuing to employ occasional *missi*, Charlemagne in essence invented the office of the regular *missus*. Within this basic framework, numerous problems remain. First, the Annals of Lorsch, an important narrative source we will encounter again, suggest that Charlemagne instituted a reform of the *missi* in 802, whereby lower status *missi* were replaced with high aristocrats who would ostensibly be immune from bribery.[169] Jürgen Hannig has demonstrated that this is not entirely

keeping the peace: *Capit.* I, no. 33, c. 25, p. 96; mustering the host: *Capit.* I, no. 50, c. 1, p. 137.

[165] K.F. Werner, "*Missus-marchio-comes*," p. 195 (p. 112 in the reprint). See Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions*, pp. 23–6 on types of *missi*. And still valuable is the overview in Krause, "Geschichte des Institutes der missi dominici," pp. 202–22.

[166] See, for example, one Carolingian expression of the high responsibility of the bishop in *Capit.* I, no. 22, c. 60, p. 57 (also ed. *AG*, introduction to part 2 of the capitulary, p. 208), and further comments of K.F. Werner, "*Missus-marchio-comes*," pp. 197–203 (pp. 114–20 in the reprint). The rest of the capitulary lays out many of the more specific tasks with which bishops were charged.

[167] On selection of bishops, see Schieffer, "Karl der Große und die Einsetzung."

[168] The works cited in Note 165 provide a sense of the traditional views.

[169] The Annals of Lorsch s.a. 802: *Codex Vindobonensis 515*, ed. Unterkircher, pp. 39–41; text can also be consulted in *SS* 1, pp. 38–9.

accurate, and that there were *missi* of various status both before and after 802.[170] A problem that has received less attention to date is the expectation that *missi* were sent out in teams of usually two men, one laymen and one cleric, who held other offices of some kind in the regions assigned to them as *missatica*,[171] to undertake regular tours of inspection. There is evidence for such regular tours and set models for how to send out *missi*, but the majority of it dates from the reign of Louis the Pious.[172] For the reign of Charlemagne, we would do best to think of the *missi* as men close to Charlemagne, who acted on his order, but in more variable ways than later *missi* would.[173]

The agents who served as the king's men on the ground were also, as we noted earlier, part of the court broadly understood. In addition to their dealings with the king in the course of performing their duties and their informal contact with him, the main venue for aristocrats to interact with the king was the royal assembly.[174] The essential role that assemblies played in offering a locale for the king to meet with the political elite has been well established.[175] Such meetings provided a venue to discuss and announce plans, to formulate royal laws, or capitularies, and for the king to get a sense of what was happening locally. Our best description of what went on at assemblies comes from Hincmar of Reims, working (probably) from an earlier source, but one that he had revised.[176] While not all of Hincmar's testimony necessarily holds for the reign of Charlemagne, his emphasis on assemblies as a site for the king to speak to his people underscores for us the personal components of Carolingian rule.

It has long been assumed, partly on the basis of Hincmar's testimony, that most capitularies (the royal laws issued, usually, in chapter format) were promulgated at assemblies. Recent work, to my mind rightly, has argued against an inevitable connection between assemblies and capitularies.[177] Some capitularies were certainly produced at assemblies, but not all. Assemblies, even those that did not produce capitularies, were

[170] Hannig, "*Pauperiores vassi de infra palatio*?"
[171] The best study of the geography of the *missi* remains Eckhardt, "Die Capitularia missorum specialia."
[172] See, for instance, Louis' regulations on the holding of *placita*: *Capit*. I, no. 141, c. 25, p. 291.
[173] I hope to make this argument about the work of the *missi* under Charlemagne more fully elsewhere.
[174] Assemblies are often called "*placita*" in the sources. The word can refer to general assemblies of the realm or more local meetings, and often has a judicial connotation.
[175] Airlie, "Talking Heads"; Reuter, "Assembly Politics"; Gravel, *Distances, rencontres*, pp. 130–42.
[176] Hincmar of Reims, *De ordine palatii*, chapters 34–5, pp. 90–4.
[177] Pössel, "Authors and Recipients," pp. 255–66.