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

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Citation for published version (APA):
INTRODUCTION

Nicht die Geschichte (...), sondern deren Memorierung, das Geschichtsbild – mit all seinen Verklärungen und Missdeutungen – prägt das Bewußtsein der Menschen.¹

In October, 826, Emperor Louis the Pious (d. 840) presided over a general assembly that convened in the palace of Ingelheim, located just west of Mainz on the southern bank of the Rhine. Perhaps during these proceedings, an envoy from Strasbourg presented the emperor with a gift from Ermold the Black (Nigellus), an Aquitanian cleric and former homo palatinus.² Ermold could not, or rather dared not, attend the assembly himself, for he had been exiled from the court for reasons our sources no longer reveal.³ Ermold’s gift, with which he hoped to regain the emperor’s favour, was a four-volume elegiac poem dedicated to Louis’s accomplishments.⁴ While the poem addresses the emperor, it was not intended for Louis’s ears alone, but meant to be read aloud at his court. This, at least, would explain why Ermold so excessively dropped the names of many powerful men and women who made up the emperor’s inner circle, as he once had himself. To be accepted back, Ermold needed not only to regain the emperor’s favour, but also that of his former peers. Whether Ermold’s appeal for clemency was successful remains unknown.⁵

¹ Goetz, ‘Dynastiewechsel’, p. 323.
² This date is speculative. Ermold’s In honorem Hludowici Christianissimi Caesaris Augusti was composed between the summer of 826 and February 828. The poem’s focus on Ingelheim and the baptism of King Harald at the Church of St Alban at Mainz suggest that Ermold’s poem was intended to be read aloud at Ingelheim. After the baptism in the summer of 826, Louis returned to Ingelheim in October for an assembly and again in June 828. Because Harald’s baptism is the centrepiece of the poem, Ermold probably composed his poem before Harald was dethroned in 827.
³ De Jong, Penitential State, pp. 89-96. De Jong argues that Ermold may have been exiled on account of dogmatic error.
⁴ Ermold, In honorem, lines 1-35.
⁵ De Jong, Penitential State, p. 90.
In the fourth book of this long poem, Ermold recounts the baptism of the Danish king Harald, whom Emperor Louis had personally raised from the baptismal font. Building up to this momentous event, Ermold first described the décor by taking his audience on a tour through the splendid palace of Ingelheim. After an account of the exterior of the building – with its hundred columns, thousand entries, copper doors and golden portals – Ermold has his readers enter the building and directs their attention to ‘the glorious deeds of God and of a long line of memorable men [that] may be read there again and again in distinguished paintings.’ Ermold’s tour begins in the palace chapel and he relates how the left wall displayed the stories from the Old Testament, whereas on the right the life of Christ and the stories of the New Testament are depicted. Ermold then enters the *domus regia*, or royal hall, where Louis would have held his banquets, deliberated with his councillors and received foreign embassies. The walls and carvings of this room were of a different theme. They no longer revealed the sacred history of the Bible; the *picturae* that decorated the royal hall were dedicated ‘to the greatest deeds of men.’

Ermold’s history of men’s great deeds begins in a minor key. The first tableau displays the deeds of impious and unjust tyrants of the Persian, Greek and early Roman past. They depict violent scenes from the reign of the Persian king Cyrus and the ‘wicked deeds of horrid Phalaris’ (*impia gesta Falaris nefandi*), the Sicilian tyrant. It also depicts the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus, and how one brother impiously killed the other. Lastly, Hannibal is displayed, ‘who always pursued unjust wars.’ With Alexander the Great, who ‘punished the world with his wars’ (*bello sibi vindicat orbem*), the air begins to clear, since ‘the wall on the other side gloried in ancestral deeds and in the pious faith of more recent times.’ Here, the Christian emperors of Rome and the early Carolingians are grouped into a single category: ‘The extraordinary deeds of the Franks are combined with the acts of the Caesars who resided at the rich Roman capital.’ Ermold recounts ‘how Constantine departed, dismissed Rome from his affections, and built Constantinople for himself.

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6 Thegan, *Gesta*, c. 33, identifies St Alban’s of Mainz as the location of Harald’s baptism. Ermold is (intentionally) unspecific about the location of the baptismal rite, perhaps to keep the focus on Ingelheim. After the rite, Ermold, lines 2239-2240, has Louis and Harald enter the palace. See also: Lammers, ‘Bildprogramm’, 248-9.
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Happy Theodosius is being depicted there with his own deeds added to their distinguished accomplishments.12 Without pause, Ermold proceeds with the history of the Carolingians:

Here the first Charles is painted, master of the Frisians in war (Marte magister), and the grand deeds of his warriors along with him. Here Pippin, you shine, giving laws to Aquitaine and once more joining them to your kingdom with the aid of Mars. And the face of wise Charles appears clearly, his head bearing the crown of his ancestral line. Here the Saxons stand opposite, contemplating battle, but he brings it on, dominates, and subjects them to his law.13

Thus, upon leaving the chapel and entering the royal hall, divine history was replaced with the history of men, which is not the same as saying that religious history was replaced by secular history. Together, these depictions formed ‘a vivid iconography of an imperial ideal,’ designed to impress all those attending Louis’s court.14 As the Carolingians had been keenly aware, new dynasties not only had to claim control over the present, they also had to claim the past – and they were remarkably successful in this respect.15

Traces of paint have been found in the ruins of Ingelheim, but it is impossible to confirm whether Ermold’s description is accurate.16 Real or imagined, the iconography of Louis’s palace testifies to the discrepant attitude of the Carolingian elite towards classical literature: its members were enthralled by its epic histories, yet viewed these with distrust on account of their unchristian character. In (Ermold’s) Ingelheim, this tension could be eased as these ancient histories were part of a bigger Christian truth: without the guidance of the Christian God, mankind was bound to live in chaos and tyranny. Only Alexander, that iconic hero of the Hellenistic past, takes up a unique and transitional position. Though obviously not a Christian himself, his ‘punishment of the world with his wars’ paved the way for the great Christian emperors of Rome, with the Carolingians following in their wake.

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14 Godman, Poetry, pp. 45-47.
The climax of Ingelheim’s pictorial programme was a triptych of Louis’s bellicose ancestors, Charles Martel (r. 715-741), Pippin III (r. 741-768; later known as ‘the Short’), and Charlemagne (r. 768-814). Each Carolingian ruler is praised for having conquered a people: Charles conquered the Frisians, Pippin the Aquitanians, and Charlemagne the Saxons. Their depictions probably occupied the apse of the royal hall. Ermold’s description makes it clear that he did not consider them equals. History was progressive: Pippin outshone Charles Martel, and Charlemagne outdid Pippin.\(^\text{17}\) His reign not only represented the triumph of Christianity, but also that of Empire, with Charlemagne presented as Constantine’s successor and the empire of the Franks standing in direct succession to the four great empires of the world – Babylon, Carthage, Macedonia and Rome. It was, of course, no coincidence that the theme of these palace \textit{picturae} ran parallel to the event that, according to Ermold, was hosted within these very walls in the summer of 826. Through the rite of baptism, Harald underwent a similar transition: from being an impious tyrant of the Danes, he became their just Christian ruler. It must have frustrated Louis to no small extent that within a year’s time this Danish neophyte was overthrown by his pagan rivals.\(^\text{18}\)

Pippin was not the brightest star in Ermold’s historical firmament. For Ermold, Louis’s grandfather was but a rung on the ladder from Constantine to Charlemagne. Ermold’s outlook on the past was distinctly imperial, something that greatly affected the way Pippin was represented in this tableau. In Carolingian historiography, Pippin is chiefly remembered as having been the first of his line to be elevated to the kingship. Ermold, however, was anxious to preserve the illusion that the Carolingians were the natural successors to the Christian emperors of Rome and no longer had room for kings in his vision of the Frankish past. For his purposes, it sufficed to present Pippin as the conqueror of Aquitaine – which in itself was no small accomplishment, after all. In addition to having him royally neutered, Ermold also thoroughly classicized Pippin, who, in bringing the Aquitanians back under the Frankish law, is said to have enjoyed Mars’s favour.\(^\text{19}\) However formative Pippin’s royal inauguration in 751 may have been for the Carolingian identity, Ermold considered it to have been soundly trumped by Charlemagne’s imperial coronation in 800. Moreover, had Ermold reminded his audience of Pippin’s royal inauguration, he would also have reminded them of the inconvenient fact that the Carolingians had, in fact, not inherited the world from Rome at all, but had seized it from their

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 282-4.
\(^{18}\) \textit{ARF}, s.a. 827.
\(^{19}\) A similar strategy underlies the narrative of the \textit{Annales Mettenses priores} (composed 806).
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Merovingian predecessors – something the Carolingian ideologues of the ninth century preferred to forget. In this thesis, I research the way in which Frankish history-writers retroactively dealt with the more contentious elements that underlie the formation of the Carolingian dynasty, by focusing on three moments of crisis that occurred during the reign of Pippin the Short (c. 714-768), the first Carolingian to be elevated to the kingship. In other words, I study the literary perception of Pippin’s reign in Carolingian historiography, from the mid-eighth to the early tenth centuries. These narratives were court-oriented; they were produced and consumed by members of the upper echelon of the Carolingian literate elite, in the competitive environment of the Carolingian court, for whom historiography formed a key instrument to express group identity and determine social hierarchy. The questions central to this investigation are therefore the following: how did later Carolingian generations engage with the dynasty’s past? And, more specifically: which literary strategies were used to shape the cultural memory of the Frankish elite, and how were their memories affected? Also, how might we account for these strategies or how can they be explained from a contemporary political context? Raising these questions will allow us to understand better how the Carolingian literate elite interacted with its (contemporary) past, in particular the more controversial elements thereof. In turn, this provides a better understanding of who the sons of Charles Martel were and who they were not. On a more general level, this project critically assesses the nature of the information that these narrative sources contain and that form the bedrock of our current perception of the Carolingian Period.

Pippin the Short was born c. 715 as the second son of the maior domus Charles Martel (r. c. 715-741). He inherited his father’s land and titles together with his older brother Carloman and, had they respected their father’s wishes, his half-brother Grifo. Instead, Pippin and Carloman teamed up, arrested Grifo and divided Charles’s realm between them. It ushered in a decade of civil war to which eventually Carloman would fall victim. Five years in to his reign, Carloman announced his abdication and converted to a life in the

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20 Ermold, In honorem, line 2161. Ermold may have referred to Pippin’s acquisition of the royal title indirectly, stating that Charles wore his crown ‘by his family’s right’.
21 The following works are central to this view: Innes and McKitterick, ‘Writing of history’; Nelson, ‘History-writing’; De Jong, Penitential State.
22 For a full account of Pippin’s reign, the best works to date remain the two Jahrbücher by Heinrich Hahn (1863) and Ludwig Oelsner (1871). A more readable, if less critical, work has been published in French: Gobry, Pépin le Bref. Gobry’s book cannot be considered a satisfactory answer to the recent call for a new study of Pippin’s reign, voiced by Dierkens, ‘Mort’, 37, and Innes, Introduction, p. 420.
monastery, leaving Pippin in sole command of the Frankish realm, albeit under the nominal authority of King Childeric III (r. c. 743-751) – a puppet king if ever the Franks had one. This situation ended in 751, when Pippin staged a palace coup and assumed the title of king, thus replacing Clovis’s royal lineage with that of his own. Pippin’s potentially contentious elevation demanded extensive justification, lest his claims would be found illegal and he himself a usurper. As a result, Pippin’s reign was central to the articulation of an enduring ideology based on the pillars of moral correction, dogmatic rectitude and a close association with Apostolic Rome. Nevertheless, when Pippin died in September 768, the problematic origin of Carolingian authority had become part of his legacy.

Most of the narratives that inform us of the events of Pippin’s reign were composed during the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. These narratives were part of ‘a veritable explosion in history-writing’ – and with Pippin’s reign standing in the centre of the blast. The increase in historiographical production is no coincidence. The dynasty Pippin had founded was, after all, one of parvenus. Unlike that of their predecessors, the Carolingian ‘right to rule’ was not supported by an ancient custom dating back to time immemorial. The Carolingian claim to the Frankish throne was founded in the family’s superior force and resources. In order to consolidate their claim, they needed to tap into a more lasting resource of legitimacy, namely the past. The past is a powerful resource for any regime, either as something to claim or as something to react against. The Carolingians did both. As the example of Ermold’s description of Ingelheim has shown, the Carolingians were presented as the successors to an authoritative past that was both biblical and classical. On the path from Creation to Salvation, the Carolingians modeled themselves after the heroic kings of the Old Testament and powerful Christian emperors of Rome. What they reacted against, however, was a more contemporary past, namely that of the Merovingian dynasty or, to be more exact, the reigns of the last descendants of Clovis. Because of these degenerate kings, or so it was claimed, the once great kingdom of the Franks had descended into a dilapidated state of moral and spiritual decay and political anarchy. With ideological concepts like correctio and renatatio as its hallmark, the new dynasty vigorously proposed to restore the Franks to their former greatness in order to ensure continued divine benevolence.

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23 Innes and McKitterick, ‘History’, 193; McKitterick, Charlemagne, p. 36.
24 See the contributions in Hen and Innes (eds.), Uses of the Past.
Looking back, a later generation recognized Pippin's reign as a period of transition and an important link in the historical chain that connected the present to the authoritative past. Pippin, after all, was the first Carolingian to be elevated to the kingship and, in a formal sense, the founder of the Carolingian royal dynasty. Returning to Ermold's poem, however, we must concede that Pippin's presentation in the poem's historical panorama is somewhat subdued. In fact, Ermold's approach to Pippin's reign is in many ways symptomatic of Pippin's role in Carolingian historiography in general: although he was certainly considered an important member of the Carolingian ancestral pantheon, his literary representation pales in comparison to that of his immediate successors, Charlemagne and Louis the Pious.

Three explanations may account for the reticent attitude in Carolingian historiography towards the dynasty's founder. First, as has already been observed in Ermold's poem, is the imperial panache of the dynasty after Charlemagne's imperial coronation on Christmas Day 800, which strongly affected the Frankish outlook on their past. Before 800, Pippin's reign had formed a natural point of origin for Carolingian dynastic history and an indispensable prelude to the reign of Charlemagne. After 800, Carolingian historiographers began to experiment with new and distinctly imperial outlooks on Frankish history that allowed for alternative and less controversial dynastic beginnings. The *Annales Mettenses priores* (806), for example, begin their account of Carolingian history with the mayoral reign of Pippin's grandfather, Pippin II (d. 714), in whom the author already recognized the family's august qualities. From a ninth-century perspective, Pippin II belonged to a distant past, which made it easier to appropriate and embellish as the rivalries and animosities of that age would have been forgotten or replaced by new ones. Others, like Ermold, simply omitted any reference to the Merovingian past, linking the Carolingians directly to the Caesars. This is also the case in a ninth-century adaptation of Bede's *Minor Chronicle*, in which Bede's list of Roman emperors was seamlessly linked to Carolingian history by presenting Pippin II as the successor to Emperor Justinian II (d. 711). Thus, while contemporaries had no doubt marvelled at Pippin's elevation to the

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26 Fouracre, 'Long shadow', p. 11.
27 *Chronicon breve*, p. 127. DuChesne noted that the manuscript, which is no longer extant, originated from St Denis and contained Bede's *De temporum ratione*. The text combines an extended version of Bede's *Chronica minora* and the *Annals of St Amand*. For a similar process in the context of Fulda, see Raaijmakers, *Monastic Community*, pp. 58-61.
kingship, a post-800 generation came to regard it as a step on the path to empire.

The second reason why Pippin is underrepresented in Carolingian historiography is the contemporary focus of Carolingian historiography, in combination with the absence of historiographical production during Pippin’s reign. The historiographical upsurge occurred during the reigns of Pippin’s successors, in particular that of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. Pippin had not yet surrounded himself with learned courtiers; his court was still an itinerant one, primarily geared towards the combination of warfare and governance. There is very little evidence that Pippin’s court was also a centre of learning, as Charlemagne’s Aachen would become at the end of the eighth century. No biographies or panegyrics were therefore written to commemorate Pippin’s deeds, which, figuratively speaking, ended up occupying the margins of Carolingian historiography. Pippin’s reign formed a convenient point of departure for the dynasty’s history and a fitting prologue to Charlemagne’s reign, but it never stood on its own – something that has not changed in modern historiography.

The third and final explanation was the contentiousness of Pippin’s reign. Later generations looked back on Pippin’s reign with a mixed sense of reverence and foreboding. Pippin’s achievements made him a valued ancestor. His reign formed an indispensable link between contemporary events and an older Merovingian past that in turn could be traced back to the Trojan origins of the Franks, if not to Creation itself. That being said, many events in Pippin’s reign that were indispensable for the dynasty’s formation, could not stand the light of day. Remove the polished rhetoric from the accounts that describe Pippin’s royal elevation and the New David becomes another Phalaris; unpick the streamlined testimonies of the eighth-century chroniclers, and suddenly Charles Martel had three heirs instead of two, of which the youngest was violently barred from his rightful inheritance by his older brothers, making Pippin a successor to Romulus. The less commendable aspects of Pippin’s reign relegated his memory to the backdrop of the Carolingian historiographical canvas, where his deeds were drawn up in broad, unrevealing pen-strokes that were meant to magnify royal virtue and mask mayoral vice. ‘The perception of Christian kingship,’ as Matthias Becher noted, ‘(...)’ did not allow that its

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28 A possible exception are the Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar. The first section may have been composed during Pippin’s reign.

incumbents had come to the throne through guile and treachery – especially towards their own kin, whom they had vowed to protect.’

The studies of Patrick Geary, Walter Pohl and Rosamond McKitterick have amply demonstrated that the link between past and present was subject to highly creative processes of remembering and forgetting. Add to this the fundamental critique of post-structuralism, known as the Linguistic Turn, which further challenged the relationship between text and reality (or between signifier and signified), and we might ask ourselves whether the highly stylized textual constructs that we have as our sources are capable of informing us of the historical reality that these texts claim to signify. While taking the post-structuralist critique to heart, Gabrielle Spiegel’s response to ‘post-structuralism’s dissolution of history’ has been to focus on the social logic of texts, by which she meant that the historian must ‘seek to locate texts within specific social sites that themselves disclose the political, economic, and social pressures that condition a culture’s discourse at any given moment.’

Moreover, Hans Robert Jauss’s Reception Theory argues that the meaning of a text changes over time, as new audiences interpret existing texts on the basis of different cultural norms, assumptions and criteria, forming what Jauss called a readership’s ‘horizon of expectation.’ With regard to medieval ritual, Phillipe Buc has warned us that the meaning of ritual acts is not fixed, but subject to constant reinterpretation. The same holds true for the interpretation of important historical events; the meaning of the past is always open to renegotiation, whether because of changing horizons of expectation or because changing social or political circumstances demanded it. Without abandoning the link between the historiographical text and the historical event it claims to describe, these historical dimensions – the audience’s horizon of expectation and the social logic of the text – will be at the forefront of my analysis of Carolingian historiographical narrative.

The choice to study the perception of Pippin’s reign from the mid-eighth to early tenth century, or from Childebrand’s Continuations to the Chronicle of Fredegar to Regino of Prüm’s monumental Chronicle (908), is not an arbitrary one. It is within this period that the perception of Pippin’s reign was modified in an interesting way. 

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31 Geary, Phantoms; Pohl, Werkstätte; McKitterick, History and Memory.
32 Spiegel, ‘Social logic of text’, 85. See also: Reimitz, ‘Social logic’.
33 ‘Horizon of expectations’ in Baldick (ed.), Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms.
34 Buc, Dangers of Ritual; Pössel, ‘Early medieval ritual’, 113-14.
most significantly. Not coincidentally, this period roughly matches the time it requires for a community's highly unstable communicative memory to develop into a more stable and durable form of collective memory, known as a community's cultural memory. According to Jan Assman's theory of cultural memory, communicative memory is formed through daily communication and shared experience. It is, so to speak, 'the talk of the day.' The implication is therefore that, as new days brought new topics for discussion, yesterday's topics were gradually forgotten. In order to preserve information that was considered important to a group's identity, these inherently unstable communicative memories (due to a host of neurological and social factors) first needed to be embedded in 'objectivised culture,' for example by capturing memory in ritual, commemorative statues or historiographical writings. Of course, merely attaching a memory to an inanimate object does not ensure that it is also taken up in a society's memorial canon. The formation of cultural memory, as this study means to illustrate, is an arduous and highly dynamic process, in need of constant attention and re-evaluation or, in the case of written memories, rewriting and manipulation.

To approach historiographical narrative from the angle of cultural memory theory, as the literary component to the process of memory objectivization, presupposes a link between the textual content and the communicative memory of its intended readership. Although the latter cannot be equated with objective reality, communicative memory can be perceived as its social counterpart, or that which a community considers to be real, or at least realistic, on the basis of a shared repository of social facts. Reality, if defined as a socially accepted truth on the basis of collective experience and remembrance, forms the framework within which historiography is written, but it is a framework with very flexible boundaries. Historiographical text does not necessarily reflect its readership's communicative memory, which would deny the performative potential of these texts. The purpose of Carolingian historiography is not to record the collective memory of the Frankish elite passively, but rather to influence it and give it a specific shape. Historiography,

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35 Assman, 'Collective memory'.
36 Wickham and Fentress, Social Memory, pp. 1-40.
38 Fentress and Wickham, Social Memory, p. 25. Social memory is considered 'an expression of collective experience.'
in other words, is meant actively to stimulate the processes of remembering and forgetting of its readership.39

The margins for manipulating the historical record were nevertheless small. Discrepancies between the historiographical narrative and its readership’s knowledge or expectations create tension, since historiography is ultimately bound to its truth claim. Monica Otter defined this as ‘a kind of “contract” between author and reader, governing the reader’s expectations as to the verifiability of the author’s assertions. (...) If you discover serious and unexplained discrepancies, you legitimately feel betrayed by the author: he or she has violated the contract between you and you declare the history false.’40 In many cases, however, there is little to be gained by trying to assess whether historiographical narratives, or the statements therein, are objectively true or false. Verifiability is not the only relevant factor for a narrative’s acceptance or rejection by a community: authorship or association, stylistic form and moral values were also criteria that determined the success of a narrative. Only the successful narratives were copied and became dominant in a society’s perception of its past.

Perceptions of important events tend to change for a reason. The events that are central to this thesis – the succession crisis of 741, Carloman’s abdication in 747, and Pippin’s coup of 751 – were defining moments in the formation of the Carolingian dynasty, but at the same time posed a threat to its reputation and identity. These events were political crises, but memorable ones. If we desire to understand why their memory was contentious and to what extent the earliest Carolingian commentators already attempted to manipulate the collective memory of their readership, it is necessary to reconstruct these events, however tentative or speculative the outcome. Whenever possible, these reconstructions will rely strongly on contemporary and non-historiographical sources, such as letters, capitularies and charters, allow us to momentarily escape the rhetoric specific to Carolingian historiography. But although the testimony of these sources can be used to contrast with those encountered in later historiographical narratives, the outcome of such a comparison might not allow us to discern fact from fiction. Contemporary letters, charters and even law codes present us with distorted mirrors just the same – these texts were written for a specific purpose and structured according to established literary conventions – but at least these are different distortions.


These various contemporary source types and what they have to tell us of Pippin's reign, will be introduced in the first section of chapter one.

The remainder of chapter one offers an introduction to the chronicle and the medieval annals, the two historiographical genres on which this study focuses, and to the context in which these texts were composed and circulated. Medieval annals only arrived on the Continent in the middle of the eighth century and, compared to the much older chronicle, were structured very differently. It should be noted, though, that these strict typological categorizations are foremost modern preoccupations: medieval typological hybrids were a common phenomenon. Contrary to the chronicle, the narrative in the medieval annals does not rest primarily on literary principles, but on a numerical list of years through which time is measured in relation to the Incarnation of Christ. This had significant consequences for these texts' outlook on the past and the information they contained. The main selection of texts that will be studied, belong to a select group of court-oriented narratives, written by and for the members of a small circle of learned courtiers that made up the upper echelon of Carolingian elite society. Far from being passive observers, these men and women were themselves actors in the histories they wrote, or had written, down. They were also intimately familiar with each other's work and, as the three case studies will demonstrate, did not write their accounts in a social or conceptual vacuum. Rather, they tended to build on pre-existing historical conceptions and considered the written testimonies of their peers just as much as a reality to be reckoned with as their own recollection of the events they sought to describe.

In chapter two, I investigate the compositional background, function and manuscript transmission of the *Continuations to the Chronicle of Fredegar* and the *Annales regni Francorum* (or *ARF*). Both texts were composed in the second half of the eighth century. The elaborate testimonies of these two accounts form the basis of Pippin's later remembrance, from the Carolingian period up to the present. In terms of manuscript transmission, they were highly successful, not least because of their close association with the Carolingian court. But while it is likely that they came to circulate shortly after their composition, presumably in the form of frail *libelli*, these earliest textual witnesses have not survived. Instead, the earliest extant copies date to the ninth century, when these texts came to be incorporated in stout historiographical compendia. By studying the way in which ninth- and early tenth-century compilors integrated these accounts into their historiographical compendia, much can be learned about the reception of Pippin's reign at their time of composition. These reveal,
moreover, that in the ninth century, Pippin’s reign came to mark the historical divide between the Carolingian present and the Merovingian past.

Chapters three to five are event-based case studies. The purpose of each of these cases is not to reconstruct the event itself, but rather to analyse its literary perception in Carolingian historiography and explain its transformation. Chapter three revolves around the succession crisis of 741. After the death of Charles Martel, Pippin and Carloman prevented Grifo, their younger half-brother and co-heir, from claiming his inheritance by arresting him. The event sparked a civil war that ended the fragile political order Charles had established. After several years order was restored, leaving Carloman abdicated, Grifo killed and Pippin in control of the kingdom. The earliest historiographical accounts attempted to ban Grifo from Carolingian history. Over time, however, Grifo was readmitted into the narratives and eventually rehabilitated to some extent. This gradual transformation, occurring over a span of about eighty years, suggests that a society’s collective memory placed a check on the extent to which history could be manipulated.

Chapter four, the second of the case studies, focuses on the identity of Carloman in Carolingian historiography. After a reign of five years alongside his younger brother Pippin, Carloman abdicated in 747 and proceeded to Rome, where he received the tonsure and took the monastic profession. In 753, Carloman returned to the Frankish court as an ambassador to the Lombard king Aistulf to plead against the formation of a Franco-papal pact. For Pippin, Carloman’s return was as unexpected as it was politically inopportune. Carloman soon found himself in a Frankish monastery, where he died in 755.

Carloman’s history posed a challenge to later Carolingian history-writers. Frankish society had hitherto discarded its unwanted rulers in a similar way, through forced tonsure and conversion, but Carolingian historiography stresses that Carloman’s case was different: because he had converted willingly, he left the corridors of power with his honour intact. As to his motives, the sources initially remain silent. Only in the course of the ninth century did Carloman’s conversion came to be regarded in a context of penance. This transition occurred, not coincidentally, during the reign of Louis the Pious, whose reign was characterized by his public acts of penance. Carloman’s involvement in 753 posed a very different challenge. His confinement to a monastery in Vienne had an obvious punitive character (especially because his sons, too, were now tonsured and confined to monasteries), which threatened to impede on his reputation as a model Carolingian. The solution, first to justify his arrest and later to rehabilitate him, was found in his identity as a Benedictine monk. Regardless of Carloman’s ‘true’ history, Carolingian historio-
graphers were quick to turn Carloman into a symbol of Carolingian piety, worthy of emulation, though rarely emulated. As a Carolingian prince, a willing penitent and a model monk, Carloman’s history became a highly useful resource of the past, and Carolingian history-writers highly resourceful in utilizing that past for their purposes.

In chapter five, the final case study, we turn to the dynastic transition of 751 and its remembrance in Carolingian historiography. The event itself was, and is to this day, perceived as a watershed moment in western political history. More than a dynastic transition alone, the coup of 751 has often been considered a fundamental ideological shift in western political thought. It has long been assumed that Pippin had dethroned the last of the arcane and archaic Merovingian kings and defined his own legitimacy on overtly Christian principles that would remain current in Western Europe throughout the medieval period. \(^{41}\) More recently, however, historians have argued that our perception of the event of 751 is deeply influenced by the rhetoric of a new dynasty that had yet to prove itself on the royal stage. \(^{42}\)

The events of 751 and 754, when Pope Stephen re-anointed Pippin and anointed his sons, posed a challenge to Carolingian history-writers: how to justify the deposition of a lawful king and the usurpation of his throne? It required every ounce of rhetorical ingenuity and dexterity of its commentators. In the process, discrediting the old dynasty was every bit as important as promoting the new one. A definition of proper kingship was formulated that posited that the *potestas regia* and the *nomen regium* should reside in the same person. This, it was now claimed, had not been the case under the last Merovingian kings. Though the statement itself may not have surprised contemporaries, the fact that it was cast in the form of an accusation was new. This was necessary, however, to present Pippin’s coup, for which he ostensibly had received papal approval, as a restoration of the natural order. This discourse was a double-edged sword, as became especially clear during the reign of Emperor Louis the Pious, who proved powerless himself when the Frankish bishops had him publically atone for his sins in 833. Although Louis quickly managed to regain his former dignity, the rhetoric of *nomen* and *potestas* moved to the background and Carolingian royal authority came to rely exclusively on its religious sanction, as administered and controlled by the episcopacy.

\(^{41}\) For the traditional view, see Luscombe, ‘Formation of political thought’, p. 167; Ullmann, *Carolingian Renaissance*; Cf. Enright, *Royal Anointment Ritual*, p. 137. Enright argues that the anointment ritual was meant to confer ‘a Germanic type of sacrality’ onto Pippin.

Attached to this thesis are three appendices, as well as an aide mémoire meant to aid the reader in keeping track of the chronology of the sources central to this dissertation. The first appendix accompanies chapter two, and consists of a list of the extant Carolingian manuscripts that contain the Continuations and the ARF. Appendix two discusses a set of minor annals known as Massay recension of the Annales Petaviiani, but to which I shall refer as the Annals of Massay. These annals play an important role in chapter four, as they are the first account that indisputably presents Carloman’s conversion in a penitential context. Because little research has been done on this text, I will introduce these annals in appendix two and argue that they were composed during the reign of Louis the Pious. Lastly, appendix three introduces the Breviarium Erchanberti (c. 827), a small treatise that on account of its unoriginal account of Merovingian history and its fantastical account of the early history of the Carolingians, has largely been ignored in modern scholarship. However, as I shall also argue in chapter five, the Breviary not only offers an extraordinary account of Pippin’s elevation to the kingship, but, through the compiler’s strategies of composition, creates a unique juxtaposition between Clovis I and Pippin the Short, the two founders of the great royal dynasties of the Franks, that has hitherto gone unnoticed by modern historians. Both are presented as champions of Christianity; it was a history of Constantine being invoked again and again.

This thesis will thus illustrate how the perception of specific historical events are subject to continuous reinterpretation. Both in Carolingian historiography and our own, the memory of the past is subject to the needs of the present and the expectations for the future. Given the variety of textual interpretations and the ever changing horizons of expectation, we might in the end ask whether the historical Pippin can actually be known. Though we might have to lower our expectations, the careful study of literary strategies, authorial intent and the political, moral and social circumstances that prompted the creation of our sources, form the key to reconstructing not just that which was meant to be remembered, but perhaps also that which was meant to be forgotten. Still, the true merit of understanding the forces at work in a society’s historiography is that it not only allows us to understand the object of memory and the processes of memory formation and transformation, but it also provides us with a much better understanding of that society itself.