Memorable crises: Carolingian historiography and the making of Pippin's reign, 750-900

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Citation for published version (APA):
When I began this project, I expected to come to know Pippin the Short – that influential mayor of the palace who seized the Frankish throne around 750 and founded the Carolingian dynasty. Along the way, however, I came to realize that this was a rather naive expectation. Or perhaps, having carefully studied the texts composed by learned Carolingian writers, I should say that I have come to know a great many Pippins. This thesis has ended up not so much a study of Pippin’s life and politics, but a study of the way in which Carolingian history-writers shaped and reshaped their society’s past, preserving and nurturing the bonds that were to give the realities of the present their historical foundation. What is more, not only have I diverted attention away from Pippin as a historical actor, I also forced him to share the limelight with his brothers, Carloman and Grifo. Their lives and fates proved so thoroughly intertwined that one is hard-pressed to discuss the one without referring to the others. Not just the historiographical perception of Pippin, then, but that of all three of Charles Martel’s heirs form the subject of this dissertation.

I consider these and other adjustments great improvements, but they would never have been made had it not been for all those who, each in their own way, contributed to the journey that for me began on 1 November 2008, and I fear that these words will not do justice to the gratitude I experience when thinking back of these past years. First of all, I am fortunate to have had committed supervisors, who were willing to invest time in a young academic looking to find his way. They not only provided me with the advice I needed to successfully complete a dissertation, but also kept me focused on all those other requirements one has to meet, if one aspires to reach the next rung on the academic ladder. I am grateful to Guy Geltner, whose most important lesson may well have been that ‘the enemy of good is perfect.’ Indeed, were it not for that sagely advice, I would probably still be caught in that endless circle of writing and re-writing.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most special thanks go out to Mayke de Jong. It was under Mayke's tutelage that I developed a strong interest in eighth-century Francia and it was in her office that the idea for this project was born. I owe her an intellectual debt beyond that which a student owes his teacher; one that has accumulated over many years, during which she never ceased to provide me with advice, help and (though asked, but occasionally much needed) uplifting words.

Very special thanks also go out to Janneke Raaijmakers, who, despite her own demanding workload, nevertheless found the energy and time to supervise me, almost from start to finish. Like no other, Janneke has critically read almost every draft I produced and largely took over my supervision when the chair of medieval history at the University of Amsterdam became temporarily vacant. On that note, I also wish to express my gratitude towards Frans Theuws, for accepting me into his group of PhD-students at the department of archaeology until Guy was installed as the new professor of medieval history in Amsterdam.

I am certainly grateful to my colleagues at the UvA, Maaike van Berkel, Mario Damen, Frans Camphuijsen, Jinna Smit, Claire Weeda, Jan Burgers, Bert Demyttenaere en Rudi Künzel, for their input whenever we got to discuss my work, but above all for making me feel at home at the P.C. Hooftuis. Thanks also go out to the dedicated staff of the Institute for Culture and History, for providing a stimulating research environment and for making sure this young academic always had everything he could ask for.

I look back with great fondness to the many stimulating papers and discussions I had with my fellow members of the Texts & Identities network. Our annual meetings were as intensive as they were fun, and I always returned from meetings fully motivated and inspired. I truly consider myself fortunate to have able to participate in that community. The same certainly goes for our own little circle of young medievalists, the Emeralds. I thoroughly enjoyed participating in each of our sessions, which time and again sparked passionate, but always friendly, debates about each other’s work. Thank you all for your support, advice and comments.

In my fourth year, I spent a few wonderful months at Oxford and I am extremely grateful for the hospitality offered by Kate Cooper and Conrad Leyser, and their family. In particular, I thank Conrad for taking the time to critically discuss my research with me. It ended up being a crucial turning point in the writing of my thesis: thanks to these discussions, I returned from Oxford with a clear focus and a renewed determination to bring this project to its close.

That mad, final year of finishing the thesis I spent at the University of Utrecht, having become a member of the HERA-project Cultural Memory and the Resources of the Past. For this wonderful opportunity I am grateful to the
leaders of this project, professors Walter Pohl, Ian Wood, Rosamond McKitterick and Mayke de Jong. It was also wonderful to return to my alma mater, and be able to greet former teachers as colleagues and friends. I thank you all, especially Dorine van Espelo and Carine van Rhijn, who were fortunate enough to get to share their office with a stressed-out PhD-student in the final year of his thesis. That I did not break down altogether is largely due to the company of Robert Flierman, Joanna Thornborough and, above all, Giorgia Vocino, who like no-one else understood the importance of a three o’clock coffee ritual, and who made coming to the office a joy every day. This thesis benefitted enormously from the sharp comments, corrections and suggestions of many friends and colleagues throughout the years and any mistakes that remain are, of course, entirely my own.

On a final note, I occasionally had to be reminded that there also existed a world outside the university, inhabited by family and friends. I thank you all for your support and your understanding, and I apologize for having been more of a stranger than you deserve. But above all, I wish to thank Nora for her endless support, and for her ability to put up with me bringing Pippin home from work every day, all these years. The time has finally come to put Pippin to rest.