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THE ANNALS OF ST-BERTIN

NINTH-CENTURY HISTORIES, VOLUME I

Translated and annotated
by Janet L. Nelson

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PREFACE

This book began as a rough translation for the use of history students taking the 'Charles the Bald and Alfred' special subject in the University of London. Over the past twelve years the translation has been much revised, and the notes gradually supplied, in response to continuing student demand. I am extremely grateful to all those undergraduates and postgraduates whose suggestions and questions have helped to improve and clarify the text, and whose keen interest in ninth-century history has been a constant inspiration. It is entirely appropriate that this should be the first of a new series of annotated translations of medieval texts. My own teaching experience has convinced me over the years that students well supplied with primary sources can find the study of the Middle Ages particularly satisfying: it offers, as more recent periods seldom can, direct experience of working with a sizeable proportion, sometimes all, of the raw materials available on major historical problems. What is needed, therefore, is to make available in (as King Alfred put it) 'a language we can all understand' the 'tools' of our craft. And just as tools come supplied with 'instructions for use', our translations need introductions and extensive notes to enable students to make the most of them.

The project of translating, and explaining, a wide range of sources for Continental as well as British history is especially timely, as the prospect of a wider and more united Europe evokes growing interest in a shared, and crucially formative, European past. Here, medievalists look forward to making a large contribution. From its inception, the present series has drawn strength from the positive response and practical help of many colleagues in polytechnics (where the teaching of medieval history ought surely to retain its place) as well as in universities. I welcome the opportunity to thank them here, and to acknowledge in particular the support of Margaret Gibson and Edward James, whose pioneering work in translating the sources of a rather earlier period has provided a model for a medieval series, and of David Rollason, whose farsightedness smoothed our path. The onlie begetter of the present series is Richard Purslow of MUP: he and his colleague Jane Carpenter (both with fairly recent first-hand experience of studying medieval history) have worked like Trojans (or Franks) to research potential topics and recruit author-translators. I greatly

appreciate their professionalism and enthusiasm.

In preparing the present volume, I have incurred particular debts of gratitude. The most longstanding is to Silvia Blumer, who typed *The Annals of St-Bertin* from my original draft translation and responded with characteristic efficiency and good humour to this unexpected extension of her *au pair* job. The second, almost as longstanding, is to Tim Reuter, whose labours on the *Annals of Fulda* have paralleled and inspired mine on the *AB*, and whose advice and friendship have sustained this enterprise from first to last. I am very grateful to Simon Coupland, John Gillingham and Ian Wood for critical comment on the translation and for many helpful suggestions. My special thanks go to my husband Howard for long-term encouragement and, more recently, for providing an ideal working environment in Aquitaine. Finally, this book's dedication acknowledges the achievement of the editors of the Latin text of the *Annals of St-Bertin*: Félix Grat, finest of textual scholars, *mort pour la patrie* in 1940,[1] and Léon Levillain, tireless student and still unrivalled connoisseur of the Carolingian world.[2]

1 See the *mémoires* in *Mélanges dédiés à la mémoire de Félix Grat*, vol. i (Paris 1946).

2 See the obituary in *Le Moyen Âge*, 58, 1952: 213–19.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAng — Annals of Angoulême

AB — Annals of St-Bertin

AF — Annals of Fulda

AFont — Annals of Fontenelle (St-Wandrille)

AM — Annales du Midi

ASC — Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

AX — Annals of Xanten

AV — Annals of St-Vaast

BEC — Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes

BISI — Bollettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il medioevo

CCM — Cahiers de Civilisation médiévale

CMH — Cambridge Medieval History

DA — Deutsches Archiv für die Erforschung des Mittelalters

EHR — English Historical Review

FMS — Frühmittelalterliche Studien

GC — Gallia Christiana

HZ — Historische Zeitschrift

JEccH — Journal of Ecclesiastical History

L. — L. Levillain ed., *Actes de Pépin I et Pépin II, rois d'Aquitaine*

L/G — *Les Annales de Saint-Bertin*

LM — Lexikon des Mittelalters

MA — Le Moyen Âge

Mansi — J.-D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*

MGH — Monumenta Germaniae Historica
- *Capit. — Capitularia regum Francorum*
- *Conc. — Concilia*
- *Epp. — Epistolae*
- *Fontes — Fontes Iuris Germanici Antiquae*
- *SRG — Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum*
- *SSRL — Scriptores rerum Langobardorum*
- *SSRM — Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*
- *SS — Scriptores*

NCE — *New Catholic Encyclopedia*

PL — *Patrologia Latina*

RB — *Revue Bénédictine*

RFA — *Royal Frankish Annals (Annales regni Francorum)*

RH — *Revue Historique*

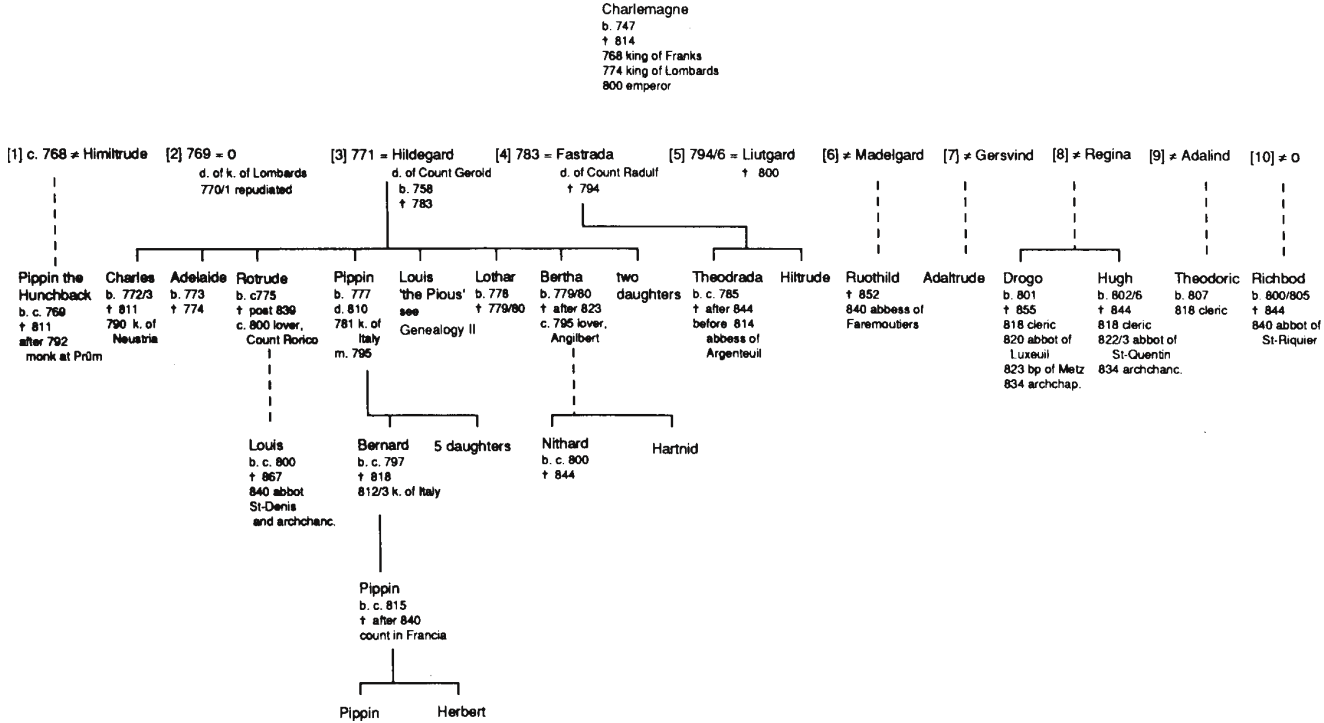
RHE — *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*

SCH — *Studies in Church History*

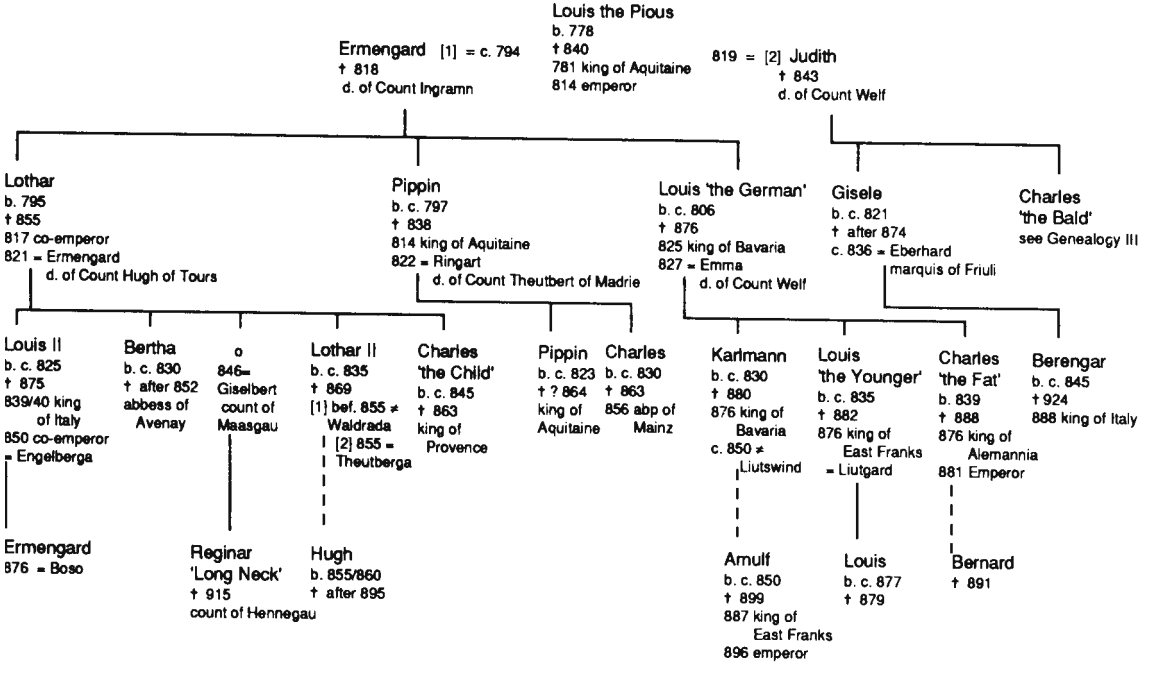
SS Spoleto — *Settimane di Studio di Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo*

T. — G. Tessier ed., *Receuil des Actes de Charles II le Chauve*

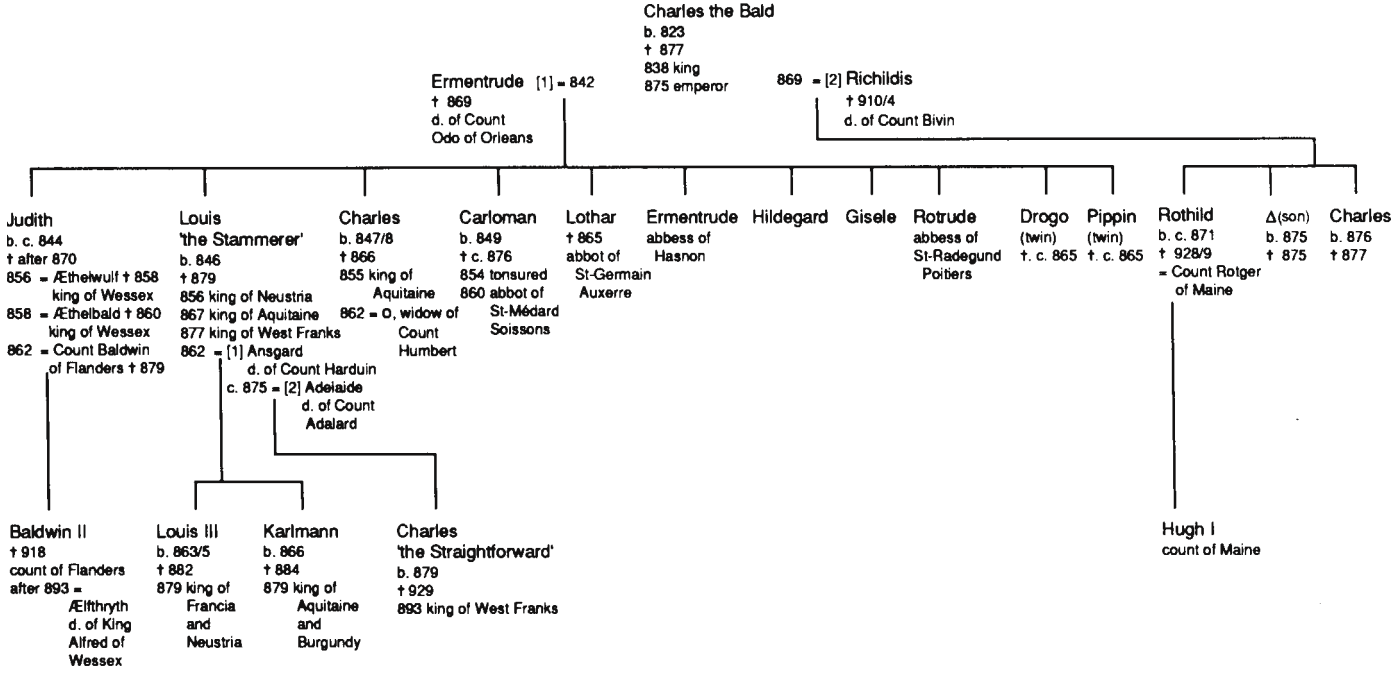
WaG — *Die Welt als Geschichte*



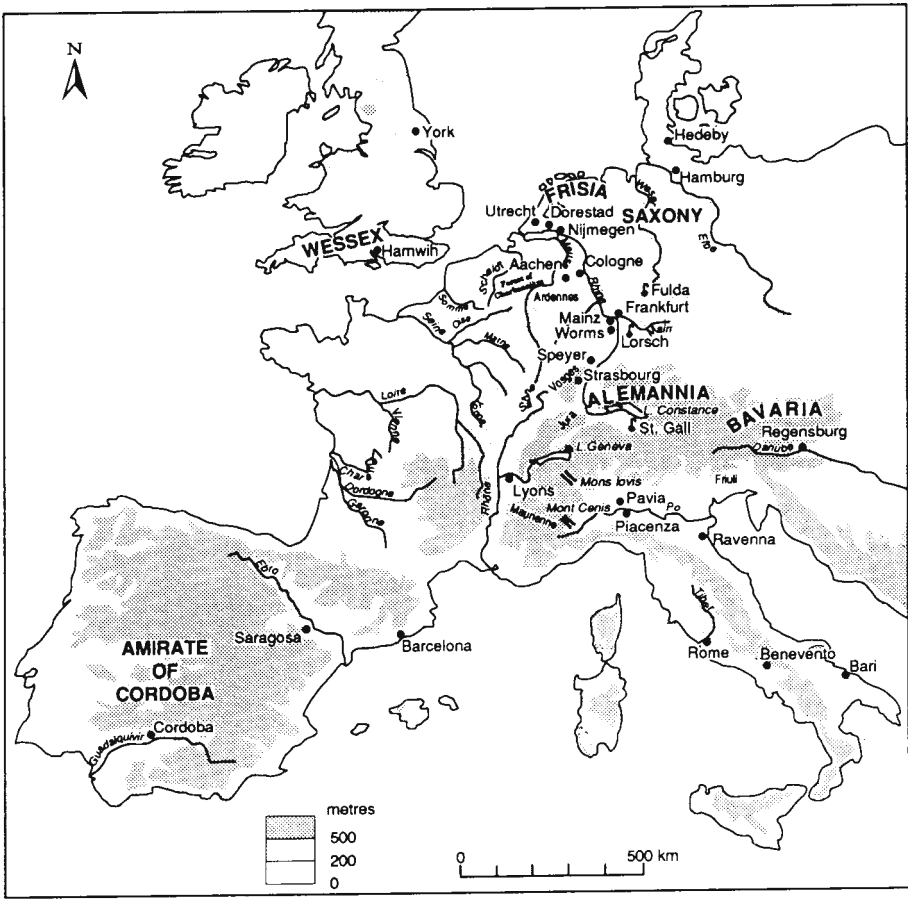
Genealogy I The descendants of Charlemagne



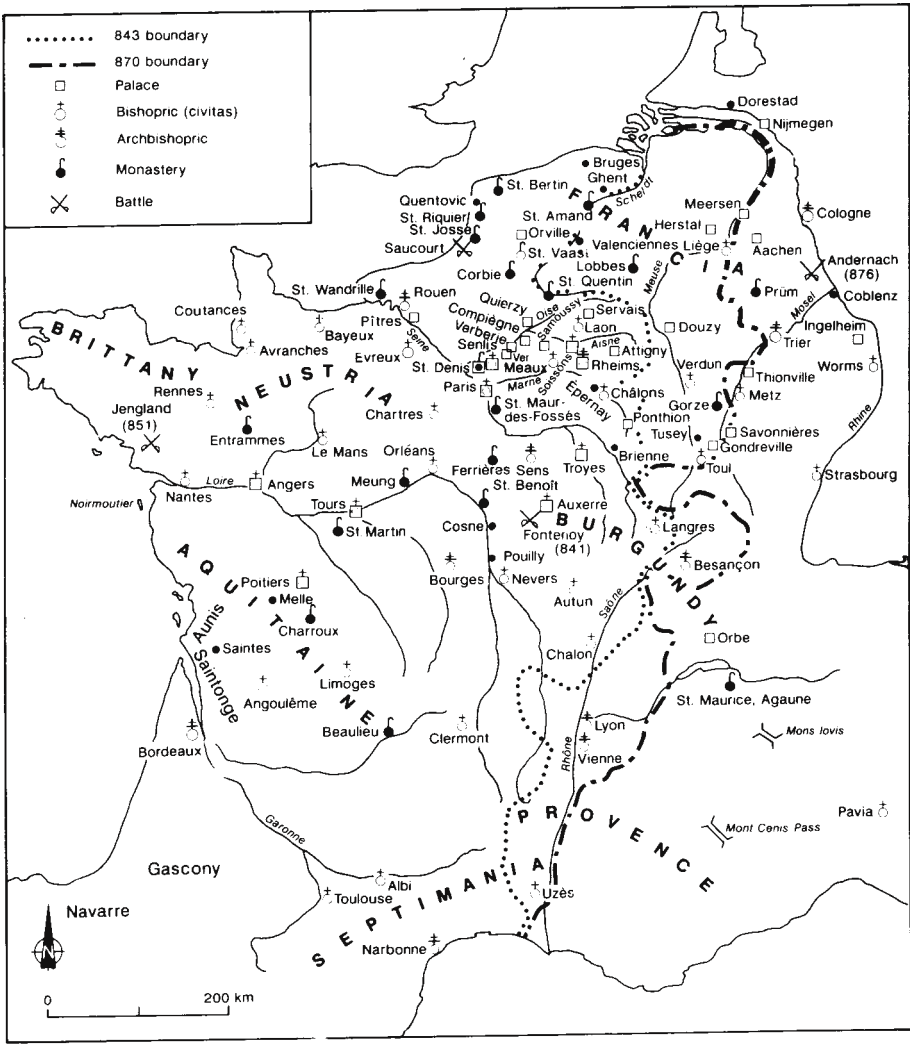
Genealogy II The descendants of Louis the Pious



Genealogy III The descendants of Charles the Bald



Map I The Carolingian world



Map II The kingdom of Charles the Bald

INTRODUCTION

1. The importance of the text

The *Annals of St-Bertin* give a detailed record of events in the Carolingian world, covering the years 830-82. They constitute the most substantial piece of contemporary historical writing of their time[1] – a time that was, on any reckoning, a critical one in western European history. As on most major issues, modern historians' interpretations have diverged widely. Some see the period as a catastrophic one, when the Carolingian Empire declined and fell, the western economy re-entered a deep recession, and Christendom reeled under the blows of pagan Viking attacks. Others see this as a period of creativity and growth, when new political communities, a new and dynamic western economy, and a self-conscious Latin Christendom first took distinctive forms.[2] The debate offers a challenge. For anyone concerned to make a judgement of their own, the *AB* more than any other single text supply essential evidence.

The *AB* contain, for instance, uniquely extensive information about Viking activities, constructive as well as destructive, and also about the variety of responses to those activities. There is plenty of blood and guts, but there is also evidence of the everyday: of money, markets and diplomacy, of ships and sealing-wax. The *AB* throw sometimes lurid light on Carolingian politics: on deep structures as well as on changing surfaces, on local (rather than national) sentiment refracted through the authors' sense of the persisting unity of the Carolingian Empire, on the clash of ideals with realities but also of competing ideals, on rulers trapped (like Wotan in the *Ring* story) by their own treaties, on nobles caught between conflicting loyalties and jarring short- and long-term interests, on peasants driven to self-defence as well as to flight, on women who as queens and concubines and

1 Levillain 1964: 15-16; Löwe 1967: 9-10; Ganshof 1970: 679-82.

2 For mainly pessimistic views of the ninth century, see Bloch 1961: 39-42. 52-6; Le Goff 1969: 11-14; Fossier 1981 and Fossier 1986. Compare the more positive views of Duby 1974: 77-139; McKitterick 1989; Verhulst 1989; Hodges 1990a, 1990b; Nelson 1992: ch. 2.

heiresses sometimes wrote their own scripts as well as acting out roles assigned them. Through the *AB* can be glimpsed a Christendom in uneasy yet intimate relationships with pagan neighbours, from Muslim Spain to the Scandinavian North, a Christendom bound by multiple contacts, political and cultural, yet divided in its attempts at mission work, divided too between Greek East and Latin West, and within the West, between papal and episcopal authority, and between opposed conceptions of predestination and free will. In the *AB*'s reporting, both style and content are extremely varied: from the near-'tabloid' (racism and sexism are here) and the anecdotal (there is the earliest description known to me of the ironing of a shirt) to 'quality' passages of high seriousness and official protocol (no comparable text offers more to students of medieval political ideas). Readers with preconceptions about 'dry-as-dust' annals will find *these* annals a revelation.

After all this, it may come as no surprise that these annals have nothing whatsoever to do with the monastery of St-Bertin. The name was given simply because the text's first published (and only complete) manuscript, written out in the eleventh century, was preserved at St-Bertin thereafter.[3] The *AB* are not, then, monastic annals, with all that that genre implies of restricted vision. The scope of the *AB* embraces a realm, and beyond that a world that stretches from Constantinople to Cordoba, from Sicily to Sweden. Its authors' perspective is that of palace clergy and bishops rather than monks, and their primary concern is with the deeds of secular rulers and prelates. Yet the *AB* were not produced at any ruler's behest: they are not 'official history', still less propaganda. Though their concern is with public events, they represent, for the most part, individual responses.[4] This is the paradox to be explored. But first, the writing of annals as a genre in the Carolingian world needs a little explanation.

2. Annals: the conditions of production

The keeping of chronological records, widely practised in the Roman world, survived as a slim but tenacious tradition in the early medieval

3 See below: 16, for the St-Bertin manuscript 'O'.

4 Nelson 1990b. The *AB* thus flout the generalisation of Van Caenegem and Ganshof 1978: 34: 'The positive point about annals is their precise matter of fact style, trustworthiness and care about chronology. On the negative side they are extremely brief and attempt nothing more than to give an unconnected enumeration of political, military, ecclesiastical and meteorological facts.'

west. In the fourth century, Eusebius had chronicled the peoples and rulers of antiquity and their superseding by the single Empire of Rome: translated into Latin by Jerome in 380, Eusebius's firm chronological framework provided a model which early medieval chroniclers could imitate and/or continue.[5] Thus, in the mid-seventh century, in the lands ruled by the Frankish Merovingian dynasty, Eusebius–Jerome inspired Fredegar to produce a world-chronicle that became a history of the Franks.[6] The entering of notes on historical events in the margins of Easter Tables (used to calculate for successive years the changing dates on which fell the greatest day in the liturgical calendar) was another route by which chronological works came to be compiled. Annals, literally a 'year-by-year' record, were a characteristic product of early medieval monastic culture: a genre came of age when margins were outgrown, and one-line notes expanded into snatches of narrative.[7] Both concerns – to extend Christian world-history forwards into a new age of 'gentile' kingdoms (that is, kingdoms constructed by the peoples, *gentes*, of the post-Roman west) and to establish a framework of Christian chronology – merged in the early eighth century in the work of Bede: his *Reckoning of Time* had a large impact on the Continent in the historical output of the Carolingian Renaissance.[8]

For it was in the early eighth century that a new dynasty rose to power in the kingdom of the Franks. This, the longest-lived and most dynamic of the successor-states to the Western Roman Empire, had tended to split into warring parts, Austrasia (around the valleys of the lower Meuse and Rhine) and Neustria (the Seine basin). The man who reunited the two parts, and gave his name to the new Carolingian dynasty (though he himself remained for most of his life the mayor of the palace to the last scions of the Merovingians) was the Austrasian magnate Charles Martel. By the time of his death in 741, the keeping of annals had been resumed when an Austrasian writer in the 730s produced a Continuation of Fredegar's seventh-century Chronicle. Then Martel's own half-brother sponsored a second Continuation which was in effect a set of annals of the Frankish realm from 736 until 751.[9]

5 Hay 1977: 23; Van Caenegem and Ganshof 1978: 18-25, 30-4; Goffart 1988: 3-19.

6 Wallace-Hadrill 1960.

7 Ganshof 1970: 669-74.

8 Goffart 1988: 240-7.

9 Wallace-Hadrill 1960: xxv-xxvi.

The year 751 was the year in which Martel's family became a royal family, with the consecration of Martel's son Pippin as king of the Franks (and the consigning of the last Merovingian to monastic retirement). A third Continuation of Fredegar's Chronicle carried the story on down to Pippin's death, and the accession of his two sons, in 768.[10] At monastic houses protected and exploited by the new dynasty, annalistic writing revived, often fuelled by Bedan concerns.[11] In the reign of Pippin's son Charlemagne (sole ruler from 771, died 814), with the organising of a royal chapel staffed by a small team of palace clergy, and with the ruler's increasingly frequent stays at Aachen from 794 onwards, the royal household seems to have become also a home for the production of annals. The deeds and diplomacy of Charlemagne and of the Frankish nobles who sustained his power were noted down, year by year, in the *Royal Frankish Annals* (*Annales Regni Francorum*).[12] There is no evidence that Charlemagne ever sought to influence the annals' content, or to exploit the annals for what would nowadays be termed 'public relations' purposes. His biographer does not mention historical writing as among Charlemagne's scholarly interests, not does he list the sponsorship of an 'official record' as among Charlemagne's concerns after he became emperor on Christmas Day 800.[13] If the annals for the eighth century were revised and amplified late in Charlemagne's reign, the initiative may have lain with the revisers rather than the ruler himself. The *RFA* are less evidently dynastic in focus than the so-called *Prior Metz Annals* (*Annales Mettenses Priores*), compiled (making heavy use of the *RFA*) probably at the convent of Chelles under the auspices of Abbess Gisèle, Charlemagne's sister, in the early ninth century;[14] and they are less overtly propagandistic than the annals produced c.890 very probably in the circle of King Alfred of Wessex – the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*[15].

In the reign of Louis the Pious, the *RFA* continued to be produced down to 829, with successive archchaplains, it seems, taking responsibility for their contents.[16] Louis himself is nowhere credited with any involvement with what his chaplains were recording. There is little

10 Wallace-Hadrill 1960: xxvi-vii, xlv.

11 Löwe 1953 (Wattenbach, Levison and Löwe 1952-73) 180-92; Hoffmann 1958; Werner 1975.

12 Kurze 1895; Scholz 1970.

13 Einhard c. 29.

14 Nelson 1990e: 80-2.

15 Wormald 1982: 158-9.

16 Malbos 1966.

sign of any central interest in disseminating an 'official' view of the recent past, or of local concern to acquire 'up-to-date' copies of the ongoing work. (The manuscripts are nearly all of the complete text down to 829, and were written out, at a single go, considerably after the events described.)[17] The authors' working conditions cannot have been easy. When the ruler moved, his household, including chaplain-annalists, moved with him, as did the royal archive (sometimes called 'the cupboard', which is probably just what it was). Louis in his early years moved about a good deal; and from 822 Aachen was less often favoured as a winter residence than Ingelheim and Compiègne. Under such conditions, the annalists would hardly envisage the collection of written material and its incorporation in their work; instead they used the evidence of their own eyes and ears, or others' oral testimony. The palace was the centre to which information flowed and politically important informants were drawn. But the flow of information was uncertain. Rumours could not always be checked and were often false. Messages might be delayed, letters lost. Even a courier with regular changes of horses at his disposal, and in summertime, took two weeks to convey the most urgent of messages from Lombardy to northern France (a travel-rate of approximately 60 km. per day).[18]

The year 830 marks a break in annalistic activity in the chapel of Louis the Pious. Most manuscripts of the *RFA* stop at 829. This implies that there was some diffusion of an existing set of annals at that point in time. The explanation is clear: the rebellion of 830 caused a dispersal of Louis's entourage, and in particular the removal of the archchaplain Hilduin who had sided with the rebels.[19] But the work of annal-keeping was soon resumed within the old milieu: the *Annals of St-Bertin* started as a continuation of the *RFA*, thus remained the work of palace chaplains and archchaplains. The manuscripts show no break, offer no new heading. The story is taken up where the *RFA* left off. The 'he' in the opening sentence of the 830 annal is the subject of the last sentence of the *RFA* for 829: namely, Louis the Pious.[20] But the *AB* did not remain a palace product. To explain how and when they ceased to be so, and what they then became, we must ask who wrote them.

17 Kurze 1895: ix-xv.

18 *AB* 869, below: 157. Cf Brühl 1968: 66; Prinz 1977.

19 Malbos 1966; Brown 1989: 29-33. Hilduin was abbot of St-Denis.

20 Below: 21; Nelson 1990b: 24. Contrast *AF* and *AX*, which carry on the Frankish annalistic tradition, but do not literally continue the *RFA*. Translations of the *AF* by T. Reuter (1991) and of the *AX* by S. Coupland are forthcoming from MUP.

3. The authors of the *AB*

(i) The early years

Successive editors, first Pertz, then Waitz, and finally Levillain, looked for successive single authors of the *AB*. The first author was thought to have been responsible for the annals from 830 to part-way through the annal for 835, when a first break in authorship was detected.[21] Though there was no break in any manuscript, no explicit statement in the text, the modern editors found stylistic clues to authorial change: in general, the annals from 830 up to this point were allegedly written in language that was 'awkward, sometimes obscure'; in particular, Louis the Pious was 'consistently' referred to as *domnus imperator*, Judith as *domna imperatrix*. The 'new author', from mid-835 onwards, referred to Louis simply as 'imperator', Judith as 'augusta'. Further, a difference was observed in the forms in which place-names were given: the 'first author' used names current in the ninth century, but the 'second author' preferred more elaborate classical forms. Levillain identified 'the first author' as Fulco, a royal chaplain who had been trained under Hilduin in the 820s, but remained loyal to Louis the Pious in the rebellion of 830 and succeeded Hilduin as archchaplain. Fulco stayed loyal too in the second rebellion against Louis in 833-34, and in 835 received his reward: when Archbishop Ebbo of Rheims was made the rebels' fall-guy, removed from office and consigned to a monastic prison, Fulco became administrator of the see of Rheims (though not archbishop, since doubt remained about the canonical validity of Ebbo's removal). For Levillain, Ebbo's 'confession' and 'resignation' thus aptly formed the last great set-piece of Fulco's annals, and a new author took over at this point. A clinching argument was the reference to Drogo of Metz as 'bishop' immediately before the alleged break, and 'archbishop' immediately after it: this was 'precisely the point' at which Drogo succeeded Fulco as archchaplain.[22]

Levillain's argument, though seductive, is not totally convincing. It is true that the annals for 830 and 833-34 consistently present Louis the Pious in a sympathetic way. Further, they appear to be contemporary, written up at the end of each year (or early in the next) from notes presumably kept as information was received. In 832, Louis is described acting mercifully 'as is his usual way'.[23] The fullness and

21 Waitz 1883: v-viii; Levillain 1964: vi.

22 Levillain 1964: viii-xii; below: 835. n. 1.

23 Below: 25.

continuity of the annals for 833 and 834 testify to the short-lived impact of the rebellion against Louis: it lasted a mere seven months, and the threads of the annalistic record were easily picked up. The assumption of a single author (and hence his identification as Fulco) can be quest-ioned, however. The stylistic traits are in part a matter of subjective judgement, and in any case do not point quite unequivocally to a break in mid-835: Louis the Pious is called *religiosissimus* (not *domnus*) *imper-ator* just before the alleged break; and after as before it, the rendering of place-names is not wholly consistent, with Aachen appearing as both *Aquae* and *Aquisgrani* in the last sentence of the 835 annal, for instance. The fact that one manuscript, 'M', contains the annals from 830 to part-way through 837 perhaps points to an alternative, or additional, break, and might tell against the hypothesis of single authorship of the work at this stage.[24] If the archchaplain had general oversight of the annals' production, team-authorship remains a possibility for as long as the palace remained the environment in which the *AB* were written: that is, for the rest of Louis the Pious's reign.

(ii) Prudentius

In a letter of September 866, Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims quoted from the 859 annal of the *AB*, and stated explicitly that the work's author was Prudentius. Of Spanish origin (his given name was Galindo), Prudentius was probably the son of refugee parents who had moved north of the Pyrenees early in Louis the Pious's reign. The boy was apparently sent to the palace *c.* 820 to serve in due course in Louis's chapel. He may have had some input into the *RFA*, and then the *AB*, before 835. After that date, if manuscript 'M' perhaps reflects the continuing interest of Drogo, as archchaplain, in the *AB*'s production, Prudentius, resident in the imperial household, remained well placed to participate in the ongoing task of annal-keeping. The annals for 836 to 839 are impressive in their fullness. The focus on the palace is clearer than ever: only there could much of the information entered in the *AB* have been amassed.[25] Thanks to the *AB* more than any other single source, the years 835-40 can be seen in terms of a genuine Restoration of Louis the Pious's regime.[26]

Louis's death on 20 June 840 meant a break in the activity of the

24 Below: 15.

25 See further Nelson 1990b: 26-7.

26 Nelson 1990c.

palace, and of palace-clerks: a break faithfully reflected in the annalistic record. The succession was disputed, with most of the old emperor's entourage transferring their loyalty to his eldest son Lothar. The *AB* have little information for the year 840 after the death of Louis, and something like the earlier density of reporting is resumed only with the battle of Fontenoy (25 June 841).[27] Former annal-keepers prudently lay low until the battle's outcome was clear. Once Lothar's two younger brothers, Louis the German and Charles the Bald, had emerged the victors, there was the prospect of peace and a more or less stable royal household to provide, once again, the traditional environment for royal annalists to resume work. It was in the entourage of Charles, a youth well known to former members of his father's household (and perhaps hopefully looked to by them as a promising patron of learned men), that the resumption occurred.[28] From 841 on, the *AB* were based in the western part of the old empire, in what became, with the Treaty of Verdun in 843, the kingdom of Charles the Bald. Thus the division of Verdun is, again, faithfully reflected in the *AB*'s record. From time to time, information was received from Lothar's Middle Kingdom, and from Louis the German's East Frankish kingdom; but the *AB*'s main focus after 843 was on events in the West and on the doings of Charles the Bald (840-77).

A second, equally significant change in the nature of the *AB* came very soon after the first. From late 843, the *AB* ceased to be a palace product. Instead, the record was being maintained by someone working for the most part at a distance from the royal household. It is at this point (if not before) that the assumption of Prudentius's sole authorship seems to fit the evidence. For the change in the *AB* coincides with a change in Prudentius's personal life. He was appointed bishop of Troyes in the ecclesiastical province of Sens.[29] This sort of promotion was what a loyal chaplain hoped for as the reward for long service. It meant that Prudentius left Charles's palace. He seems to have taken with him the sole working manuscript of the *AB*. There is no evidence that the annals were continued at the palace thereafter, or that Charles himself took any interest in their continu-

27 Below: 50.

28 For Charles's education and tastes. McKitterick 1980, 1990; Nelson 1992: ch. 4.

29 Probably in late 843 or 844; Nelson 1990b: 28.

30 There is no necessary link between learned tastes and patronage of historians. Perhaps Charles had had his fingers burned by Nithard who, having been commissioned by Charles to write propagandistic 'public *Histories*,' then turned his work into a 'private history'; Nelson 1986a (1985): 195-233.

ance there.[30] In other words, the *AB* from 843 were no longer in any sense an 'official' record. This is evident from the partial and spasmodic quality of the information Prudentius was now able to acquire (or thought fit to record), and from the jerkiness of his narrative. Further, as the years went by, Prudentius's work acquired a more personal and 'private' tone. In the 850s, he voiced in his annals criticisms of Charles, making it clear that the *AB* were in no sense a court product any more, and that the author did not foresee the king or his entourage as potential readers. If Prudentius's personal situation at Troyes imposed this distancing from the palace, his personal views reinforced it. In the theological debate over predestination which racked the scholarly world of the 850s, Prudentius took a line sympathetic to the theologian Gottschalk whom Charles and his court condemned.[31] Charles's chief adviser on this issue, and a major source of political support, was Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims. Hincmar and Prudentius had other grounds for disagreement: the see of Rheims held some proprietory churches in the diocese of Troyes, and Prudentius had caused difficulties for Hincmar as landlord.[32] During the years 850 to 858, a powerful faction based in the Loire valley became increasingly alienated from the king. In 858, that faction was joined by Prudentius's metropolitan Archbishop Wenilo of Sens and by the count of Troyes. They were among the leading men involved in a conspiracy to invite Louis the German to take over the kingdom of his brother Charles. It is hardly surprising that the record of these events in the *AB* shows certain peculiarities and reticences.[33] Prudentius the annalist withdrew increasingly into his own world, yet he stuck to his self-imposed task of keeping up the historical record. He died in 861, 'still scribbling things that were mutually contradictory and contrary to Faith'. The waspish epitaph was supplied by Hincmar of Rheims, leading spirit in the condemnation of Gottschalk, and faithful supporter of Charles the Bald in 858. The epitaph was entered in the *AB*.[34]

(iii) Hincmar of Rheims

Hincmar clearly took over the writing of the *AB* after Prudentius's death. But exactly when did the new author start work? The answer

31 Below 849: 67; 853:76-7.

32 Below, 861: 94 with n. 3.

33 Below 858: 85-9; Nelson 1990b: 30-1.

34 Below: 94.

can be reconstructed from the letter (referred to above) which Hincmar wrote in 866 to Archbishop Eigil of Sens. It seems clear that in accordance with customary practice, the movable goods of the recently deceased bishop of Troyes had passed into the hands of the king in 861. Prudentius's papers included the *AB*: hence 'a number of people' at the court now, for the first time, could read Prudentius's annals.[35] Hincmar took the initiative in asking the king to loan him the single manuscript, which he then copied, and continued from the point where Prudentius had left off. Hincmar had known of the earlier, 'palace' section of the *AB*, for he referred in 860, in his *Third Treatise on Predestination*, to the account of Ebbo's deposition in the 835 entry of 'the Annals of the Lord Emperor Louis'.[36] The date at which Hincmar, having learned of the existence of Prudentius's continuation, borrowed the manuscript from the king, has been suggested as 865, on the grounds that this was the year when Eigil became archbishop, and Hincmar in his letter of 866 reminded Eigil that the loan had been made in his presence.[37] But in fact Eigil left Prüm in the Middle Kingdom, and was granted the abbacy of Flavigny by Charles in 861[38]; so the occasion when the king handed over Prudentius's annals could have happened at any date between 861 and late 866, by which time Hincmar had returned the manuscript to Charles.

In the seventeenth century there survived at Antwerp in the library of the great Jesuit scholar Jean Bolland a manuscript containing part of the *AB*. A copy of the annals from part-way through 839 to near the close of 863 made on Bolland's orders in 1638 was rediscovered by René Poupardin in 1905. [39] Bolland's now lost early-medieval manuscript was closer to Hincmar's own than any of the other copies extant. It may even have been Hincmar's manuscript. The vital clue is the presence of a marginal note, according to Bolland in the same hand as that of the main text, beside the passage in the annal for 859 where Prudentius had attributed to Pope Nicholas I views on predestination that accorded with his own. The annotator had written: 'Here Bishop

35 *MGH Epp.* VIII, no. 187, pp. 194-5. Cf. Nelson 1990b: 32-3.

36 *PL* 125, col. 391. Cf. Levillain 1964: xvi-xvii; below: n. 43.

37 Nelson 1990b: 32.

38 Löwe 1973 (Wattenbach, Levison and Löwe 1952-73): 628.

39 For manuscript 'C', see below: 16. The fact that the annals stopped part-way through 863 could imply that Hincmar's discovery of Prudentius's manuscript, and initial continuing of it, occurred in that year.

40 Ganshof 1949: 163; Levillain 1964: xviii-xxi.

Prudentius wrote concerning Nicholas what he (Prudentius) wished was the case; but in saying that it *was* so, he said what was not true.' The annotator, and hence the writer of the *AB* copy, and its continuation, can plausibly be identified as Hincmar himself.[40] His interest in Prudentius's work clearly had much to do with his theological concerns: he needed to know what Prudentius had alleged about Pope Nicholas's views. He also needed to see how Prudentius had presented the preceding quarter-century of history; for, in Hincmar's mind, theology and history were interlinked, and faulty theology would give rise to a misrepresentation of the past.[41] Having seen Prudentius's annals, Hincmar not only copied, but decided to continue them. He would record 'The Deeds of Kings' as seen through his own eyes.[42] Perhaps he wanted to carry on the work for which Hilduin had once been responsible. As a young member of the community of St-Denis in the 820s, Hincmar had frequented the palace in Hilduin's entourage: continuing the annals may have been a way of paying an old debt of loyalty.[43] Like Prudentius, Hincmar persisted with his self-imposed task until his death in 882.

Hincmar's annals resemble Prudentius's in two further crucial respects. They are a record of events written away from the palace, from the perspective of an ecclesiastical magnate; and they represent a personal, often idiosyncratic view, not intended for the public gaze, still less for the king's. What distinguishes Hincmar's work from his predecessor's is a much more significant involvement in high politics and much closer (if intermittent) contacts with the king and the court. For Hincmar's position among the Frankish elite was unlike Prudentius's. The Spaniard had been an outsider, lucky to receive a bishopric of the second rank. Hincmar was born a Frankish noble, and numbered counts among his kinsmen.[44] As archbishop of Rheims he was also among the greatest magnates in Charles the Bald's kingdom. Furthermore, Hincmar was one of the most prolific writers of the

41 Wallace-Hadrill 1981.

42 *MGH Epp.* VIII, no. 187, p. 194.

43 Hincmar remained loyal to Hilduin in 830, but in 833 preferred loyalty to the emperor; Flodoard III, c. 1, p. 475. After 834, however, Hilduin was restored to imperial favour and he and Hincmar were again close; Devisse 1976: 1094–5; Wallace-Hadrill 1981: 45–7. In the early years of Charles's reign, Hincmar seems to have been a priest in his household; Flodoard II, p. 178. T. 57, dated 12 August 844, a grant of lands to 'the venerable man, the priest Hincmar', suggests that Hincmar had accompanied Charles on campaign in Aquitaine.

44 Flodoard III, c. 26, pp. 543 (Bernard count of Toulouse) and 545 (Bertram count of Tardenois).

Carolingian period, and in a variety of genres. Thanks to his management of a scriptorium and an archive at Rheims, he could ensure that many of his works were preserved. He also ensured the preservation of official documents, capitularies, which he himself had either written or helped draft. Perhaps most important of all for modern historians, his letters (or at least abbreviated versions of them) have survived.[45] Thanks to this wealth of documentation, we can not only read Hincmar's annals for what they have to tell, but we can sometimes see what Hincmar has chosen *not* to tell. Hincmar could be inconsistent, and he was often economical with the truth. True, such is the practice of politics in any period. But what is unusual for the ninth century is that, thanks in large measure to his own voluminous writings, we can not only suspect Hincmar but catch him in the act.[46] When Charles the Bald's nephew Lothar II attempted to divorce his wife, Hincmar upheld the indissolubility of marriage; yet when Charles the Bald himself wanted his son's remarriage, Hincmar connived at, and in the *AB* was silent over, the repudiation of a royal bride.[47] In his annalistic record, we can find repeated instances of suppression of vital evidence. Who was Hincmar attempting to mislead? The answer (beyond a measure of self-deception) seems to be: his own circle at Rheims; and posterity. For he could never have intended his work for a wide contemporary audience. When relations between him and the king were cool, as in 866, and positively icy in 874–77, Hincmar confided his criticisms and resentments to the annals.[48] Charles was known for his fiery temper, and his harshness to those he suspected of disloyalty. Hincmar wrote for his own entourage what he could never have said or written for a wider public. And yet he was not disloyal: his complaints were those of a jilted favourite, ousted by other, younger men at court. Hincmar remained a would-be confidant of the king, and did in fact recover something of his influence during the brief reign of Charles's son.[49] The special value of Hincmar's annals as a historical record is the result of precisely this combination of closeness to royal

45 Schieffer 1986: 355–60.

46 E.g. below 865:121, n. 1; 868:150, n. 15; 870:167, 168, 171, nn. 8, 13, 21; 875: 188, n. 9; 876:189, 190, nn. 2, 5.

47 Nelson 1990b: 38–9.

48 Below: 133, 136, 141, 192, 197.

49 *Instructio ad Ludovicum Balbum regem*, *PL* 125, 983–90; cf. below 877:203, n. 19. For the content of Hincmar's political advice here, see Devisse 1976: 966–79, with the comment at 969: 'l'analyse nous paraît singulièrement forte chez un homme de 70 ans qui n'a pas lu Marx!'

power (with all that that meant in terms of access to documents and to information), and frankness in expressing his own changing reactions to its exercise. The flood of light thrown by the sheer fullness of Hincmar's record on the 860s and 870s makes the reader painfully aware of how much of the rest of the Carolingian period remains a closed book. Yet Hincmar's evident bias should warn against taking his judgements at face value or allowing them to determine ours.

4. How the *AB* were written

The only evidence of the working methods of successive annalists lies in the text itself. All the writers saw themselves as continuing a tradition established by the *RFA*, for instance, following the practice of using 25 December as the start of the new year, and maintaining an interest in 'the deeds of kings' throughout the Carolingian world. In the 830s, each annal seems to have been written up from material collected and noted in the course of each year. The chronological sequence within each annal seems accurate. After 843, Prudentius no doubt encountered more problems in obtaining, and arranging, his material. Some chronological errors within or across particular annals are best accounted for on the assumption that information reached him belatedly, and that he was unsure where to insert items as they came in. Nevertheless, errors are remarkably few.[50] The annals for 840 and 843 obviously caused difficulties. Otherwise, it seems reasonable to infer that Prudentius, like his predecessors, wrote up year by year.

Hincmar's working methods have recently been carefully reconsidered by Marlene Meyer-Gebel.[51] She has confirmed that most of his annals were written up year by year, and that Hincmar entered material several times a year. His chronology is thus accurate within the limits of the 4–8 weeks it normally took for data to reach him. But Meyer-Gebel has also been able to show that Hincmar, especially in the later annals of his section, sometimes attempted a more thematic treatment. Long paragraphs reveal the writing-up of a sequence of events after their outcome was known. Examples occur in the 869 annal, where the account of Lothar II's visit to Italy was obviously written up in the knowledge that he never returned, and in the 877 annal, where again

50 Below 851:73, n. 9. Other alleged (but not certain) errors: 857:85, n. 8; 859:91, n. 11.

51 Meyer-Gebel 1987.

52 Below: 203.