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

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CHAPTER FIVE

‘Quod Dignitatis Regiae ac Potestatis Non Fungor?’

The Carolingian Coup of 751

The reign of the Merovingian king Childeric III ended in the summer 751 and would later be made famous by Einhard’s derogatory description in the introduction to his *Vita Karoli*.¹ Childeric’s installation by the sons of Charles Martel, in 743, ended a five-year interregnum. This event is not mentioned in any of the Carolingian annals or chronicles and its date is deduced on the basis of the dating clause in Pippin’s capitulary for the Council of Soissons (744).² If not for that, we would only have learned of Childeric’s existence from the same annalistic entries that inform us of his political undoing. Due to the inauspicious silence that surrounded his reign, Childeric is generally considered to have been a Carolingian puppet, discarded by his ambitious mayor of the palace the moment he outlived his purpose. When that moment arrived, Childeric's majestic long hair, hitherto the hallmark of his family’s royal dignity, was removed and replaced with a clerical tonsure. Stripped of his rank and honour, the former king was cast from the palace and sent to the monastery of St Bertin.³ Childeric was not the first Merovingian to suffer this fate, but he was the last: for the first time in the history of the Franks, the successor to the throne stood openly outside the Merovingian family. Contemporary

¹ Einhard, *VK* c. 1.
² *Council of Soissons* (744), prologue.
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historiography presented Pippin's elevation to the kingship as a great Carolingian triumph.  

Prior to the coup of 751, kings came and went, sometimes in rapid succession, but political convention had always dictated that the royal title was reserved to a very select group of Franks. According to Gregory of Tours, writing in the late sixth century, this group originally consisted of several families, whose exalted rank found expression in their privileged hairstyle: they were the reges criniti, or long-haired kings. The Merovingians belonged to this cluster of families and, after Clovis I (r. 481-511) had eliminated his long-haired rivals, became the sole heirs to this privilege. Clovis's descendants ruled over the Franks for two-and-a-half centuries. Although the formation of the Merovingian dynasty had been hard-fought, its enduring success did not owe to the boundless talent of Clovis's descendants, but rather to the establishment of a caste-like political system that found broad support among the Frankish elite. Individual kings could be overthrown and replaced by new ones, but the system itself proved remarkably durable.

The advantage of limiting royal authority to a very small and, in theory, exclusive group, was that it allowed for a degree of political stability in an otherwise violent and competitive society. The king acted as a supreme and to some extent impartial arbiter of power, whose exclusive authority guaranteed the rights, privileges and property of the majority. Over-ambitious members of the polity soon found themselves opposed by a majority united in the belief that their interests were better served by supporting an impartial Merovingian who, as Fouracre argued, 'was seen to be above the rivalries of his mightier subjects.'

By the mid-eighth century, the political faction led by the Carolingian family nevertheless had managed to obtain a level of influence that could no longer be checked by conventional balancing mechanisms, such as the general assembly. Outgunned and outmanoeuvred, Childeric was unable to keep the Carolingian agenda in check, leaving him powerless. This did not occur overnight. Since the middle of the seventh century, the family that modern historians refer to as the Pippinids and, from the reign of Charles Martel onwards, Carolingians, had been able to gradually expand its powerbase, despite an occasional misstep and a growing opposition. It is doubtful that those who

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4 Wood, 'Usurpers', 30-1. Wood argues for a more fluid understanding of Merovingian identity, i.e. to conceive of the Merovingian family more as a political construct, than as a biological unit: Ibid, 26; idem, 'Deconstructing', esp. 164-5.
5 A term first mentioned in Gregory of Tours, Histories, l. 2, c. 9.
6 Fouracre, Charles Martel, p. 32.
7 Semmler, 'Sukzessionkrie'; Fouracre, ‘Outgrowth’.
resisted the outgrowth of Carolingian power did so out of loyalty to a specific
Merovingian king; their concern will rather have gone out to the political
system that was being hijacked by a rival faction. This system, as it had come to
develop in the course of the seventh century, promoted a weak form of kingship
that, in the words of Janet Nelson, 'floated above [a competitive Frankish
aristocracy] in glorious impotence.'

It gave the Frankish nobility room to 
manoeuvre, which the Pippinids/Carolingians exploited most successfully of all.
Pippin's bid for the throne in 751 was more than a proposition to replace the
old dynasty; it proposed to change the very political system as it had existed for
over a century. Instead of becoming another Childeric, Pippin aspired to
become a new Clovis – a powerful king everyone admired, yet few wished to
see return.

In 753, two years after Pippin had staged his coup, Pope Stephen II (752 -
757) visited the Frankish court. This, too, was a novelty, but Stephen had no
choice. Faced with the expansionist zeal of the Lombard king Aistulf and an
emperor who was either unable or unwilling to come to Rome's aid, the newly
consecrated pope chose to follow the example of his predecessor, Pope Gregory
III, and petition the Franks for help – that is to say: for them to come to the aid
of Saint Peter.

What Charles Martel had earlier denied Gregory, Pippin was
willing to grant Stephen, albeit at a price: in return for military protection,
Pippin demanded apostolic confirmation for himself and his descendants as
kings of the Franks by the grace of God. With that the Apostolic See, hitherto a
respected spiritual authority in the Latin west, also gained political influence
north of the Alps, now that the Carolingians had introduced it as the
mouthpiece of the divine will that had manifested itself in Pippin's kingship.

While the coup of 751 is nowadays generally perceived as a watershed
moment in Carolingian, if not western, political history, virtually nothing is
known about how it was executed or what had occurred in the years around it.
Our sources only reveal that it came to be viewed as an important transition,
second only to Charlemagne's imperial coronation in 800. The cautious manner
with which the coup came to be recorded in contemporary historiography –
with its silences and sparing detail – and the apparent need for a papal

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8 Nelson, 'Bad kingship', 3. Nelson argues that such a system could not have been maintained, let
alone created, in a society founded on early medieval Christian thinking.
9 CC, no. 1; Continuations, c. 22; According to LP, Life 94 (Stephen II), c. 15, Pope Zachary also had
10 Pippin and his sons received at this occasion the title patricius Romanorum. There is little
agreement on the origin of, and rights associated with, this title. There is no evidence that Pippin
ever used it, and I propose to consider it foremost a papal invention, meant to remind the Frankish
king of his obligations towards Rome. For discussion, see: Noble, Republic, pp. 278-91.

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confirmation in 754, nevertheless imply that not everyone had welcomed the birth of the new royal dynasty. In discarding the Merovingians in 751, Pippin had taken a huge gamble and may well have overplayed his hand. Only after the new dynasty had found its footing, in the first decades of the ninth century, was Einhard willing to reveal that Pippin had in fact experienced great difficulties mustering the support needed to take on the Lombards and gain the support of the papacy. It is also in this context that Notker’s Herculean story, in which Pippin stepped into the ring with two ferocious animals in order to win the respect of the Franks, should be understood. Contrary to what earlier Carolingian history-writers have tried to impress upon us, it is indeed an illusion to think that Carolingian kingship had been fully formed in 751.

In retrospect, Frankish authors could claim that Pippin’s coup was the solution to a political imbalance that had grown between royal and mayoral authority. But just because Pippin had the political means to seize the kingship, did not mean his actions were justified. Deposing one’s king, after all, meant breaking one’s oath of fidelity. Pippin’s opponents may easily have recognized in him a usurper and a tyrant. For a dynasty that justified its claims on account of its moral superiority, and that presented itself as the keeper of societal order and religious orthodoxy, the memory of its ignoble birth presented a problem. Moreover, the need to justify Pippin’s actions not only stemmed from a desire to promote the dynasty’s image, but also from a needed to ensure that this coup did not turn into a dangerous precedent. This, then, was the challenge that awaited those who had taken it upon themselves to write Carolingian history: they needed to justify a coup, castigate the old dynasty and transplant its exclusive rights onto the new one.

As a point of departure, I subscribe to McKitterick’s view that our sources present a strongly manipulated account of the coup of 751/4. In particular, she argues that the Carolingian claim that Pope Zachary had sanctioned the original coup of 751 is fictitious. In the contemporary papal sources, Rome only got involved in 753, when Pope Stephen visited Francia. Stephen’s petition for military aid came as a godsend for Pippin, who, in a carefully orchestrated

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11 Much has been written on the dynastic transition of 751. See especially: McKitterick, ‘Illusion’; Semmler, ‘Zeitgeschichtsschreibung und Hofhistoriographie’; idem, Der Dynastiewechsel; and the articles in Becher and Jarnut (eds.), Dynastiewechsel.
12 Einhard, VK, c. 6.
13 Notker, Gesta Karoli, l. 2, c. 16. Also see the conclusion, where this anecdote is discussed further.
16 See previous note.
17 These preparation are described in LP, Life 94 (Stephen II), cc. 18-29. See also: CC, nos. 4-5.
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John Smith

anointment ceremony, used the pope’s apostolic authority to legitimize his and his family’s position. With great success, Carolingian history-writers projected this apostolic sanction of 753 back onto the original coup of 751, in an attempt to erase the memory of what all but Pippin’s closest adherents would have recognized as a legal transgression. Both events, however, were highly significant to a later generation: 751 was important because it marked the end of the Merovingian dynasty, 754 was important because it marked the beginning of the Carolingian dynasty.

This chapter is not principally concerned with the consequences of the coup itself, but explores how this event came to be presented in Carolingian historiography and which literary strategies were applied to justify the coup of 751 during the first three generations of the dynasty. Contrary to the study by Goetz, which provides a catalogue of early and high medieval texts that mention the events of 751/754 and from which general conclusions about their medieval reception are drawn, this chapter looks more closely at the texts composed between c. 750-840, focusing specifically on their intertextuality. Section 5.1 discusses the initial literary responses to the Carolingian coup, as composed in the second half of the eighth century. In these texts, the dynastic transition came to be explained as a reparation of a political imbalance caused by the separation of royal power and the royal title. The consolidation and augmentation of this discourse occurred in the opening decades of the ninth century (5.2). In the 830s, a major reorientation occurred in reaction to the political crisis that had resulted in Louis the Pious’s public penance in 833, which broke the spell of Carolingian inviolability (5.3). This chapter therefore intends to pick up where McKitterick left off and studies how the illusion of a just coup was created in Carolingian historiography between c. 750 and c. 840.

5.1. The formation of a narrative

5.1.1. Rewriting history: Childebrand’s Continuations

If indeed Pope Zachary’s sanction of Pippin’s coup was a Carolingian invention, it had been invented shortly after the act, for it already features in the Continuations. Childebrand, on whose auctoritas this section of the Continuations had been composed, sketched, in triumphant tones, the first decade of Pippin’s reign and presented his royal inauguration in 751 as the natural conclusion to his extraordinary reign as mayor of the palace. The event

18 Goetz, ‘Dynastiewechsel’.
also marked the end of Childebrand’s involvement in the 
Continuations: the remainder of the text, up to Pippin’s death in 768, was composed on the authority of his son, Nibelung. In the previous two chapters, we have come to know Childebrand’s presentation of contemporary events as highly stylized and manipulated. His homage to the reigns of Charles Martel and Pippin had little room for missteps, such as the succession crises of 741 or the abdication of Carloman in 747. Because Childebrand simply removed obstacles such as Grifo, Drogo, or King Childeric from his narrative, the Continuations present their readership with an idyllic Carolingian family portrait. As we have seen in chapter three, external opposition to Carolingian authority was systematically presented as anti-Frankish, rather than anti-Carolingian. In general, the Continuations were written from a strongly partisan and teleological perspective, in which the author plotted the ideal historical trajectory between his narrative’s beginning and the contemporary situation.

It is in this light that we need to assess Childebrand’s account of the coup of 751. Three chapters before Pippin’s actual inauguration is described, the Continuations begin constructing Pippin’s royal identity. When Carloman, prior to his departure, left his realm and sons in Pippin’s care, the author added that ‘on account of this succession Pippin was strengthened in his rule.’ 19 Pippin’s royal quality is furthermore prefigured in his procurement of tribute from the unruly Saxons ‘as they had once owed Chlothar.’20 As the coup drew near, Pippin can be seen spending his days settling scores with the enemies of the Franks while converting subjugated pagan gentes to Christianity. In short, Pippin is presented as having embodied all the characteristics of a good king long before he held the title. That the Franks subsequently elected this hero as their king, would hardly have surprised the reader. According to Childebrand:

At that time, after a proposition (relatione) had been sent to the Apostolic See with the counsel and consent of all the Franks, and having received the authoritative pronouncement (auctoritate), the exalted Pippin, by the election of all the Franks to the seat of the kingdom, with the consecration of the bishops and with the subjection of the great men, along with Queen Bertrada, as ancient order required, was elevated to the kingship.21

19 Continuations, c. 30: ‘Qua successione Pippinus roboratur in regno.’
20 Ibid., c. 31: ‘Quae Chlothario quondam presbyterant.’ The reference is to Chlothar II (r. 584–629).
21 Continuations, c. 33: ‘Quo tempore una cum consilio et consensu omnium Francorum missa relatione ad sede apostolica auctoritate praecelsus Pippinus electione totius Francorum in sedem regni cum consecratione episcoporum et subiectione principum una cum regina Bertradane, ut antiquitus ordo depositi, sublimatur in regno.’
In a few densely packed lines, Childebrand listed the core elements of Pippin’s royal inauguration. Reminiscent of the biblical kings of ancient Israel, Pippin was elected by the people, was consecrated by the bishops and received the homage of the Frankish elite. Whether or not this ceremony really was as ancient or conventional as Childebrand claimed, is less important than the claim itself, which was meant to underscore the legitimacy of Pippin’s royal authority. The presence of Bertrada as queen in this account is significant, even though her exact role in these proceedings is unclear. Equally significant is the absence of King Childeric III, which invites the reader to think that Pippin was elected to a vacant throne. In addition to imitating the inauguration rites in the *Books of Kings*, Childebrand added three additional elements to bolster Pippin’s authority: first, the initiative for the coup came from the Franks, not Pippin. Second, the Franks are said to have sent a petition to the papacy. Lastly, Pippin was made king in accordance with the requirements of an ancient *ordo*.

It is not altogether clear what Childebrand meant by ‘ancient order’. Perhaps it required no explanation, because Childebrand’s contemporary readership was familiar with its meaning. Or, more likely, the author may have been intentionally cryptic, leaving its meaning open to the interpretation of his readership. Labelling it ‘ancient’ certainly gave off a reassuring signal, regardless of what exactly it signified. Historians today are divided on how to interpret Childebrand’s *ordo*: the more traditional view holds that Childebrand referred to the Augustinian concept of a natural and divine order, i.e. the governing principles by which the spiritual, natural and social world should be organized. Alternatively, as argued by Achim Hack, the term may merely have referred to an older Merovingian custom, which would mean Childebrand used it to stress the continuity between Pippin’s reign and that of his predecessors. A third possibility, which does not necessarily interfere with Hack’s argument, is that *antiquitus ordo* refers to the ceremony itself (i.e. episcopal consecration, popular election, and elite recognition), underscoring its biblical authority. Each of these interpretations would have suited Childebrand’s agenda.

Modern historians generally assume that Pippin, at his royal inauguration, introduced a new royal symbol. The characteristic long hair, which had marked the royal status of the Merovingian kings since time immemorial, was abandoned and in its place came the unction with holy chrism to symbolize the

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24 Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Fredegar*, p. 102, n.3, referring to Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, l. 19, c. 13.
covenant between the king and the divine. This alleged innovation has been used to argue that the Carolingians introduced a new, Christian model of kingship in Francia, where the Merovingians had previously adhered to a sacral and archaic (and therefore quasi-pagan) model. Today, the paradigm of *germanisches Sakralkönigtum* has mostly been refuted; there is no evidence that the Merovingians retained any pagan practices, or that they were any less Christian than their Carolingian predecessors, though the latter tended to be more outspoken about it. Even the symbolic meaning of Merovingian long hair, regardless of its pre-Christian origin, could have acquired a Christian meaning. As I have argued elsewhere, if long hair was abandoned in the mid-eighth century, it would not have been because of any lingering pagan connotations, but because its meaning as a symbol of royal *virtus* had eroded, due to a long tradition of weak Merovingian kingship.

Historians have debated the origins of this anointing ritual, which had already been in use in Visigothic Spain and Ireland. Pippin’s most obvious source of inspiration, however, was the Old Testament itself. Others were struck by the different vocabulary used in the *Continuations*, which mention a more generic *consecratio* in 751, and the *ARF*, that uses the more specific *ungere* in both 751 and 754. Arnold Angenendt argued that Pippin had been anointed at both occasions, though they had different meanings: the first unction, he argued, was a royal inauguration rite that may have been meant to echo the baptism of Clovis; the second unction, performed by Pope Stephen II, established a familial bond between the pope and Pippin’s family.

The idea that the ritual of anointing, as the centre piece in a royal inauguration ceremony, was a Carolingian innovation is based on the observation that Carolingian sources are generally quite explicit about this ritual, while Merovingian sources are not. It is, therefore, an *argumentum e silentio* to argue that Merovingian kings did not practice this ritual, since we have virtually no sources that describe Merovingian inauguration ceremonies to begin with.
The special emphasis that Childebrand and his successors placed on Pippin’s inauguration ceremony is not surprising, given the dynasty’s need to legitimize its claims after it had just broken with an almost three-century-old tradition. Because Pippin was not of Merovingian descent, he needed to be every bit as royal as his predecessors, if not significantly more so. Seen from this perspective, it is unlikely that Pippin wished to reinvent Frankish kingship altogether. Also, if the anointment ritual had indeed been an innovation – one that was meant to be as defining for Carolingian kingship as long hair had been for Merovingian kingship – why had Childebrand not spoken more specifically of an unctio? The author’s use of the more generic consecratio (though it may well have implied an anunction) places the stress on the fact that it was Pippin who had been consecrated; it does not stress the specific form of the consecration. In other words, although the references to long-haired kings disappear along with the dynasty it characterized, our sources nowhere explicitly state that the Carolingians turned to the ritual of anointment as its replacement. There may have been more continuity between Merovingian and Carolingian kingship than historians have thus far been willing to admit.

New in this context, however, was the role of the papacy. Not long after Pippin committed his coup, news reached him that Pope Stephen II had entered Francia. There was nothing spontaneous about this papal visit: the contemporary Life of Stephen in the Liber Pontificalis offers an elaborate account of the embassies sent to and fro to arrange Stephen’s journey. The pope’s arrival was meant to be a great and awe-inspiring spectacle, not least because it would boost Pippin’s royal prestige. Although Stephen had taken the initiative for these Franco-papal deliberations by sending a legate disguised as a pilgrim across the Alps, the idea that the pope should venture north in person may well have been Pippin’s. In response to the papal envoy, Pippin sent Abbot Droctegang of Jumièges to convey the message that he ‘would fulfil the pope’s every wish and request.’ Perhaps the papal biographer had chosen to omit the conditions posited by Droctegang, namely that in return for Frankish military support, Stephen had to personally confirm Pippin’s status as king of the Franks. Droctegang returned to Francia carrying two letters: the first was a short message, announcing that Droctegang would convey the pope’s reply to Pippin orally. The other was addressed to the Frankish magnates, meant to

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34 Continuations, c. 36.
35 LP, Life 94 (Stephen II), cc. 24-5
36 Ibid., c. 16.
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mobilize them to fight against the enemies of Saint Peter. Next an escort was sent to Rome to collect the papal delegation. At St Maurice d’Auguaine, Abbot Fulrad of St Denis and Duke Rotchar awaited Pope Stephen and escorted him to the palace of Ponthion. Several miles out, the pope encountered young Charlemagne, who personally escorted the vicarius Christi back to his father’s palace, providing the pope with a solemn adventus ceremony. By the time Stephen arrived, in the winter of 753, Pippin’s courtiers must have been buzzing with anticipation. Pippin counted on the prestige of Saint Peter to strengthen his own, and therefore did his best to make his apostolic successor appear larger than life.

That winter, king and pope deliberated at Ponthion, St Denis and Quierzy. Contemporary accounts, all written from a papal perspective, focus more on the promises made by Pippin than on the anointing ritual that Pippin received in return. With regard to this ceremony, Stephen’s biographer later only recalled how, during the harsh winter of 753/4, the pope stayed at St Denis. When later Pippin joined him, the biographer added how, ‘after some days, the same most Christian king Pippin by the same most holy pope, with the grace of Christ, with his two sons were anointed kings of the Franks.’ It is worth noting that the Continuations do not mention the papal anointing ritual of Pippin and his sons. They only describe in great detail Pippin’s negotiations with Stephen concerning the Frankish military intervention in Italy. I shall return to this point after discussing how the ARF, the most influential eighth-century narrative, presented Pippin’s coup and its aftermath.

5.1.2. The consolidation of the past: the ARF

Like the Continuations, the ARF were composed to sing the praise of the Carolingians and to filter out much of the turmoil of the first decade of Pippin’s reign. Overall, they tend to be less dramatic and more ‘factual’ in their presentation of these events than the Continuations. To some degree, this is because of the literary conventions inherent to the annalistic genre, which Sarah Foot characterized as having a ‘minimalist expression’ and forming a

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37 CC, nos. 4-5.
38 LP, Life 94 (Stephen II), c. 18.
40 LP, Life 94 (Stephen II), c. 27: ‘post aliquantos dies hisdem christianissimus Pippinus rex ab eodem sanctissimo papa, Christi gratia, cum duo bus filiis suis regis uncti sunt.’ Trans. Davis, Eighth-Century Popes, p. 65.
41 Continuations, cc. 36-7.
'conjunction of outwardly unrelated observations in relentlessly paratactic style.' Though the ARF are much more literary in character than the so-called minor annals, they nonetheless offer a concise record of the events of Pippin's reign that rarely accounts for their underlying motives or consequences.

For example, the entry for 742 states that Carloman and Pippin 'led the army against Hunald, duke of the Aquitanians' and the entry for 743 merely states that they 'engaged in battle against Odilo, duke of the Bavarians.' Unless the reader is already acquainted with these events, he or she is left to wonder why these campaigns were executed and what their outcome was. Only in the direst of circumstances does the author add cause to effect, possibly to prevent his readership from drawing the wrong conclusions, which could incriminate the Carolingian protagonists. In the case of Carloman's abdication, we have seen how after Carloman had announced that he would retire, the annalist added that Pippin prepared 'so that he might honorably direct his brother with gifts [to Rome],' thereby acquitting Pippin of any wrong-doing. Had the author had been more succinct in his account, his readership might not have been able to distinguish between Carloman's abdication and that of Childeric. If interpreted the wrong way, Carloman would have been dishonoured and Pippin a prime suspect.

Because of the seemingly unconnected character of the entries, the ARF do not offer a similar build-up to Pippin's royal inauguration as we have seen in the Continuations. There is no added emphasis on Pippin's successes prior to his inauguration, nor do we encounter mass conversions of pagans, or references to famed kings of old. Instead, the entry for 749 relates that a Frankish embassy had travelled to Rome:

Bishop Burchard of Würzburg and the chaplain Fulrad were sent to Pope Zachary, to ask with regard to the kings in Francia, who at the time did not have royal power, whether this was good or not. And Pope Zachary sent official word to Pippin that it is better to call him king who had the power, than him who was without royal power. So that the order would not be disturbed, he commanded by apostolic authority that Pippin be made king.
The two Frankish messengers were prominent members of the Frankish elite: Fulrad, abbot of St Denis (c. 749-784) and Pippin’s future archchaplain, and Burchard, the bishop of Wurzburg (742-753) and a known associate of Boniface. Although it is of course possible that the ARF’s testimony is accurate, McKitterick’s interpretation is a plausible one, arguing that the involvement of Fulrad and Burchard as Frankish legates should be interpreted symbolically. Fulrad and Burchard were archetypical representatives of the Neustrian and Austrasian elites; together, they represented the unified support of the Franks for Pippin’s royal elevation.46

However, the real innovation in the narrative of the ARF is what these annals have to say about the contents of the Frankish petition and Pope Zachary’s response. When the delegation informed the pope that there had occurred a separation between the royal power and the royal name, Zachary agreed that this disturbed (conturbare) the order (ordo), with which the pope appears to have referred to notions of cosmic order.47 To go against it meant going against God, with all the damming consequences that came with it. It is the first sign that the idea that royal action had effected the natural order and that bad royal behaviour could have disastrous consequences was becoming current in Carolingian political thinking.48

Boniface, as we have seen, had warned King Æthelbert of Mercia with the apocalyptic consequences should the king persist in his debauchery.49 Similar ideas on the close relation between royal power and the natural world are expressed in Cathwulf’s letter to Charlemagne (775).50 Cathwulf, believed to have been an Anglo-Saxon cleric, probably got his ideas from an Irish treatise known as pseudo-Cyprian’s On the twelve vices of the world, and the earliest evidence that this treaty circulated on the Continent dates to the first half of the ninth century.51 The ninth vice, ‘on unjust kings,’ explains how bad kingship will result in catastrophes such as military defeat, crop failure or extreme weather conditions.52 Bad kingship therefore could have been perceived as a serious threat to the spiritual and material welfare of the Franks, and a solid argument

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49 Letters of Boniface, nos. 73-4.
51 Pseudo-Cyprian, De Duodecim abusivis, p. 51-53.
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to depose a ruler. If we accept that there is nothing inherently secular about early medieval kingship, a Frankish call for papal arbitration becomes understandable.53

The papal orders were executed the following year:

Pippin according to the custom of the Franks was elected to the kingship and anointed by the hand of Archbishop Boniface of saintly memory and elevated by the Franks in the kingdom in the city of Soissons. Childeric, however, who was falsely called king, was tonsured and sent into a monastery.54

The description of the inauguration ceremony in the ARF invokes some of the same ingredients we already encountered in the Continuations: the annals use the words *eligere*, *ungere* and *elevare*, whereas the Continuations use *electio*, *consecratio* and *sublimare*. Both mention the papal petition, but Childebrand also speaks of the nobility’s *subjectio* to Pippin’s authority, though the ARF specifically state that Pippin was ‘elevated by the Franks’ (*elevatus a Franci*), which might amount to the same thing. Because it is assumed that the ritual of anointing was new in this context, historians have favoured a translation in which only the element of royal election is recognized as part of the ‘Frankish custom’ (*mos Francorum*). On the basis of the Latin, however, it can also be argued that each of these three elements – election, elevation and consecration – were customary for Frankish royal inaugurations, effectively reducing Carolingian innovation to a change in royal hairstyle.55 As with Fulrad and Burchard, Boniface’s participation in the inauguration ceremony as presented in the ARF raises suspicion. The archbishop’s correspondence suggests that he was not a member of Pippin’s inner circle.56 Yet by the 790s, when the ARF were composed, Boniface had become the object of popular veneration as a Carolingian martyr. More importantly, the annalist may have regarded him as a papal legate. As with the symbolic presence of Fulrad and Burchard as Frankish

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54 ARF, s.a. 750: ‘Pippinus secundum morem Francorum electus est ad regem et unctus per manum sanctae memoriae Bonefacii archiepiscopi et elevatus a Franci in regno in Suessionis civitate. Hildericus vero, qui false rex vocabatur, tonsoratus est et in monasterium missus.’
56 McKitterick, ‘Illusion’, 15-16. Boniface seems to have retreated from the corridors of power in 747, after Carloman abdicated. His old age may have been the cause, but a falling out with Pippin remains possible, too. Note for example the anonymous letter to the priest Andhemus (*Letters of Boniface*, no. 79), inquiring whether Boniface had attended Pippin’s or Drogo’s council. We do not have the answer, but Boniface may have stood on the wrong side in a Carolingian family dispute.
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Envoys, Boniface’s involvement in the ceremony, as the person who executed the papal order to make Pippin king, was meant to reaffirm the papal approval for Pippin’s royal elevation and symbolized the close connection between the new king and the papacy.57

After the ARF record Pippin’s royal inauguration, silence set in and the entries for 751 and 752 are left empty. Such a lacuna, whether caused by a lack of information or a reluctance to go into detail, is difficult to camouflage in a narrative organized on a numerical scheme of year entries. Pippin’s inauguration therefore occupies four year-entries, from the purported embassy in 749 to the blank entry for 752.58 A similar gap exists in the Continuations, but while chronicles adhere to a chronological ordering of events, they generally tend to do so on the basis of literary, instead of numeral, principles, making it much easier for the author to mask such gaps.59 The entry for 753 finds Pippin once more on campaign in Saxony, when he learned of Pope Stephen’s arrival. That winter, pope and king deliberated on the papal supplication, during which they were disturbed by Carloman’s unexpected reappearance as a Lombard agent.60 In 754 ‘the aforesaid apostolic Stephen confirmed Pippin with holy chrism in the kingship and with him anointed his two sons, the lord Charles and Carloman as kings.’61

To sum up, the Continuations state that Pippin was made king after having received papal approval. The author reveals little about the contents of the message or the composition of the embassy. The inauguration itself involved an election, a consecration and a formal subjection of the elite, ‘as ancient order required.’ During this ceremony, Bertrada was made queen. However, the author makes no mention of the abdication of King Childeric, nor do they record Pope Stephen’s consecration of Pippin and his sons in 754. Conversely, the ARF, composed in the mid-790s, are quite explicit about both the composition of the Frankish delegation sent to Rome, and the papal reply they carried back with them to Francia: Because Childeric’s lack of potestas regia threatened to disturb the order, he had forfeited his claim to the royal title. The pope judged that whoever wielded royal power should also bear the royal title. Pippin is subsequently elected, anointed and raised to the kingship, according to the Frankish custom. Because the author claims more knowledge about the

57 Palmer, Anglo-Saxons, pp. 86-8.
58 McKitterick, ‘Illusion’, 16; See also: Otter, ‘Functions of fiction’, 110.
59 As noted in chapter 1.5: these typological distinctions should not be applied too strictly. Hybrid categories were common.
60 See above, chapter 4.2.
61 ARF, s.a. 754: ‘Supradictus apostolus Stephanus confirmavit Pippinum unctione sancta in regem et cum eo innumát duós filios eius, dominum Carolum et Carlomannum, in regibus.’
papal verdict in this matter, he could involve Childeric in his account, who was tonsured and sent to the monastery of St Bertin because he was ‘falsely called a king’. The *ARF* do not mention Bertrada, but they do record that in 754 Pippin and his sons received the unction from Pope Stephen.

How might we account for these differences? As argued in chapter three, Childebrand probably ante-dated the so-called division of Vieux-Potiers (742) to 740, when Charles Martel was still alive. In doing so, he made it appear as though Charles had divided his realm between Carloman and Pippin alone, while Charles had most likely included Grifo in his plans as well. If the succession crisis of 741 was considered harmful to the Carolingian reputation, the coup of 751 was probably worse. When three years after the coup, in 754, Pippin’s usurpation was justified through the apostolic sanction provided by Pope Stephen II, Childebrand seized the opportunity to perform the same trick a second time. It was his *auctoritas* that enabled him to retroactively correct the faults that had crept into the weave of his family’s history by antedating the apostolic sanction for Pippin’s royal dignity from 754 to 751.

Childebrand’s solution was to invent a Frankish embassy that had been sent to Rome prior to the coup. Adding as little detail as possible, Childebrand created a compelling account of Pippin’s just seizure of throne, transforming on parchment a usurpation into an apostolically sanctioned succession, and a tyrant into a just king. But even for Childebrand and Nibelung there were limits to how far he could bend the historical perception of his peers. Stephen’s visit to Francia, a spectacular event that had nestled itself firmly in the Frankish collective memory, could not be ignored. When he arrived, three years later, there was no reason to have Pippin anointed a second time. Thus, according to the *Continuations*, Stephen’s sole purpose for coming to Pippin’s court was to petition the Frankish king for help, which the latter graciously granted him.

Childebrand created a compelling fiction, which came to resonate in the *ARF* and in subsequent narratives, up to present-day textbooks dealing with the dynastic transition of 751. The author of the *ARF* did make several modifications, though. To begin with, he identified all the key figures who participated in this dynastic transition. Of course, the *ARF* was foremost a history of Charlemagne and not Pippin, and they could therefore not skimp the

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62 *ARF*, s.a. 750: ‘*false rex vocabatur.*’ Childeric’s exile to St Bertin is recorded in *Gesta abbatum Fontanellensium*, l. 10, c. 4. The text also states that Childeric had a son named Theoderic who was sent to St Wandrille. See Krüger, ‘Grablegen Childeric’s’.

63 See above, chapter 3.2.

64 Fouracre, ‘The long shadow’, 17.

65 If correct in this assumption, it would be a further argument that Childebrand did not actually write his account in 751.
significance of the papal visit of 753/4, at which not only Pippin, but also his sons received the holy unction. Throughout the ninth century, those who attempted to write this history would continue to struggle with these complex narratives. Their sources, whether they were written texts or oral traditions, continued to conflict with each other, causing the historical perception of the dynasty’s foundation to evolve continuously.

5.2. A rhetoric of strength

At the close of the eighth century Paul the Deacon, a Lombard with experience at Charlemagne’s court, wrote the history of his now conquered people. He could not ignore the advent of the Carolingian kings, which occurred when Paul had still been a young man named Warnefrid, and captured the dynastic transition in the following words:

At this time in Gaul when the kings of the Franks were degenerating from their wonted courage (fortitudine) and skill (scientia), those who were regarded as mayors of the palace began to administer the kingly power and to do whatever is the custom for kings, since it was ordained from heaven that the kingdom of the Franks should be transferred to the progeny of these men.66

Paul had witnessed the demise of his people’s sovereignty first hand. When the Lombards had pushed the conquest of the Italian peninsula too hard, a threatened papacy responded by calling upon the Franks to take up the imperial duty of protecting Rome and its property. The formation of the Carolingian dynasty had everything to do with it. Though Lombard independence ended with Charlemagne, it had been Pippin’s soldiers who first marched on Pavia, the seat of the Lombard kings. Twice Pippin’s armies defeated the Lombards, accepting hostages, oaths and plunder on both occasions. But Pippin was not out for conquest and may well have feared to get caught up – more than he already was – in the struggle for power between Lombards, Greeks and Romans. It was Charlemagne who in 774 accepted that the die had already been cast and annexed the Lombard kingdom. Their continued to be pockets of Lombard resistance, and Paul’s brother was arrested during the rebellion of

66 Paul the Deacon, Historia, 1.6, c. 16: ‘Hoc tempore aput Gallias Francorum regibus a solitia fortitudine et scientia degenerantibus, hi qui maiores domui regalis esse videbantur administrare regi potentiam et quicquid regibus agere mos est coeperunt; quippe cum caelitus esse dispositum, ad horum progeniem Francorum transvehi regnum.’ Trans. Foulke, History of the Lombards, p. 262, with minor alterations by the author.
Friuli in 776. Six years later, Paul, already a monk, came to Charlemagne’s court hoping to arrange his brother’s release.

Paul’s learned background made him a valued member of the court community. He composed a series of epitaphs for the dynasty’s dead,67 and was commissioned by Angelram, bishop of Metz, to compose the *Gesta episcoporum Mettensium*, with its strong emphasis on the history of the Carolingian family.68 While residing at the Frankish court, between 782 and 786/7, Paul would have discussed the origins of the Carolingian family with the other literati. Paul’s reference to the dynastic transition in the *History of the Lombards* makes for a difficult comparison with the account in the *ARF*, yet it seems that, despite their different vocabularies, their tenor is strikingly similar. Rather than a sudden revolt, both accounts present the dynastic transition of 751 as the divinely sanctioned finale to a long process of Merovingian decline vis-à-vis Carolingian ascent.

The act of deposing a legitimate ruler and claiming his position was no complex matter; justifying it, on the other hand, was. The earliest solution offered in Frankish historiography was simply not to mention Childeric III. By excluding Childeric from the account, the *Continuations* make it seem as if Pippin’s elevation was not the outcome of a coup, but the conclusion of a power vacuum of unclear origin – though clearly one that was not meant to invite further questions. The *ARF* were less inclined to ignore the Merovingian elephant in the room. Instead, they tried to put it down by explaining why the Franks (rather than the Carolingians) had risen against their king. Since this was no small matter, they asked the pope ‘with regard to the kings in Francia, who at the time did not have royal power, whether this was good or not.’69 The pope confirmed what the Franks had feared, namely that they had been duped by Childeric, who despite his royal lineage was ‘without royal power’ (*sine potestate regia*). Childeric therefore was not really a king at all, but a pretender ‘who was wrongly named king’ (*qui false rex vocabatur*). So as not to disturb God’s divine order, the Franks carried out the papal *auctoritas* and corrected this anomaly. Childeric was removed and Pippin appointed in his place; the royal *nomen et potestas* were once more united in the person of the king.

Notions of strength and power underlie the very concept of kingship, especially in societies where kings figured as leaders of a warrior-elite,70 but to

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68 Goffart, ‘Paul the Deacon’, argues that the text was composed in relation to Charlemagne’s plans for succession.
69 *ARF*, s.a. 749: ‘Interrogando de regibus in Francia, qui illis temporibus non habentes regalem potestatem, si bene fuisset an non.’
70 I am indebted to Bert Demyttenaere for his thoughts on this matter.
use it as an argument for a weak king’s removal was a novelty. According to Edward Peters, ‘the antithesis between *nomen* and *potestas* in these sources is somewhat misleading. The frequent use of these terms in opposition to justify the events of 751 would indicate that they had been traditional terms for the expression of political ideas. This, however, cannot be proven to have been the case.’

Prior to 751, royal *potestas* was the implied royal prerequisite, but it had never been articulated as such, nor had its absence ever been voiced as an excuse for deposing a ruler. From the second half of the seventh century up to 751, Merovingian faineance had been sustained, if not promoted, by an emancipated Frankish elite. In the 790s, the *ARF* thus articulated a new political idea which it retroactively used to justify a four-decade-old coup. In subsequent decades, this justificatory argument was honed to perfection. Around 806, the compilers of the *Annales Mettenses priores* and the *Lorsch Chronicle* would go to great lengths to further emphasize Merovingian degeneracy. Two decades later, this discourse reached its pinnacle in the writings of Einhard and Erchanbert.

### 5.2.1. The *Annales Mettenses priores*

In the *Divisio imperii* of 806, Charlemagne publicized his plans for the division of his realm between his sons in the event of his death. The text has also been associated with the composition of a chronicle known today as the *Annales Mettenses priores*. One purpose of this Carolingian family history was to retrace the family’s imperial character, which it had acquired at Christmas Day 800. For the anonymous chronicler, it was not at Pippin’s coup in 751 that the exalted character of the Carolingians manifested itself for the first time, but rather at his grandfather’s victory at the Battle of Tertry of 687. The main emphasis of the chronicle is on the achievements of the Carolingian mayors of the palace: Pippin II, Charles Martel and Pippin the Short. However, their deeds are recorded in a language which Paul Fouracre and Richard Gerberding have described as being ‘rich with royal innuendo’ and in which Charlemagne’s ancestors are presented with typically royal and imperial predicates, such as *invictissimus*, *nobilissimus*, *gloriosus* and *serenissimus*. According to Fouracre and Gerberding, it was the chronicler’s objective ‘to define for his readers what the nature of *regnum* and *imperium* was in the Frankish historical terms they

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71 Peters, *Shadow King*, p. 52-4. Citation on p. 54.
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understood.' In the prospective view of the *Annales Mettenses priores*, such royal and imperial virtues were part of the genetic makeup of the Carolingian family, which the author expressed by writing their history in an imperial language.

According to the *Annales Mettenses priores*, the Carolingians’ rise to power commenced with the Battle of Tertry in 687. Pippin II is praised as a second David for having as a youth avenged his father’s death. The author furtermore presents him as a leader of exceptional virtue on account of the ‘unconquerable lineage of his forebears’ (*invictissima parentum prosapia*), through divine inspiration and because he had been raised by his saintly next of kin. These qualities were in high demand, since Austrasia in the late seventh century was a realm in crisis:

But on account of the do-nothingness of the kings, domestic disagreements, and civil wars, which had fallen upon many areas of the divided realm, [the assorted peoples of the Frankish world], one by one in their own land and deserting the lawful authority, attempted to defend their freedom with arms.

It was, therefore, this Carolingian ancestor who had worked to keep the realm together. In his attempt to restore order, Pippin, having been appointed mayor of the palace in Austrasia, came head-to-head with the Neustrian king and his mayor, resulting in the famous Battle of Tertry. In colourful prose, the *Annales Mettenses priores* celebrate Pippin’s victory, which expanded Carolingian influence over both the Frankish east and west.

Conversely, the author only dedicated a few short lines to the coup of 751, which Pippin’s like-named grandson enacted. Having had access to the accounts of both the *Continuations* and the *ARF*, the chronicler nonetheless preferred a more sober account of the Carolingian acquisition of the royal title: ‘that year, as a result of the advice of Pope Zachary of the city of Rome, the ruler Pippin, anointed by Archbishop Boniface, was made king of the Franks.’ To this, however, the chronicler added that ‘henceforward rumour of his power (*potentiae*) and fear of his strength spread in all the lands.’

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One reason why the author of the *Annales Mettenses priores* gave relatively little attention to this defining moment in Carolingian history, was because he wished to downplay the role of the papacy in the formation of Carolingian authority. In presenting Pippin II as the founding hero of the Carolingian dynasty, he needed to blend the deeds of his grandson into the narrative. The coup of 751 was therefore not a point of dynastic beginning, but a logical step on the road towards their acquisition of the imperial dignity. In other words, the rhetoric of *nomen* and *potestas* that came together in the vigorous figure of Pippin the Short, as first articulated in the *ARF*, was maintained in the narrative of the *Annales Mettenses priores*, but instead of applying it to a singular event in 751, the author used it for the full span of Carolingian history, from Pippin II’s victory at Tertry in 687 to Charlemagne’s coronation in 800.

The author knew better than to pass off his protagonists as aggressive tyrants. A confrontation between Pippin II and the ‘haughty king’ Theuderic, aided by Bercher, his tyrannical mayor of the palace who acted ‘contrary to the shrewdness of his character and the wisdom of human counsel,’ had become unavoidable.79 In the build-up to the Battle of Tertry, the author presented Pippin and Theuderic as each other’s opposites. For example, when both men addressed their troops on the eve of battle, Theuderic ‘was boasting with hollow words’ (*inanibus verbis gloriabatur*), whereas the author has Pippin treating his followers to a fiery, near-Virgilian speech. *Potestas* and lack thereof was not just made visible in the outcome of battles; it lay in the details as well. However, the true strength of Pippin’s character was revealed after his victory, when he caught up with Theuderic, who by then had fled to Paris, ‘lest [Pippin] would appear to exercise tyranny or barbarity, he reserved with innumerable piety the name of king for [Theoderic]. However, he retained the control and the treasury of the kingdom and the mastery of the whole army for himself, and the administering of his own resources in law.’80 All that was left for his grandson to do, six decades later, was to take the royal *nomen*, the last remnant of the royal status the Merovingians had once enjoyed.

For the author of the *Annales Mettenses priores*, weak Merovingian kingship was the main cause for the many of the wars fought by Charlemagne’s ancestors. Having united the Franks under his rule in 687, Pippin II brought the fight to those living on the edges of the Frankish world, ‘for the leaders of those peoples, having turned into stubbornness, withdrew themselves in evil

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79 *AMP*, s.a. 689: ‘Preter ingenii calliditatem et humani consili sagacitatem.’
80 *AMP*, s.a. 690: ‘Ne tirannidem videretur exercere vel sevitiam, nomen sibi regis inestimabili pietate reservavit. Ipse vero totius regni gubernacula thesaurosque regios et universi exercitus dominationem propriae facultatis iure disponenda retinuit.’
presumption from the rule of the Franks because of the idleness of the [Franks'] former leaders.' Moreover, as the Annales Mettenses priores’s description of a general assembly reveals, the outcome of the Battle of Tertry had completely inverted the hierarchy between king and mayor:

Each year on the Kalend of March [Pippin II] held a general council with all the Franks, according to the custom of the ancients. In which gathering, on account of his respect for the name of king, he ordered [the king], whom he had placed before himself because of the magnitude of his [Pippin’s] humility and clemency, to preside while offerings were received from all the nobles of the Franks (...) and an order was also given to the army that, on whatsoever day it should be determined, they must be prepared to set out for a region which he [Pippin] had chosen. With these things concluded, he sent the king to the royal villa at Montmacq to be kept in custody with honour and respect.82

In reality, these yearly gatherings presented the last major obstacle between the Carolingians and the Frankish throne, since the assembled body of the armed elite provided its ruler with a powerful instrument to eradicate haughty subjects.83

When the Merovingian king Theuderic III died in 690/1, 'moved by piety, his small son Clovis made king by Pippin.' Unfortunately, little Clovis died four years later and was succeeded by his brother, Childebert III (r.694-711). Thus, while kings were coming and going, the author could note that 'by assigning to them the names of kings, [Pippin] kept the reins of the whole realm and governed with the highest glory and honour.' With this, the author is presenting Pippin's 'loyalty' towards his powerless masters as a virtue and, at

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81 AMP, s.a. 691: 'Harum enim gentium duces in contumatiam versi a Francorum se dominio per desidiam precedentium principum iniqua se presumptione abstraxerunt.' Trans: Fouracre and Gerberding, Late Merovingian France, p. 359.
82 AMP, s.a. 692: 'Singulis vero annis in Kalendis Martii generale cum omnibus Franciorum priscorum consuetudinem concilium tenuit. In quo ob regii nominis reverentiam eum, quem sibi ipse pmptor humilitatis et mansuetudinis magnitude prefecerat, presidere iubebat, donec ab omnibus optimatibus Francorum donariis acceptis (...), exercitui quoque precepto dato, ut, quacumque die illis demuntiaretur, parati essent in partem, quam ipse disposuerat, profisci: hic actis regem illum ad Mamaccas villam publicam custodiendum cum honore et veneratione mittebat.' Trans. Fouracre and Gerberding, Late Merovingian France, pp. 360-1.
83 Fouracre, Charles Martel, pp. 29-30.
84 AMP, s.a. 692: 'ob (...) pietatis affectum filius eius parvulus nomine Clodoveus a Pippino ordinatur in regem.'
85 AMP, s.a. 693: 'ills quidem nomina regum imponens, ipse totius regni habens privilegia cum summa gloria et honore tractabant.' Trans. Fouracre and Gerberding, Late Merovingian France, p. 361.
first glance, something that contrasts greatly with the coup his grandson would stage in 751. It might, in fact, be another reason why the author spent so few words on the coup, and why – like the Continuations – he omitted the name of Childeric III. But even Carolingian clemency had its limits: Childeric’s deposition was therefore not presented as an impulsive act, but as the long-awaited solution to an increasingly lopsided political situation that had endured for three generations. In the Annales Mettenses priores, both Pippins faced political disintegration at the start of their reigns. For Pippin II it had been sufficient to seize power, but not the title. For his grandson, however, this no longer sufficed.

The Annales Mettenses priores also offer a radically different relation between Pippin and the papacy. By the time this chronicle was written, in the early ninth century, part of the mystique that apostolic Rome would have enjoyed in the mid-eighth century may have worn off as the relations between the Carolingians and Rome had intensified. Bonds of spiritual kinship had already been formed during Pippin’s reign, when Pope Paul I (757-767) – Stephen’s brother and successor – became the spiritual sponsor of Pippin’s daughter Gisela in 758 and thus compater to Pippin himself. While Pippin may never have set foot in Rome, Bertrada visited Rome in 770 and Charlemagne would visit it on no less than four occasions, until, on Christmas day 800, Pope Leo III (795-816) placed the imperial crown atop his head. By 806, when the Annales Mettenses priores were written, Pope Hadrian I (772-795) had baptized Charlemagne’s youngest son, and respectively crowned his older sons Pippin and Louis kings of Italy and Aquitaine.

Although the author of the Annales Mettenses priores maintains the customary reverence for Rome and its apostolic patrons, he also liberates the Carolingian rulers from Rome’s hold on their position, disassociating their authority from that of Saint Peter’s successors and linking this more directly to the divine sphere. Two passages from the account of Pippin’s reign illustrate this point particularly well. The first case concerns Carloman’s and Pippin’s joint campaign against Odilo in 743, during which they captured a priest by the name of Sergius, who claimed to be a papal legate sent by Rome with orders to prevent the Frankish mayors from attacking Odilo. Pippin, however, saw through the priest’s lies and supposedly said:

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87 ARF, s.a. 801. The literature on this event is vast. For an overview of the sources and their interpretation, see Nelson, ‘Kaiserkrönung'; Collins, ‘Imperial coronation'.
88 ARF, s.a. 780-781.
89 Haselbach, Aufstieg und Herrschaft, pp. 119-131.
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O Lord Sergius, now we have learned that you are not Saint Peter the Apostle, nor do you actually carry a mission of him. For you have said to us yesterday that the apostolic lord had disputed our just claim concerning the Bavarians on his authority and that of Saint Peter, and we have said to you that neither Saint Peter nor the apostolic lord have appointed you to say this thing. You should understand, therefore, that had Saint Peter not found our cause to be just, he would not have helped us in this war today. Now be assured that by judgment of God, through the intercession of Saint Peter, the first of the apostles, which we have not hesitated to undergo, that Bavaria and the Bavarians belong to the imperial rule (imperium) of the Franks.90

While maintaining the appropriate reverence towards apostolic authority, the author nonetheless makes it clear that divine will manifested itself through Carolingian action, not necessarily through papal commands, and most certainly not through the words of some priest pretending to speak on his behalf.

The second example involves the pope more directly and relates to the adventus ceremony of Pope Stephen in the winter of 753. While the Continuations and the Life of Stephen each present the pope’s arrival as if he had been the Prince of the Apostles himself who was approaching, the author of the Annales Mettenses priores paints a much humbler picture:

Coming to this place, the aforesaid pope was honourably received by King Pippin. He lavished many gifts upon the king and his magnates. And the following day, together with his clergy, sprinkled in ashes and dressed in a garment of goat’s hair, laying prostrate on the ground for the mercy of almighty God and the reward of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, he beseeched King Pippin, that he should liberate him and the Roman people from the yoke of the Lombards and from the servitude of the arrogant King Aistulf. And he did not want to rise from the ground before the aforesaid King Pippin with his sons and great men of the Franks extended their hands to him and lifted him from the ground as a sign of future support and liberation.

90 AMP, s.a. 743: ‘O domine Sergi, modo cognovimus, quia tu non es sanctus Petrus apostolus nec legationem illius ex veritate geris. Dixisti enim nobis hesterna die, quod domnus apostolicus ex auctoritate sancti Petri et sua nostram iusticiam de Baiararís contradixxisset, et nos diximus tibi, quod sanctus Petrus nec domnus apostolicus te istam causam non ordinasset dicere. Idcirco scias, si sanctus Petrus cognovisset, quod nostra iusticia non fuisset, hodie in isto bello nobis adiutorium non prestitisset. Nunc vero certus esto, quod per intercessionem beati Petri apostolorum principis, per iudicium Dei, quod subire non distulimus, Bawariam Bawariosque ad Francorum imperium pertinere.’

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Then King Pippin, carrying out every desire of the pope, directed him to the monastery of Saint Dionysius the martyr and instructed him to winter at this place with all honours and diligence.\(^91\)

According to this extraordinary version of events, Pope Stephen is presented before Pippin as a humble penitent, not his apostolic saviour, though the pope's authority and his role in the anointment ceremony of Pippin and his sons are not ignored. It is an extreme example of how the meaning of a ritual was liable to reinterpretation.\(^92\) However, the author's main intention does not appear to have been to portray Stephen as a sinner, but rather may have been an attempt to level the playing field between king and pope. As Haselbach has argued, the author in particular tried to obfuscate Pippin's promises to restore papal lands, enabling him to present Pippin's invasion of Lombardy as a divine ordination (ordonatio divina), instead of compensation for a papal sanction.\(^93\) For the author of the Annales Mettenses priores, it was much more important to present Pippin the Short as a capable successor to his celebrated grandfather, for example by drawing parallels between the Battle of Tertry and Pippin's divinely inspired Lombard wars.\(^94\)

Moreover, writing in 806, when the Carolingian dynasty had firmly established itself, the need to boost papal authority, and with that the weight of its sanction of Carolingian authority, had dissipated. If anything, the author of the Annales Mettenses priores can be seen to release some of the pressure from the inflated image of apostolic authority.\(^95\) After all, now that the Carolingian dynasty appeared firmly in control of the imperial dignity in the West, a higher earthly power to support that claim could scarcely be tolerated. Yet as soon as the foundations of Carolingian power proved to be less solid than anticipated, Rome's spiritual capital was used once again to buttress the Carolingians' claims to leadership.\(^96\)

\(^{\text{91}}\) AMP, s.a. 753: 'Ibique veniens predictus papa a Pippino rege honorifice susceptus est. Qui multa munera tam regi quam et optimatibus eius largitus est. Sequenti die una cum cero suo, aspersus cinere et indutus cilicio, in terram prostratus per misericordiam Dei omnipotentis et merita beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli Pippinum regem obsecrat, ut se et populum Romanum de manu Langobardorum et superbi regis Heistulfi servitio liberaret. Nec antea a terra surgere voluit, quam sibi predictus rex Pippinus cum filiis suis et optimatibus Francorum manum porrigerent et ipsum pro indicio suffragi futuri et liberationis de terra levaret. Tunc rex Pippinus ommem pontificis voluntatem adimplens direxit eum ad monasterium sancti Dionissii martiris eumque ibi cum summo honore et diligentia hiemare precepit.'

\(^{\text{92}}\) See: Buc, 'Nach 754', esp. 30-1.

\(^{\text{93}}\) Haselbach, Aufstieg und Herrschaft, p. 123.

\(^{\text{94}}\) Ibid., pp. 128-31.

\(^{\text{95}}\) Buc, 'Nach 754', 36.

\(^{\text{96}}\) The earliest example is Louis's imperial coronation in Aachen, by Pope Stephen IV in 816. De Jong, Penitential State, pp. 24-5; see also below, chapter 5.3.
5.2.2. The Chronicle of Lorsch

The author of the first section of the *Chronicle of Lorsch*, composed his chronicle in 807, only shortly after the *Annales Mettenses priores*. The chronicle’s outlook on the Carolingian past is in some respects very similar to that of the *Annales Mettenses priores*, if perhaps more attuned to the significance of the events of 751.97 Though both accounts cover roughly the same period, the *Chronicle of Lorsch* is much more concise.98 After 807, when a copy of this chronicle had reached Fulda, it was continued up to 817 independently at both monasteries. Minor changes in spelling aside, the narrative of the first section remained unchanged. For the purpose of this study, I shall limit myself to this initial section, as composed in Lorsch in c. 807.99

The sources used by the author of the *Chronicle of Lorsch* have been subject of debate. Wilhelm Pückert argued that the compiler not only relied on the *Continuations*, the *ARF* and the *Annals of Lorsch*, but also on an earlier redaction of the *Annales Mettenses priores* that is no longer extant. This ‘Lost Chronicle’ was argued to be the missing link that could account for the discrepancies between the narratives of various historiographical texts of the period.100 While such a theory found support in subsequent scholarship, not least of all from Friedrich Kürze, it was eventually dismissed by Hartmut Hoffmann in the 1950s. He maintained that there was no need for a phantom chronicle to account for these variations and argued furthermore that the influence of the *Continuations* on the *Chronicle of Lorsch* was limited to the events up to 741.101 But even though it is evident that the *ARF* is the dominant source for the chronicle’s narrative for the events from 741 onwards, the *Continuations* nevertheless continued to be used for the remainder of Pippin’s reign.102 The *Chronicle of Lorsch* in turn came to be used as the basis for a number of later annalistic writings.

As the manuscripts attest, the narrative of the *Chronicle of Lorsch* is not as rigorously organized as that of a set of annals, nor does it resemble that of a...
5. THE CAROLINGIAN COUP OF 751

chronicle, as for example that of the *Continuations*. The structure of this text appears rather more flexible, being able to adapt to the codicological environment the text inhabits. In four out of the extant seven manuscripts, the *Chronicle of Lorsch* was appended to Bede's *Greater Chronicle* and is made to mimic its structure. The compiler responsible for connecting Bede's text to the *Chronicle of Lorsch* marked the transition with the words: 'Up to this point the priest Bede composed his chronicle, to which we add these matters.' To further promote the continuity between the two texts, the death of Pippin II was calculated according to the years of the Byzantine emperor's reign, thereby using the same system of dating events Bede used in his chronicle. In the remainder of the work, however, the date of the events was no longer linked to the reigns of the Byzantine emperors; the chronicler could switch to a more local brand of imperial authority, namely the Carolingians themselves. It is in his dating that the Lorsch chronicler reveals his indebtedness to the *Annales Mettenses priores* most: the chronicler's transition from the regal years of the Roman emperors to those of the Carolingian mayors (who only later became kings and emperors) signalled the inherent imperial quality of these rulers, making the coronation of 800 nothing more than its formal recognition.

This construction, in which the *Chronicle of Lorsch* is connected to Bede's chronicle, gave the text a classical/imperial, instead of Frankish/royal orientation, that promoted a sense of continuity from the biblical past, via the emperors of Rome and Byzantium, to the Carolingian present. This format not only gave the earlier members of the Carolingian family a distinctly imperial aura, but it also rigorously denied the Merovingians their role in history. Considered too insignificant to be used as a means to date events prior to 751, the Merovingians were overshadowed by their Pippinid mayors. The *Lorsch Chronicle* opens with similar if less refined message: 'And [Pippin II] held the kingdom of the Franks for 27 years, with the kings Clovis, Childebert and Dagobert subjected to him' (*subiectis sibi*).

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103 Ibid., p. 249, n. 2, referring to: Corradini, *Die Wiener Handschrift Cvp 430* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000).
105 *CL*, incipit: 'Hucusque Beda presbyter chronica sua perducit, cui nos ista subiciamus.' This incipit is present in MSS: Valenciennes, BM 330 (St Amand, s. x); Brussels, KB 15835 (St Bertin, s. x); Rome, BAV Pal. lat. 243 (Lorsch, s. ix/x); and Brussels, KB 6439–6451 (St Vaast, s. xi).
107 *CL*, 1, 1, c. 1: 'Obtinuitque regnum Francorum per annos 27 cum regibus sibi subiectis Hludowico, Hildiberto et Dagoberto.'
But unlike the *Annales Mettenses priores*, the author from Lorsch did not centre his attack on the Merovingian reputation around the Battle of Tertry, but focusses on the coup of 751 instead. Borrowing elements from the *ARF* and the *Annales Mettenses priores*, while adding some original material for greater clarity, the author of the *Chronicle of Lorsch* heaped additional scorn onto the Merovingian reputation. Its account of the Carolingian coup starts with the petition the Franks had allegedly sent to Pope Zachary. However, instead of merely inquiring whether it was good that the kings in these days had no royal *potestas*, the author drew a more detailed picture of Merovingian fainance, using elements we already encountered in the *Annales Mettenses priores*. In the *Chronicle of Lorsch*, the legate sent to Rome inquired about kings of the Franks who

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\text{were of the royal lineage and were called kings, and had no royal power in the kingdom, except to the extent that charters and privileges were issued in their name. But they had no power at all; what the mayor of the palace of the Franks wanted, this they did. On the day of the March Field, according to ancient custom, gifts were offered to these kings by the people, and the king sat on the royal throne, with the army standing around him and the mayor of the palace in his presence. And on that day he instructed the king on whatever had been decided by the Franks. On another day, however, [the king] would remain in the palace.}
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108

At this point, the author again (notionally) picks up on the narrative of the *ARF*, and related how Zachary 'responded that it seemed better to him and more useful (utilius) that he would be called king and be king, who had the power in the kingdom than he who was falsely called king.'

Thus Pippin became king and Childeric, to add to the zest of his account, was not merely 'sent' (*missus*), but 'hurled' (*mittitur*) into a monastery.

Thus, although the *Chronicle of Lorsch* closely resembles the *Annales Mettenses priores* thematically, the Lorsch compiler chose fully to invest in the dynastic transition of 751 as a historical break. For the author, this event was

\[108 \text{CL, L. 3, c. 12: ‘Mittit Pippinus legatos Romam ad Zachariam papam, ut interrogarent de regibus Francorum, qui ex stirpe regia erant et reges appelabantur, nulhamque potestatem in regno habebant, nisi tantum quod cartae et privilegia in nomine eorum conscribantur, potestatem vero regiam penitus nulham habebant, sed quod maior domus Francorum volebat, hoc faciebat; in die autem Martis campo secundum antiquam consuetudinem dona illis regibus a populo offerebantur, et ipse rex sedebat in sella regia circumstante exercitu, et maior domus coram eo, praecipiebatque die illo quicquid a Franciis decretum erat; die vero alia et deinceps domi sedebat.’}
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\[109 \text{CL, L. 3, c. 12: ‘[Zacharias] respondit, melius atque utilius sibi videri, ut ille rex nominaretur et esset, qui potestatem in regno habebat, quam ille, qui falso rex appellabatur.’}
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much more important than Pippin’s papal confirmation in 754, of which he merely noted that ‘Pope Stephen anointed the two sons of Pippin, Charles and Carloman, kings.’ After all, Pippin’s position did not require additional papal confirmation: the event of 754 was noteworthy because it also acknowledged Pippin’s sons, Charlemagne and Carloman, as kings of the Franks and Pippin’s royal successors. In other words, if 751 was important because it marked the end of the Merovingian dynasty, 754 was important because it marked the beginning of the Carolingian dynasty.

5.2.3. Einhard’s \textit{Vita Karoli}

Even during the reign of Louis the Pious, the advent of the dynasty remained a sensitive matter. None, however, had created a more lasting and, from a Merovingian point of view more devastating, rendition of the final days of the Merovingian dynasty than Einhard. The debate on the date of composition of Einhard’s \textit{Vita Karoli} is on-going, though historians do agree that it must have been composed at some point between the Arbodrite Revolt of 817 and Lupus’s letter of 827/8, in which he praises Einhard’s work. Within this time frame, those who stick to the traditional view that Einhard had intended his work as a critique on Louis’s reign – the son who could not measure up to his father – argue for a late date. More recently, however, this interpretation has come under attack as the actual evidence in the text for such a critical stance towards Louis proves slim. If no longer connected to the more difficult years of Louis’s reign – i.e. the late 820s and early 830s – then an earlier date of composition becomes possible. Without summarizing a long debate, I will follow Karl-Heinrich Krüger, who links the composition of the \textit{Vita Karoli} to the birth of Charles the Bald in 823.

True to his Suetonian model, Einhard could not simply begin his \textit{Vita Karoli} without first commenting on the origins of the authority and nobility of his protagonist’s background. Charlemagne’s roots were not as long or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{CL}, l. 3, c. 16: ‘Stephanus papa unxit duos filios Pippini in reges Karlum et Carlomanum.’
\item Löwe, ‘Entstehungszzeit’, connects the \textit{VK} to the crisis of 833. In this he follows Lintzel, ‘Einhard’s \textit{Vita Karoli}’; Hauck, ‘Diskussion des Einhard-Bogens’ associates the text’s composition with an earlier crisis in 828/9; Tischler, \textit{Einhart’s Vita Karoli}, argues for a date in the late 820s.
\item Innes and McKitterick, ‘Writing history’, 203–8, connect the \textit{VK} to the \textit{Ordinatio imperii} of 817; Krüger, ‘Datierung’, connects the composition to the birth of Charles the Bald in 823/824. Ganz, ‘Einhard’s Charlemagne’, argued for a date in the late 820s, though he is not convinced that the \textit{VK} was intended as a critique on Louis the Pious; Patzold, ‘Einhards erste Leser’, distances himself from the debate on whether or not Einhard wrote positively or negatively about Louis and instead interprets the \textit{VK} as a document that Einhard wrote to reflect on his own position at court. Patzold nevertheless argues for 827/8 as the text’s date of composition.
\end{itemize}
illustrious as those of the first Roman emperor and Einhard struggled to situate imperial Charlemagne in a tradition of high-placed magistrates that dated back to his great-grandfather Pippin II, of whom he noted that ‘it was the custom of the people to give this honour only to those men who stood out above others because of the nobility of their birth and the extent of their wealth.’\textsuperscript{113} But Einhard was not writing the biography of a prefect of the palace, but ‘of Charles, the most excellent and deservedly most famous \textit{king}.’\textsuperscript{114} Thus, Einhard ingeniously began his narrative with the antithesis of good kingship, by discrediting the last of the Merovingian kings. More explicitly than any of his predecessors, Einhard tore down the Merovingian royal edifice, to make way for the potent leadership of the Carolingians that culminated in the triumphant reign of his own lord and patron, Charlemagne.

Einhard’s opening narrative was strongly influenced by ideas that were already present in the \textit{ARF}, the \textit{Annales Mettenses piores} and the \textit{Chronicle of Lorsch}, which, as we have seen, linked the rise of the Carolingians to Merovingian degeneration. With great literary skill, Einhard honed this notion to perfection:

\begin{quote}
\qquad The family of the Merovingians, from which the Franks used to make their kings, is thought to have lasted until King Childeric, who was deposed and tonsured and forced into a monastery on the order of Pope Stephen. Although it might seem to have ended with him, it had in fact been without any strength for a long time and offered nothing of any worth except the empty name of king.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

Like the \textit{Chronicle of Lorsch}, Einhard emphasized that the Merovingian dynasty had ended long before Childeric had been deposed. The latter was only ‘believed’ (\textit{putatur}) to have been the last king, the one with whom it ‘seemed’ (\textit{videri}) to have ended. In reality, Einhard made clear, these men had been ‘without any strength’ for a long time and carried about them only and ‘empty name of king’ (\textit{inane regis vocabulum}). In his own polished language, Einhard reiterated the view earlier expressed in the \textit{ARF}, namely that a king is ultimately defined by his power and virtue and not by his lineage or outward symbols, such as the length of his hair.

\textsuperscript{113} Einhard, \textit{VK} c. 2. \textit{Qui honor non aliis a populo dari consueverat quam his qui et claritate generis et opum amplitudine ceteris eminebant.} Trans. Ganz, \textit{Einhard and Notker}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{114} Einhard, \textit{VK}, prologue: ‘Karoli, excellentissimi et merito famosissimi regis.’
Childeric was reduced to a pitiful figure: impoverished and living on a small stipend, he hung about his throne, 'with his flowing hair, his beard uncut' (crine profuso, barba summissa) and 'satisfied with the name of king (...) and the appearance of ruling.' Einhard's imagery was meant to point out the inefficacy of these traditional royal symbols. Although foreign ambassadors still presented themselves before the king, they returned with messages the mayor of the palace had whispered into the king's ear. There are close parallels between the narratives of the Chronicle of Lorsch and that of Einhard, who was, after all, a Fulda alumnus himself, and could therefore have been familiar with this chronicle, which arrived in Fulda after 807.

Even Childeric's mode of transport was without vigor: during spring assembly, the king of the Franks was wheeled out of his villa rustico more by ox-cart. Transport by oxen was, in the view of Einhard's audience, a feeble mode of transportation very unbefitting a powerful and noble ruler in the Carolingian mould. Contrary to what has long been argued, however, Einhard was not accusing Childeric of having actually worshipped pagan deities, though, as Paul Barnwell has argued, he may have been familiar with a corpus of texts in which this practice is associated with specific pagan rites and customs. For Einhard, this was merely another argument to point out that Childeric did not embody the qualities that a good Christian king required. Childeric thus came to play the part of the anti-Carolingian: poor, weak, and rustic, he was everything the wealthy, vigorous and noble Carolingians were not.

Since Einhard wrote almost eighty years after the coup, modern historians have occasionally criticized this author for having made certain factual mistakes. After all, it was not Pope Stephen, but his predecessor, Zachary, who had allegedly ordered Childeric's abdication. But can this have been a mere slip of a master's quill? Was it a case of forgetting or misremembering? Einhard had no personal recollection of these events, but relied for his information on collectively remembered constructs and written accounts, not least of which the ARF. These annals clearly identify Pope Zachary as the coup's facilitator and only introduce Stephen when he visited Pippin's court in 753. Nor can the role of the papacy in the coup be in any way considered an insignificant detail, since it was apostolic authority that had justified it, transforming Pippin from a usurper into a king. Einhard clearly subscribed to the view that the role of the

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119 Nelson, ’Bad kingship’, 4-6.
papacy was central in this affair, as witnessed by the place it occupies in
his
text, namely as the opening statement of his treatise.

Instead of perceiving this as a pontifical mix-up, it should be viewed as a
solution to an older problem, or rather: an older tension. The authors of the
Continuations and the ARF manipulated in their accounts the history of the
dynasty's formation. Their version of events differed from what their contem-
porary readership would have recalled – tension got built into these texts, as it
were. Not everyone may have been comfortable with the invention of Zachary's
justification of Pippin's palace coup in 751. Einhard's solution may well have
been an attempt to take off some of the pressure by leaving out Zachary's name
and replacing him with that of his successor, who, as all recalled, actively
participated in the dynastic transition.

Nor was this all Einhard did. In chapter three, he wrote: 'Pippin, who had
been mayor of the palace, was made king by the authority of the Roman pope
and he ruled the Franks on his own for fifteen years or more.'\footnote{Einhard,
VK, c. 3: 'Pippinus autem per auctoritatem Romani pontificis ex praefecto palatii rex
constitutus, cum per annos XV aut eo amplius Francis solus imperaret'. Trans. Ganz,
Einhard and Notker, p. 20.} But Pippin had
died in 768, which means Einhard dated Pippin's royal inauguration to 754
instead of 751. He therefore did not just take the problematic pope out of the
equation, but by-passed the problematic coup by integrating it into Pippin's
more festive royal confirmation by Pope Stephen. Einhard did not compose a
set of annals or a chronicle, but a history, which freed him from the rigors of
chronology, and allowed him to inconspicuously create one event where there
used to be two.

5.2.4. The Breviary of Erchanbert

In c. 827, not long after Einhard had completed his literary masterpiece in
Aachen, a short historical treatise was composed in Alemannia, probably at the
monastery of St Gall,\footnote{The origins of this text has been determined on the basis of certain unique textual references to
political events taking place in Alemannia, the Alemannian provenance of the extant three
manuscripts (one of which comes from Sank Gallen), and the codicological context of the codex
Stuttgart, Würtembergische Landesbibliothek jur. Qu. 134, containing legal texts with an
Alemannian focus.} entitled the Breviary of the kings of the Franks and the
mayors of the palace. The text is extant in two independent copies, a late ninth-
century copy now kept at the Vatican and a tenth-century copy preserved in
Stuttgart.\footnote{The Breviary is extant in Rome, BAV, Reg. Lat. 713 (s. ix); Stuttgart, Würtembergische
Landesbibliothek jur. Qu. 134 (s.x); and Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek 547 (s. xii), which is a copy of

120 Einhard, VK, c. 3: 'Pippinus autem per auctoritatem Romani pontificis ex praefecto palatii rex
constitutus, cum per annos XV aut eo amplius Francis solus imperaret'. Trans. Ganz, Einhard and
Notker, p. 20.

121 The origins of this text has been determined on the basis of certain unique textual references to
political events taking place in Alemannia, the Alemannian provenance of the extant three
manuscripts (one of which comes from Sank Gallen), and the codicological context of the codex
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122 The Breviary is extant in Rome, BAV, Reg. Lat. 713 (s. ix); Stuttgart, Würtembergische
Landesbibliothek jur. Qu. 134 (s.x); and Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek 547 (s. xii), which is a copy of}
composition, running from Pippin I (d. 639/640) to Charles Martel. The tenth-century copy, on the other hand, contains the full span of the *Breviary* and provides a record of Frankish history from King Faramund to Louis the Pious, at which point the text was continued by Notker the Stammerer. A computation of 242 years, from the reign of King Chlothar II (d. 629) to 'the currently thirteenth year of Emperor Louis,' places the composition of this section of the *Breviary* in 827. For an analysis of the composition and meaning of the *Breviary*, on which very little research has been done to date, see appendix 3.

Because the name 'Erchanbert' features in the margin of the Vatican manuscript, it is assumed to be the name of the author. However, the otherwise unknown Erchanbert lacked both Einhard's network and literary skill. He also was not interested in the deeds of either Charlemagne or Louis, during whose reign he composed his text. Instead, Erchanbert painted the rise of Carolingian prominence against a backdrop of Merovingian decline in a narrative ranging from Pippin I (d. 639/640) to Louis the Pious. In line with Einhard and the author of the *Chronicle of Lorsch*, Erchanbert presented Pippin's coup as the climax of this transition. For Erchanbert, the history of the Carolingian rise to power began with the reunification of the Frankish realms under Chlothar II in 610, which, he

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123 Stuttgart, Würtembergische Landesbibliothek jur. Qu. 134. On the continuation by Notker, see: Simson, 'Monachus Sangallensis'.

124 Erchanbert, *Breviarium*, p. xlix: 'A Chlothario rege in praesens xiii anno Ludovici imperatoris constat in summa numerus annorum ccccxxi decem.' To arrive at 827, the author needs to have had additional information, as the internal computation is 29 years short. To account for these, it is possible that the author calculated from the start of Chlothar's reign as king of Neustria, and not the moment of the Frankish reunification. Also, there is confusion about the final stage of Charles Martel's reign: unaware of the interregnum (737-742) and Childeric III's installation afterwards, the compiler stated that Theuderic had reigned for six years (copied from the *Liber historiae Francorum*), yet argued that it was Theuderic whom Pope Stephen commanded to be abdicated.

125 Rome, BAV Reg. lat. 713 (s. ixv) was originally attached to Leiden, Universitätsbibliothek, Voss. Lat. Q.5, forming an almost complete copy of the *Chronicle of Fredegar*. Description in Collins, *Fredegar-Chroniken*, pp. 68-9. Bischoff, 'Die karolingische Minuskel', p. 218, no. 378. He later argued for a less specific date and place: s. vii/v, originating from the Bodensee area. The *Chronicle of Fredegar* runs from l.2, c. 36 and ends at l. 21 (fol. 62v). Slipping a single line, a later hand dated to the late ninth-century added the *Breviary* (fol. 62v, l. 23- fol. 63v, l.29). The beginning of the *Breviary* is not marked with an initial, title or incipit, though in the same hand the name 'erchanb' is added in the margin.
argued, had been accomplished ‘with the advice and support of Pippin the Elder, who at that time was mayor of the palace.’

Although Erchanbert relied foremost on the Liber historiae Francorum, this particular passage corresponds much more closely to the Chronicle of Fredegar, which states that ‘Chlothar entered Austrasia with [the help of] the faction of Arnulf, Pippin and the other magnates,’ leading to the aforesaid reunification. The Liber historiae Francorum does not yet mention Pippin at this point, but introduces him later on as a duke who was sent by Chlothar to assist his son, Dagobert I (r. 623-639), as king of Austrasia. Erchanbert tweaked this account and presented Pippin as Dagobert’s ‘mayor of the palace and tutor’ (maior domus ac paedagogum), even though Dagobert was ‘already an adult’ (iam adulto). Erchanbert thus created a scene in which the Pippinids were already the driving force behind Merovingian politics at the start of the seventh century.

The Pippinid focus is temporarily lost in the commotion that followed the death of Pippin I and the crisis that ended in the brutal death of his son and successor, Grimoald. Erchanbert, unwilling to compromise his triumphant narrative, at this point conveniently shifts his attention to the Neustria kings and mayors, until Bertharius is said to be succeeded in that region by Pippin II. That this was the outcome of Pippin’s victory at Tertry, as celebrated in the Annales Mettenses priores, receives no attention from Erchanbert. Instead, the author chose this point to interrupt the steady rhythm of his chronicle by commenting on the changing relation between king and mayor:

Hence, the kings assumed the title (nomen), but not the dignity (honores). Nevertheless, when this was arranged, there was abundant sustenance for them. And they were under perpetual custody, so that they could not achieve anything without the legitimation of their power (iure potestatis). For at that time and thereafter, Godfrid, duke of the Alemanni, and various dukes around him refused to be submissive to the dukes of the Franks, because they were unable to

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126 Erchanbert, Breviary, p. xlv: ‘(... consilio et adiutorio Pipini senioris, qui tunc temporis Maior domus erat.’
127 Chronicle of Fredegar, 1. 4, c. 40: ‘Chlotharius factione Arnulfo et Pippino vel ceteris procerebus Auster ingreditur.’
128 Liber historiae Francorum, c. 41: ‘Eratque Chlothario rege tunc filius nomine Dagobertus, puer efficax atque strenuus, ad omnia solers, versatissimus. Quem rex adultum una cum Pippino duce in Auster regnaturum direxit. Austrasii vero Franci superiores congregati in unum, Dagobertum super se regem statuunt.’
129 Erchanbert, Breviary, p. xlv. N.B. In LHF, c. 42, Dagobert is called enutritor Francorum. This episode is not present in the Chronicle of Fredegar.
130 See above, chapter 1, n. 2.
131 Erchanbert, Breviary, p. xlvii: ‘Maior domus Bertharius, quo occiso Pipinus iunior filius Ansgisi, veniens de Austrasii, successit in principatum maiorum domus.’
serve the Merovingian kings, as had previously been their custom. For that reason each one kept to himself, until finally after the death of Duke Godefrid, Charles and the other leaders of the Franks gradually endeavoured to recall them, as best as they could.\textsuperscript{132}

Thus Erchanbert introduces the \textit{nomen/potestas} disjunction for the first time: the Merovingian kings no longer ruled on account of their own \textit{potestas}, but had come to rely on the strength and loyalty of the Frankish dukes instead. The plot is similar to that encountered in the \textit{Annales Mettenses priores} and the \textit{Chronicle of Lorsch}. Instead of opposing their Merovingian lords, the Carolingian ancestors are presented as their valiant defenders, even though this inverted the traditional hierarchy between king and mayor – as Erchanbert’s readership would have understood. Despite their good intentions, Erchanbert claimed, this led to a conflict of authority between the Pippinid mayors and the ‘non-Frankish’ dukes of Alemannia and its neighbouring provinces, who were accustomed to take orders from a Merovingian king, not his mayoral protectors. Again, therefore, it is weak kingship, rather than mayoral ambition, that is said to have destabilized Frankish politics – no matter how hard men like Charles Martel and his Frankish dukes struggled to maintain the status quo.

While Charles and his sons were busy running the kingdom, Merovingian finiance supposedly took a turn for the worse: ‘it was said that the aforesaid King Theoderic [IV] held the name, not the royal power, but with lesser dignity than the previous kings, except for when they inserted their name and year at the bottom of the page when the aforesaid leaders had composed charters.’\textsuperscript{133}

This last note reveals Erchanbert’s indebtedness to the \textit{Chronicle of Lorsch}.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{132} Erchanbert, \textit{Breviary}, p. xlvi: ‘Ex hinc reges nomen, non honorum habere coeperunt: quibus tamen, ubi constitutum fuerat, victus fuerat exsuperans, custodiaque iugis erga illos habebatur, ne alienum agere possint. Illis namque temporibus ac deinceps Gotefredus dux Alemannorum, caeterisque circumsaeque duces, noluerunt obtemperare ducibus Francorum, eo quod non potuerunt regibus Merovei servire, sicut antea soliti erant. Ideo se unusquisque secum tenuit, donec tandem aliquando post mortem Gotefredi ducis, Carolus caeterique principes Francorum paulatim ad se revocare illos arte, qua poterant, studuerunt.’

\textsuperscript{133} Erchanbert, \textit{Breviary}, p. xlvii: ‘Interea tamen, ut aiunt, praefatus Theodericus rex nomen, non regnum tenuebat, sed minore dignitate, quam antiores reges habebant, nisi tamen, ut quando praedicti principes chartas traditionum fecerant, in fine pragninolae suum nomen annuque inserebant.’

reach this conclusion, but it took a pope to come to Francia and spell it out for them:

Before Pippin was raised to the kingship, Pope Stephen came from Rome to the territory of the Franks, in order to petition the aforesaid ruler so that he may be a source of help to him with regard to Aistulf, king of the Lombards, because he seized many cities, as well as various places and territories, from Saint Peter. The aforementioned ruler is said to have responded: ‘I have a lord king; I do not know what he wants to decide next.’ And the pope himself begged for help from the king with similar entreaties. The king then said: ‘Can’t you see, pope, that I do not execute the royal dignities and powers? How can I act upon any of these matters?’ ‘You’re right,’ answered the pope, ‘this is rightly said, because you are not worthy of such an honour.’ And returning to the ruler Pippin he said: ‘On the authority of Saint Peter I instruct you: tonsure him and relegate him to a monastery. For whatever land he controls, he is useful neither to himself, nor to others.’ After he was immediately tonsured and thrown into a monastery, the pope said to the ruler: ‘The Lord and the authority of Saint Peter choose you, that you may be prince and king of the Franks.’ And immediately having constituted and blessed him in the kingship, he consecrated his two still young sons, Charles and Carloman, to be kings. At that King Pippin promised to do everything as it would have pleased him [the pope]; which indeed he did subsequently. And king Pippin ruled after his consecration for seventeen years.135

In a direct and almost laconic style, Erchanbert presented Pippin as his king’s loyal subject, though naturally his loyalty to Saint Peter outweighed that to his king. Pope Stephen, on the other hand, was less tolerant of the king’s inability to

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135 Erchanbert, Breviary, p. xlviii: ‘Pipinus namque antequam ad regem sublimaretur venit Papa de Roma, nomine Stephanus, ad fines Francorum, ut praedictum principem peteret, quatenus ei causa auxili sui papae apud Haistulfum regem Longobardorum, quia de S. Petro tam civitates, quam caetera loca ac fines habuisset possessos. Fertur, respondisse praefatum principem: ’habeo dominum regem; ignoro, quid inde velle definire.’ At ipse Papa ad regem idem sermonibus auxilium flagitavit. Tunc rex, ’vides ne,’ inquit, ’Papa, quod dignitatis regiae ac potestatis non fungor? Quomodo possum hunc horum aliquid agere?’ ’Vere,’ inquit Papa, ’hoc iuste convenit, quia non es dignus semper regis honoris.’ Reversusque ad principem Pipinum aiebat: ’ex auctoritate S. Petri ibi praebi, tondere hunc, et destina in monasterium; ut quid terram occupat? nec sibi, nec alis utilis est.’ Statim tonso, ac in monasterium retruso tunc Papa ad principem: ’te elegit Dominus et auctoritas S. Petri, ut sis princeps et rex super Francos.’ Et statim illum in regem constituens ac benedicens, filiosque eius duos adhuc teneros, Carlum et Carlomanum, in reges consecravit. At ille Pipinus rex se omnia facturum spopondit; sic ut illi complacuerit; sicut et postea fect. Regnavitque Pipinus rex post consecratorem sui annis XVII.’
act and proposed to make Pippin, his energetic mayor, king instead. The effect Erchanbert invokes is comparable to that of Einhard, in that he combines the coup of 751 and the papal confirmation of 754 into a single event. However, Erchanbert presents Theudric IV (d. 737) as the last Merovingian king instead of Childeric III. This may have been an innocent mistake, since Erchanbert’s chief source, the Liber historiae Francorum, ends with the reign of Theuderic. Such mistakes occurred more often at St Gall: the Annales Sangallenses maiores, composed in the mid-tenth century, do identify Childeric as the last Merovingian, but added that he ‘at his baptism was called by another name Daniel’ and therefore confuse Childeric III (r. 743-754) with Chilperic II (r. c. 715-721). Another possibility is that Erchanbert ‘mistake’ was intentional: if the goal was to have the Carolingian mayors appear as loyal protectors to the Merovingian dynasty, a five-year-interregnum becomes somewhat difficult to explain.

The similarities between Erchanbert’s Breviary and earlier narratives, notably the Annales Mettenses priores (806), the Chronicle of Lorsch (807) and Einhard’s Vita Karoli (c. 823?), tend to be notional rather than literal, as is the case in the earlier section of the Breviary, for which the author borrowed extensively from the Liber historiae Francorum. Except for the latter text, we cannot be certain that Erchanbert had exemplars of the other texts at his disposal, but if not, the similarities between these accounts at least suggests that Erchanbert had known them, and that these histories may therefore have circulated, if not in writing, than perhaps in spoken form.

Pertz may have made a mistake in dismissing the earlier section of the Breviary as an epitomized version of the Liber historiae Francorum. Because the earliest version of the Breviary, as witnessed in Rome, BAV Reg. lat. 713, only contains the section relating to Carolingian history, we cannot be certain that the epitomized version of the Liber historiae Francorum was appended by Erchanbert in c. 827, or that it was added as late as the tenth century. Regardless of its time of composition, the compiler’s selection of what he copied and what he omitted was not arbitrary and conveys a very potent and clear message about how he viewed Pippin’s reign. The ‘extended Breviary,’ as extant in the tenth-century Stuttgart manuscript, no longer exclusively related Carolingian history, but by adding an account of Merovingian history obtained a cyclical dimension, in which dynasties rose and fell. The compiler placed a particularly strong emphasis on the heroic conversion and baptism of Clovis I, praised as a New Constantine. Clovis’s successors, who follow each other in

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136 Annales Sangallenses maiores, s.a. 754 (752): ‘qui a baptismo alio nomine vocatus est Daniel.’
5. The Carolingian Coup of 751

rapid succession in the account, only served to form an unbroken chain of kings that linked Clovis to Chlothar II, and thus to the advent of Carolingian power and Pippin's elevation to the kingship.

The effect is as spectacular as it is unique in Frankish historiography: a juxtaposition is created between Clovis I and Pippin the Short, the two founders of the great royal dynasties of the Franks, each presented as a champion of Christianity. It was a history of Constantine being invoked again and again. Pippin's successors, Charlemagne and Louis, appear as important to the author as the successors of Clovis had been. Following Pippin's elevation, the chronicler pauses only to note that Charlemagne was consecrated emperor by Pope Leo III, which in the context of the *Breviary* echoes Pippin's consecration by Stephen II. The roles of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, who are normally at the heart of ninth-century Carolingian historiography, now serve to emphasize the enduring success of Pippin's deeds, or perhaps the author is even signalling that the Carolingian dynasty was already in decline.

5.3. Hilduin's workshop

With Einhard and Erchanbert, the rhetoric of Carolingian *potestas* as opposed to Merovingian weakness had reached its zenith. They composed their narratives at a time when the Carolingians ruled uncontestedly over a vast empire that had no equal in the Latin West since Rome's decline. In 833, this spell of boundless Carolingian *virtus* was broken when Emperor Louis the Pious was presented before a Frankish assembly at the monastery of St Médard in Soissons, where he was made to publically confess his sins, lay his weapons aside and change his dress to that of a penitent.\(^{137}\) Albeit temporarily – within a year Louis had managed to regain the upperhand – the emperor had effectively been made powerless.\(^{138}\) After his restoration, new solutions would be necessary to secure the foundations of Carolingian authority, as the events of 833 had painfully exposed that even emperors could lack the *potestas* to keep the peace. In 835, Abbot Hilduin of St Denis and archchaplain at Louis's court, formulated such a reorientation on the historical foundations of Carolingian authority. In a short text known as the *Gesta Stephani*, Hilduin recalled the ceremony of 754, at which Pope

\(^{137}\) Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 49.

Stephen II had consecrated Pippin and his two sons as kings of the Franks. Contrary to earlier traditions, Pippin’s royal inauguration was no longer explained in terms of Carolingian strength versus Merovingian weakness, but came to rest solely on the authority of the bishop of Rome. But before we turn to Hilduin’s writings, we first need to dispel the persistent myth that the text known as the Clausula de unctione Pippini – which Hilduin had allegedly used as his source – is an eyewitness account of the proceedings at St Denis in 754.

5.3.1. The Clausula de unctione Pippini

The Clausula de unctione Pippini is a short text comprising of two parts: a rather elaborate dating clause and a short historical note on the events of 751 and 754.\(^{139}\) The text concludes with a papal blessing for the Frankish nobility, followed by an interdict that states that ‘they may never in time presume to elect a king from the loins of another, except from those whom divine goodness has seen fit to exalt and has decided to confirm and consecrate by the intercession of the holy Apostles through the hand of their vicar, the most blessed pontiff.’\(^{140}\) The main argument for the text’s purported contemporaneity is the section containing the dating clause. Using three independent dating methods, its author established that ‘this little book’ (hic libellus) was written in 767.\(^{141}\) Doubts about the validity of this claim already existed in the nineteenth century, but the text’s most renowned critic was Max Buchner, who argued in 1926 that the Clausula was a late ninth-century forgery, created by Abbot Gauzlin of St Denis in the 880s.\(^{142}\) Buchner mistakenly believed that Gauzlin had been a supporter of the Carolingian scion Louis the Child, whose claims were challenged by Count Hugh of Paris.\(^{143}\) In Buchner’s view, the Clausula was intended as a polemical text, meant to remind the Frankish nobility of their loyalty to Pippin’s royal line and the consequences should they forsake their oaths. To support his claim that the Clausula could not have been contemporary, mid-eighth-century account, Buchner presented a score of argu-

\(^{140}\) Clausula, lines 21-4: ‘[francorum principes] tali omnes interdictu et excommunicationis lege constrinxit, ut numquam de alterius lumbis regem in evo presumant eligere, sed ex ipsorum quos et divina pietas exaltare dignata esse et sanctorum apostolorum intercessionibus per manus vicarii ipsorum beatissimi pontificis confirmare et consecrare disposit.’  
\(^{141}\) Clausula, line 1.  
\(^{142}\) Buchner, Die Clausula.  
\(^{143}\) Stoclet, ‘La Clausula’, 22-3. Stoclet points to Werner, ‘Gauzlin von Saint Denis’, who argues that Gauzlin was not in Louis’s camp, but in that of Count Hugh.
ments. But while some of these have real merit, others have been refuted with considerable ease, which for a long time resulted in a general rejection of Buchner's thesis. 144

Though many of Buchner's arguments were easily refuted, the Clausula's lengthy dating clause, disproportionate to the size and contents of the historical note it preceded, remained difficult to explain. A convincing theory was put forward by Ernst Schulz, who argued that the dating clause was in fact intended as a colophon. This colophon did not relate to the short historical notice about Pippin's royal confirmation, but to the copy of the Libri VIII miracolorum of Gregory of Tours that preceded the Clausula in the extant manuscripts. 145 Schulz's key argument is the word libellus, or 'little book', which poorly reflected the few lines that make up the Clausula, but resonates rather well with Gregory's work, to which Gregory in his prologue refers as 'libelli'. 146 The historical note, Schulz reasoned, must have been added at a later stage, written on the last blank lines of a codex originally produced in the scriptorium of St Denis, in 767.

In 1970, Haselbach vindicated some of Buchner's arguments, arguing furthermore that the critique against Buchner's less convincing arguments had drawn attention away from his central and more convincing thesis, namely that the relation between the Clausula de unctione Pippini and Hilduin's Gesta Stephani should be inverted. 147 Buchner's conviction that the Clausula was of late ninth-century date led him to conclude that Hilduin's Gesta Stephani (835), to which the historical note of the Clausula bears a strong resemblance, must have been used as its source, and not the other way around as had previously been assumed. Alain Stoclet also consented to this point. On the basis of Schulz's premise, Stoclet reconstructed the manuscript tradition of the Clausula, arguing that the original composition, which contained Gregory's Libri VIII miracolorum and the colophon, had been produced at St Denis in 767. At some point, this manuscript ended up in St Gall, where it was copied in combination with Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek cod. 577. According to Stoclet, when in the tenth century this combined manuscript was copied at Reichenau,
the scribe must have added a small historical note that related to Pippin’s royal confirmation and the nobility’s sworn fidelity toward the reigning dynasty.

The *Clausula de unctio ne Pippini*, as modern historians have come to recognize it, thus consists of a contemporary colophon dated to 767 and a tenth-century historical note on the events of 754. In the tenth century, the matter of fidelity to the Carolingian dynasty had once more become a relevant issue as the old Carolingian claims were being contested by local strongmen, giving the memory of Pippin’s royal elevation in 754 a new lease of life. The *Clausula* can no longer be considered a contemporary witness to the events of 754, but originated in the tenth century. Its source, however, was Hilduin’s *Gesta Stephani* – a short account of Stephen’s confirmation of Pippin’s kingship which had been commissioned by Louis the Pious in 834, shortly after he had been restored to his former dignity.

5.3.2. Hilduin’s *Gesta Stephani*

According to the *Annals of St Bertin*, the captors of Emperor Louis the Pious ‘harassed him for so long that they forced him to lay aside his weapons and change his garb, banishing him to threshold of the Church.’ Effectively, the emperor could no longer perform his duties as a protector of the *ecclesia*. When news reached Pippin of Aquitaine and Louis the German of their brother Lothar’s maltreatment of their father, they switched allegiances and marched on Aachen to liberate Louis. Lothar fled south on 28 February 834, leaving his father to be restored to his former status. Since it was through a carefully orchestrated ritual that Louis was publically turned into a penitent, it required additional ritual to revert the transformation, and regird the emperor with the weapons symbolizing his ability to execute his *ministerium*. In a series of carefully concerted reconciliations, Louis patched up his battered image and mended the broken bond between the head of the empire and the body of the elite. As Louis realized, this was not the time to bear grudges; those who had forsaken their emperor on the Rotfeld, among whom his archchaplain Hilduin, were pardoned and restored to their former positions.

The first step on the route to Louis’s restoration was not set in Aachen, where Louis had been crowned emperor by Charlemagne in 813, nor in the cathedral of Rheims, where in 817 his imperial dignity was confirmed by Pope

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149 *Annals of St Bertin.*, s.a. 833, p. 7: ‘illum vexaverunt, quousque arma deponere habitumque mutare cogentes, liminis ecclesiae pepulerunt.’
Stephen IV (816-817); rather, ‘the emperor (...) wanted to be reconciled in the church of St Denis by episcopal ministration and consented to be girded with his arms at the hand of the bishops.’\textsuperscript{151} Louis had good reasons to choose the monastery of St Denis, with which the Carolingian family had a close historical bond. After his reinstatement in the presence of relics of Dionysius, Louis felt indebted to the martyr. In a letter he afterwards wrote to Abbot Hilduin of St Denis, the emperor reminisced about the monastery’s former royal patrons. After Dagobert I, patronage of the monastery had fallen to the Carolingians. Charles Martel, or so Louis was convinced, owed his reign to the martyr in whose presence he would later be buried, as would his son Pippin, Louis’s grandfather. In thinking of the role St Denis had played in his family’s history, Louis could scarcely pass over the ceremony of 754, which had turned his family into a royal dynasty. Louis recalled in his letter how

\begin{quote}
[Pippin] was proclaimed during the solemn rites of mass along with his two sons, that with Caroman and our lord and father of blessed memory Charles, deservedly called ‘the Great’, received the said apostolic pope anointed in the kingship of the Franks, he gained the blessing of the heavenly gift.\textsuperscript{152}
\end{quote}

The memory of this important event marking the beginning of the dynasty explains why Louis had wished to be restored in the basilica of St Denis. However, the purpose of Louis’s letter to Hilduin was not to recall the historical ties between the royal family and St Denis, but to commission a codex that contained all the known texts – histories in Greek and Latin, as well as charters and liturgical texts – dedicated to the martyr Dionysius.\textsuperscript{153} In addition, Louis requested from Hilduin: ‘that you may bring together the revelation revealed by the blessed Pope Stephen in the church of the same most holy Dionysius, just as it was composed by him, and the deeds which are attached to this, along with


\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Epistolae variorum}, no. 19, p. 326, lines 30-33: ‘[Pippinus] dedicatum est inter sacra missarum sollemnia una cum duobus filiis, Karomanman videlicet et divae memoriae domno ac genitori nostro Karolo iure praenosinato Magno, ab eodem apostolico papa in regem Francorum unctus superni muneras benedictionem percepit.’

\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 327, lines 4-16. In 827, Louis received a Greek history of Dionysius the Aeropagite from the Byzantine court. This Dionysius came to be identified as Dionysius the Martyr. Hilduin made the first Latin copy of the text, though John Scotus soon made another. See: Spiegel, \textit{Past as text}, pp. 140-142.
the hymns that you have about that most glorious martyr and the pope, and the nocturnal office.' \(^{154}\)

The ‘Dionysius-codex’, which Louis commissioned, is no longer extant. However, some of the texts that had been composed for this purpose still are. Among these is the *Gesta Stephani*, a text that above all recalled how on 27 July 754, Stephen 'anointed as kings of the Franks the most prosperous King Pippin and his two sons Charles and Carloman.' \(^{155}\) Not Pippin's royal confirmation is the central issue of the *Gesta*, but, more generally, the formation of the Carolingian royal dynasty and its close association with the monastery of St Denis and the papacy. In addition to the papal anointing of Pippin, Hilduin related how Charlemagne and Carloman received the holy unction, and how Bertrada was formally recognized (consignavere) as Pippin's wife. \(^{156}\) The Frankish nobility also received an apostolic blessing, but, more importantly, Pope Stephen obliged and had [them] testity, that in the future they would never dare to install a king over them from another lineage, or descended from whatever other family, except from the line of those, who divine providence has deigned to elect in order to protect the holiest apostolical see, as well as to elevate and consecrate with the holiest oil, through him that is the vicar of Saint Peter, and in fact of out Lord Jesus Christ. \(^{157}\)

In addition to emphasizing the bond between the papacy and Carolingian royal authority, Hilduin also strengthened the ties between Rome and his monastery. The *Gesta* relates how Stephen placed a 'pallium of the apostolic dignity' atop the altar, as well as the keys to the celestial kingdom. \(^{158}\) In return, the pope took relics of the martyr Dionysius with him to Rome, whose cult would continue to

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\(^{154}\) Epistolae variorum, no. 19, p. 327, lines 17-20: ‘ut revelationem ostensam beato papae Stephano in ecclesiam eiusdem sanctissimi Dionisii, sicut ab eo dictata est, et gesta quae ei sem subnixa sunt, una cum ymnis, quos de hoc gloriosissimo martire atque pontifice habes, et officium nocturnum subiungas.’

\(^{155}\) Hilduin, *Gesta Stephani*, lines 5-6: ‘Unxit in reges Francorum florentissimum regem Pippinum et duo filios eius Karolum et Karlomanum.’

\(^{156}\) Hilduin, *Gesta Stephani*, lines 7-8. The vocabulary of Betrada’s blessing (gratia septiformis Spiritus sancti in Dei nomine consignavit) appears to have been borrowed from the *Constitutum Constantini*. See the discussion in Haselbach, *Aufstieg*, pp. 193-200.

\(^{157}\) Hilduin, *Gesta Stephani*, lines 9-13: ‘Obligavit et obtestatus est, ut numquam de altera stirpe per sucedentium temporum curricula ipsi vel quiue ex eorum progenie orti regem super se presumant aliquo modo constituere nisi de eorum propagine, quos et divina providentia ad sanctissimam apostolica sedem tuendam eligere et per eum, videlicet vicarium sancti Petri, immo domini nostri Ihesu Christi, in potestatem regiam dignata est sublimare et unctione sacratissima consecrare.’

\(^{158}\) Ibid., line 15: ‘pallium apostolicae dignitatis.’
flourish in the apostolic city. In his enthusiasm to collect all there was to find on his patron saint, Hilduin managed to combine his Parisian martyr, the Greek Aeropagite and the third-century Roman pontiff into a single saint. What Hilduin therefore created was a powerful nexus between the papacy and the Frankish monarchy, which he attached to the locus of St Denis, where it would endure until the French Revolution.159

In the Gesta Stephani, the Carolingian rulers and their nobles remain a passive presence. Also, there is no trace of the rhetoric of nomen et potestas. Only the pope, acting as the intermediary between the secular and the divine, is seen to actively confer the divinely inspired royal dignity onto the members of the new dynasty. We are left, therefore, with a tradition in which Carolingian royal authority is founded exclusively on episcopal authority, as represented by the bishop of Rome. Hilduin’s conception of the foundation of Carolingian authority is no antithesis to the earlier rhetoric of Carolingian strength versus Merovingian weakness, but rather its alternative. In light of the events of 833, the idea that the Carolingian authority was based on its potestas had lost some of its efficacy. Strength would of course remain an important quality for a ruler, but it was in itself no longer a suitable criterion on which to base one’s royal status, as it had been been in the early days of the dynasty. Hilduin adhered to a new reality, in which the Frankish episcopacy presented itself as the only valid mediator between divine authority and Carolingian leadership.160 It was a reality that Louis could not ignore: in 833 bishops had forced him to surrender his arms and, one year later, Louis was reconciled again ‘by episcopal ministration’ and ‘girded with his arms at the hand of the bishops.’161

5.4. Conclusion

The Carolingian dynasty came to be formed in two stages, namely Pippin’s coup of 751 and its apostolic confirmation in 754, during which Pippin’s sons, Charlemagne and Carloman, were also consecrated kings of the Franks. The first event marked the end of the Merovingian dynasty; the second gave the new dynasty a future. The lack of information in contemporary sources for the intermediate period suggests that Pippin’s initial elevation to the kingship in 751 was contested, and the apostolic confirmation that came in 754 most welcome. This chapter has attempted to analyse how Carolingian history-

159 Spiegel, ‘The cult of Saint Denis and Capetian kingship’.
160 De Jong, Penitential State, pp. 176-7; Patzold, Episcopus, pp. 134-84.
writers justified and shaped these events in their narratives in ways that agreed with contemporary moral standards. In developing a remarkably durable discourse that justified the Carolingian dynasty’s formation, from Childebrand’s Continuations up to the modern textbook, the current chapter meant above all to demonstrate how yesterday’s fiction could become tomorrow’s reality. It demonstrates, in other words, the power of a convincing narrative and helps us to understand why the Carolingian literate elite invested so much energy in the constant revision of its past.

Carolingian historiography was not created in a conceptual and social vacuum. Despite differences in form, style and vocabulary, each author worked on the basis of a pre-existing tradition, which he adapted and augmented to match ‘the mood of the day.’ Because history-writing in the Carolingian period was above all the pastime of a close-knit elite that actively partook in the events it recounted, these ideas and perceptions tended to circulate in a relatively small circle. As Nelson remarked: ‘the literati voiced an élite’s concerns, and gave them rhetorical shape.’ Those testimonies that eventually found their way to the archives, first of religious houses and later of national archives and libraries where they survive up to the present day, used to be part of a vibrant debate on the history and identity of Carolingian elite society. It would explain the remarkable coherency in a series of historiographical accounts that were created in a relatively short span of time over long distances; how the narrative of the Chronicle of Lorsch (807) could borrow elements from the Annales Mettenses priores (806), or why someone like Erchanbert, writing in Alemannia in c. 827, created an account that, with regard to the dynasty’s formation, has very much in common with Einhard’s Vita Karoli.

The common aim of these authors was to justify a coup that, at its core, had been nothing short of a usurpation of royal authority. A rhetoric was developed featuring two distinct elements of justification: one the one hand, these authors exploited the apostolic sanction of 754 and, on the other, they introduced in the late-eighth century the that the dynastic transition had been a correction of an unnatural political imbalance, in which the royal power and the royal name had come to be divided, something that was argued to be contrary to the natural order.

Childebrand especially should be credited for having created the illusion that, as McKitterick called it, Carolingian kingship had been fully formed in 751. In the Continuations, written during Pippin’s lifetime or shortly there-
5. The Carolingian Coup of 751

After, Childebrand boldly antedated the apostolic confirmation of 754 to 751, by inventing a Frankish embassy that allegedly had sought the advice of Pope Zachary in Rome before proceeding with Pippin’s royal elevation. As a consequence, Pope Stephen’s visit in the winter of 753/4 was reduced to a unilateral papal petition for Frankish military support, since no additional apostolic sanction was, to Childebrand’s mind, required.

The author of the ARF, writing in c. 795, considered the notion of a papal sanction in 751 a compelling fiction. However, he did not wish to ignore the papal confirmation of 754, at which Pippin’s sons were also consecrated kings of the Franks. However, subsequent authors continued to struggle with the tension that existed between Pippin’s alleged papal sanction in 751 and the apparent need for a second sanction in 754. Thus, the Chronicle of Lorsch, for example, invested fully on the 751, but noted that in 754 Stephen had ‘anointed the two sons of Pippin as kings.’ The author makes no mention of Pippin’s confirmation at this point. A more extreme attempt to streamline these accounts dates to the 820s, roughly seventy years after the dynasty’s formation, when both Einhard and Erchanbert combined the acts of 751 and 754 into a single event.

The earliest evidence for the idea that Merovingian fainance had demanded the dynasty’s dismissal comes from the ARF, composed in mid-790s. The author of these annals cleverly introduced this notion as a growing concern of the Franks, which they then presented before the pope in 749. It was Pope Zachary who confirmed their suspicion and ‘ordered Pippin that it may be better to have call king he who has the power, than he who abides without royal power.’ By deviating from this natural principle, or so the ARF claim, the Franks risked upsetting the natural order, with all the disastrous consequences that came with it. Pippin’s claim on the royal title had been a bold experiment and its outcome will not immediately have been clear. Only with the benefit of hindsight could Pippin’s coup be presented as a corrective measure; a restoration to the norm that was pleasing to God.

In the first decade of the ninth century, the authors of the Annales Mettenses priores and the Chronicle of Lorsch expanded on the ARFs theme by significantly reducing the opportunistic character of Pippin’s coup and presenting it instead as the long-awaited solution to an old Frankish problem. Suddenly, the origins of Merovingian fainance were located in the late seventh century, arguing how the Pippinid and Carolingian mayors of the palace had

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164 ARF, s.a. 749: ‘Zacharias papa mandavit Pippino, ut melius esset illum regem vocari, qui potestatem haberet, quam illum, qui sine regali potestate manebat.’
struggled to maintain the integrity of the realm, as its political cohesion was crumbling on account of the weakness of its kings. Two decades later, this particular discourse reached its climax in the accounts of Erchanbert and Einhard. Especially the latter’s derogatory description of the last Merovingian kings continues to affect our modern perception of the dynasty, though historians are now becoming increasingly aware of the significant distortions in the Carolingian lens.

Only when, during the reign of Louis the Pious, the first cracks began to appear in the Carolingian political edifice, had the time come to rethink the founding principles of Carolingian authority. With the painful memory of 833 in mind, Hilduin changed tack in his account of the dynasty’s foundation and abandoned the notion that strength was the hallmark of Carolingian kingship. Instead, Hilduin focussed entirely on the dynasty’s apostolic sanction and its special bond with the papacy. If this new discourse was not as powerful or compelling as its predecessor, it was at least more resilient to temporary crises. By letting go of personal virtus as the chief prerequisite for the royal dignity, relying increasingly more on their apostolically sanctioned covenant with the divine, as symbolized by their consecration and conferred through episcopal agency, one could argue that, under Louis, the Carolingian dynasty had reached maturity. On the other hand, it was becoming increasingly difficult to perceive Carolingian kingship as the powerful antithesis to the Merovingian model. By the mid-ninth century, accusations of lethargic, do-nothing kings once again resounded through the empire, as local strongmen, while publically flaunting their potestas, began to wonder whether he who had the power, should perhaps not also have the title.