Abstract

This thesis reconsiders longstanding questions regarding the economic and ideological forces that drove Frankish expansion into Saxony in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, Frankish strategies of rule in the newly conquered region, and the effects of conquest and cultural dispossession on the Saxons themselves. Specifically, the dissertation seeks to present a new interpretation of this critical historical episode as a process of colonization. After an introduction that briefly outlines various conceptions and definitions of colonization and how these apply to the early medieval period, chapter one provides an overview of the main Latin and Old Saxon sources regarding Saxony and the Saxons in the Carolingian period from the coronation of Pippin III to the suppression of the Saxon Stellinga uprising in 842. The chapter emphasizes the tendentious nature of these sources and the ways in which they reflect the perspective of the colonizer while obscuring the experiences of the colonized. Chapter two looks at the ideological justifications for the conquest advanced in the Frankish primary sources, arguing that the Franks’ forcible Christianization of the Saxons was driven in part by the Carolingian dynasty’s increasingly close ties with the papacy and by ancient imperial prerogatives regarding the extension of the faith. Chapter three, in contrast, examines the economic forces driving Frankish expansion into Saxony, demonstrating that the region possessed more material wealth than is
generally assumed. Finally, chapter four turns to the effects of conquest and colonization on the Saxons themselves, analyzing the ways in which imperial ideologies and practices of rule were presented to a newly converted Saxon audience in the Old Saxon Gospel harmony known as the *Heliand*. 
Acknowledgments

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## Abbreviations

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARF</td>
<td>Annales regni Francorum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSL</td>
<td>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChLA</td>
<td>Chartae latinae antiquiores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGH</td>
<td>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</td>
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<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Auctores antiquissimi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capit.</td>
<td>Capitularia regum Francorum</td>
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<td>Conc.</td>
<td>Concilia</td>
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<td>Epp.</td>
<td>Epistolae</td>
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<td>Epp. sel.</td>
<td>Epistolae selectae in usum scholarum</td>
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<td>Fontes iuris.</td>
<td>Fontes iuris germanici antiqui in usum scholarum</td>
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<td>Leges nat. Germ.</td>
<td>Leges nationum germanicarum</td>
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<td>Poetae</td>
<td>Poetae latini aevi Carolini</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRG</td>
<td>Scriptores rerum Germanicarum</td>
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<td>SRL</td>
<td>Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRM</td>
<td>Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Scriptores (in folio)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev.</td>
<td>Revised <em>Annales regni Francorum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>RGA</td>
<td><em>Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde</em>, 2nd ed.</td>
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Introduction

Ubicumque vicit Romanus, habitat.
– Seneca, De consolatione ad Helviam Matrem

For the space of a generation in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the Franks, led by Charlemagne, waged a singularly fierce war of conquest and Christianization against their pagan Saxon neighbours to the north-east. In the face of stiff resistance, the Franks carried out mass executions and forcible baptisms, and enslaved and deported from their native lands thousands of Saxon men, women, and children. Military conquest and compulsory religious conversion were accompanied in due course by the implantation of the secular and ecclesiastical organs of Frankish government and by the gradual suffusion of a Latin-Christian culture—in its peculiarly Frankish form—into the lands between the Rhine and the Elbe.¹

Long considered “one of the foundations of medieval and modern Germany,”² and, of all Charlemagne’s wars, “the one most important for the civilization of Europe,”³ the conquest stands as one of the signal developments of the Carolingian age. Over the centuries, its history has been written innumerable times and from a multitude of perspectives. This dissertation will present a new interpretation of the conquest as a process of colonization.

Colonization

In recent decades, the concept of colonization has extended its own dominion over the humanities and social sciences. Nevertheless, there remains significant skepticism about the heuristic value of the term. This skepticism is rooted first and foremost in the fact that there exists no universally agreed-upon definition of colonization or its many subsidiary terms (colonialism, post-colonialism, etc.). Indeed, the archaeologist Brad Bartel has argued that “there are so many definitions of colonialism and imperialism as to make the terms almost useless,” while the Swiss historian Herbert Lüthy long ago remarked of colonization (etc.) that “the suggestive power of [these] words is in inverse relation to their accuracy.” Jürgen Osterhammel, in a focussed, book-length study of the problem, has declared colonization “a phenomenon of colossal vagueness.”

The lack of a single, clear definition of the word colonization necessarily raises doubts about its utility as an analytical tool. However, as Osterhammel ultimately concludes, perhaps there need not be agreement on a single definition of the term but rather a recognition that there exist a range of different ‘types’ of colonization, distinguished by their various driving forces, strategies of implementation, and ultimate effects but united in certain shared core characteristics. As Osterhammel notes, there clearly existed differences between the “settler colonization” of the kind seen in the European settlement of the Americas and the “exploitation colonization” of the kind seen

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4 The catalytic work was E. W. Said, Orientalism (New York, 1978).
8 Osterhammel, Colonialism, pp. 10–12.
in the British conquest of India—the latter seeing not a mass influx of settlers but rather a relatively small host of soldiers, officers, and bureaucrats. Focussing on the broader similarities between these differing historical examples, however, Osterhammel suggests the following working definition:

Colonialism is a relationship between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule.

At the heart of colonization, therefore, lies the essential unequal dynamic between the ‘colonizer’ and the ‘colonized’.

If there exists some skepticism about the utility of the term colonization in general, significant doubt has been expressed about the appropriateness of the term for the Middle Ages in particular. For although on occasion—partly, it would seem, in deference to the etymological roots of the word (Latin, colere)—it has been thought appropriate to extend its use to the various expansions of the classical age, most usually the word has been preserved for the modern period of European military and economic expansion and

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9 Osterhammel, Colonialism, pp. 4–10. For a further list of ‘types’ of colonialism, see N. Shoemaker, “A Typology of Colonialism,” Perspectives on History 53:7 (2015), pp. 29–30. Some scholars have insisted on large-scale settlement as a qualifying factor in processes of colonization. See, e.g., M. I. Finley, “Colonies: An Attempt at a Typology,” Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 26 (1976), p. 171: “A colony was a plantation of men, a place to which men emigrated and settled,” and p. 173: “No one speaks of the colonization of the midwest and west of the United States, and I am unable to find any more justification for that term when it is applied to settlements within the Roman empire or within Charlemagne’s empire, or to enforced transplantations by tyrants and conquerors.”

10 Osterhammel, Colonialism, pp. 16–17.


domination which lasted from around 1500 to 1950, with a few notable and still-controversial exceptions in the central and later medieval periods. Indeed, Moses I. Finley has argued that it was only the modern period, with its large-scale movements of peoples and complex economic and political relationships directed by the state, that could give rise to true colonization. Finley’s insistence on the modern period’s exclusive claim to the process of colonization on the basis of its supposedly more inherently complex political and economic relationships brought on by the large-scale movement of peoples, and particularly, the existence of ‘the state’, is typical of entrenched, ill-informed,

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14 However controversially, the term has regularly been applied to various historical episodes of the central and later medieval periods. The various trading ventures of the Italian city states, the Norman Conquest, the Crusades, and the German conquest and settlement of the Slavic lands of eastern Europe have all at various times been considered examples of colonization, though Finley’s reasoning would deny these the status of such. On the Italian city states, see C. Verlinden, The Beginnings of Modern Colonization, trans. Y. Freccero (Ithaca, 1970), who traces the beginnings of modern colonization to these ventures, as well as M. Balard (ed.), *État et colonisation au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance* (Lyon, 1989); M. Balard and A. Ducellier (eds.), *Coloniser au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1995); M. Balard and A. Ducellier (eds.), *Partage du monde: échanges et colonisation dans la Méditerranée médiévale* (Paris, 1998). On the Norman Conquest, see J. C. Holt, *Colonial England, 1066–1215* (London, 1997); F. J. West, “The Colonial History of the Norman Conquest?,” *History* 84:274 (1999), pp. 219–236; B. Golding, *Conquest and Colonisation: The Normans in Britain, 1066–1100* (Basingstoke; New York, 2013). On Ireland, see B. Smith, *Colonisation and Conquest in Medieval Ireland: The English in Louth, 1170–1330* (Cambridge, 1999). On the Crusades, see J. Prawer, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: European Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (London, 1972); J. Muldoon and F. Fernández-Armesto (eds.), *The Medieval Frontiers of Latin Christendom: Expansion, Contraction, Continuity* (Farnham, 2008). On German eastward expansion, see J. M. Pikorski (ed.), *Historiographical Approaches to Medieval Colonization of East Central Europe* (New York, 2002). If the complexity of colonization is often denied to the Middle Ages as a whole, it is hardly ever allowed to the early Middle Ages, which are generally considered the nadir of European civilization and a period defined by personal bonds rather than state relations—though as we shall see below, the Frankish conquest of Saxony has been something of an exception.

15 Finley, “Colonies,” pp. 167–188, esp. 176, in which Finley speaks of the essential incompatibility of ‘feudalism’ and ‘colonialism’ because of feudalism’s reliance on personal bonds as opposed to the state relations upon which colonization is based. Likewise, Osterhammel focuses mainly on the modern period, as do M. E. Page and P. M. Sonnenburg, *Colonialism: An International Social, Cultural, and Political Encyclopedia*, 3 vols. (Santa Barbara, 2003). However, see R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, 1994), who argues that “the mental habits and institutions of European racism and colonialism were born in the medieval world.” The advent of ‘post-colonialism’ in the literature of the humanities and social sciences, meanwhile, has spurred yet more attempts—mainly in the realm of literary studies—to see the Middle Ages in a colonial light.
and longstanding pejorative attitudes towards the Middle Ages in general and the early medieval period in particular.

There can of course be no denying that the Middle Ages were different in many ways from the modern period. But such differences can be easily exaggerated. As Patrick Wormald argued with regard to the problem of the early medieval state, “no medievalist who fails to guard against the anachronistic imputation of contemporary standards to his or her sphere of study can be said to be doing their job. Yet we can overdo ‘alterity’.”\(^{16}\) Indeed, recent scholarship has generally asserted the legitimate use of the term ‘state’ for the governments of the early medieval period, even if those governments were different in some important respects from the governments of the modern period.\(^{17}\) Jennifer R. Davis has recently argued that apparent overlaps in bureaucratic organization in Charlemagne’s government—traditionally viewed as defects and inefficiencies—may have been intentionally designed.\(^{18}\) Moreover, although modern colonization may well be characterized by the large-scale movements of peoples, the medieval and early medieval periods saw movement and migration as well, possibly on a larger scale than has traditionally been imagined.\(^{19}\) Finally, despite misgivings about the application of terms...
such as ‘colonization’ and ‘colonialism’ with regard to the Middle Ages—and particularly to the early Middle Ages—the conquest and subsequent governance of Saxony by the Frankish secular and ecclesiastical elite has nevertheless repeatedly been described as ‘colonial’ in character, though the full ramifications of this characterization have not as yet been fully explored.

The Conquest of Saxony: An Overview

The conflict between the Saxons and the Franks in the late eighth and early ninth centuries was no encounter between strangers. Indeed, it was only the latest development in a long and highly variable relationship between the two peoples. Franks and Saxons had lived in close proximity to each other in the lands east of the Rhine since the beginning of the fourth century, and were frequently mentioned in tandem by Roman and Gallo-Roman authors. From at least the fifth century onwards, groups identified as Saxons had taken up occupation not only in Britain, but also in Gaul, along the Atlantic coast. During the Merovingian period, Frankish kings frequently led campaigns into the Saxon lands, collecting tribute, and exerting a loose hegemony. At the same time, royal and ecclesiastical agents and soldiers, there may have been a more substantial stream of Frankish settlement into Saxony than is commonly assumed. See G. Droege, “Fränkische Siedlung in Westfalen,” Frühmittelalterliche Studien 4 (1970), pp. 271–288.

numerous Saxons appear to have held high office within the Frankish kingdoms—even as dukes and queens.\textsuperscript{21}

The period of Carolingian ascendence that began with the mayorship of Charles Martel in the second quarter of the eighth century saw increased Frankish military activity in the Saxon lands in the form of more military campaigns. This coincided with an intensive movement of Anglo-Saxon missionaries, backed in part by the papacy, into the wider region east of the Rhine.\textsuperscript{22} Meanwhile, since the late seventh century, the Saxons themselves seem to have been expanding southwards, conquering land and coming into increased competition with the Franks. During the 740s and 750s, the Saxon lands saw more campaigns by both Pippin III and Carloman, the reestablishment of an apparently lapsed obligation to pay tribute, and possibly—though by no means certainly—the first efforts to enforce the Christian religion.

When Charlemagne undertook his first campaign against the Saxons in 772, he did so as the ruler of a newly unified Frankish realm. The expedition resulted in the capture of the fortress known as the Eresburg, the destruction of the Saxon shrine known as the Irminsul, and the taking of twelve Saxon hostages. The following year, a Saxon attack on Frankish settlements east of the Rhine appears to have focussed on Christian centres, including the monastery of Fritzlar that had been founded by St. Boniface.

\textsuperscript{21} I refer here to the Merovingian Queens Balthild (\textit{Vita Sancti Balthildis}, MGH SSRM 2, pp. 475–508) and Nanthild (\textit{LHF}, MGH SRM 2, p. 315), to the Saxon dux Chulderic (Gregory of Tours, \textit{Libri Historiarum} X, MGH SRM 1:1, pp. 328, 385, and 514), whose wife owned land in the south-west of France, and to the optimas Aighyna (Fredegar, \textit{Chronicon}, MGH SRM 2, pp. 148 and 160). Charlemagne’s own uncle, Bernhard, had a Saxon wife. See L. Weinrich, \textit{Wala} (Lübeck, 1963), pp. 11–12. Balthild in particular may have been an Anglo-Saxon, though there appears to have been little distinction made between the Saxons of Britain and the Saxons of the continent during this period. See Springer, \textit{Die Sachsen}, p. 47.

Most medieval and modern histories of the conquest begin with the campaign of 772, but the conquest proper almost certainly began three years later in 775 following the successful conquest of Italy and a subsequent royal assembly at Quierzy.\textsuperscript{23} The 775 campaign appears to have been highly coordinated, preceded by several small expeditionary forces in late 774, and seemingly aimed at securing the loyalty of the leaders of the three main Saxon southern regions: Eastphalia, Angraria, and Westphalia through the extraction of oaths and the giving over of hostages. The first baptisms of the conquest may have taken place in the course of this campaign, though the greater weight of evidence would point to these taking place the following year. 776 also saw the construction of a new centre of Frankish royal power in the Saxon lands. Its name is given as \textit{Urbs Caroli}.	extsuperscript{24} In 777 more baptisms were carried out at a royal assembly held at Paderborn—probably the same as the \textit{Urbs Caroli}—the first assembly held in the Saxon lands. The assembly of 777 and the baptism of the Saxons were celebrated in the first Frankish written documentation of the conquest, a brief anonymous poem known as the \textit{Carmen de conversione Saxonum}. To the author of this poem, and probably to the attendees of the assembly of 777, it seemed that the conquest had been brought to a successful conclusion.

In fact, however, the conquest was far from over. In 778, while Charlemagne was on campaign in Spain, the Saxons rose up under the leadership of the Westphalian Widukind, destroying Paderborn. Widukind first emerges in the Frankish sources in the entry of the \textit{Annales regni Francorum} (composed c. 790) for the year 777, which notes

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[23] Rev., a. 775. For discussion, see Chapter 2, pp. 89–91.
\item[24] See \textit{Annales Mosellani}, \textit{Annales Petaviani}, and \textit{Annales Maximiniani}, aa. 776. For discussion of these sources, see Chapter 1, pp. 28–30.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
that he, with a few of his associates, had fled to the Northmen. The Franks responded to the rebellion of 778 with an autumn offensive and with a further summer campaign in 779. The following year, the Saxons had been sufficiently pacified for a second royal assembly at Lippespringe, in the vicinity of Paderborn. The same year, Frankish efforts to Christianize the Saxons extended into the northern areas of Wigmodia and Nordalbingia. According to some of the minor annals, it was in this year that Charlemagne first “divided the land amongst bishops, priests, and abbots.”

In 781, all was quiet in Saxony. In 782, however, there erupted a flurry of action that would radically alter the tenor of Frankish rule in the region. It saw yet another royal assembly held at Lippespringe, where a new administrative regime in Saxony was ushered in through the appointment of counts. It may also have been at this assembly that the notorious Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae was first promulgated. The draconian legal code demanded allegiance to the Frankish administrative regime and the Christian religion, on pain of death. The same year also saw the return of Widukind and the massacre of a Frankish detachment, including the chamberlain of the palace and four counts, in the Süntel mountains. Shortly afterwards, likely in retaliation, there was carried out the infamous massacre at Verden, wherein a reported 4,500 Saxon resistors were rounded up and executed by beheading.

783 saw more rebellion in Saxony, and 784 more again, this time in coordination with Frisian support. After suppressing these uprisings, Charlemagne held yet another assembly at Paderborn. This same year, Widukind himself travelled to Attigny to receive baptism. The pope received the tidings gladly, announcing three days of litanies and

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25 ARF, a. 777.
26 Annales Petavienses and Annales Laureshamenses, aa. 780, MGH SS 1, pp. 16 and 31.
prayer throughout the Christian lands. Once again, it must have seemed that Saxony had been subdued, and in fact peace prevailed for some seven years. From 792–799, however, there were annual revolts in Saxony, this time focussed in the northern regions of Wigmodia and Nordalbingia. 797 saw the promulgation of the second major piece of Saxony-specific legislation, the *Capitulare Saxonicum*, a text which—at least on its surface—would appear to temper the harshness of the earlier *Capitulatio*.

In 799, Charlemagne once again held an assembly at Paderborn, which was the occasion of the king’s meeting with the injured and temporarily deposed pope Leo III. In 802, the king sent “an army of Saxons against the Saxons north of the Elbe”—a sign that at least some of Saxony had been integrated into the Frankish military system. The following year, there was held an assembly at Salz, where a final peace treaty between Saxons and Franks may have been concluded. That same year, the *Lex Saxonum* was issued, regulating the laws of the Saxons as subjects of the Frankish king. The following year saw a further campaign into the north and the deportation of a reported 10,000 Saxons from the far side of the Elbe. 810 would see another Frankish army move through Saxony, though this time to meet the Danes. Yet 804 would mark the conclusion of the Frankish conquest of Saxony.

The following decades would see a certain loss of focus on the Saxon lands, as the Carolingian empire moved through Charlemagne’s waning years and the turbulence of the reigns of Louis the Pious and his sons. Activity would mainly focus on the further development of Saxony’s ecclesiastical landscape (including the translation of relics from

27 *ARF*, a. 802.
Francia and Italy), the deeper religious education of the formerly pagan Saxon population (a task which had been mostly neglected during the conquest proper), and the ascendence of some noble Saxon families (some with pre-conquest roots). The rebellions and uprisings of the Saxon war would have their coda with the so-called Stellinga uprising of 841–842, in which lower class and unfree Saxons rose up against their noble Saxon lords, demanding a return to the laws and customs of the pre-conquest period.29 The taking up of the mantle of Charlemagne’s empire by the Saxons themselves in the tenth century, and their conquest and Christianization of their pagan Slavic neighbours, is one of the more striking historical examples of a conquered people taking up the culture of their conquerors so soon.

**Historiography**

The historiography of the conquest of Saxony by the Franks constitutes one of the largest of all topics of Carolingian history and also one of the most tendentious. Indeed, from the Frankish sources of the late eighth and ninth centuries,30 through the Romances and pseudo-histories of the Middle Ages and Renaissance,31 to the ‘scientific’ historical literature of the modern era, the events of the conquest have been made subject time and

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30 For a discussion of the sources, see Chapter 1.
again to the changing political, religious, and ideological predilections of passing ages.\textsuperscript{32} Most notoriously, in the 1930s and 1940s, National Socialists sought to impose a particularly warped historical vision on the events of the conquest, whereby the Saxons were to be understood as the representatives of a pure Germanic culture and Charlemagne himself as a \textit{Sachsenschlächter} (butcherer of Saxons) and a “half-foreign Frank” whose mission of Christianization effected the subjection of a previously independent pagan Germanic people to an alien semitic culture.\textsuperscript{33} German historians who resisted such blatantly ahistorical interpretations were branded race traitors and authors of a ‘degenerate’ history. One such ‘degenerate’ historian was Martin Lintzel, whose own writings on the Saxons and the conquest are foundational to the modern study of the topic.\textsuperscript{34} As Lintzel argued, “every age has at once its own values, its own style of life and politics, even as it has its own style of art,” and in the age of Charlemagne, “nobody pursued the ideal of keeping the Germanic race mentally and physically pure.”\textsuperscript{35}

The Nazi co-option of the Frankish conquest of the Saxons represents a particularly low moment in the conquest’s historiographical life. However, even less toxic, more

\begin{center}
\textsuperscript{32} On the early twentieth-century scholarship, see W. Lammers (ed.), \textit{Die Eingliederung der Sachsen in das Frankenreich} (Darmstadt, 1970).
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\textsuperscript{34} See M. Lintzel, \textit{Ausgewählte Schriften} (Berlin, 1961).
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\end{center}
methodologically sound histories are imbued with their own more or less subtle political energies, as each age has, to a greater or lesser extent, sought to see the historical truth of the conquest through the filter of its own attitudes, outlooks, and ideals. Indeed, Lintzel’s own foundational writings, which framed the conquest as a struggle between an allied Frankish and Saxon aristocracy and a free Saxon peasantry, were certainly informed—at least implicitly—by their own Marxist ideological bent. Lintzel is “more correct dialectically than source-wise,” as his friend and critic Karl Brandi put it.36

Following the end of WWII and the controversies of the National Socialist period, scholarship on the conquest dropped off markedly. Indeed, the volumes of essays published in the wake of the 1965 Council of Europe exhibition at Aachen, which focussed on Charlemagne and the Carolingian empire as symbols of European unity, are telling in that they contain no single essay devoted to Saxony.37 That scholarship which was published, meanwhile, for the most part moved away from explicitly nationalist themes and towards less politically vexed questions regarding the Christianization of the Saxons and the establishment of religious institutions in the Saxon lands.38

In the past twenty years, as focus has shifted away from the centre and towards the peripheries and regions of the Carolingian empire, the Saxons, Saxony, and the conquest have once again become the subject of intense scholarly work, including a 1999 exhibition at Paderborn conceived as a direct answer to the the Aachen exhibition of

1965. Important themes within this recent scholarship have included the integration of the historical and archaeological evidence, an emphasis on the tendentious nature of the Frankish narrative of the conquest, the deconstruction of venerable ideas regarding a unified and uniform pre-conquest Saxon people, the exploration of the institutional means whereby Saxony was bound together with the wider Carolingian empire (and the degree to which it remained separate), and the creation of a post-conquest Saxon identity in the decades following their conquest and Christianization.

These shifts in the interpretation of the conquest of Saxony by the Franks may be observed even at the level of the language chosen to characterize the process itself. Throughout the Middle Ages and until the first decades of the twentieth century, authors generally spoke uncomplicatedly of Charlemagne’s ‘conquest’ (Eroberung) and ‘conversion’ (Bekehrung) of the Saxons. Beginning in the early 1920s, however, German historians, sensitive to the import of the conquest for the subsequent development of a unified German state, began to speak instead of the ‘incorporation’ (Eingliederung) of the Saxons and Saxony, emphasizing the institutional transformation of the Saxon lands and their binding together with the other Germanic-speaking peoples of Charlemagne’s empire. In recent years, language has shifted once again, this time towards ‘integration’ (Integration), a word with its own particular resonances in the contemporary German

political discourse.\textsuperscript{41} The term integration has in fact become common in recent discussions of cultural assimilation in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{42} As Ian Wood has argued, its neutral and detached flavour may have a certain value precisely because it withholds judgement on the character of political and social change.\textsuperscript{43} However, this potential strength may also be seen as a weakness, for the term can mask the turbulence and conflict which often characterized such change. In contrast to these previous approaches, a study of the conquest under the rubric of colonization offers a number of advantages. For where most previous studies have tended to view the conquest either from the perspective of Frankish expansion and Carolingian ascendance or, conversely, from the perspective of the transformative effects of the conquest on Saxony and the Saxons, an examination of the events of the conquest as a process of colonization allows for a broader exploration encompassing both the driving forces behind the Frankish annexation of Saxony and Frankish strategies of rule in the region, as well as the effects of conquest and cultural dispossession on the Saxons themselves.

**Outline of the Present Work**

Chapter 1 consists of an extensive overview of the main written sources for the Saxons and Saxony in the Carolingian period, from the coronation of Pippin in 751 to the conclusion of the so-called *Stellinga* uprising in 842. These include the Latin narrative

\textsuperscript{41} C. Ehlers, *Die Integration Sachens in das fränkische Reich* (Göttingen, 2007). In contemporary German political discourse, the term is generally used to describe the settlement and process of cultural adjustment of immigrants and newcomers into German society.

\textsuperscript{42} W. Pohl and M. Diesenberger (eds.), *Integration und Herrschaft: Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter* (Vienna, 2002); W. Pohl (ed.), *Die Völkerwanderung: Eroberung und Integration* (Stuttgart, 2002); and H. Wolfram and A. Schwarcz (eds.) *Anerkennung und Integration: Zu den wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen der Völkerwanderungszeit, 400–600* (Vienna, 1988).

sources both ‘secular’ and hagiographical, legal sources both prescriptive and pragmatic, poetry, epistolary evidence, and the small but significant body of Old Saxon material. Particular emphasis is placed on the tendentious nature of these texts and the ways in which depictions of the Saxons were often modified by Frankish, papal, and Anglo-Saxon authors in order to meet specific political ends.

Chapter 2 explores the role of the conquest in the emergence of a Frankish imperial ideology in the late eighth century. Like later examples of colonization from the modern period, the Frankish conquest of Saxony was justified by the Franks as a divinely sanctioned war aimed at the extension of the Christian religion. Specifically, the chapter argues that the undertaking of such a war was rooted in late antique notions regarding the traditional prerogatives of Christian emperors and that depictions of the Saxons as rebels, pagans, and barbarians—the traditional enemies of the empire—should be understood as bolstering an image of the Carolingian rulers from Pippin III onwards as the rightful defenders of the Roman Church.

Chapter 3 will turn from the ideological dimension of the conquest to the economic, challenging the widely held assumption that Saxony held little of material value for the Carolingians. Specifically, it will examine the variety of economic resources offered by Saxony in the form of plunder and tribute, manpower, land, judicial fines and renders, mineral resources, and, critically, access to trade routes. Ultimately, the chapter seeks to situate Saxony within the wider context of a Carolingian economy, and to reconsider longstanding assumptions about Frankish kings’ lack of capacity for strategic economic management.
Chapter 4 turns to the question of a shifting Saxon worldview in the years and decades following the conquest. Specifically, it examines the Old Saxon biblical epic known as the *Heλianν*. This text, composed in the first half of the ninth century to introduce a recently conquered and converted Saxon audience to the rudiments of the faith, appears to translate the geographical and social setting of the Gospels from Roman-occupied Judaea to one more closely resembling Carolingian Saxony. Critically, the *Heλianν* also exhibits numerous additions and adaptations from its source material that emphasize ideologies of empire and practices of imperial rule. Ultimately, the *Heλianν* presents a deeply ambivalent historical vision of empire to a Saxon audience that was still adjusting to its new role as subjects within a Christian Carolingian empire.
Chapter 1:
Saxony and the Saxons:
Latin and Old Saxon Sources, c. 751–842

Among the calamities of war may be jointly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsehoods which interest dictates and credulity encourages.
– Samuel Johnson, *The Idler*

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the sources relevant for the study of the Saxons and Saxony in the Carolingian period, to elucidate the context within which they were produced, and to describe their often tendentious nature. The period encompassed stretches from the ascension of Pippin III in 751 to the suppression of the Stellinga uprising in 842. Cross-references will be given throughout to more detailed discussions of many of these sources in subsequent chapters.

**Frankish Political Narratives**

The Carolingian coup d’état of 751 ushered in not only a new political regime but a new era in Frankish historical writing. Indeed, from 751 onwards almost all of our most important narrative sources for developments within the Frankish realm, as well as for Frankish interactions with neighbouring regions, were produced either at or under the influence of the Carolingian royal court. Whether or not texts such as the *Continuationes* of the *Chronicon* of Fredegar, the *Annales regni Francorum*, the *Annales mettenses*

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priores, and the *Vita Karoli Magni* rise to the level of “propaganda,” the authors who composed them unarguably sought to convey a flattering portrait of the Carolingian royal family and its accomplishments and were not above outright deception in the pursuit of this aim. This is true of Frankish treatments of the conquest perhaps more than any other aspect of history that these sources address, to the extent that, as Matthias Springer has recently noted, “the study of the Saxon wars suffers from the fact that the contemporary or near-contemporary sources almost exclusively convey the point of view of the royal court.” Nonetheless, through a careful sifting of the evidence, including comparisons between the major and minor annalistic traditions, as well as the small number of Anglo-Saxon sources that address the conquest, many of the most egregious deceptions can be identified and the basic contours of the conquest sketched. Moreover, the hard-driving ideological bent of the ‘official historiography’ constitutes in and of itself powerful evidence for the assertion of a new, Carolingian-centric Frankish identity, for which the Saxons provided a convenient foil.

a) *Continuationes* of the *Chronicon* of Fredegar

The first page in this new chapter of pro-Carolingian Frankish historiography is represented by the so-called *Continuationes* of the *Chronicon* attributed to ‘Fredegar’. These continuations are generally thought to have been written in two installments, the first composed at the behest of Pippin’s uncle Childerich in 751 and the second at the

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behest of Childebrand’s son Nibelung in 768, perhaps for the royal coronations of Pippin and Charles and Carloman respectively. This process of composition is implied by a colophon inserted into the text immediately following its description of Pippin’s royal acclamation in the ninth-century MS Vatican Reginensis lat. 213: “Up to now the illustrious man Count Childebrand, uncle of the aforesaid King Pippin, made provision for this History or Deeds of the Franks to be written down most carefully. From here on, this responsibility (uctoritas) shall fall to the illustrious man Nibelung, son of that same Childebrand, also a count.”

Moreover, Roger Collins has argued that the version of the Fredegar text to which the two continuations were attached was itself rewritten from an expressly Austrasian perspective sometime around 660, with the author making enough changes that it should not in fact be deemed the same text as the original Chronicon. Collins names this new text the Historia vel Gesta Francorum, based on the words of the colophon. In the view of Collins, the modified version of the Fredegar text attached to the continuations becomes “more clearly a history of the Franks.”

It is notable that these first Frankish historical works of the Carolingian age display a marked interest in Saxon affairs as well as a number of innovations in their treatment of the Saxons and Saxony. The first continuation of the Chronicon, for example, contains the first recorded reference to Saxon paganism in a Frankish source, in a section regarding a 738 campaign by Charles Martel:

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5 Fredegar, Continuationes, p. 182: “Usque nunc inluster vir Childebrandus comes, avunculus praedicto rege Pippino, hanc historiam vel Gesta Francorum diligentissime scribere procuravit. Abhinc ab inlustre viro Nibelungo, filium ipsius Childebrando, itemque comite, succedat auctoritas.” Cf. R. McKitterick, “The Illusion of Royal Power in the Carolingian Annals,” The English Historical Review 115:460 (2000), pp. 1–20 at pp. 5–6, who argues that both continuations could have been composed after 768, perhaps even as late as 786, with the insertion on Childebrand and Nibelung indicating merely a shift in patronage rather than a chronology of composition.

And so, with the most pagan (paganissimos) Saxons who live across the Rhine once again in rebellion, the vigorous man Charles gathered an army of Franks, crossed over with keen purpose to that place where the river Lippe enters into the Rhine, laid waste the greatest part of that region with the direst slaughter and instructed that most savage people to pay tribute and accepted a great many hostages from them. And so with the Lord giving him aid, he returned home as victor.

[Itemque rebellantibus Saxonis paganissimos, qui ultra Renum fluvium consistunt, strenuus vir Carlus, hoste commoto Francorum, in loco ubi Lippia fluvius Renum amnem ingreditur sagace intentione transmeavit, maxima ex parte regione illa dirissima cede vastavit, gentemque illam sevissimam ex parte tributaria esse praecepit atque quam plures hospitibus ab eis accepit; sicque, oppitulante Domino, victor remeavit ad propria.]

Charles Martel’s 738 campaign against the Saxons was an important one, possibly paving the way for the missionary Boniface. What concerns us more immediately here, however, is the characterization of the Saxons as both ‘rebels’ and, more importantly, ‘most pagan’. During the Merovingian period, Gallo-Roman and Frankish authors sporadically made vague assertions of Frankish authority over the Saxons. Marius of Avenches was the first author to refer to the Saxons as being ‘in rebellion’ against the Franks, a phrasing repeated by Gregory of Tours and thereafter adopted into numerous Frankish histories that used Gregory as a source. But while the Franks had become progressively Christianized since the conversion of Clovis (c. 500), neither Gregory, nor the Liber historiae Francorum, nor the original Chronicon of Fredgar—all of which describe numerous Frankish campaigns against the Saxons—express interest in any religious differences which might have existed between Franks and Saxons during the sixth and seventh centuries. As we shall see in Chapter 2, Carolingian depictions of the Saxons as pagan enemies par excellence would play an integral role in justifying the

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7 Fredegar, Continuaciones, p. 177.
9 Marius of Avenches, Chronicon, MGH AA 1, pp. 236 and 237. The references concern two campaigns of Chlothar I in 555 and 556. Gregory of Tours, Libri Historiarum X, MGH SRM 1.1, pp. 145–146. Gregory appears to have followed Marius.
Frankish conquest of Saxony during the time of Charlemagne and in formulating an image of the king as a defender of the Church. As such, it is notable that such a shift in emphasis appears in a text composed at the very advent of Carolingian rule.

The second continuation also exhibits significant innovations with regard to the description of the Saxons and their lands. First and foremost, it contains the first explicit reference to a lack of Saxon *fidelitas*.10 As we have seen in the paragraph above, the picture of Saxons as ‘rebels’ was nothing new. In the Carolingian period, however, focus on the concept of *fidelitas* rose to the level of obsession, with enemies both internal and external characterized as lacking ‘faith’.11 The accusation of ‘faithlessness’ (*perfidia*) against the Saxons in particular appears to have become exceptionally charged—applying as it did both to secular treason and religious apostasy.12

The second continuation also presents the first clear use of the term *Saxonia* within a Frankish context.13 The term was ancient. Perhaps first attested in a monument erected to the memory of Count Theodosius in Macedonia in the late fourth century,14 its first secure usage was by the adaptor of Josephus known as Pseudo-Hegesippus (c. 400).15

However, in Merovingian sources, as well as in the great majority of Gallo-Roman

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10 Fredegar, *Continuationes*, p. 182.
13 Fredegar, *Continuationes*, p. 182.
writing, the talk always had been of *Saxones* as a people, rather than of Saxony as a geographical territory. Of course, the question of whether political authority in the early medieval period was based in essence on authority over territory or peoples has long occupied historians. And, on the one hand, the reemergence of the term *Saxonia* may be seen as simply being in line with an emergent classicizing mood. On the other, however, in a court-centric Carolingian source, composed mere years before the launch of a war aimed at conquering and incorporating the Saxon lands, the use of *Saxonia* could also indicate a shift towards a Frankish perception of the Saxons as an increasingly fixed, and inimical, group.

b) *Annales regni Francorum*

If the continuations of the *Chronicon* of Fredegar represent the earliest contributions to a new pro-Carolingian historiographical tradition, then the so-called *Annales regni Francorum* are normally held to represent the apogee of an ‘official’ Carolingian historiography. Covering the period 741–829, the composition of the annals is thought

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16 Of the Gallo-Roman writers, only Venantius Fortunatus speaks of *Saxonia*, in his panegyric for the *domesticus* Conda. See Venantius Fortunatus, *De Condane domestico*, MGH AA 4:1, pp. 171–172. In general, Gallo-Roman authors used *Italia*, *Gallia*, etc., but were restrained in their use of such regional designations for lands inhabited by barbarians. Gregory of Tours, for example, used the terms *Francia* and *Gothia* only rarely, preferring the ethnonyms *Franci* and *Gothi*. (See Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum*, pp. 145, 150, and 437 for *Francia*, and p. 188 for *Gothia*.) For reasons that are unclear, *Thuringia* appears to be the exception to the rule. (See Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum*, pp. 61, 62, 104, 105, 106, and 141.) In the Frankish-authored *Liber historiae Francorum* and the original *Chronicon* of Fredegar, the term *Francia* begins to be used more frequently—though the general tendency of discussing barbarians in terms of peoples rather than lands holds true for other groups.


to have been begun in the late 780s or early 790s, either at or under the influence of the royal court, with earlier entries based in part on other annalistic traditions and the
Continuationes of Fredegar and subsequent entries composed in batches at different points, possibly by several different authors. Sometime between 814 and 817, moreover, the entire set of annals was substantially revised before being continued onwards until 829. In fact, the circumstances of composition and transmission of these annals and their relationships to other so-called ‘minor’ Frankish annalistic traditions remain highly controverted. If the precise circumstances of composition of the Annales regni Francorum are not entirely clear, their impact on subsequent historical views of the Carolingian period is nevertheless obvious. Indeed, as Rosamond McKitterick has observed, “the Royal Frankish Annalists in fact constructed so powerful an image of their society and its events, and evoked such a convincing sense of identity, that it is their version that has been remembered, and believed, ever since.”

With regard to the annals’ treatment of the Saxons and the conquest of Saxony in particular, the historical value of the annals lies first and foremost in the information that they provide on developments in Saxony during the period of the conquest, including Frankish military campaigns, Saxon rebellions, the capturing of fortifications, and, on occasion, shifts in Frankish royal and ecclesiastical policy such as the appointment of

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19 R. Collins, “The ‘Reviser’ Revisited: Another Look at the Alternative Version of the Annales Regni Francorum,” in After Rome’s Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History, ed. A. C. Murray (Toronto, 1998), pp. 191–213. Collins (at p. 192) sees the entry for 788 as a dividing line in the text (from the end of this entry onwards, tunc is no longer used). Thus, according to this view, 741–788 comprises one stretch of the narrative; the relatively sparse 789–793 possibly another (does the sparseness of these years imply a date of composition long after the fact?); 801–806 are perhaps another cluster; and the later section 807–829 perhaps was originally conceived as a continuation of the ‘revised’ version and then appended to both versions. (There are a large number of stylistic similarities between the later section of the annals and the revised version.)
20 McKitterick, Charlemagne, p. 37; H. Hoffmann, Untersuchungen der karolingischen Annalistik (Bonn, 1958).
counts to the region. Indeed, it is through the annals that we can reconstruct a general picture of the conquest’s temporal and geographical dimensions. If the annals represent our most important source for the actual events of the conquest, however, then they at times also appear intentionally to obfuscate and conceal potentially embarrassing information, to the extent that serious doubts emerge regarding their trustworthiness. Indeed, Matthias Springer has described the annals’ account of the conquest as nothing more than a “web of lies.”

There can be no denying that the *Annales regni Francorum’s* propensity for misleading information constitutes a serious challenge to their interpretation. In many cases, however, instances of deceit or omission can be corrected by one or several of the various so-called ‘minor annals’ (these will be introduced in more detail below) or by the later, revised version of the annals, which are generally accepted as being more candid, especially where Saxon affairs are concerned. In a particularly brazen instance, it appears that the author of the *Annales regni Francorum* attempted to conceal a Saxon uprising of 792 by intentionally misdating it to the following year. Similarly, it is only through one of the minor annals that we learn of the destruction in 778 of a Frankish-built fortification in Saxony known as the *Urbs Karoli* or *Karlsburg*, an episode left out of the *Annales regni Francorum*, perhaps in order to save face. It is through the revised version of the annals, meanwhile, that we gain a fuller account of the Frankish military disaster in the Süntel mountains in 782, which the original annals describe as a victory, as well as an

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important report regarding the royal assembly at Quierzy in 775, at which the plan to conquer and convert the Saxons was apparently first determined.  

It is instances like these that have caused scholars to view the revised version of the annals as taking a particular interest in Saxony, and offering a generally more precise and accurate account of Saxon affairs. Interestingly, it has been observed that “one of the few clearly distinguishing personal characteristics of this author is the markedly anti-Saxon tone of some of the narrative.” An example of this particularly anti-Saxon viewpoint is the reviser’s insistence on the Saxons’ faithlessness. Where the original annals describe the conquest in fairly simple terms as a struggle between Christians and pagans, the revised version more specifically “explains the bloody campaigns against the Saxons primarily as a consequence of their rebellion, their inroads into Frankish territory, and their stubborn treachery and perfidy.” It should be noted, however, that although the revised annals might describe Saxon faults in more precise terms than the original annals, the Saxons’ status as enemies—by far the most conspicuous of all Frankish foes described in the annals—was in both instances useful to Frankish authors seeking to establish a new, Carolingian-focussed Frankish identity.

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26 ARF, a. 775; cf. Rev., a. 775. For further discussion, see Chapter 2, pp. 87–89.  
28 Scholz (trans.), Carolingian Chronicles, p. 14. For examples, see on perfidy, aa. 782, 785, 786 (on Saxons settled in Brittany), 793, 795, 798. Inroads into Frankish territory can only really be seen as implied in the entry for a. 775.  
29 McKitterick, “Constructing the Past,” pp. 101–129 at p. 128, observes that the text “builds up a strong sense of the Franks in opposition to other people.” No other people appear more frequently than the Saxons (see Appendix). See also McKitterick, “The Illusion of Royal Power,” pp. 1–20.
c) Annales mettenses priores

The *Annales mettenses priores* represent yet another Carolingian-focused set of annals.³⁰ Covering the years 678 through 805 (with entries taken from the *Annales regni Francorum* inserted thereon until 829), the so-called Metz annals are in fact thought to have been composed at the abbey of Chelles sometime around the year 806, probably under the direction of Charlemagne’s sister Gisela, who was abbess of the monastery at that time.³¹ The Metz annals draw liberally from both the *Chronicon* of Fredegar and its continuations as well as from the *Annales regni Francorum* and possibly other minor annals. In their depiction of the early stages of Carolingian ascendance, the Metz Annals, like the *Continuationes* and the *Annales regni Francorum* before them aim for the glorification of the Carolingian family. In the case of the *Annales mettenses priores*, this is achieved through a marked disparagement of the last Merovingians as well as an insistence on the rights of the early Carolingians to rule over neighbouring peoples. Indeed, the *Annales mettenses priores* reflect a decidedly imperial outlook characteristic of the early ninth century, even adopting an “imperial vocabulary.”³²

One of the most obvious ways in which the annals set out to fulfill this aim is through the repeated and insistent claim that early Carolingian rulers had succeeded in subjecting various neighbouring peoples to their authority.³³ In the entry for 688, for example, the

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³⁰ *Annales Mettenses priores*, MGH SRG 10.
annals claim that Pippin II conquered the Swabians, the Bavarians, and the Saxons, and that they submitted to his imperio. The Bavarians were certainly not made subject during this time, so doubts may persist about the annals’ claim regarding the Saxons as well. Nevertheless, under the entry for 691, there is again a claim that the Saxons were among those peoples who had been “once subjected to the Franks.” In the Merovingian period—from the point of view of the Franks at least—there seems to have been a general sense that the Saxons were in fact subject to a kind of loose Frankish hegemony, often involving the payment of an annual tribute. Nevertheless, the Annales mettenses priores move beyond simply labelling the Saxons ‘rebels’, asserting that the Saxons were subjected specifically to the Franks as a group—as opposed to a particular king or some other unnamed authority or terms against which they had rebelled. The assertion of such a claim in a text composed only two years after the conclusion of the conquest of the Saxons by Charlemagne thus suggests an attempt to establish legitimacy for the breadth of Frankish rule.

d) Annales minores

The Annales mettenses priores represent one example of a large number of smaller, generally more localized, annalistic traditions from throughout the Frankish realm known

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34 Annales Mettenses priores, MGH SRG 10, a. 688.
35 Fouracre and Gerberding (eds. and trans.), Late Merovingian France, p. 353, n. 120, refer on this matter to von Simson, without providing a specific reference.
36 Annales Mettenses priores, MGH SRG 10, a. 691: “Francis subiectae fuerant.”
as the ‘minor annals’. These complement, but at times also challenge the otherwise dominant narrative of the *Annales regni Francorum*. Besides the Metz annals, some of the more important of these minor annals are the Moselle annals, the Lorsch annals, the Moissac chronicle, the St. Amand annals, the Petau annals, the Alemannic annals, the St. Maximin annals, and the Lorsch chronicle. The relationship of these texts to the *ARF* is debatable. It has been argued both that the *Annales regni Francorum* made use of some minor annals and conversely that the minor annals drew upon the *Annales regni Francorum*. The fact that most of the minor annals break off in the early ninth century may suggest, as Roger Collins has argued, that the local annals were replaced by the centrally produced and disseminated *Annales regni Francorum*, whose numerous manuscript witnesses are found across the various regions of the Frankish realm.

The value of the minor annals for our understanding of the conquest of Saxony is significant, for they help both to corroborate the claims of the *Annales regni Francorum* and signal when there might be problems with those claims, as we have already seen. Some additional examples may also be cited. Through the Lorsch annals, we learn that the Saxon uprising of 792 may have involved “other pagan peoples living around them,” and even possible collusion with the Avars; through the Moselle annals, we learn of an

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40 The most important of the minors annals include the *Annales sancti Amandi*, *Annales Tiliani*, *Annales Petaviani*, *Annales Alemannici*, *Annales Laureshamenses*, and the *Chronicon Moissiacense*, all collected in MGH SS1. The *Annales Maximini*, are found in MGH SS 13, the *Annales Mossellani* in MGH SS 16, the *Annales Xantenses* in MGH SRG 12, the *Annales Fuldensi* in MGH SRG 7, and the *Annales Bertiniani* in MGH SRG 5. The Lorsch chronicle is found in *Das Chronicon Laurissense breve*, ed. H. Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *Neues Archiv* 36 (1911), pp. 13–49. Even these represent only a selection the surviving annalistic traditions from the eighth and ninth centuries.
42 *Annales Laureshamenses*, MGH SS 1, a. 792: “[Saxones] coniungentes se cum paganas gentes, qui in circuitu eorum erant. Sed et missos suos ad Avaros transmittentes conati sunt in primis rebellare contra Deum.”
apparent division of the Saxon lands “among bishops, priests, and abbots” in 780; through the St. Maximin annals, we learn that Charlemagne appointed Franks as well as Saxons counts in the newly conquered region in 782 (the Annales regni Francorum speak only of Saxons); and through the Lorsch chronicle, we hear of Franks being settled on confiscated Saxon lands in 797 (the Annales regni Francorum report Saxon deportations, but say nothing of Frankish settlement).

Three other important sets of annals for the later history of the Carolingian empire are the annals of Fulda, the annals of St. Bertin, and the annals of Xanten. Picking up roughly where the Annales regni Francorum leave off, only the earliest entries of these three annals pertain to the period we are concerned with here. All three are important sources for the Stellinga uprising of 841–842, though they provide slightly different emphases. All three of the sources, for example, make clear the class-based foundations of the uprising, while only the annals of St. Bertin—all along with the Historiae of Nithard (discussed below)—suggest a religious component, reporting that the Saxon rebels “who were always prone to wicked things, chose rather to imitate the rite of pagans than maintain the sacraments of the Christian faith.”

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44 Annales Maximiniani, MGH SS 13, a. 782: “Carolus iterum cum Saxonibus conventum magnum habuit ad Lippiaebromum, et constituit super eos comites ex nobilibus Francis atque Saxonibus.”

45 Das Chronicon Laurissense breve, p. 34: “Carlus in Saxoniam Francos collocat, Saxones inde educens cum uxoribus et liberis, id est tertium hominem.”

46 Annales Fuldenses, MGH SRG 7; Annales Bertiniani, MGH SRG 5; Annales Xantenses, MGH SRG 12.


48 Annales Bertiniani, MGH SRG 5, a. 841, reports that the Saxon rebels “Qui semper ad mala proclives, magis ritum paganorum imitari quam christianiae fidei sacramenta tenere delegerunt.”
e) Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, c. 814–840

The *Vita Karoli Magni*, composed by the Frankish courtier and lay abbot Einhard, represents the first secular biography of the medieval period and, of all Carolingian representations of Charlemagne, is the one most influential for the formation of a historical picture of the Frankish king.\(^{49}\) The sense of authority possessed by the text, however, must be tempered by the uncertainty surrounding its date and purpose of composition.\(^{50}\) As such, the *Vita* constitutes an indispensable, if fraught, historical witness to the life and accomplishments of Charlemagne, including the conquest of Saxony.

Einhard devotes two full chapters of the *Vita* to the conquest of Saxony, wherein there is set out the only direct, contemporary Frankish statement on the motives of the conquest and the reason for its duration.\(^{51}\) In describing the war generally, Einhard offers that:

> No [war] longer, fiercer, or more arduous for the Frankish people than this one was ever undertaken; because the Saxons, like nearly all nations living in Germany, are ferocious by nature, devoted to the worship of demons, and are opponents of our religion. They thought it not dishonourable to violate and transgress laws both human and divine.

> [Quo nullum [bellum] neque prolixius neque atrocius Francorumque populo laboriosius susceptum est; quia Saxones, sicut omnes fere Germaniam incolentes nationes, et natura feroces et cultui daemonum dediti nostraeque religioni contrarii neque divina neque humana iura vel polluere vel transgredi inhonestum arbitrabantur.]\(^{52}\)


\(^{50}\) For an overview of the dating debate, see McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 11–20, who argues for an extremely early dating on the supposition that the *Vita* could have been used as a funeral oration. In general, a *terminus post quem* of January 814 can be established on the basis of Einhard’s inclusion of Charlemagne’s will, while the only secure *terminus ante quem* is Einhard’s own death in 840. It is less than certain that the *Vita* was intended as an implicit critique of the rule of Louis the Pious, as has sometimes been suggested. See McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 14.

\(^{51}\) Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, cc. 7 and 8.

\(^{52}\) Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7.
Einhard’s characterization of the conquest as ‘the longest, fiercest, and most difficult’ war ever waged by the Franks speaks to the impression its events made on the generation of Franks who grew up in its immediate aftermath. At the same time, his subsequent claims that the Saxons rebelled “nearly every year,” and that the war was waged for “thirty-three continuous years,” are patently false, for there was no campaign in 781 and a period of prolonged peace was established from 785–792.

As for the ultimate cause of this impressive struggle, Einhard claims that it was the long, poorly defined border between the two peoples and the constant “murder, rapine, and arson” which occurred back and forth across it that spurred the Franks to abandon tit-for-tat reprisals and “undertake an open, worthy war against them.” The situation described by Einhard is hardly surprising, given that both Franks and Saxons seem to have been moving into the lands between the Rhine and the Weser, putting the two groups into competition for land and surely resulting in conflict. Indeed, Einhard’s specific reference to ‘murder, rapine, and arson’ suggests that the conquest may have been preceded not by formal cross-border campaigning as much as by low-level inter-community feuding. The social and economic dynamics of this situation will be explored further in Chapter 3.

As for the reason that the conquest of Saxony took as long as it did, Einhard, like the author of the revised version of the *Annales regni Francorum*, lays the blame squarely at the feet of the Saxons themselves, claiming (rather defensively) that although the Saxons

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53 *Annales Petaviani*, MGH SS 1, a. 781.
54 Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7: “Suberant et causae, quae cotidie pacem conturbare poterant, termini videlicet nostri et illorum poene ubique in plano contigui, praeter paucas locas, in quibus vel silvae maiores vel montium iuga interiecta utorvmque agros certo limite determinant, in quibus caedes et rapinae et incendia vicissim fieri non cessabant. Quibus adeo Franci sunt irritati, ut non iam vicissitudinem reddere, sed apertum contra eos bellum suscipere dignum iudicarent.”
in the end suffered more than the Franks, “the war could have been finished more quickly, if the faithlessness (perfidia) of the Saxons had [only] allowed it.”\textsuperscript{55} Indeed, Einhard goes on to claim:

It is difficult to say how many times they were overcome and gave themselves kneeling as suppliants to the king, promised to obey his orders, gave over the hostages as commanded to without delay, received legates who were sent [to them], [and] thus several times were subdued and enervated, so that they even promised to be willing to abandon the worship of demons and place themselves under the Christian religion. But just as they were sometimes prone to do these things, so too were they always quick to subvert them, so that it is not easy to reckon which of these two [behaviours] they can be said truly to be most at home with.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Difficile dictu est, quoties superati ac supplices regi se dediderunt, imperata facturos polliciti sunt, obides qui imperabantur absque dilatione dederunt, legatos qui mittebantur susceperunt, aliquoties ita domiti et emolliti, ut etiam cultum daemonum dimittere et Christianae religioni se subdere velle promitterent. Sed sicut ad haec facienda aliquoties proni, sic ad eadem pervertenda semper fuere praecipites, non sit ut satis aestimare, ad utrum horum faciilores verius dici possint.}\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

Einhard’s description of a pattern of rebellion and apostasy over the course of the conquest agrees with the information conveyed by the annals, while the emphasis on Saxon ‘faithlessness’ accords with the general Carolingian discourse on \textit{fides}—developed, as we have already seen, from the continuations of Fredegar onwards.

Einhard concludes his discussion of the conquest with the claim that, in the end, the Saxons were converted to the Christian religion and “joined together with the Franks and made one people (\textit{populus}) with them”\textsuperscript{57}—a claim that has occasioned much debate. It is unlikely that Einhard meant to imply a kind of ‘ethnic’ unification,\textsuperscript{58} for Saxons and Franks continued to be seen as distinct \textit{gentes} subject to separate laws. Most scholarship

\textsuperscript{55} Einhard, \textit{Vita Karoli}, c. 7: “Poterat siquidem citius finiri, si Saxonum hoc perfidia pateretur.”
\textsuperscript{56} Einhard, \textit{Vita Karoli}, c. 7.
\textsuperscript{57} Einhard, \textit{Vita Karoli}, c. 7: “Eaque conditione a rege proposita et ab illis suscepta tractum per tot annos bellum constat esse finitum, ut, abyecto daemonum cultu et relictis patriis caerimonis, Christianae fidei atque religionis sacramenta susceperent et Francis adiunati unus cum eis populus efficerentur.”
presumes that he intended the word *populus* in the spiritual sense of a *populus christianus*. In neither case can the claim be accepted as accurate, for the Saxons remained juridically separate from the Franks, politically subordinate, and only superficially initiated into the Christian faith. In the tenth century, the Saxon historian Widukind of Corvey would change Einhard’s phrasing to the far more equivocal “quasi una gens.” Whatever Einhard intended, the Saxons remained both separate from and subordinate to their Frankish conquerors, and only superficially Christianized, until long after the conquest itself. Indeed, one need only look to Einhard’s own earlier, hardly-flattering characterization of the Saxons as ‘ferocious by nature’ to see that Frankish attitudes toward the Saxons in the post-conquest period were not fully conciliatory.

f) Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, 836–837

Thegan’s *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris* represents the first of two near-contemporary biographies of Louis the Pious. However, it deals only lightly with the Saxons and Saxony, mentioning that Louis held his first assembly after the death of his father at the royal palace at Paderborn *in partibus Saxoniae* in 815; noting that Louis’s wife Judith

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60 See Chapter 4, pp. 197–198.
61 Widukind, *Res gestae saxonicae*, MGH SRG 60, 1.15, p. 25
was half Saxon on her mother’s side;\(^\text{64}\) and reporting that Badarad, the Saxon bishop of Paderborn, was among the *missi* sent by Louis to his son Lothar.\(^\text{65}\)

g) The Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*, c. 840

The anonymous *Vita Hludowici* constitutes the second near-contemporary biography of Louis the Pious.\(^\text{66}\) The author is anonymous but has been dubbed ‘the Astronomer’ on the basis of his apparent astronomical knowledge. Beyond this, nothing can be said for certain about his identity, though his interest in the affairs of the southwest, his apparent knowledge of the Mozarabic liturgy, his drawing of a distinction between *Franci* and *Germani*,\(^\text{67}\) and his reference to *Germania* as “lying beyond the Rhine” point to an origin in the West, and perhaps even to time spent in Aquitaine with Louis himself.\(^\text{68}\) Compared to the only slightly earlier work of Thegan, the Astronomer places far more emphasis on the Saxons and Saxon affairs, celebrating Charlemagne’s conquest of the region and attaching the achievement to his subject, Louis.\(^\text{69}\)

The Astronomer has far more to say about Louis’s relationship with the Saxons after his father’s death. In the first place, the Astronomer reports that Louis took steps to solidify the loyalty of the Saxons as well as the Frisians by restoring the “paternal law of

\(^{64}\) Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c. 26, p. 214: “Sequenti vero anno accept in coniugium filiam Huelfi ducis sui, qui erat de nobilissima progenie Baioariorum, et nomen virginis Ludith, quae erat ex parte matris, cuius nomen Eigiluui, nobilissimi generis Saxonici, eamque reginam constituit; erat enim pulchra valde.”

\(^{65}\) Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c. 54, p. 248: “Tunc imperator misit legatos suos post illum, Badaradum episcopum Saxonicum et Gebehardum nobilissimum ac fidelissimum ducem et Berengarium sapientem propinquum suum.”

\(^{66}\) Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*, MGH SRG 64. English translation in Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*.

\(^{67}\) Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 45.


\(^{69}\) Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici*, cc. 9 and 11. The author emphasizes Louis’s presence in Saxony as a child in the mid 780s and his leadership of a campaign into Eastphalia in 804.
their heritage, which they had legally lost under his father on account of perfidy." The Astronomer notes that public opinion was divided on the emperor’s clemency in this instance, because “these peoples were accustomed to natural ferocity,” but ultimately argues that the strategy effectively bound these peoples to the emperor for the duration of his reign. (This comment must be seen in light of the Astronomer’s claim that Louis’s sole flaw was that he was too clemens.) The text reports that Saxon counts were subsequently used by Louis in campaigns in both Denmark and the Slavic lands. Danish incursions in Saxony are noted. Saxon duces parade a rebel leader of the Abodrites before Louis. The Astronomer reports also that at Frankfurt Louis held an assembly “of eastern Franks, Saxons, and other peoples who bordered them.” In chapter 42, the Astronomer reports again that Saxon counts were sent into Denmark in another attempt to intervene with Godfred on behalf of Harald. In chapter 62, the Astronomer hints at some of the divisions that were yet to come within the empire, describing how Saxons and Thuringians joined with Louis the German in an invasion of Alemannia.

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70 Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici*, c. 4
71 Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici*, c. 24: “…ius paterne hereditatis, quod sub patre ob perfidiam legaliter perdidierant…” and “…eo quod hae gentes, naturali adsuæfactae feritati…” The use of the term *ius* here suggests that the passage refers to the restoration of a traditional form of law rather than to the restoration of previously deported Saxons to their lands, as Noble suggests (Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, p. 249, n. 128).
74 Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 29.
75 Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 31.
76 Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 36.
77 Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 42.
78 Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 62.
Nithard, the Frankish nobleman, soldier, and grandson of Charlemagne, completed his *Historiae* in the spring of 843, a year before his own death in battle. These four books focus primarily on the civil wars of the 830s and 840s. Within this overall remit, Nithard spends some time on Saxon affairs:

Since I consider the affairs of the Saxons to be very important, I believe that they should not be omitted. Emperor Charles, deservedly called the Great by all peoples, converted the Saxons by much effort, as is known to everyone in Europe. He won them over from the vain adoration of idols to the true Christian religion of God. From the beginning the Saxons have often proved themselves by many examples to be both noble and extremely warlike. This whole people is divided into three classes. There are those among them who are called *edhilingi* in their language, those who are called *frilingi*, and those who are called *lazzi*; this is in the Latin language nobles, freemen, and serfs. In the conflict between Lothar and his brothers, the nobility among the Saxons was divided into two factions, one following Lothar, the other following Louis.

[Saxonum casus quoniam maximos esse perspicio, praetereundos minime puto. Saxones quidem, sicut universis Europam degentibus patet, Karolus Magnus imperator ab universis nationibus non inmerito vocatus ab idolorum vana cultura multo ac diverso labore ad veram Dei Christianamque religionem convertit. Qui ab initio tam nobiles quam et ad bella promptissimi multis inditiis persaepe claruerunt. Que gens omnis in tribus ordinibus divisa consistit: sunt etenim inter illos qui dhilingui, sunt qui frilingi, sunt quiazzi illorum lingua dicuntur; Latina vero lingua hoc sunt: nobiles, ingenuiles atque serviles. Sed pars illorum, quae nobilis inter illos habetur, in duabus partibus in dissensione Lodharii ac fratrum suorum divisa, unaque eorum Lodharium, altera vero Lodhuvicum secuta est.]

Nithard’s comment is valuable on two counts. In the first place, it speaks—much as the *Vita Karoli*—to the outsize place that Charlemagne’s conquest of the Saxons appears to have occupied in the minds of the younger generation. Second, it appears to confirm the persistence of a tripartite socio-juridical hierarchy among the Saxons.

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81 See below.
After outlining this situation, Nithard goes on to explain how Lothar went about attempting to bolster his support among the Saxons by making grants of fiscal property, granting freedom to some and promising freedom others, and, most intriguingly, offering to the frilingi and lazzi—who had banded together under the name Stellinga—a return to “the law that their ancestors had kept in the time when they were still worshipping idols.”

Whether this report should be taken to mean that they wished to return to paganism per se, or merely to the laws which they had during the time of paganism, is somewhat unclear.

Hagiographical Sources

The process of the Christianization of the Saxons had begun long before their conquest by Charlemagne. It appears to have started in earnest with Anglo-Saxon missionaries who felt a calling to convert their continental kindred and continued later by the establishment of ecclesiastical institutions in the region by both Franks and Anglo-Saxons in the time of Charlemagne. Both parts of this process are given some illumination through a number hagiographical works dealing with the lives of saints whose work had—sometimes only fleetingly—been directed towards the region. Like the ‘secular’ histories examined above, the hagiographical works are similarly partial, often

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82 Nithard, Historiae, 4.2: “…legem, quam antecessores sui tempore, quo idolorum cultores erant, habuerant.”


84 For discussion, see below.

concerned with the defence of particular versions of history and the assertion of institutional claims.  

a) Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, c. 754–768

The *Vita Bonifatii* was composed by a certain ‘Willibald’ in the years following the martyrdom of the Anglo-Saxon missionary and archbishop of Mainz in 754. Boniface’s mission to the continent appears from the evidence of his correspondence to have been eminently concerned with the conversion of the continental Saxons. It is perhaps a testament to the missionary’s relative lack of success in this area that his *Vita* makes spare reference to them. For although it is true that the title for Chapter 7 (in those manuscripts which contain chapter titles) reads: “How [Boniface] converted the Saxon and Hessian peoples, and how he sent an announcement of his deeds to Rome, and how he was soon summoned to speak about this same thing with the pope,” Saxons appear relatively infrequently in the surviving text. Indeed, following the chapter heading just given, talk is only of the Hessians, who are said to live *iuxta fines Saxonum*. Later in the work, however, there is a brief section relating how the Saxons asserted their authority over part of Thuringia, with disastrous results for the Christian religion in the region.

Specifically, the *Vita* claims that two dukes, Theobald and Heden, were so tyrannical that many of the people “subjected themselves to the leadership of the Saxons,” and that

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87 Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, MGH SS 2, pp. 331–353. Whether this was Willibald of Eichstätt, or another Anglo-Saxon of the same name, is still not settled. For an overview of the debate, see H. Wagner, *Bonifatiusstudien* (Würzburg, 2003), pp. 9–46, who argues once again in favour of Willibald of Eichstätt.

88 See below.

89 Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, p. 342: “Quomodo Saxonum et Hessorum populos convertit, et de gestis suisnuntium Romam misit. eodemque mox evocatus cum papa collocutus est.”

consequently “there ceased in them devotion to Christianity and religion.”

Notably, the *Vita* suggests that these people moved not to paganism, but to heretical forms of Christianity. Finally, late in Boniface’s life, the *Vita* refers to the saint’s appointment of Burchard to the church of Würzburg, where he would oversee all of the churches *in confiniis Francorum et Saxonum atque Sclavorum*.

b) Liudger, *Vita Gregorii*, c. 800

The *Vita Gregorii* describes the life and career of Gregory of Utrecht (c. 700–770s), though its earlier part has as much to say about Boniface as about Gregory. At times thought a forgery, most scholarship now accepts the *Vita* as authentic, composed by Gregory’s student Liudger, but with “no authority as an account of Gregory’s life.”

Given this doubt regarding the *Vita*’s historical worth, it is uncertain how much stock should be put in its claim that a diverse group of students gathered around Gregory at Utrecht, including:

> Certain ones of them from the noble line (*stirpe*) of the Franks; certain ones from the religious nation (*gens*) of the Angles; but certain ones also from the those that have emerged from God’s new plantings that have come into being in our own day, namely the Frisians and Saxons, and also certain ones from the Bavarians and the Suebians gifted in that same religion, or from whatever people or nation God had sent them.

[Quidam enim eorum erant de nobili stirpe Francorum, quidam autem et de religiosa gente Anglorum, quidam vero et de novella Dei plantatione diebus nostris]

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92 Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, p. 344. These events are probably to be placed in the 720s. Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 120, speculates that perhaps the implication was that Thuringia came under the influence of heretical (Anglo-)Saxon missionaries.

93 Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, p. 344.


The text describes a situation in the mid-eighth century, long before the Christianization of the Saxons by Charlemagne. Yet there is no reason to think that certain Saxons could not have converted already at this early date.\textsuperscript{97}

c) Eigil, \textit{Vita Sturmi}, c. 791–818

The \textit{Vita Sturmi} was composed by Eigil, the fourth abbot of Fulda and a relative of the text’s subject.\textsuperscript{98} The dating of the composition of the \textit{Vita} has traditionally been placed in the 790s in the midst of the Saxon conquest, though more recent arguments have moved this to the second decade of the ninth century.\textsuperscript{99} Sturm himself was the founder and first abbot of that same monastery and a key actor in the early years of the conquest.\textsuperscript{100} As such, it is hardly surprising that Saxon affairs figure prominently in the \textit{Vita}.

The Saxons make their first appearance in the \textit{Vita Sturmi} in a passage dealing with the founding of the monastery of Hersfeld, c. 740, and with Sturm’s conversation with his patron Boniface regarding the suitability of the monastery’s location.\textsuperscript{101} According to the \textit{Vita}, Boniface warned Sturm against remaining at Hersfeld, asserting: “You have indeed found a place, [however] I am very afraid for you to hold on to it on account of its proximity to a barbaric race; for there are, as you know, ferocious Saxons close by. On

\textsuperscript{96} Liudger, \textit{Vita Gregorii}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{98} Eigil, \textit{Vita Sturmi}, MGH SS 2, pp. 365–377.
\textsuperscript{100} See also Wood, \textit{Missionary Life}, pp. 68–72.
account of which, go seek for yourselves a place to live that is remoter and further from there, where you can live without danger to yourselves.”

Ultimately, Sturm would found the monastery of Fulda, further removed, as Boniface had recommended, from Saxon territory. This brief exchange is notable, for it paints a picture—albeit a retrospective one—of tension between Saxons and Franks on the frontier between the two peoples in the decades prior to the beginning of the conquest proper.

The Saxons feature even more prominently in a later section of the *Vita*, which describes Charlemagne’s early campaigns in Saxony and the role played by Sturm in these. This section begins with a description of the background of the events of the first Frankish campaign of 772:

> When the Lord King Charles had reigned happily for four years, the savage Saxon people was dangerous to all and very much devoted to pagan rites. But King Charles, the always devoted lord, since he was himself most Christian, began to think how he might be able to acquire this people for Christ. Taking the counsel of the servants of God, he asked that the Lord would assent to his prayers and offerings. And so with his great army brought together, and the name of Christ invoked, he set out for Saxony, with all the bishops, abbots, priests, and all orthodox people and those worshippers of the faith, so that they might make this people, in believing, come under the mild and sweet yoke of the sacred doctrine and Christ—which had been fettered by the chains of demons since the beginning of the world.

> [Regnante feliciter domino rege Karolo annos quatuor, Saxonum gens saeva et infestissima cunctis fuit, et paganis ritibus nimirum dedita. Rex vero Karolus, Domino semper devotus, cum ipse christianissimus esset, cogitare coepit, qualiter gentem hanc Christo adquiere quivisset. Inito servorum Dei consilio, poposcit, ut precibus Dominum votis suis annuere obtinerent. Congregato tam grandi exercitu, invocato Christi nomine, Saxoniam prefectus est, adsuntis universis sacerdotibus, abbatibus, presbyteris et omnibus orthodoxis atque fidei cultoribus, ut gentem quae ab initio mundi daemonum vinculis fuerat obligata, doctrinis sacris mite et suave Christi iugum crendo subire fecissent.]

Immediately following this description of the background to the first Saxon campaign in 772, the *Vita* relates the events of the campaign itself:

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Hersfeld was indeed temporarily abandoned, and refounded around the time of the conquest.

103 For discussion of the Frankish-Saxon border region, see Chapter 3, pp. 170–176.

104 Eigel, *Vita Sturmi*, p. 376.
When the king arrived there, he converted the greatest part of that people to the faith of Christ, partly by war, partly by persuasion, and partly by gifts; and shortly after he divided that whole province into episcopal parishes and gave the power of teaching and baptizing to the servants of the Lord.

[Quo cum rex pervenisset, partim bellis, partim suasionibus, partim etiam muneribus, maxima ex parte gentem illam ad fidelem Christi convertit; et post non longum tempus totam provinciam illam in parochias episcopales divisit, et servis Domini ad docendum et baptizandum potestatem dedit.]105

According to Eigil, after this division of the newly acquired province, it was Sturm himself who was left in charge of its ecclesiastical affairs and the catechetical instruction of the newly converted Saxons:

Then the greatest part of that people and land were committed to the blessed Sturm for his administration. Therefore, after taking upon himself the duty to preach, he devoted his attention in all ways to how he might acquire not a few people for God. But he pursued every opportunity, teaching them with holy sermons, so that they might abandon idols and images, take up the faith of Christ, destroy the temples of their gods, fell their sacred groves, and build holy churches.

[Tunc pars maxima beato Sturmi populi et terrae illius ad procurandum committitur. Suscepto igitur praedicationis officio, curam modis omnibus impendit, qualiter non parvum Domino populum adquiret. Sed temporibus instabat opportunis, sacris eos sermonibus docens, ut idola et simulacra derelinquerent, Christi fidelium susciperent, deorum suorum templaque destruerent, lucos succiderent, sanctas quoque basilicas aedificarent.]106

The *Vita* then goes on to give an account of the Saxon uprising of 773, in which Eigil claims that “again the corrupt and perverse Saxon people, straying from the faith of Christ, became entangled in their vain errors, and with the army gathered together crossed over their borders and came as far as the Rhine, laying waste to everything and killing everyone.”107 This attack caused the monks at Fulda temporarily to depart, along with the body of St. Boniface (Eigil himself seems to have been part of this sojourn)

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105 Eigil, *Vita Sturmi*, p. 376.
107 Eigil, *Vita Sturmi*, p. 376: “iterum postea Saxonum gens prava et perversa a fide Christi devians, vanis se erroribus implicavit, congregatoque exercitu ultra fines suos egressa est, et usque ad Rhenum vastando et depopulando cuncta pervenit.”
while Sturm himself attempted to parley with the Saxon host, to little avail.\textsuperscript{108} Nevertheless, Eigil claims that “on the fourth day our messengers came, who told us that some people from our side and our people banded together and undertook war against the Saxons, and beat them and made them flee to their own lands.”\textsuperscript{109} (The contrast between “our” people and the Saxons highlights the Frankish perspective of the \textit{Vita}.)

Following these events, Sturm continued to play an important role in the province’s affairs, not only in its ecclesiastical life, but in its military occupation. According to the \textit{Vita}, in an episode usually dated to 799, “then King Charles again proceeded into that land (Saxony) with his army for the purpose of strengthening that inchoate Christian faith, and the venerable and infirm Sturm came with him, now wearied by old age, to the Eresburg, and the king commanded him to remain in the city with his comrades for the purpose of protecting it.”\textsuperscript{110}

These passages relating to the early years of the conquest would seem at first reading to offer invaluable insight into the motivations for the Frankish conquest of the Saxon lands as well as into early ecclesiastical developments in the region. However, the reliability of the text’s historical validity is undercut by its long-noted chronological inconsistencies and by the fact that its version of events is substantiated by no other contemporary sources.\textsuperscript{111} Specifically, no other source points either to a strong ecclesiastical contingent accompanying the campaign of 772 or to a division of Saxony

\textsuperscript{108} Eigil, \textit{Vita Sturmi}, p. 376.

\textsuperscript{109} Eigil, \textit{Vita Sturmi}, p. 376: “quarto iam die legati nostri venerunt, qui referebant, de parte et gente nostra nonnullus congregatos contra Saxones bellum inire, eosque victos ad proprias aufugisse terras.”

\textsuperscript{110} Eigil, \textit{Vita Sturmi}, p. 377: “Tunc iterum rex Carolus ad confirmationem inchoatae fidei christianae cum exercitu ad illam terram perrexit, et venerandum Sturmen infirmum, iam senectute fessum, in Heresburg ad tuendam urbem cum sociis suis sedere iussit.”

into parishes at this early stage. Given this, it is perhaps more likely that Eigil—whenever he was writing—strove to overemphasize the role of his subject and of the Church in general in the earliest stages of the conquest. Nevertheless, his representation of the Saxons as “barbarians,” hostile to the Church, is consistent with other Frankish texts from both before and after the conquest.112

e) Paschasius Radbertus, *Vita Adalhardi*, c. 826

The *Vita Adalhardi*, composed by Paschasius Radbertus sometime after 826, the year of death of its subject, relates the life and career of Adalhard, a cousin of Charlemagne who had held the office of count palatine at an early age.113 He soon switched to the religious life, however, joining the abbey of Corbie and studying at Monte Cassino before being recalled by Charlemagne and appointed abbot of Corbie. Along with his brother Wala, he founded the abbey of “New Corbie,” or Corvey, in Saxony.114 As such, Adalhard was intimately involved in the religious life of the province of Saxony during the crucial period of Christianization and cultural adjustment that followed the conquest. In fact, however, the *Vita Adalhardi* refers only once to Saxony. The relevant passage concerns Adalhard’s arrival *ad Saxonias fines*, where he found another man of the same name already constructing a *parvissima cellula*. For reasons not entirely clear in the text, Adalhard then approached the king, Louis the Pious, requesting assistance for the construction of a new monastery in a separate place, which he received. The eventual site of Corvey was, the *Vita* reports, on the bank of the Weser, east of Paderborn.115

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112 See Appendix.
f) Paschasius Radbertus, *Vita Walae (or Epitaphium Arsenii)*, cc. 836, 851

The *Vita Walae*, also known as the *Epitaphium Arsenii* (Arsenius being a pseudonym used by Paschasius for Wala throughout the work), constitutes something of a companion piece to the *Vita Adalhardi*. In contrast to the relatively brief *Vita Adalhardi*, the *Vita Walae* is significantly longer and different in form, being arranged in a dialogue between Paschasius and a number of his monastic brothers. The work is composed in two books, the first apparently written c. 836, following the death of its subject, the second c. 851. The text provides an overview of the life of Wala, who like Adalhard had served as a soldier and member of the royal court before being removed in a purge and sent to Corbie following the transfer of the throne to Louis the Pious. Wala later succeeded his brother Adalhard as abbot of both Corbie and Corvey, where, according to Paschasius, the two brothers “devoted as if one, propagated the shoots of a new plantation in Saxony.”

Indeed, Wala may have played an especially important role at the new Saxon monastery because of his Saxon mother.

Wala’s Saxon ancestry is emphasized by Paschasius throughout his work. It is mentioned first in a passage addressed by one of the text’s interlocutors, named Adeodatus, to the author himself: “We have learned all these things: but I wish you would tell how he became a monk under our Antonius (Adalhard), especially for our brothers living in Saxony—he was of that people—so that they might know in full what

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118 See E. J. Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire* (Ithaca, 2006), p. 177, n. 135. Wala and Adalhard’s father was Bernard, half-brother of Pippin III and son of Charles Martel.
kind of founders of the faith they had.” Wala’s apparently close attachment to his Saxonnness may also be hinted at, if not stated directly, in a later passage, in which it is related that Wala followed “the customs of his native land” (*usibus patriae*) while living at Corvey, even wearing local styles of clothing and the shoes known as *ruhilingi*.120

**g) Altfrid, *Vita Liudgerii*, c. 839–849**

Born the son of noble Christians in Frisia, Liudger received training at Utrecht and York before undertaking missionary work among both the Frisians and the Saxons. His *Vita*, composed by Altfrid, later bishop of Hildesheim, is thought to have been composed some decades after Liudger’s death in 809.121 Although late, the text is considered a valuable historical source, illuminating the social and religious connections that existed between Frisia, Anglo-Saxon England, and Saxony in the mid- and late-eighth century.

The *Vita Liudgeri*’s first reference to Saxony occurs in a reference to the arrival of the Anglo-Saxon missionary Lebuin (or Liafwin) at Utrecht, whence he intended to go preach along the river IJssel *in confinio Francorum atque Saxonum*.122 However, the resultant ecclesiastical operation in this region, which included a church at Deventer, was attacked and destroyed by pagan Saxons. The church at Deventer would later be rebuilt by Liudger, and Lebuin’s remains interred there, but burned yet again by a second Saxon attack in 776.123 Indeed, affairs in Saxony appear to have been a source of constant

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119 Paschasius Radbertus, *Vita Walae*, p. 537: “Adeodatus: Novimus haec omnia: sed quomodo conversatus sit sub Antonio nostro, velim edicas, maxime pro fratribus nostris Saxonia degentibus, quorum fuit ex genere, ut sciant ad plenum, quales habuerint fidei suae fundatores.”


121 Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, MGH SS 2, pp. 403–419.

122 Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, p. 408.

123 Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, p. 408. B. S. Bachrach, *Charlemagne’s Early Campaigns* (Leiden, 2013), p. 406, suggests, based on the form of her name, that the original patron of this operation, a certain noblewoman named Avaerhilda, was herself a Saxon.
disruption to Liudger’s work in Frisia. In a passage thought to refer to 782, the *Vita*
relates that when Liudger had been in that country for seven years, “there arose the root
of wickedness, Widukind, duke of the Saxons—at that time still pagans—who turned the
Frisians from the way of God, burned churches and expelled the servants of God, and up
to the river *Fleo* made the Frisians relinquish the faith of Christ and sacrifice to idols
according to the custom of [their] former error.”

Nevertheless, the Saxons eventually were converted, after which, according to the
*Vita*, Charlemagne appointed Liudger to preach in Saxony, in the vicinity of Münster,
where the holy man constructed a monastery and “with his usual custom strove with all
eagerness and zeal to profit the rude Saxon people in teaching, and with the thorny
bushes of the idols dug up, to diligently sow the word of God through each place, to
construct churches, and to place priests in each of those, whom he nourished as helpers of
the word of God for himself.” Later, Liudger healed a blind woman “brought to that
place from Saxony” and a deaf man “from Saxony” at Werden (where the saint also
founded a monastery). The *Vita* closes by urging the reader to visit the saint’s relics at
Werden: “Rise, go forth, and seek out the tomb of the holy Liudger, once bishop of

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124 Now the Zuiderzee.
125 Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, p. 410: “Consurrexit radix sceleris Widukint dux Saxonum eatenus gentilium, qui
evertit Frisones a via Dei, combussitique ecclesias et expulit Dei famulos, et usque ad Fleo fluvium fecit
Fresones Christi fidem relinquere, et immolare idolis iuxta morem erroris pristini.” The dating of this
incident to 782 appears to be indebted to the fact that Wudkind’s first appearance in the *ARF* occurs in that
year.
126 Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, p. 411: “Itaque more solito cum omni aviditate et sollicitudine rudibus Saxonum
populis studebat in doctrina prodesse, erutisque ydolatrie spinis, verbum Dei diligenter per loca singula
serere, ecclesias construere, et per eas singulos ordinare presbiteros, quos verbi Dei cooperatores sibi ipsi
nriterat.”
127 Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, p. 416: “Quaedam autem femina ad eundem locum de Saxonia ceca perducta est.”
128 Altfrid, *Vita Liudgeri*, p. 417: “Contigit cuidam viro de Saxonia in loco qui dicitur Werthina ut per
temptationem fieret surdus, ita ut nullum omnino sonum auribus caperet.”
Saxons and Frisians, and there, with God having mercy, you will receive health through his merits.”

**Legal Sources**

If the narrative sources of the Carolingian period sketch for us the essential—if at times contradictory and confusing—outlines of the Frankish conquest of Saxony, then it is the surviving legal sources, both prescriptive and pragmatic, which give us some insight into the character of Carolingian rule in the newly conquered Saxon lands. This evidence consists of three Saxon-specific legal texts alongside numerous fleeting references to Saxon affairs found within the wider capitulary evidence and a small number of miscellaneous administrative documents and charters. Nevertheless, the same question applies to the Saxon material as looms over all Carolingian legislation: To what extent did practice accord with the written text?

i) Prescriptive Legal Sources

a) *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, 782/785

The most notorious, and almost surely the earliest, of all the Frankish legal documents pertaining to the Saxons and Saxony is the so-called *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*. Dubbed “the terror capitulary” by Pierre Riché, the *Capitulatio* appears to spell out the

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130 *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, MGH Fontes iuris 4, pp. 37–44.

initial terms of the Saxons’ integration into the Frankish state. The capitulary places a particular emphasis on the prohibition of pagan practices and the enforcement of Christian sacraments and ritual practices, in many instances on pain of death. Indeed, the opening chapter of the capitulary states that “the churches of Christ, which are now being constructed in Saxony and consecrated to God, should not have less honour, but greater and more distinguished honour than the shrines of the idols used to have.” The Capitulatio then proceeds to outlaw the ‘pagan’ burial customs of cremation and internment in “burial mounds” (tumuli), the swearing of oaths at groves or springs, human sacrifice, and the eating of witches, while simultaneously demanding baptism, Sunday church attendance, the keeping of the Lenten fast, and the payment of the tithe. In mandating Christianization by force of law and threat of execution, the capitulary appears to fulfill the mandate of the so-called ‘Alternative of Quierzy’ as described by the revised Annales regni Francorum.

If the religious context of the capitulary is immediately apparent, no less clear are its political and legal dimensions. For the capitulary takes equal care to establish the duty to obey one’s lord and pay fines. The king, and his local representatives, the counts, are established as the highest law of the land. In an apparent nod to continuing anxieties over Christian rebellion, unsupervised public assemblies are outlawed. An obscure reference

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132 Doubts have at times been raised about the unity of the chapters included in the Capitulatio. L. Halphen, Études critiques sur l’histoire de Charlemagne (Paris, 1921), pp. 171–179, for example, suggested that the capitulary may represent a compilation, with chapters 24–33 not to be understood as Saxon-specific.
133 Cc. 1–13 constitute the capital crimes, though c. 14 offers an ‘out’ through confession and penance.
134 Capitulatio, c. 1, p. 37: “Hoc placuit omnibus, ut ecclesiae Christi, que modo construuntur in Saxonia et Deo sacratae sunt, non minorem habeant honorem sed maiorem et excellentiorem quam vana habuissent idolorum.” (The manuscript reading vana is presumably a corruption of fana. Cf. Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum, MGH Cap. 1, c. 4, p. 223: “De casulis id est fanis.”)
135 Rev., a. 775. The question of the validity of this report is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, pp. 88–90.
to the continued force of a pre-existing *lex Saxonorum* (sic) with regards to perjury is also present.\(^{136}\)

As always in the early medieval legal tradition, there arises the question of representation versus reality. The *Capitulatio* projects a picture of starkly contrasted and contesting Christians and pagans—chapter 10 warns expressly against the forming of “plots” (*consilia*) with pagans against Christians. In fact, however, distinctions may not always have been so clear in the so-called ‘Wild East’. Moreover, some of the supposedly ‘pagan’ Saxon practices described by the *Capitulatio* may be called into question. Archaeological evidence, for example, has shown that both cremation and burial mounds—if this is indeed what the term *tumuli* refers to—had already largely gone out of fashion by the time of the Frankish conquest,\(^{137}\) while the chapter regarding the burning and eating of witches is not in disagreement with a general Frankish belief in witches evident from Frankish legal texts.\(^{138}\) Should the paganism of the *Capitulatio* then be understood not as the lived paganism of the Saxons at the time of the conquest but more a Frankish ‘imagined paganism’?

The actual dating of the *Capitulatio* is extremely important, if it is to help us understand the development of Frankish policy in Saxony, but is highly controversial. The text’s date is usually given as 782, or less often as 785. Those who prefer 782 point to the capitulary’s reference to the authority of counts, who appear to have been first

\(^{136}\) *Capitulatio*, c. 33, p. 43; “De periuris, secundum legem Saxonorum sit.” Presumably this refers to an oral, customary legal tradition.


appointed in that year at an assembly at Paderborn. Such scholars often also see the capitulary—and its arguably draconian tone—as spurring the uprising which resulted in the massacre at Verden that same year. Those who prefer a date of 785, meanwhile, point to the baptism of Widukind in that year as a watershed moment in the conquest, which marked the beginning of a seven-year period of peace during which Saxony was thought to have been fully pacified and integrated. At various points, the years 777, 780, 788, and 797, have also been suggested.139 Given the capitulary’s emphasis on comital authority and its focus on the ‘fundamentals’ of Christianity and loyalty to the Frankish regime, a date earlier in the Frankish conquest is an attractive option. However, the fact remains that the *Capitulatio* exists only in a single ninth-century manuscript, wherein is also preserved the (probably) slightly later *Capitulare Saxonicum*.140 As such, caution should be exercised in relating the contents of the *Capitulatio* to a specific point in the Frankish conquest.

b) *Capitulare Saxonicum*, 797

The *Capitulare Saxonicum* was promulgated on the 28th of October 797, at a royal assembly at Aachen.141 Sometimes understood as a sign of a new, milder approach to Frankish rule in the Saxon lands, it must be stressed that there is nothing in the *Capitulare* to indicate that the laws of the presumably earlier *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* no longer applied. Nevertheless, there can be no denying that the *Capitulare* does strike a markedly different tone from that of the *Capitulatio*, with no mention at all

140 MS Vatican Pal. lat. 289.
141 *Capitulare Saxonicum*, MGH Fontes iuris 4, pp. 45–49. The date and occasion of the document’s drafting is given in the preamble.
of either the Church, Christianity, or paganism. Instead, the Capitulare focuses intensely on the monetary consequences of various infractions including arson, failure to comply with court summonses, and pursuit of the blood feud. Great attention is given to the differing fines to be paid by the three different Saxon socio-juridical groupings.\textsuperscript{142} Moreover, there is a marked emphasis on the consent of the Saxon fideles in the drafting of the document.\textsuperscript{143} Finally, the last chapter of the Capitulare makes clear that Saxony was still essentially a pre-monetary economy, spelling out the monetary equivalences of the fines (reckoned in \textit{solidi} and \textit{denarii} throughout the document) in oxen and measures of oats, rye, honey, and barley.\textsuperscript{144}

c) \textit{Lex Saxonum}, 802

The third, final, and most expansive of the Saxon-specific law codes is the \textit{Lex Saxonum}.\textsuperscript{145} The \textit{Lex} is generally associated with a royal assembly held at Aachen in October 802, at which, according to the Lorsch annals, both religious and secular laws were read aloud, reviewed, amended, and finally written down.\textsuperscript{146} It is to the activities of this assembly that Einhard is presumed to have referred when he claimed that, “after having received the imperial name,” Charlemagne “caused the unwritten laws of all the peoples that came under his rule to be compiled and reduced to writing.”\textsuperscript{147} Consisting of

\begin{thebibliography}{147}
\bibitem{142} On the different socio-juridical classes of the Saxons, see, above all, M. Lintzel, \textit{Die Stände der deutschen Volksrechte, hauptsächlich der Saxonum} (Halle/Saale, 1933).
\bibitem{143} The capitulary’s first chapter remarks that Saxons from “diversis pagis” were involved, including the Westphalians, the Angrians, and the Eastphalians.
\bibitem{144} The evidence for the Saxon economy, and its role in driving the Frankish conquest, is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.
\bibitem{145} \textit{Lex Saxonum}, MGH Fontes iuris 4.2, pp. 7–33.
\bibitem{146} \textit{Annales Laureshamensis}, a. 802.
\bibitem{147} Einhard, \textit{Vita Karoli}, c. 29: “Post susceptum imperiale nomen…omnia tamen nationum, quae sub eius dominatu erant, iura quae scripta non erant describere ac litteris mandari fecit.” This is generally thought to refer to the \textit{Lex Saxonum}, the \textit{Lex Thuringorum}, and the \textit{Lex Frisonum}. As Matthias Springer has noted,
a total of 66 chapters, the *Lex* covers a range of topics including the payment of the wergeld of the different Saxon social groupings, capital crimes, marriage and inheritance, property crimes, the buying and selling of property, rules regarding the king’s *liti* (an unfree group), and, as in the *Capitulare Saxonum*, rules regarding the rates of conversion between *solidi* and various forms of agricultural wealth.\textsuperscript{148}

In general, the *Lex Saxonum* reveals a basic three-fold division of Saxon society into *nobiles*, *liberi*, and *liti*—groups which appear to be equivalent to the *nobiles/nobiliores*, *ingenui*, and *liti* of the *Capitulatio* and *Capitulare* as well as to the *edhilingui*, *frilingi* and *lazzi* mentioned by Nithard. Whether or not these three groups were directly equivalent to the three-fold socio-juridical division of Frankish law, and how they stood in relation to each other, remains contested.\textsuperscript{149} Much of this confusion stems from the fact that the wergelds in the *Lex Saxonum* are reckoned in both ‘greater’ and ‘lesser’ *solidi*, and because no wergelds are offered for the *ingenui*. According to Martin Lintzel’s detailed study, however, Saxon *nobiles* possessed an exorbitant wergeld worth eight times more than the *liti*.\textsuperscript{150}

\footnotesize{the writing down of a law in a specific year hardly precludes the earlier existence of that law. See Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 234.\textsuperscript{148} See Chapter 3, p. 184.\textsuperscript{149} Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 242–254 and M. Lintzel, *Die Stände der deutschen Volksrechte, hauptsächlich der Saxonum* (Halle/Saale, 1933).\textsuperscript{150} M. Lintzel, *Die Stände der deutschen Volksrechte, hauptsächlich der Saxonum* (Halle/Saale, 1933), p. 323. Lintzel points to Anglo-Saxon examples to suggest that this imbalance predated the conquest, rejecting the idea that the Franks raised the wergelds of the Saxon nobility in order to curry their favour.}
d) Miscellaneous Capitulary Evidence

In addition to the Saxon-specific legislation described above, there also appear numerous references to Saxons in the wider body of capitulary and administrative evidence.\(^{151}\) As Thomas Faulkner has observed, these “may hint at a larger body of material than is now extant, but their interpretation is difficult.”\(^{152}\) Fleeting and often only tantalizing, these snippets nevertheless yield some information. For example, it is from a rare piece of administrative ephemera known as the *Memoratorium Missis datum ad Papam Adrianam legatis* (tentatively dated to 785) that we learn of Charlemagne’s eagerness to keep the pope informed of his progress against the Saxons.\(^{153}\) In this document—nothing more than a series of talking points for missi who had been dispatched to the papal court while Charlemagne wintered in Saxony—the king sends greetings, thanking the pope for his prayers “by which you fight continuously for him (Charlemagne) and the faithful, both yours and his, of the holy Church,” while also, apparently, sending along “such gifts as he was able to procure in Saxony.”\(^{154}\) Meanwhile, two capitularies (both probably dating to 802) refer with nearly identically words to Saxons holding beneficia in Francia, suggesting that some Saxon supporters of the king received land in Francia itself;\(^{155}\) the 803 *Capitulare missorum* contains the enigmatic chapter title “Regarding those Saxons

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\(^{152}\) Faulkner, *Law and Authority*, p. 69.


\(^{154}\) *Memoratorium Missis Datum*, p. 225: “…pro illo et fidelibus sanctae ecclesiae et vestris atque suis decertatis…” and “…talia munera qualia in Saxonia praeparare potuit.”

\(^{155}\) *Capitulare missorum speciale*, MGH Capit. 1, no. 34, p. 100; *Capitulare missorum item speciale*, MGH Capit. 1, no. 35, p. 104.
who do not have wives;" and the Divisio regnorum of 806, which set out the planned division of Charlemagne’s realm among his heirs, awards Saxony, along with Austrasia, Neustria, a large part of Burgundy, Thuringia, Frisia, and the Nordgau, for Charles the Younger. Charles would not live to inherit this vast landscape, but the Divisio’s intention to include Saxony along with the heartland of Francia itself hints at the importance of the region in the view of those considering the future of the Frankish realms.

Of course, more information can be gained from some of these “capitulary-classified” texts than from others. The so-called Indiculus obsidum Saxonum Moguntiam deducendorum (c. 804/805), for example, gives some insight into the fate of at least some of the Saxon hostages taken over the course of the conquest. The Indiculus consists mainly of a list of Saxon hostages, identified by their own and their fathers’ names and the region of Saxony from which they came (Westphalia, Eastphalia, or Angria), alongside the names of the hostages’ mainly Alemannian minders. It commands both hostages and keepers to arrive at Mainz on a certain date. As Janet L. Nelson has observed, the Indiculus provides a window—however small—onto at least one way in which some Saxons may have been integrated into the Carolingian system. A letter addressed to Abbot Fulrad of St. Quentin, probably to be dated to 806, announces a general assembly to be held at Stassfurt on the river Bode near Magdeburg in eastern Saxony—indicating something of the otherwise murky Frankish activity in the region’s far east. Other capitularies, meanwhile, are concerned with Saxon military service. The

156 Capitulare missorum, MGH Capit. 1, no. 40, p. 116.
159 Karoli ad Fulradum abbatum epistola, MGH Capit. 1, no. 75, p. 168. For commentary, see McKitterick, Charlemagne, p. 228. The ARF, a. 806, refer to a campaign by Charles the Younger against the Sorbs and the building of two castella, one on the Saale and the other on the Elbe.
Capitula de causis diversis (a. 807?), which stipulates how many Saxons are required to come for campaigns in various regions, depending on the distance from Saxony (five Saxons should arm a sixth if the campaign is in Spain or against the Avars; two should arm a third if against the Bohemians; and all should come against the Sorbs or if needed).\textsuperscript{160} Two chapters from the time of Charlemagne (a. 810/811) preserved in the capitulary collection of Ansegisus (compiled a. 827) set out specific provisions regarding false imprisonment and horse theft among Saxons.\textsuperscript{161} The Capitulare Bononiense (a. 811), much like the Capitula de causis diversis, is concerned with the adequate provisioning of troops travelling from various parts of the empire, including Saxony, whose boundary is marked as the Elbe.\textsuperscript{162}

Any assumptions about the integration of the Saxons into the Carolingian empire on equal terms with their Frankish conquerors must be measured against evidence such as the Capitula legi addita (816) and the Item capitula legi addita (a. 816), which state explicitly that Saxons and Frisians are to pay much greater fines than Franks—with the former paying 40 \textit{solidi} in compensation for a crime in which the latter would pay 12.\textsuperscript{163} A list of those who had taken the oath of fidelity to the king, possibly from Italy, and possibly dating to 828/829, contains the proper name \textit{Sax}—hinting at a possible Saxon background for this individual.\textsuperscript{164} Louis the Pious’s \textit{Regni divisio} of 831 deals with plans for the future of Saxony, which is grouped together with the other mainly ‘German’

\textsuperscript{160} Capitula de causis diversis, MGH Capit. 1, no. 49, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{161} Capitula Karoli apud Ansegisum servata, MGH Capit. 1, no. 70, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{162} Capitulare Bononiense, MGH Capit. 1, no. 47, pp. 166–167.
\textsuperscript{163} Capitula legi addita, MGH Capit. 1, no. 134, p. 268; Item capitula legi addita, MGH Capit. 1, no. 135, p. 270. The stipulation appears to encompass all offences: “Ut omnis solutio adque conpositio, que lege Salica continetur…” (p. 268).
\textsuperscript{164} Indiculus eorum qui sacramentum fidelitatis iuraverunt, MGH Capit. 1, no. 181, p. 377.
regions of the empire. The *Divisio imperii* of 839, meanwhile, speaks of the “realm (regnum) of Saxony with its marches” in what appears to be the first recorded use of the term *regnum* to describe the Saxon lands, suggesting a new formality to the province’s political arrangement.

ii) Charters

Besides the prescriptive legal sources represented by the *Lex Saxonum* and the various capitularies (including administrative documents of a somewhat less official character), there also exists some charter evidence for Saxony—though relatively meager before the years up to 843. These charters are preserved for the most part in the cartularies of the churches and monasteries founded by Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. Together, these sources give a picture—though highly fragmentary—of the initial impact of Frankish rule on land ownership in Saxony.

The most important cartularies for the early period in Saxony are those of Fulda, Corvey, Hamburg, and Bremen. However, many of the charters contained in these books have been shown to be forgeries, and even apparently authentic texts are often fraught with problems of transmission. Nevertheless, the charters provide insight into the initial spatial and institutional development of a nascent ecclesiastical landscape in Saxony and the outsize role of the monasteries and bishoprics in the politics and economics of the region. Two charters in particular have attracted the most attention. In

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165 Regni divisio, MGH Capit. 2, no. 194, p. 24.
the first, dated to 1 December 811, Charlemagne affirms for Count Bennit ownership of the part of the forest of Bochonia by Waldisbech, between the Werra and Fulda rivers, that was cleared by the count’s father Amalung, a Saxon who had lost his original home in Saxony on account of his service to the king.\textsuperscript{169} The second charter, whose language appears to be modelled on the first, is dated to 9 May 813 and deals with a similar issue, confirming the lands of a certain Saxon \textit{fidelis} by the name of Asig, whose father Hiddi had likewise lost land during the conquest.\textsuperscript{170} We have already encountered Saxons holding \textit{beneficia} in Francia. The charters regarding Bennit and Asig, however, suggest that actually securing the benefits accrued through supporting Frankish intervention in Saxony may not always have been straightforward or without cost. In addition, the two charters hint at the apparent competition for land taking place between the Rhine and the Weser during the period, a phenomenon that may well have predated the period of the conquest proper and perhaps even played a role in provoking it. The charter of 813, notably, represents the last extant charter issued by Charlemagne before his death in 814.\textsuperscript{171}

\textbf{Poetic Works}

\textit{a) Carmen de conversione Saxonum, 777}

The relatively brief and often overlooked \textit{Carmen de conversione Saxonum} celebrates (prematurely) Charlemagne’s conquest and conversion of the Saxons.\textsuperscript{172} Attempts to

\textsuperscript{169} MGH DD 1, no. 213, pp. 284–285. Also contained in E. F. J. Dronke (ed.), \textit{Codex diplomaticus Fuldensis} (Kassel, 1850), no. 261, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{170} MGH DD 1, no. 218, pp. 290–292.
\textsuperscript{171} Springer, \textit{Die Sachsen}, p. 259.
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Carmen de conversione Saxonum}, MGH Poetae 1, pp. 380–381.
identify the poem’s author have not achieved widespread agreement. Angilbert, Lull, and Paulinus of Aquileia are among the leading candidates. The poem’s date of composition can be determined with much greater specificity. Indeed, after opening with an excursus on the salvation of Christ in the sixth age of the world, the text itself declares:

Now about seven hundred completed years
And seven times ten, unless I err, besides seven left over,
As the calculator index of the ancients hands down,
Are present by the flowing away of the time of the present year,
And in that year Charles is reigning happily for his ninth,
In which the nation of the Saxons, sprung from depraved blood,
Merited to know the highest king of heaven.

[Iam septingentos finitos circiter annos
Et septem decies, ni fallor, supra relictì,
Ut tradit, septem, priscorum calculus index,
Adsunt præsentis defluxu temporis anni,
Quo Carolus nono regnat relicter anno,
in quo Saxonum pravo de sanguine creta
Gens meruit regem summum cognoscere caeli.]  

Given a date of composition in 777, the Carmen holds a significant place as the earliest extant statement on Charlemagne’s conquest of Saxony, as well as one of the earliest pieces of Carolingian ‘court poetry’—a fact that highlights the apparent importance of the conquest of Saxony for a developing Carolingian self-image.

The year 777 was a highly significant one for Charlemagne and his war against the Saxons. It had been only two years prior, in early 775, according to the revised version of the Annales regni Francorum, that the plan to conquer and convert the Saxons to the

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Christian faith had been decided upon at a royal assembly at Quierzy. Only a few months before the assembly at Quierzy, Charlemagne had returned from his successful conquest of Italy, upon the conclusion of which he had immediately deployed four *scarae* (small, mobile units) into Saxony on what might reasonably be interpreted as a series of reconnaissance missions. The summer of 775 then saw the first concerted Frankish campaign into the Saxon lands, wherein the Franks appear to have focussed on capturing and rebuilding the main fortifications of the region: the Sygburg and the Eresburg—sites that would change hands several times over the course of the conquest—as well as the less frequently mentioned Braunsberg on the Weser. The securing of the fortifications was followed by parleys with and the subjection of all three of the major Saxon groupings south of the Elbe: the Eastphalians, the Angrarians, and the Westphalians, the latter only submitting after a pitched battle. 776 then saw a Saxon uprising and another Saxon campaign to quell it, again focussed on securing fortified sites and the building of a new *castrum* on the Lippe. This resulted again in Saxon capitulation and the first mass baptisms, making good on the promise made at Quierzy. (It is from the minor annals that we learn that this *castrum* on the Lippe was called Karlsburg or *urbs Karoli*.) In 777, “the lord king Charles held the assembly at Paderborn”—the *castrum* at the source of the Lippe—“for the first time,” an occasion accompanied by the baptism of even more Saxons and the consecration of a church. The name of the church—*salvator mundi*—

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177 Rev., a. 775.
178 ARF, a. 774. For discussion, see Chapter 2, p. 91.
179 ARF, a. 775.
180 See Annales Mosellani, Annales Petaviani, and Annales Maximiniani, aa. 776.
seems significant for the king’s first major expansionist war of conversion against a pagan people.  

It appears to have been for the occasion of the assembly, church dedication, and mass baptism that the *Carmen de conversione Saxonum* was composed, for the poem describes in panegyric tones Charlemagne’s triumph and conversion of the Saxons, whom the Frankish king “poured over with the mist of saving baptism.” As Susan A. Rabe has noted, the poem draws parallels between the Frankish king and Christ himself in their salvific roles, with the crucial difference that in the *Carmen* “it is the sword that in the potent hand of Charlemagne becomes a virtual liturgical, almost sacramental instrument that mediates between heaven and earth.” At the same time, the portrayal of the king anticipates the imperial language which would be employed with increasing insistence in the years leading up to the imperial coronation in 800. He is, for example, described as subjugating the Saxons “through a thousand triumphs.” The Saxons themselves, meanwhile, are painted in a palette drawn almost directly from Roman stock images of ‘the barbarian’—a *gens* “sprung from depraved blood,” who are nevertheless transformed through their conquest from wolves into sheep, ravens into doves, griffins and harpies into birds, hounds into gazelles, tigers and lions into sheep, and ultimately led by Charlemagne as a “new progeny of Christ into the great hall (*aulam*).”

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182 For further discussion of the assembly at Quierzy and the following first years of the conquest, see Chapter 2, pp. 88–95.
183 *Carmen de conversione Saxonum*, l. 56: “salutiferi perfusos rore lavacri.”
185 *Carmen de conversione Saxonum*, l. 43: “per mille triumphos.”
b) Paderborn Epic, c. 800

The anonymous poem known as *Karolus magnus et Leo papa* or, alternatively, the *Paderborn Epic*, survives in a single ninth-century manuscript.\(^{188}\) In its extant form, the poem tells the story of the meeting between Charlemagne and Pope Leo III at Paderborn in Saxony in the summer of 799.\(^ {189}\) Given that the action ends shortly after the meeting, and before Charlemagne’s ultimate journey to—and imperial coronation at—Rome on Christmas Day 800, it is often presumed that the poem itself must have been composed in the late summer of 799. However, it is also possible that the poem as we have it may be incomplete, possibly representing only the first book of a longer work which might in fact have treated the coronation as well as other events. If so, then this would imply a date sometime after 800.\(^ {190}\)

Whether composed before or after the coronation, the poem contains a significant amount of imperial imagery. Charlemagne himself is described, for example, explicitly as *augustus*, as well as *pius*, recalling one of Virgil’s most oft-used epithets for Aeneas.\(^ {191}\) Charlemagne’s city, meanwhile, is described as a “second Rome” and a “Rome-to-be.”\(^ {192}\)

Scholarship has traditionally associated this other ‘Rome’ with Aachen. However, in recent years, opinion has begun to shift towards the possibility that the city could be

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\(^{188}\) *Karolus magnus et Leo Papa*, MGH Poetae 1, pp. 366–379. The manuscript is Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Ms C 78.

\(^{189}\) See P. Godman et al. (eds.), *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung* (Berlin, 2002).

\(^{190}\) A representative sample of the foundational scholarship can be found in H. Beumann et al. (eds.), *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa* (Paderborn, 1966).


\(^{192}\) *Karolus magnus et Leo Papa*, p. 368, ll. 94 (*Roma secunda*) and 98 (*ventura...Roma*).
Paderborn itself, the site of the action of the poem and a royal and later imperial residence in its own right.\textsuperscript{193}

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a poem whose action is set in Saxony, the Saxons themselves feature prominently. They are described as a “rebellious and savage people” whom Charlemagne conquers “with cold blade.”\textsuperscript{194} With regard to their conversion, the epic states: “That which the wicked mind and sinister soul refuses to do by persuasion, / May they at least desire to accomplish it when compelled by fear.”\textsuperscript{195} The poem thus justifies forcible conversion and makes Charlemagne both a \textit{domitor gentium} and a \textit{defensor ecclesiae} in the traditional Roman-imperial vein, an image that was closely connected to the king’s ascension to the imperial office.\textsuperscript{196} Moreover, in addition to these explicitly imperial images of Charlemagne, the king is also made \textit{pater Europae}, a thoroughly novel designation.\textsuperscript{197} The assertion of this new idea of ‘Europe’ as the Christian lands under Charlemagne’s rule\textsuperscript{198} in a poem set against the backdrop of the conquest and conversion of Saxony may hint at the significance that the acquisition of the region had for contemporaries.\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{193} McKitterick, \textit{Charlemagne}, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Karolus magnus et Leo Papa}, p. 374, ll. 340–341: “…Saxonum populum domitare rebellem / Et saevam gelido gentem rescindere ferro.”
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Karolus magnus et Leo Papa}, p. 367, ll. 41–42: “Quod mens laeva vetat suadendo animusque sinister, / Hoc saltim cupiant implere timore coacti.”
\textsuperscript{196} For a discussion of the relationship between the conquest of Saxony and Charlemagne’s ascension to imperial status, see Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Karolus magnus et Leo Papa}, p. 379, l. 504. Various other terms of praise using the term \textit{Europa} are also employed at p. 366, l. 12; p. 368, l. 93; and p. 370, l. 169.
\textsuperscript{198} W. Ullmann, \textit{The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship} (London, 1969), p. 102: “Europe as conceived in the Carolingian age stopped where Roman Christianity ceased to be effective.”
\textsuperscript{199} Also of possible significance is the fact that the first clear evidence of the use of the term \textit{Europa} in this new sense is found in a letter directed to Charlemagne by an Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic named Cathwulf following the conquest of Italy and on the eve of the beginning of the conquest of Saxony in 775. On this letter, see J. Story, “Cathwulf, Kingship, and the Royal Abbey of St. Denis,” \textit{Speculum} 74:1 (1999), pp. 1–21.
c) Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, c. 826–828

Ermoldus Nigellus’s *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris* was written sometime between 826 and 828.200 Its purpose was to curry enough favour with the emperor that the author might be recalled from his exile in Strasbourg.201 The poem contains a single but significant reference to Saxons, in a famous section describing the decorated walls of the palace of Ingelheim, which had been recently painted. Among the religiously and historically themed images was Charlemagne, crowned with an imperial wreath and conquering the Saxons.202 The fact that Charlemagne’s defeat of the Saxons was chosen as the subject of the painting suggests the significance of the conquest for the next generation of Franks.

d) Miscellaneous Poems

The *Carmen de conversione Saxonum*, *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa*, and the *Carmina in honorem* represent the three most important Carolingian poems to deal with the Saxons and Saxony in a significant way. However, references to Saxons also appear in a number of other Carolingian poetic works. An epitaph for Count Gerold of Bavaria, slain in battle against the Avars in 799, for example, contains a reference to a “Saxo fidelis” who

200 Ermoldus Nigellus, *Carmina in honorem Hludowici Caesaris*, MGH Poet. Lat. 2, pp. 4–79.
carried the body of the dead count from the field. The word ‘Saxo’ has at times been taken as a proper name, thus ‘faithful Saxo’. However, it could just as well be read as ‘a faithful Saxon’, or even ‘the faithful Saxon’. Given the general Carolingian tendency to characterize the Saxons as a ‘faithless’ people, the emphasis on a particular Saxon’s fidelity would be noteworthy. Saxons appear also in brief poetic works traditionally attributed to Walahfrid Strabo and Hrabanus Maurus as well as in the Carmen de exordio gentis Francorum, a text composed c. 844 in the ambit of Charles the Bald. Such fleeting references to Saxons further contribute to the ambiguous place of Saxons within Carolingian society, demonstrating how they were becoming integrated even as Frankish texts such as Einhard’s Vita and the revised version of the Annales regni Francorum continued to demonize them. The epitaphs of Bernaldus and the noblewoman Wigfrid, both c. 840, for example, celebrate their subjects’ Saxon ancestry, while the Carmen de exordio continues the tradition of depicting Saxons in barbarian terms. The Egloga duarum sanctimonialum attributed to Paschasius Radbertus, meanwhile, refers to Saxons lamenting the death of Adalhard of Corbie, who had been abbot of Corvey in Saxony, in 827.

Miscellaneous Frankish Sources

a) The Opus Caroli regis contra synodum, c. 791

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203 Epitaphium Geroldi Comitis, MGH Poet. 1, p. 114. Gerold was appointed governor of Bavaria following the deposition of Duke Tassilo in 788. He was Charlemagne’s brother-in-law, the brother of Queen Hildegard. His death is reported by the Annales regni Francorum, the precise date of the kalends of September (i.e. September 1) being reported in the Epitaphium. On Gerold’s life and career, see J. B. Ross, “Two Neglected Paladins of Charlemagne: Erich of Friuli and Gerold of Bavaria,” Speculum 20:2 (1945), pp. 212–235.
204 Epitaphium Bernaldi, MGH Poet. Lat. 2, pp. 420–421: “Saxo quidem genere…” The poem is thought to have been composed c. 840.
206 Egloga duarum sanctimonialum, MGH Poet. Lat. 3, pp. 45–51 at p. 45.
The *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, also known as the *Libri Carolini*, represents a Frankish response—written in the voice of Charlemagne—to the Second Council of Nicaea held in Constantinople in 787.\(^{207}\) Proposed authors have included Theodulf of Orléans, Angilram of Metz, and Alcuin, with Theodulf being the leading candidate.\(^{208}\)

The work articulates a scathing attack on the perceived positions of the Byzantine-led council regarding sacred images, as they were transmitted to the West through the medium of a bad Latin translation. Specifically, the author of the *Opus* understood the Greeks to have taken a position in favour of the adoration of images, when in fact they had only reversed course from a position of extreme iconoclasm to once again allow their veneration. The mistake appears to have been caught before the *Opus* was officially promulgated, and may account for the document’s relatively low profile over the subsequent centuries. It is known, however, that the pope had been sent a copy—or at least a summary—of the *Opus*.\(^{209}\)

The creation and tone of the *Opus* must be understood within the context of (i) a period of intensified writing at the Carolingian court (the *Annales regni Francorum*, as discussed above, were begun at about this same time, and the *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, discussed below, collated); and (ii) increased competition between the Carolingians and the Byzantine empire.\(^{210}\) It is within this climate of competition between East and West that the document’s single but significant reference to Saxons must be understood. The relevant passage claims that Charlemagne had promoted the

\(^{207}\) *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, MGH Conc. 2, Suppl. 1.


\(^{210}\) On relations between the Greeks and the West in the eighth and ninth centuries, see C. Gantner, *Freunde Roms und Völker der Finsternis* (Vienna, 2014).
faith throughout the former western provinces, as well as among the Saxons. Clearly, the king’s work to promote the faith not only in the old provinces of the West but even amongst formerly pagan ‘northern’ peoples like the Saxons stood in contrast—in Frankish eyes—to the unorthodox and erroneous religious work of the Byzantine “king.” Moreover, the passage clearly illustrates how the conquest and conversion of the Saxons could be used to broadcast an image of Charlemagne as an equal, or even superior, to the emperor in the East.

b) Hrabanus Maurus, *Liber de oblatione puerorum*, c. 829

Hrabanus Maurus’s *Liber de oblatione puerorum* was composed following the Synod of Mainz in 829 to address the controversy that had erupted regarding the rights and obligations of oblate monks who had taken their vows at a young age. This controversy had centered around the attempt of Gottschalk of Orbaïs—the son of a Frankish woman and a Saxon count—to seek release from his monastic vows and the return of his family lands on the basis of ancestral Saxon law. Hrabanus, Gottschalk’s former teacher and abbot, attacked Gottschalk in his *Liber de oblatione puerorum* with words that made explicit the Frankish–Saxon hierarchy of the post-conquest period:

For who living in this part of the world does not know that Franks came before Saxons in the faith and religion of Christ, and afterwards subjected them by force of arms to their dominion, and were made their masters by right of conquest (*ritus dominorum*), or rather by a paternal act, drawing them away from idols, converted them to the faith of Christ?

[Quis enim ignorat sub hac plaga mundi habatans, Francos ante Saxones in Christi fide atque religione fuisse, quos ipsi postmodum suae dominationi subegerunt armis, atque

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211 *Opus Caroli regis*, p. 136.
212 *Opus Caroli regis*, p. 99, lowers the Byzantine imperator to a mere rex.
213 The significance of this passage is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2, p. 109.
superiores effecti, dominorum ritu, imo magis paterno effectu, ab idolorum cultu
abstrahentes, ad fidel Christi converterunt[214]

Gottschalk had been born to a Saxon count and a Frankish mother, and had been educated
to the highest levels of Christian-Frankish intellectual culture.[215] Yet, as Hrabanus’s
invective makes clear, the “know-it-all” (sciolus) could still be put in his place, when
necessary, as a mere Saxon, and thus inferior to a Frank.[216] The text puts the lie to
Einhard’s roughly contemporaneous claim that Franks and Saxons had become “unus
populus” in the post-conquest period.[217]

Papal Correspondence

a) The Codex epistolaris Carolinus, c. 739–791

The Codex epistolaris Carolinus consists of a collection of ninety-nine letters addressed
by the popes to Carolingian mayors and kings over the period 739–791.[218] The letters are
not the originals but, according to the attached preface, were copied and collated at the
Carolingian court at the behest of Charlemagne.[219] Tracing the ebb and flow of the
special relationship between the papacy and the Carolingians that developed over the

[214] Hrabanus Maurus, Liber de oblatione puerorum, PL 107, col. 432 A. For discussion, see Nelson, The
Frankish World, p. xxix, who appears to want to downplay the political implications of Hrabanus’s attack
and to see a levelling effect of “the Faith.” H.-W. Goetz, “Terminology and Perception of the ‘Germanic’
Peoples,” in The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages, ed. R. Corradini et al. (Leiden,
2003), p. 52, on the other hand, acknowledges that what Hrabanus proposes is a “‘hierarchy’ of peoples.”
[215] On Gottschalk’s life and career, see M. B. Gillis, Heresy and Dissent in the Carolingian Empire
(Oxford, 2017); M. B. Gillis, “Noble and Saxon: The Meaning of Gottschalk of Orbais’ Ethnicity at the
Synod of Mainz, 829,” in Ego Trouble, ed. R. Corradini et al. (Vienna, 2010), pp. 197–210; and M. de
[216] On the significance of the term sciolus, which Hrabanus repeatedly used to describe Gottschalk, see de
[217] See above.
[218] Codex epistolaris Carolinus, MGH Epp. 3, pp. 469–657. The most recent and exhaustive study is A. T.
course of the eighth century, the *Codex* constitutes one of the most important historical documents of the early medieval period.\(^\text{220}\)

With regard to the Saxons and their conquest, the *Codex* offers a number of insights. In the first place, as Achim Thomas Hack observed, of the non-Christian peoples mentioned in the letters “undoubtedly the most prominent among them are the Saxons.”\(^\text{221}\) Throughout the letters, the pope appears to show an awareness of—and keen interest in—Frankish interventions in Saxony, particularly during the reign of Charlemagne.\(^\text{222}\) Indeed, Charlemagne is frequently praised for his successes in Saxony in language that is not merely effusive, but which appears to hint at his increasing status as an advocate for the pope and his Church.\(^\text{223}\) Moreover, in 785, Pope Hadrian I reacted to the news of Charlemagne’s apparent success in converting the Saxons by announcing three days of prayers and litanies throughout Christendom.\(^\text{224}\) However, in contrast to the Franks’ punitive approach to imposing the faith in Saxony, Hadrian recommended a remarkably lenient penance for Saxon apostates in response to a query from the king.\(^\text{225}\)

**Anglo-Saxon Sources**

Throughout the period under discussion here, the word *Saxones* was used indiscriminately in the sources to refer to both continental Saxons and those Germanic peoples living in Britain who traced their descent to the continent. The term ‘Anglo-

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\(^{222}\) E.g., *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, ep. 50, p. 570; and 52, p. 574.

\(^{223}\) See Chapter 2, p. 141–143.

\(^{224}\) *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, ep. 76, pp. 607–608. The letter makes clear that the pope conceived the borders of Charlemagne’s realm and the Christian Church as coterminous, referring to “nostris vestrisque finibus.”

\(^{225}\) *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, ep. 77, pp. 608–609.
Saxon’ as a particular designation for the Germanic inhabitants of Britain was at this time only beginning to come into use (though it will be employed here for purposes of clarity).\textsuperscript{226} Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Anglo-Saxon authors appear to have taken a particular interest in their continental kinred. This interest was expressed above all in an assertion of their relationship to the insular and ‘Old Saxons’, and specifically in the idea that as Christians the Anglo-Saxons had an obligation to attempt to convert their pagan brethren. There is disagreement, however, as to how strongly such sentiments ultimately affected the shape of the Anglo-Saxon mission to the continent. On the one hand, it has been suggested that “instead of speaking of the English mission among the Germans, we should more accurately and also more revealingly speak of the mission of the (insular) Saxons among the Old (continental) Saxons.”\textsuperscript{227} On the other, it has been asserted that “this reference to the continental background of the Anglo-Saxons does not constitute the objective of the mission” and that “these statements, in situations in which concrete possibilities of the admittance of a Saxon mission are given or conceivably appear, do not permit the assumption that the Anglo-Saxon missionary effort had been directed from the outset and principally to a Saxon mission as a prearranged long-term objective.”\textsuperscript{228}

\textsuperscript{226} It was probably first used by Paul the Deacon, \textit{Historia Langobardorum}, MGH SRL 1, p. 124. For discussion, see Springer, \textit{Die Sachsen}, pp. 47–52.


a) Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, 731

The *Historia ecclesiastica* of Bede, although written two decades before the beginning of the period we are strictly concerned with here, bears mention not only because it was copied and read widely on the continent throughout the latter half of the eighth century, but also because it offers critical information regarding the continental Saxons prior to their conquest and Christianization by the Franks. This information falls essentially into two categories. These are: (i) the origins of an Anglo-Saxon mission to the continent and the possibility that such a mission took a particular interest in the continental Saxons; and (ii) the socio-political structure of pre-conquest Saxon society.

According to Bede, Anglo-Saxon missionary work on the continent began with the efforts of a certain Ecgbert, who proposed to send a mission to convert those peoples in Germany “from whom the Angles and Saxons who now live in Britain are known to have been descended,” including the Frisians, the Rugi, the Danai (sic), the Huns, the Old Saxons, and the Boructuari (sic). This plan was put into effect, according to Bede, first by Willibrord, who would attain the title ‘apostle of the Frisians’, and then by the two Hewalds (the Black and the White, from the colour of their hair). These latter holy men represent the first known missionaries to travel to Saxony itself. Theirs was not a happy ending. While they initially met with the favour of a local official (*vilici*), who promised to take them to the local ruler (*satrapa*), the two were martyred before this could occur and their bodies dumped in the Rhine. According to Bede, the murders were carried out

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231 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.9: “…a quibus Angli uel Saxones, qui nuncBrittaniam incolunt, genus et originem duxisse noscuntur.”
by the local people, who feared their rulers might accept the new religion and abandon
the old gods.\textsuperscript{232}

The sentiment expressed by Bede— that the Christian Anglo-Saxons had a certain
obligation to convert their blood relatives on the continent—is clear enough from the text.
Moreover, such a sentiment accords to an extent with the idea expressed in the Great
Commission itself, wherein it is made clear that the \textit{gens} is to be the express target of
missionary work.\textsuperscript{233} At the same time, the particular peoples whom Bede claims as the
targets of the initial Anglo-Saxon mission are a somewhat puzzling and motley
assortment of barbarian groups (did contemporary Anglo-Saxons think that they were
related to the Huns?), so that the intention to convert the Saxons in particular seems
somewhat unclear.

The socio-political situation encountered by the two Hewalds, as described by Bede,
has long occupied historians seeking to understand the institutional history of the pre-
Christian Germanic peoples.\textsuperscript{234} In a passing aside, Bede explains the significance of the
\textit{satrapa} to whom the two unlucky missionaries were to be led. They were to go to the
\textit{satrapa}, according to Bede “for the Old Saxons also have no king, but many \textit{satrapae}
placed in command of their people, who, when war is coming on, cast lots equally using
joint-bones, and, whomever the lot reveals, they obey him at the time of war; but when
the war is over, again all the \textit{satrapae} become of equal power.”\textsuperscript{235} This brief passage has

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Historia ecclesiastica}, 5.10.
\item Matthew 28:19: “Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.”
\item E. A. Thompson stated at the outset of his pithy study of the ancient Germans that he would “refer more
than once to the Saxons because of their exceptionally primitive social life even in the eighth century.” See
\item \textit{Historia ecclesiastica}, 5.10: “Non enim habent regem idem Antiqui Saxones, sed satrapas plurimos suae
genti praepositos, qui ingruente belli articulo mittunt aequaliter sortes, et, quaecumque sors ostenderit,
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
been made to bear an immense interpretative weight in fashioning a picture of the pre-conquest political organization of the Old Saxons.\footnote{For a skeptical discussion, see Springer, \textit{Die Sachsen}, pp. 131–134.} For now, it is sufficient to say that the description accords with the general picture of a somewhat diffuse political organization in the lands east of the Rhine, with a flatter socio-economic structure, a situation that has frequently been invoked to explain the apparent resistance of the lower classes in particular to Frankish rule.\footnote{C. Wickham, \textit{Framing the Early Middle Ages} (Oxford, 2005), pp. 52–57.} As for the precise constitutional position of the \textit{satrapae}, it does seem to be the case that the Saxons did not have kings.\footnote{No Frankish source from the eighth century speaks of a Saxon \textit{rex}. M. Becher, \textit{“Non enim habent regem idem Antiqui Saxones,” Studien zur Sachsenforschung} 12 (1999), pp. 1–31, argues that there may have been no real difference between a \textit{satrapa} and a \textit{rex}.} Recently, it has been proposed that Bede may have used the term to evoke the Philistine rulers of the Old Testament.\footnote{I. Wood, \textit{“Beyond Satraps and Ostriches: Political and Social Structures of the Saxons in the Early Carolingian Period,”} in \textit{The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century}, ed. D. H. Green and F. Siegmund (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 271–297.} However, it was clearly in use in Anglo-Saxon England in the seventh century, meaning nothing more exotic than \textit{ealdorman} or the like.\footnote{E.g., Boniface, \textit{Epistolae}, MGH Epp. sel. 1, no. 139, p. 278.}

b) The Bonifatian Letter Collection, c. 700–754

The letters of Boniface and his circle constitute one of the most important bodies of evidence for missionary activity in the Saxon lands in the first half of the eighth century.\footnote{Boniface, \textit{Epistolae}.} Preserved in three manuscripts, the letters were compiled by Lull, Boniface’s successor as archbishop of Mainz, shortly after Boniface’s martyrdom in Frisia in 754.\footnote{On the manuscripts, see M. Tangl, \textit{“Studien zur Neuausgabe der Bonifatius-Briefe,” Neues Archiv} 40 (1916), pp. 641–790 and 41 (1917–1919), pp. 25–101. On the life and career of Boniface, who was originally named Wynfrith, see T. Schieffer, \textit{Winfried–Bonifatius und die christliche Grundlegung Europas} (Freiburg, 1954); T. Reuter (ed.), \textit{The Greatest Englishman} (Greenwood, S.C., 1980); L. E. von Padberg,
Together, the body of correspondence paints a picture of a period of intense activity in the lands on the northern periphery of the Christian world, where Anglo-Saxon, Frankish, and papal interests often coincided but also came into competition with each other.

Although Boniface’s work encompassed a wide range of peoples and regions, Boniface, like other Anglo-Saxons, appears to have taken a particular interest in the continental or ‘Old’ Saxons. This focus is hardly surprising, given Bede’s comments on the origins of the Anglo-Saxon mission to the continent in the last decade of the seventh century. Indeed, Boniface’s expression of interest in the Saxons as a particular target of Anglo-Saxon mission is far more precise than Bede’s.

The first reference to continental Saxons in the Bonifatian letter collection occurs not in a letter from or to Boniface himself but in an epistle by a pope ‘Gregory’ addressed directly to “all the people of the province of the Old Saxons.”²⁴³ The question of whether this was Gregory II writing in the 720s or Gregory III writing around 738 has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate.²⁴⁴ The text of the letter itself, whereby the pope commends the addressees to his representative, Boniface, and urges them to “withdraw from the worship of idols,” is made up overwhelmingly of scriptural citations.²⁴⁵

Two further letters, both dated to around 737/738, provide further evidence for a particular Anglo-Saxon interest in converting the continental Saxons. The first is a letter from Boniface to all the religious men and women “of the stock and lineage of the

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²⁴⁴ Michael Tangl, editor of the letters, eventually was swayed to the side of Gregory III (for discussion of the debate up to that point, see Boniface, *Epistolae*, ep. 21, p. 35, n. 1). However, Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg*, pp. 526 ff., argues for the date 729 and thus an attribution to Gregory II.
²⁴⁵ Boniface, *Epistolae*, ep. 21, p. 36: “ab idolorum culte recedite.”
Angles” requesting prayers that Boniface “might convert the hearts of the pagan Saxons to the Catholic faith.” 246 Boniface stressed the urgency of this task by invoking the relationship between the insular Angles and the continental Saxons: “You should pity them, because they themselves say: ‘We are of one bone and of one blood’.”247 The second letter is from Bishop Torthelm of Leicester to Boniface and may represent a response to the first or to another letter bearing a similar request.248 In it, Torthelm sends greetings along with an undisclosed ‘small gift’ (munusculum), and declares:

We have received your excellency’s letter. Reading it, we recognize your most pious devotion and most fervent love, which you have on account of the blessed life, so that under the protecting hand of the Lord you pray day and night that the hearts of the pagan Saxons be converted to the catholic and apostolic faith for the redemption of your own soul. For who hearing these sweet things would not be cheered? Who would not exult and rejoice in these works, because our own people believes in Christ the omnipotent God?

[Desiderabiles litteras excellentiae vestrae suscepimus. Quas relegentes cognovimus tuam piissimam devotionem ferventissimumque amorem, quem habes propter beatam vitam, ut dextera Domini protegente meditaris die ac nocte ad fidem catholicam atque apostolicam pro tuae animae redemptione corda paganorum Saxonum converti. Quis enim audiens haec suavia non laetetur? Quis non exultet et gaudeat in his operibus, quia gens nostra Christo omnipotenti deo credat?]249

Taken together, these letters suggest a significant sense of responsibility on the part of the Anglo-Saxons towards the conversion of their continental relatives. At the same time, however, it remains an open question to what extent an emphasis on blood kinship might have been a rhetorical strategy on the part of a missionary seeking both material support and a means of legitimizing his authority in a specific region.

246 Boniface, Epistolae, ep. 46, pp. 74–75 at p. 75: “convertat ad catholicam fidem corda paganorum Saxonum.”
247 Boniface, Epistolae, ep. 46, p. 75: “Miseremini illorum, quia et ipsi solent dicere: ‘De uno sanguine et de uno osse sumus.’”
248 Boniface, Epistolae, ep. 47, pp. 75–76.
249 Boniface, Epistolae, ep. 47, p. 76.
c) Alcuin, *Epistolae*, c. 760–804

The surviving letters to and from Alcuin number three hundred and eleven.\(^{250}\) Brought together from a number of different manuscript collections, they testify to Alcuin’s wide-ranging contacts throughout the Carolingian empire and the British Isles. A number of Alcuin’s letters shed light on the conquest of Saxony and especially on the Frankish strategy of forcible Christianization in the region, to which Alcuin objected.

Throughout Alcuin’s letters, Charlemagne’s movements in Saxony are frequently both reported on and inquired about.\(^{251}\) Alcuin’s most detailed discussions of the Saxons concern their Christianization. In a letter dated to 789, for example, Alcuin addresses Willehad, bishop of Bremen, requesting of his fellow Anglo-Saxon: “Send me a letter, [to let me know] how and what you are doing; and how the Saxons agree with you in your preaching; and if there is any hope of the conversion of the Danes; and if the Wiltzes and Wends whom the king has recently acquired will accept the faith of Christ; and what is happening in those parts; and what the lord king is going to do about our enemy the Huns.”\(^{252}\) Here, Alcuin is surely interested in the Saxons, but not to the exclusion of other peoples. In a letter written the following year, meanwhile, Alcuin reported to an Irish recipient: “First your delight ought to know that through the mercy of God His Church in the regions of Europe has peace, profits and grows. For the Old Saxons and all the people of the Frisians have been converted to the faith of Christ through the efforts of King

\(^{250}\) Alcuin, *Epistolae*, MGH Epp. 4, pp. 1–481.


\(^{252}\) Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ep. 6, p. 31: “Mandate mihi per litteras, quomodo habeatis vel quid faciatis; et quomodo consentiunt vobis Saxones in praedicatione; et si spes ulla sit de Danorum conversione; et si Wilti vel Vionudi, quos nuper adquisivit rex, fidem Christi accipiant; et quid illis in partibus agatur; et quid de Hunorum hoste dominus rex acturus sit.” Willehad had been appointed bishop of Bremen in 787.
Charles, some of them being encouraged by rewards and others by threats.” This passage is remarkable on two counts. First, it again suggests the increasing importance of the concept of ‘Europe’ in the second half of the eighth century and that this concept emerged first from an Anglo-Saxon context (having first appeared in the latter by Cathwulf). Second, it suggests that Alcuin may not always have found forcible conversion disagreeable, willing as he was to countenance the use of ‘threats’ (minae) in this instance. By 796, however, Alcuin’s views appear to have shifted. In a letter dated to that year, he complained vociferously about what he saw as a failed strategy in Saxony, urging bishop Arn of Salzberg, who was preparing to undertake missionary work among the Avars: “But be a preacher of piety, not an exactor of tithes, because the tender soul ought to be nourished with the milk of apostolic piety, until it grows, thrives, and waxes in strength for the acceptance of solid food. The tithe, as it is said, subverted the Saxons’ faith.” Alcuin elaborated the theological rationale against forcible conversion in a separate letter of that same year, addressed to the chancellor Meginfred, wherein he invoked Augustine’s ideas regarding proper catechetical procedure and the necessity of free will in choosing the faith. “If the light yoke and sweet burden of Christ had been preached to the most hard Saxon people with the same insistence as the payment of the tithe or the obligation of upholding the law for every tiny little fault, perhaps they would not have abhorred the sacraments of baptism.” The sentiment would be repeated in yet

253 Alcuin, Epistolae, ep. 7, p. 32: “Primo sciat dilectio tua, quod miserante Deo sancta eius ecclesia in partibus Europae pacem habet, proficit et crescit. Nam antiqui Saxones et omnes Frisonum populi, instante rege Karolo, alios premiis et alios minis sollicitante, ad fidem Christi conversi sunt.”

254 Alcuin, Epistolae, ep. 107, p. 154: “Et esto praedicator pietatis, non decimarum exactor, quia novella anima apostolicae pietatis lacte nutrienda est, donec crescat, convalescat et roboretur ad accceptionem solidi cibi.”

255 Alcuin, Epistolae, ep. 111, p. 161: “Si tanta instantia leve Christi iugum et onus suave durissimo Saxonum populo praedicaretur, quanta decimarum redditio vel legalis pro parvissimis quibuslibet culpis edicti necessitas exigebatur, forte baptismatis sacramenta non abhorrerent.”
another 796 letter, addressed again to Arn, wherein Alcuin lamented “the wretched Saxon people so many times lost the sacrament of baptism because they never had the foundation of faith in their hearts.”

At the same time, reservations about the method of Christianization used in Saxony should not be interpreted as sympathy for the Saxons themselves. For in a 796 letter addressed to Charlemagne, Alcuin had harsh words for the Saxons, lamenting: “Behold with how much devotion and kindness for the enlargement of the name of Christ you have labored to soften the hardness of the unhappy Saxon people through the counsel of true salvation. But because divine election does not yet seem to exist for them, many of them still remain damned with the devil in the filth of their wicked custom.” Similarly, in 798, Alcuin referred to Saxony as that terra pessima and to the Saxons as homines invidos, in two separate letters from 799 as a populus nefandus, and in a third as the maledicta generatio Saxonum.

f) Annales Nordhumbrani, c. 802

The Annales Nordhumbrani, or York Annals, are preserved in the twelfth-century Historia regum of Symeon of Durham. Despite the unfortunate circumstances of their

259 Alcuin, Epistolae, ep. 174, p. 289; ep. 177, p. 293.
260 Alcuin, Epistolae, ep. 184, p. 309.
261 Key excerpts from the Annales Nordhumbrani are printed in MGH SS 13, pp. 154–156. For the complete text, see Symeon of Durham, Opera, Vol. 1 (London, 1868).
transmission, they appear to be authentic. Thought to have been composed at York, or at least in Northumbria, they cover the years 732–802 and are notable for their knowledge of and interest in continental affairs, providing sometimes insightful coverage of the Frankish conquest in their subtly critical alternative to the laudatory Frankish narrative.

For example, the Annales Nordhumbrani characterize Charlemagne’s first campaign into Saxony in 772 as a failure. Making no mention of the destruction of the Irminsul or the taking of treasure and hostages, the annals note only that the king lost many “princes and noble men.” The contrast with the depiction found in even the minor Frankish annals is stark. In another vaguely critical entry for the year 775, meanwhile, it is asserted that Charlemagne “laid waste” Saxony “raging out of control with fire and the sword, because he was confounded in his mind.” The description of the king as consternatus (an alternative reading is efferatus—savage, wild) is hardly complimentary, as lack of control was commonly associated with bad kings during the early Middle Ages.

The Annales Nordhumbrani also contain an additional interesting piece of information about Saxony in their report for the year 767, prior to the beginning of the Frankish conquest. According to the annals, a certain Aluberht “was ordained bishop of the Old Saxons.” Something of Aluberht’s life is known from the Vita Gregorii and the Vita Liudgeri, wherein it is reported that the man was a Northumbrian who was made a

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262 On the annals, their production, and transmission, see Story, Carolingian Connections, pp. 97 ff.
263 Annales Nordhumbrani, a. 772: “Multisque ex principibus ac nobilibus viris suis amissis, in sua se recepit.”
264 See above.
265 Annales Nordhumbrani, a. 775: “vastavit, igne ferroque debacchans, quia erat consternatus animo.”
267 Annales Nordhumbrani, a. 767: “Aluberht ad Ealdsexos ordinatus est episcopus.”
coepiscopus in Frisia, though ordained at York. However, no mention is made in these texts of his having been made bishop of the ‘Old Saxons’ in particular. This odd situation of an Anglo-Saxon being ordained in England as bishop over the ‘Old Saxons’ demands further consideration. Was the see of York in fact attempting to invoke a jurisdictional authority over the ‘Old Saxons’ on the basis of the idea of their shared descent? If so, Anglo-Saxon preoccupations with the conversion of the continental Saxons take on a new shape. For where Franks attempted to assert their authority in Saxony by emphasizing the differences between Franks and Saxons, perhaps Anglo-Saxons sought authority by emphasizing similarity.

The Old Saxon Evidence

a) The ‘Old Saxon Baptismal Vow’, 8th c.

The so-called Old Saxon Baptismal Vow, which consists of a series of questions and answers regarding a presumed baptizee’s renunciation of the old gods and his acceptance of the Christian faith, is preserved in a single codex probably written at Fulda or Mainz and dating to around the end of the eighth century. The document is written partly in Latin and partly in what most scholars agree to be an Old Saxon dialect. It has been associated, alternatively, with the mission of Boniface in the first half of the eighth century and with the forcible Christianization of the Saxons by Charlemagne.

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269 MS Vatican, Codex Pal. lat. 577.
270 It has at times been thought to be Old Low Franconian. For discussion and rejection of this idea, see Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 154.
However, there is little direct evidence, and in fact the document could presumably date to any point in the eighth century in which there was an active mission in Saxony. The brief document reads:

\[
\text{Do you forsake devils?} \\
\text{and [the baptizee] responds: I forsake devils.} \\
\text{and all offerings to devils?} \\
\text{and [the baptizee] responds: and I forsake all offerings to devils.} \\
\text{and you forsake all the works of devils?} \\
\text{and [the baptizee] responds: and I forsake all the works and words of devils, Thunaer, and Uuoden, and Saxnot, and all those wicked persons who are their friends.} \\
\text{Do you believe in God the Almighty Father?} \\
\text{I believe in God the Almighty Father.} \\
\text{Do you believe in Christ, God’s Son?} \\
\text{I believe in Christ, God’s Son.} \\
\text{Do you believe in the Holy Ghost?} \\
\text{I believe in the Holy Ghost.} \\
\text{[Forsachistu diabolae?} \\
\text{et respondet: ec forsacho diabolae.} \\
\text{end allum diobolgelde?} \\
\text{respondet: end ec forsacho allum diobolgeldae.} \\
\text{end allum dioboles uuercum?} \\
\text{respondet: end ec forsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum, Thunaer ende Uuoden ende Saxnote ende allum them unholdum the hira genotas sint.} \\
\text{gelobistu in got alamehtigan fadaer?} \\
\text{ec gelobo in got alamehtigan fadaer.} \\
\text{gelobistu in Crist godes suno?} \\
\text{ec gelobo in Crist gotes suno.} \\
\text{gelobistu in halogan gast?} \\
\text{ec geloboin halogan gast.}]^{273}
\]

The vow is a testament to the fact that conversion was serious business in the eighth century. Moreover, the text sheds a brief if flickering light on the cosmology of the pre-conquest Saxons. The gods Thunaer, Uuoden, and Saxnot, who enter into the historical record only at the very moment that they and their universe were to be snuffed out of

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273 *Interrogationes et responsiones baptismales*, MGH Capit. 1, p. 222.
existence, must have possessed their own myths and stories. Their replacement by ‘God, the Son, and the Holy Ghost’ would have necessitated the adoption of new ones.

b) The *Heliand*, c. 840

The Old Saxon *Heliand* recounts the life, deeds, and crucifixion of Christ in the traditional alliterative idiom of Germanic verse. At nearly 6,000 lines, it represents the longest extant text written in the Old Saxon language and is a critical witness to the long and drawn-out process of Christianization that took place in the region over the course of the late eighth and early ninth centuries. According to a Latin *praefatio*—unconnected with any manuscript tradition, but widely considered authentic—the *Heliand* was composed at the behest of a certain *Ludouuicus piissimus Augustus* to acquaint the recently conquered and converted Saxons with the tenets of their new faith.

Like any work of translation, the *Heliand* is a work of cultural adaptation. Unsurprisingly, then, scholarship on the poem has generally been divided into two camps: (i) the *interpretatio christiana*, which focusses on attempts to identify the text’s Latin models and sources and to undersand the poem within the context of Carolingian literature and theology; and (ii) the *interpretatio germanica*, which focusses on those elements of the text which appear to evoke a native, Germanic world. Overall, less attention has been paid to the immediate political context in which the poem was composed. This political context will be examined in some detail in Chapter 4.

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275 For a recent overview of scholarship, see V. A. Pakis (ed.), *Perspectives on the Old Saxon Heliand* (Morgantown, VA, 2010). For older scholarship, see the essays in J. Eichoff and I. Rauch (eds.), *Der Heliand* (Darmstadt, 1973).
Specifically, the chapter will focus on the *Heliand’s* emphasis on imperial ideologies and the structures and practices of imperial rule within the context of a Gospel narrative adapted to the culture and customs of its target audience.

**Conclusion**

The texts discussed above constitute the main sources of evidence for the Saxons and Saxony during the Carolingian period. Taken together, they reveal an avid interest in Saxons on the part of Franks, Anglo-Saxons, and the papacy over the course of the years in which Saxony was conquered, Christianized, and incorporated into the Frankish state. In general, the tendentious nature of the texts is particularly striking. With regard to the Frankish literary sources, there is a marked trend towards the ‘barbarizing’ of the Saxons, while Frankish legal documents make clear the Saxons’ utility as a source of income.

Overall, the pagan, barbarian Saxons serve as a useful foil for the Christian Franks. The Anglo-Saxon texts, meanwhile, are most interested in showing the Saxons as targets of Christianization and potential subjects of (Anglo-)Saxon ecclesiastical authority. The papal letters, too, are interested in the Christianization of the Saxons, but perhaps even more so in using them to flatter the Frankish king. The Old Saxon material, finally, offers insight into the mechanics of Christianization and ‘Francization’. These issues will be examined in greater detail in the following chapters.

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276 In addition to these written sources, there is also the archaeological evidence, which has been omitted in this discussion purely for reasons of space, growing as it is every year. For the briefest of introductions to this evidence, see T. Capelle, *Die Sachsen des frühen Mittelalters* (Stuttgart, 1998) and the various essays contained in *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* (1977–2007) and *Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung* (2010–).
Chapter 2: The Ideology of Conquest

In his *Carmen in honorem Hludowici imperatoris*, a roughly 2650-line verse panegyric written around the year 826 while in exile from the court of Louis the Pious, Ermoldus Nigellus set out a vivid description of the walls of the royal palace at Ingelheim, as he had seen them just a few years before.\(^1\) The walls were painted, Ermoldus claimed, with brilliant scenes from both the Old and New Testaments as well as with images of the famous deeds of ancient kings and emperors from the Assyrians down to the present line of Carolingian rulers. The culmination of this expansive mural was a depiction of Charlemagne himself, which Ermoldus described as follows:

And wise Charles shows his gracious face,
His head duly crowned with a *stemma*;
Here the Saxon host stands against him, tempting battle;
He attacks them, dominates them, and draws them under his law.

\[Et Carolus sapiens vultus praetendit apertos,
Fertque coronatum stemmate rite caput;
Hinc Saxo cohors contra stat, proelia temptat,
Ille ferit, domitat, ad sua iura trahit.\]^2

According to Ermoldus’s description of the paintings at Ingelheim, the depiction of Charlemagne thus combined two of the Frankish king’s greatest achievements: the acquisition of the imperial title—for in contemporary parlance, the *stemma* always

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referred to a Roman, i.e. Byzantine, imperial crown— and the conquest of the Saxons.

Recently, Ildar Garipzanov has described the scene as “a traditional triumphal image of a Roman Christian emperor pacifying belligerent pagans.”

That such an image should have been chosen to memorialize the great Frankish king is in a certain sense unsurprising, for both the revival of the imperial title and the conquest of the Saxons were seen as particularly noteworthy accomplishments by Ermoldus’s generation. Moreover, the ideal of the Christian emperor as a conqueror of barbarians and a defender and propagator of the Christian faith was by that time both widespread and ancient. To most modern scholars, however, the two achievements continue to constitute two essentially distinct historical problems with relatively little intersection. Those few theories that have suggested a connection between the two, moreover, have for the most part either been misconceived or require significant refinement. In the following pages, I will suggest that the conquest of Saxony and the revival of the imperial title were in fact closely linked, and not simply from the retrospective viewpoint of Ermoldus.

In the first place, I will argue that the conquest and Christianization of the Saxons by Charlemagne afforded both the Franks and the papacy ample material for the fashioning of an imperial image of the Frankish king on a late antique Roman model—as both a conqueror of barbarians and a defender and propagator of the Church—both before and following the imperial coronation itself. As we shall see, such an image drew heavily from the seemingly stereotypical depictions of Saxons as ‘rebels’, ‘pagans’, and

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3 See G. Dagron, Emperor and Priest (Cambridge, 2003), p. 54, n. 3.
5 See in particular Einhard, Vita Karoli Magni, MGH SRG 25, c. 7, and Nithard, Historiae, MGH SRG 44, 4, c. 2.
'barbarians’—the traditional imperial enemies of the Christian Roman empire—found in Carolingian sources from 751 onwards, and which were themselves part of a longstanding project aimed at promoting a recalibrated Frankish political identity in the years following the overthrow of the Merovingian dynasty. Furthermore, I will suggest that the intention to conquer, Christianize, and incorporate the Saxons into the Frankish state over the course of the late eighth and early ninth centuries may itself have been more bound up with Carolingian-papal politics and Frankish imperial ambition than has hitherto been acknowledged. Indeed, I will suggest that the conception of the plan to conquer and Christianize the Saxons at a Frankish royal assembly at Quierzy in 775 should be viewed within the context of Charlemagne’s Italian politics and his newly emphasized status as *patricius Romanorum* and *defensor ecclesiae*.

**Rome–Quierzy–Paderborn**

It was in the summer of 772, one year after the death of his brother and erstwhile co-ruler Carloman, that Charlemagne led his first military campaign as the sole king of a newly unified Frankish realm. The target of this important demonstration of the king’s military and political abilities was the Saxons, who over the course of the eighth century had come to pose an increasingly serious threat to Frankish interests east of the Rhine.⁶ According to the *Annales regni Francorum*, the campaign was successful to the extent that the Franks captured the Saxon stronghold known as the Eresburg, destroyed the pagan Saxon shrine called the Irminsul, and crossed to the far bank of the Weser, where

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⁶ On Saxon southward expansion, see M. Costambeys et al. *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 73. On increasing Frankish and Saxon competition in the lands between the Rhine and the Weser rivers, see Chapter 3, pp. 170–176. A generation earlier in 753, Pippin III apparently also had chosen Saxony as the target of his own first campaign following his coronation. See Fredegar, *Continuationes*, MGH SRM 3, p. 182.
the Frankish king held a *placitum* with the defeated Saxons and received twelve Saxon hostages before returning home.\(^7\)

For some modern scholars, the campaign of 772 is still taken as the opening act of Charlemagne’s long and infamously brutal war of conquest and Christianization in the Saxon lands.\(^8\) To others, however, the idea that conquest and Christianization were already on the Frankish agenda at this early date remains doubtful\(^9\)—for, in fact, there is little evidence to suggest that the offensive of 772 had any aims beyond those of previous Frankish interventions in the region, which since the sixth century were mainly limited to the taking of plunder, the exaction of tribute, and the imposition of a loose Frankish hegemony.\(^10\)

\(^7\) ARF, a. 772.
\(^9\) See R. McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 103: “It is doubtful whether conquest of the Saxons, or even their conversion to Christianity, was the purpose from the beginning.” To K. Brandi, “Karls des Großen Sachsenkriege,” Niedersächsisches *Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 10 (1933), pp. 29–52; repr. in *Die Eingliederung der Sachsen in das Frankenreich*, ed. W. Lammers (Darmstadt, 1970), pp. 3–28, 772 marked the beginning of “the war” (p. 33 in the *Jahrbuch* and p. 7 in *Eingliederung*), but “ob die Christianisierung schon beim ersten Feldzug von 772 das Ziel war, ist nicht auszumachen. Sichtlich aber trat sie in den siebziger Jahren immer deutlicher in den Vordergrund” (pp. 39–40 in the *Jahrbuch* and pp. 14–15 in *Eingliederung*).
\(^10\) Earlier Merovingian and Carolingian rulers certainly exerted their influence and supported missionary efforts east of the Rhine, but there is little clear evidence either for the use of force to compel conversion or for direct rule in the region. The claims regarding Saxon baptisms carried out by the elder Carloman in 744 and Pippin III in 747 in the first continuation of the Chronicle of Fredegar constitute the only evidence for direct royal involvement in Christianization, and these are retrospective, and this retrospective nature must be borne in mind. See Fredegar, *Continuationes*, MGH SRM 3, cc. 27 ad 31, pp. 180–181 and 181. For an overview of Merovingian and early Carolingian activities in Saxony, see Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 97–121 and 166–174. The only contemporary evidence that either conquest or Christianization lay on the agenda in 772 is Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, who claims that the Saxon war continued for 33 consecutive years (i.e. 772–804—but in fact, peace existed in the region from 785–792, and Einhard may have been blurring chronology); and Eigel, *Vita Sturmi*, MGH SS 2, cc. 22 and 23, p. 376, which claims—alone among all sources—that the Frankish campaign of 772 was accompanied by priests, abbots, and bishops. The historical accuracy of this latter text has long been held in low regard, as it too seems to muddle its chronology significantly. See, e.g., M. Lintzel, “Die Quellenwert von Eigils Vita S. Sturmi für die Geschichte der Sachsenkriege Karls des Großen,” *Sachsen und Anhalt* 8 (1932), pp. 6–16; repr. in M. Lintzel, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, Vol. 1 (Berlin, 1961), pp. 128–137.
Within three years, this situation appears to have changed radically, as the conquest, Christianization, and incorporation of the Saxons into the Frankish state emerged as the explicit goal of Charlemagne and the Frankish secular and ecclesiastical elite. According to the revised version of the *Annales regni Francorum*, it was at a royal assembly at Quierzy in January 775 that the Frankish king first decided “that he should attack the perfidious and treaty-breaking Saxon people by means of war, and persevere in this until they be conquered (*victi*) and made subject to the Christian religion, or else utterly destroyed.”\(^{11}\)

Composed long after the fact (c. 790), the veracity of the report of the so-called ‘Alternative of Quierzy’ has long been questioned, with Louis Halphen in particular dismissing it out of hand.\(^{12}\) On balance, however, the greater weight of scholarship tips in favour of its acceptance, though with often divergent understandings of the precise Frankish intentions implied by the report.\(^{13}\) For example, in what remains the most

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\(^{11}\) Rev., a. 775: “Cum rex in villa Carisiaco hiemaret, consilium inuit, ut perfidam et foedifragam Saxonum gentem bello adgrederetur, et eo usque perseveraret, dum aut victi christianae religioni subicerentur, aut omnino tollerentur.”


focussed and exhaustive study of the motives behind and development of the Frankish conquest of Saxony, Hans-Dietrich Kahl has pointed to the ambiguous nature of the term *victi* employed by the reviser, suggesting that perhaps initially the Frankish plan was only to enforce the Christian religion in the Saxon lands, without enacting direct Frankish rule, and that the need to annex the region fully emerged only in the course of an unplanned process of military ‘escalation’.\(^{14}\) In contrast, Matthias Becher, while generally accepting the revised annals’ claim regarding plans for the conquest of Saxony in 775, has asserted that the Saxons’ “Christianization played only a minor role, if any, in these plans.”\(^{15}\)

In fact, there are good reasons both to accept the resolution at Quierzy and to believe that it implies a Frankish intention from 775 onwards both to conquer and Christianize the Saxons. In the first place, the revised version of the *Annales regni Francorum* are widely understood to be more candid than the original royal annals with regard to Charlemagne’s Saxon affairs, and so their words must be weighted accordingly.\(^{16}\) As for the potential ambiguity of these words, it is true, as Kahl has argued, that the word *victi* does not in itself imply political annexation and direct rule.\(^{17}\) However, given the abject failure of both Frankish and Anglo-Saxon missionaries to advance the cause of the faith in the Saxon lands over the previous three-quarters of a century, it is hard to understand how the Franks could have hoped to achieve Christianization in the absence of direct rule. Moreover, as we shall see, there is significant circumstantial evidence pointing to

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\(^{15}\) Becher, *Charlemagne*, p. 61.
\(^{16}\) See Chapter 1, pp. 23–26.
775 as the beginning of an earnest Frankish program of both conquest and Christianization in the Saxon lands.\(^\text{18}\)

To begin, even before the assembly at Quierzy, certain preparations appear to have been undertaken for an invasion of Saxony more extensive and more systematic than the campaign of 772. Specifically, in late 774, following what appears to have been a particularly destructive Saxon counter-attack against Frankish territory and Christian centres during the king’s absence in Italy, Charlemagne sent four of the small, mobile Frankish units known as *scarae* into Saxony.\(^\text{19}\) In light of the events that were to follow, it is difficult to see these expeditionary deployments as anything other than reconnaissance missions, for their successful return was followed immediately by the assembly at Quierzy. The assembly was followed in its own turn by an apparently highly coordinated summer campaign ranging through all three of the major southern Saxon regions—Westphalia, Eastphalia, and Angraria—culminating in the capitulation of all three of the main southern Saxon groups and their leadership, who took oaths to the king and offered up hostages.\(^\text{20}\) According to the St. Gall annals, the campaign may also have seen the first baptisms of the war,\(^\text{21}\) though the greater weight of evidence suggests that in 775 the priority was less Christianization and more the securing of political loyalty through hostages and oaths, presumably as a prerequisite for the implementation of both

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\(^{19}\) *ARF*, a. 774. On the *scarae*, which are generally understood to have been cavalry units, see J. F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages*, trans. Col. S. Willard and Mrs. R. W. Southern, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 20–21.

\(^{20}\) *ARF*, a. 775. In hindsight, one wonders if the *scarae* of 774 had covered similar territory in preparation for just such a campaign.

\(^{21}\) *Annales Sangallenses*, MGH SS 1, a. 775: “in ipso anno perrexit Karlus super Saxones, et plurimos ex eis ad baptisma gratiam perduxit, et multos pluriores interfecit.”
Frankish rule and the Christian religion at a later stage.\textsuperscript{22} The fact that 775 represents “the year from which the greatest number of charters, twenty-two, survives in the whole of Charlemagne’s reign,” only reinforces the view that 775 represented a year of groundwork, part of which included the wooing of the ecclesiastical institutions whose support would be so necessary for the king’s Saxon efforts in the coming years.\textsuperscript{23}

The following year, Charlemagne and the Frankish army were again in Italy, dealing with the rebellion of the Lombard Rodgaud, when an envoy arrived, announcing that the Saxons “had rebelled and abandoned all of their hostages and foresaken their oaths.”\textsuperscript{24} The news was met by yet another Saxon campaign that summer, which resulted in “all [the Saxons] coming from every region to that place where the Lippe rises, and they handed over their country by means of a pledge into the hands [of the Franks], promised to become Christians, and placed themselves under the authority of the Lord King Charles and the Franks.”\textsuperscript{25} At this same time, the annals report, the Eresburg was rebuilt once again, and a new castrum constructed on the Lippe—the Urbs Caroli or Karlburg of the minor annals.\textsuperscript{26} Finally, the royal annals claim that the Saxons, “together with an innumerable number of their wives and children,” came to that castrum and there “were baptized and gave hostages, as many as the aforesaid Lord King demanded.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{22} Kahl, “Karl der Große und die Sachsen,” at pp. 65–66, argues that Frankish intentions in 775 were directed only towards Christianization rather than direct rule of the region. Such a view is difficult to reconcile, however, with the picture set forth in the sources.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{ARF}, a. 776: “…rebellatos et omnes obsides suos dulgtos et sacramenta rupta.”
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{ARF}, a. 775: “omnes ad locum, ubi Lippia consurgit, venientes ex omni parte et reddiderunt partriam per wadium omnes manibus eorum et soponderunt se esse christianos et sub dicione domni Caroli regis et Francorum subdiderunt.”
\textsuperscript{26} The \textit{Annales Laureshammenses} and \textit{Annales Mosellani} refer to a “Karlesburg;” the \textit{Annales Petaviani} to an “Urbs Karoli;” and the \textit{Annales Maximimiani} to an “Urbs Caroli et Francorum.”
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{ARF}, a. 776: “ibique venientes Saxones una cum uxoribus et infantibus innumerabilis multitudo baptizati sunt et obsides, quantos iamdicuus domnus rex eis quaesivit, dederunt.” The \textit{Annales laureshamenses} and
These first steps towards the conquest and Christianization of the Saxons following the assembly at Quierzy were capped the following year by the first general assembly held in the Saxon lands, at the newly constructed royal palace-and-church complex of Paderborn—likely, though not certainly, to be identified with the aforementioned Urbs Caroli. The centrepiece of the assembly of 777 appears to have been yet another mass baptism of Saxons, a spectacle accompanied by the Saxons’ mortgaging of “their freedom and their property” against their renewed promise to maintain “in all things the Christian religion and their fidelity to the aforesaid Lord Charles and his sons and the Franks.”

We know relatively little about the content and conduct of Carolingian royal assemblies. However, like the later, more famous Paderborn assembly of 799—at which Charlemagne met the deposed and mutilated Pope Leo III, and where plans for the imperial coronation at Rome the following Christmas were probably discussed—the assembly of 777 appears to have been conceived to achieve maximum public impact, and, also like the assembly of 799, was commemorated in the form of a poem. The Carmen de conversione Saxonum, composed more than a decade before the retrospective account of the Annales regni Francorum, represents the earliest Frankish statement on

Annales Mosellani, a. 776, both state more bluntly: “et conversi sunt Saxones ad fidem Christi, et baptizata est eorum multitudo innumera.”

Springer, Die Sachsen, p. 184.

ARF, a. 777: “Ibique multitudo Saxonum baptizati sunt et secundem morem illorum omnem ingenuitatem et alodem manibus dulgitum fecerunt, si amplius inmutassent secundum malam consuetudinem eorum, nisi conservarent in omnibus christianitatem vel fidelitatem supradicti domni Caroli regis et filiorum eius vel Francorum.”


For the assembly of 799, see below.
Charlemagne’s project of conquest and Christianization in the Saxon lands. The poem’s anonymous author celebrated—albeit prematurely—the military conquest and conversion of the Saxons to the Christian religion in high Virgilian style, depicting Charlemagne himself as a conqueror of barbarians and a defender of the faith who “subdued” (domuit) the Saxons “through a thousand triumphs” (per mille triumphos). As Karl Hauck has suggested, this assembly of 777, alongside its accompanying poem speaking of the king’s ‘triumphs’, appear already to hint at the creative possibilities offered by the Saxons for the creation of an imperial image for the Frankish king. Indeed, the image of Charlemagne set forth in the Carmen de conversione Saxonum anticipates in many respects Ermoldus’s explicitly imperial description of the image of the king from the walls of Ingelheim a half-century later.

Taken together, the events of 775, 776, and 777 can plausibly be seen as an attempt to make good on the resolution at Quierzy and provide compelling support for the argument that there was indeed such a resolution. The securing of the submission of the Saxon leadership by means of oaths and hostages; the securing, rebuilding, and garrisoning of existing fortifications; and the construction of a new centre of royal power in Saxony, along with the mass baptisms of Saxons, all point towards the enaction of a plan of conquest and Christianization. Moreover, from the point of view of the author of the Carmen de conversione Saxonum, it must have seemed that the plan outlined at Quierzy

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32 Carmen de conversione Saxonum, MGH Poet. Lat. 1, pp. 380–381. For more on this text, see Chapter 1, pp. 59–62.
33 Carmen de conversione, p. 381.
had been achieved, with the Saxons indeed conquered and made subject to the Christian religion.

If the veracity of the report of the decision at Quierzy seems clear enough, however, two critical questions nevertheless remain: (i) Why was the decision to annex and Christianize the Saxon lands made at all, when previous Frankish regimes appear to have been satisfied with the receiving of tribute and occasional retributive raids? (ii) Why was it made when it was, in January of 775?

One argument that has occasionally been advanced to explain the apparent about-face in Frankish policy regarding the Saxon lands is that the Saxons’ pagan religion made their oaths unreliable, and that their conquest and Christianization was seen as a solution to their seemingly constant state of ‘rebellion’. Of course, religious identity was closely bound to political identity in the early medieval period, and it may well have been the case that pagan oaths were held in lower regard than Christian oaths by the Franks. Ultimately, however, this argument ignores the numerous obvious cases in which Carolingian leaders made alliances and conducted diplomacy with other non-Christian groups, most notably the Obodrites, who as pagans fought alongside the Christian Franks against the Saxons. Moreover, as we shall see later in this chapter, Frankish descriptions of the Saxons as ‘rebels’ were part of a larger shift in Frankish discourse regarding all perceived enemies during the Carolingian period and should not necessarily be

35 Collins, Charlemagne, p. 46.
understood as indicating that the breaking of oaths had become an especially marked problem in the eighth century.

More commonly, scholarship has pointed to the claims made by Einhard in his *Vita Karoli Magni*, wherein the Frankish courtier and biographer of Charlemagne set forth the only direct, near-contemporary Frankish statement on the underlying causes of the Saxon war. In the *Vita*, Einhard writes of the difficult frontier zone between the two peoples and of the long history of back and forth fighting across it, asserting that finally the Franks decided—at what precise point Einhard does not say—to set aside tit-for-tat reprisals and undertake a full-scale war.37

Einhard’s assessment, in addition to being the sole direct statement on the issue, has the virtue of fitting well with what is known of Frankish–Saxon relations in the decades before the conquest. Indeed, Franks and Saxons—whatever these names might may have meant in the earliest centuries of their use—appear to have lived side by side since as early as the turn of the fourth century and had come into occasional conflict since this time.38 However, the eighth-century appears to have seen a heating-up of violence, brought on by increased settlement and competition for land in the Rhine-Weser area. As such, it is indeed possible that the Saxon action of 773 may simply have been the last

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37 Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7.
straw, and that the conquest, Christianization, and incorporation of the Saxon lands into
the Frankish state were conceived essentially as a defensive measure. At the same time,
however, it must be acknowledged that Frankish expansion towards Saxon territory and
Frankish military expeditions against the Saxons appear to have been equal to or greater
than Saxon expansion against the Franks—indeed, as we shall see in the following
chapter, there is significant evidence for strong economic incentives driving Frankish
expansion to the east—39—and so perhaps we should be cautious in accepting too readily
Frankish claims regarding a defensive motivation.

It is also possible that other, more strictly political events may have inspired
Charlemagne’s apparent shift in policy towards conquest and Christianization of the
Saxon lands in 775. Specifically, it is a fact little commented upon that the assembly at
Quierzy took place immediately following Charlemagne’s return from his successful
conquest of Italy in 774. The conquest of Italy represented a hugely significant
development for Charlemagne and the Franks, greatly deepening Frankish involvement in
papal and Byzantine affairs.40 Its import was reflected not least in changes to royal
entitulature and self-representation at the Frankish court. Most obviously, following the
conquest of Italy Charlemagne became known not only as rex Francorum but as rex
Langobardorum.41 This was, however, not the only change made to the king’s
entitulature, for it was also after the conquest of Italy that Charlemagne began to use the
titles of patricius Romanorum and, perhaps, defensor eclesiae.

39 See Chapter 3.
40 On the conquest of Italy, see S. Gasparri (ed.), 774, ipotesi su una transizione (Turnhout, 2008).
41 The first recorded usage of the term by Charlemagne appears in a charter dated 5 June 774, supposedly
issued at Pavia: MGH DD Kar. 1, no. 80, pp. 114–115. Some irregularities cast doubt on this earliest
example, however, and a charter dated 16 July 774 may in fact represent the earliest example of the title
The office of *defensor ecclesiae*, modelled on the older office of *defensor civitatis*, originated during the reign of the emperor Honorius to designate an official responsible for the representation of the Church and its interests in the courts of law. In the eighth century, the title continued to be used in reference to legal experts within the Church, but also to individuals who could be seen as acting generally in support of ecclesiastical interests, including Frankish counts. It had been used in papal letters to address Carolingian rulers since 757 and was used by Charlemagne in his so-called *Capitulare primum*, the dating of which has long been the subject of debate. Most recently, Rosamond McKitterick has suggested that the capitulary, which is concerned mainly with the protection of ecclesiastical rights, could be “understood as a neat summary of the sentiments expressed in Charlemagne’s earliest charters, issued in 769–775.” If this is indeed the case, then it would place the adoption of the title *defensor ecclesiae* in the period following the conquest of Italy and at the beginning of the conquest of Saxony and could reflect a new sense of purpose on the part of the Carolingians with regard to the Church in general and the bishop of Rome in particular following the conquest of Italy and the liberation of the papacy.

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43 E.g., *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, MGH Epp. 3, no. 33, p. 539, whereby Pope Paul I introduced Peter, *defensor ecclesiae Romae*, to Pippin and his sons in the early/mid-760s.

44 E.g., Boniface, *Epistolae*, MGH Epp. sel. 1, no. 56, p. 100.

45 *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, no. 13, p. 510.


47 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 238.
It was this particular connection with the papacy and the population of Rome that appears to have been the focus of the second title that Charlemagne adopted in 774, *patricius Romanorum*. In contrast to the title *defensor ecclesiae*, the title *patricius Romanorum* seems to have been an innovation of the Carolingian period.\(^{48}\) It had been bestowed on Pippin III, Charlemagne, and Carloman by Pope Stephen II in 754, following the coronation of the first Carolingian king by the pope at St. Denis and was frequently used by the popes in letters addressed to the Carolingian kings from that point on. The title has been seen as an acknowledgement that “the nominal authority of the Byzantine empire over the papal lands was replaced by Frankish ‘patronage’.”\(^{49}\)

Given—as we shall see below—that the imperial prerogative both to defend and expand the Roman church was ancient and revered, it seems significant that Charlemagne’s declaration of the first truly expansionist holy war in the history of the Christian religion followed immediately on the assumption of a status transferred, via the papacy, from the now-eschewed emperor in the east.

**The Saxons and Empire: Connective Theories**

In recent years, a number of theories have appeared suggesting that Charlemagne’s conquest of the Saxons should be seen as linked to the revival of the imperial title in 800. Perhaps most notably, in a provocative article published in 1996, Henry Mayr-Harting advanced the novel argument that Charlemagne’s assumption of the mantle of emperor may have been motivated in part by a practical need to make his rule acceptable to the

\(^{48}\) J. Deër, “Zum-Patricius-Romanorum-Titel Karls des Großen,” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 3 (1965), pp. 31–86; and H. Wolfram, *Intitulatio*, Vol. 1 (Graz, 1967), pp. 225–236. Of course, the title *patricius* alone was ancient, originally designating one belonging to the highest social order in Rome, and was later used as an honorific in its own right beginning in the time of Constantine.

famously kingless Saxons, who would not deign to be ruled by a king but would accept an emperor.  

In the years since its publication, Mayr-Harting’s bold explanation for the revival of the imperial title has generated much discussion but has in the end been met largely with skepticism. Ultimately, there is little evidence to support the notion that an emperor would have been any more welcome to the Saxons than a king, or, more to the point, that the constitutional preferences of the Saxons were given any consideration at all in the aftermath of the Frankish conquest. Indeed, the Frankish conquerors of Saxony appear to have sought to undermine pre-conquest Saxon social and political structures as part of a conscious strategy of domination and dispossession in the region, suppressing pagan religious practices, banning public assemblies, and generally remaking the region through the implantation of the organs of Frankish government. The surviving legislation for

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Carolingian-ruled Saxony, furthermore, emphasizes the subordination of the conquered Saxons to a specifically Frankish and royal—not imperial—authority.\textsuperscript{53}

If there existed a discernable connection between Charlemagne’s conquest of the Saxons and the revival of the empire in the West, it should almost certainly be sought in Frankish and papal, rather than Saxon, political ideology. Such a thesis has recently been advanced by Bernard Bachrach, who has suggested that the military conquest and annexation of Saxony might have been undertaken by the Franks as part of a conscious, long-term strategy “to reconstruct the empire in the West by initiating a campaign to conquer the region as far east as the Elbe,” and that this plan might have coincided with a “papal program for reviving the empire in the West that included Germania as far east as the Elbe under Charlemagne’s rule.”\textsuperscript{54} Specifically, Bachrach argues, in the Carolingian period, the term Germania was not generally employed to refer to the two historical Roman provinces of Germania superior (to become Germania prima in the late third century) and Germania inferior (to become Germania secunda at the same time) as they had actually existed on the western bank of the Rhine from the first to the fifth century, but was used much more loosely to refer to a broad region east of the Rhine—the unconquered Germania magna of the Romans—to which the Saxon lands certainly did

\textsuperscript{53} The sole piece of Frankish legislation for the region promulgated after the imperial coronation is the Lex Saxonum, which never speaks of the authority of an imperator, but only of a rex. See caps. 25, 62, and 65. See also Springer, Die Sachsen, p. 180: “Wenn aus alter Zeit kein ‘König der Sachsen’ bezeugt ist, ändert das nichts daran, dass Karls Herrschaft über Sachsen im Titel des fränkischen Königs einbegriffen war.”

\textsuperscript{54} Bachrach, Charlemagne’s Early Campaigns, pp. 217 and 575. The Elbe, of course, constituted the geographical endpoint of Charlemagne’s conquest of Saxony, and the easternmost limit of Frankish rule in the Carolingian period. After finally subduing and deporting the ‘Nordalbingian’ Saxons in 804 (their lands were given to the Franks’ Wiltzi allies), Charlemagne’s conquest of the region was complete. Raimund Ernst, whom Bachrach follows on the question of a Carolingian view of an extended province of Germania-up-to-the-Elbe, is in fact far more circumspect on this point than Bachrach suggests, concluding only that there was a knowledge in the Carolingian period that the Romans had attempted to carry their conquests to the Elbe, and not that the Elbe was universally considered the eastern border of Germania in this period. See R. Ernst, Die Nordwestslawen und das fränkische Reich: Beobachtungen zur Geschichte ihrer Nachbarschaft und zur Elbe als nordöstlicher Reichsgrenze bis in die Zeit Karls des Großen (Berlin, 1976), pp. 58–70.
belong. Moreover, Bachrach notes, in the first years of the Roman empire, Augustus had aimed to integrate this vast region into the empire as a province unto itself with its eastern border set at the Elbe.\footnote{See J. F. Drinkwater, “Germania,” in The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th ed., ed. S. Hornblower et al. (Oxford, 2012), p. 612, and “Germania Magna,” in Germanen, Germania, germanische Altertumskunde, ed. H. Beck (Berlin, 1998), pp. 75–79. The terminology could be extremely confusing. In the Roman period, the two actual provinces of Germania, for example, were sometimes counted as belonging to Gallia, from a strictly geographical standpoint, as they both lay on the west bank of the Rhine.} The Frankish conquest of the Saxons, of course, ultimately extended to the Elbe (excepting the relatively small region of the Nordalbingian Saxons, which acted as something of a bridgehead across the river and a buffer against the kingdom of the Danes). As such, Bachrach notes, there existed a certain geographic coincidence between Carolingian Saxonia and Augustus’ would-be province of Germania, and it is not impossible that Charlemagne could have had Augustus’s unfulfilled plan in mind when he undertook the conquest in Saxony. For Bachrach, then, the conquest of Saxony should be understood as an integral part of a ‘grand strategy’ aimed at the revival of the Roman empire in the West through the reunification of its constituent provinces, even though, to be sure, Bachrach is somewhat unclear on the point of whether and how the papal program and the Frankish plan were connected.\footnote{Bachrach, it seems, sees this plan as a kind of coda to an earlier supposed ‘grand strategy’ of Pippin III to reunite the lands of the Merovingian realm under Pippin III. On this earlier ‘grand strategy’, see B. Bachrach, Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire (Philadelphia, 2001), pp. 1–6.}

At first glance, Bachrach’s thesis would seem unlikely, for although it is certainly true that the Carolingians often used the term Germania to refer to a large but indistinct area east of the Rhine to which Saxony absolutely belonged, as, for example, in Einhard’s proclamation that the Saxons “like almost all the nations inhabiting Germania, are fierce,”\footnote{Einhard, Vita Karoli, c. 7: “Saxones, sicut omnes fere Germaniam incolentes nationes, et natura feroces.”} at other times they appear to have used the term in ways that suggest Saxony lay outside Germania. Specifically, it is clear that a knowledge of the old provinciae on
the west bank of the Rhine was preserved in the Carolingian period in texts such as the Notitia Galliarum, a list of the dioeceses and civitates of the Galls, first composed around the turn of the fifth century but preserved and recopied throughout the Merovingian and Carolingian periods by ecclesiastics for whom the old Roman dioeceses and civitates had continued significance. 58 The two German provinciae are mentioned in the Notitia, and it is made clear by the listing of the civitates that the two Germaniae continued to be conceived as existing solely on the west bank of the Rhine. 59

More importantly, however, while there may have existed a kind of coincidence between the Saxony of the Carolingians and Augustus’s hoped-for province of Germania, there is little evidence in favour of the idea that the deliberate revival of the empire in the West on the basis of the reunification of its former provinces by military conquest was an intentional long-term strategy of either the Franks or the papacy in the late eighth century. On the papal side, there may be some small evidence for such a plan in centuries past. Specifically, it has been suggested that the Gregorian mission to the Anglo-Saxons at the turn of the seventh century might have been motivated, in part, by a desire on the part of papacy to reclaim the ‘lost’ (in a religious sense) province of Britannia. 60 In the eighth century, however, there is no trace of any such plan. Indeed, the papal letters


59 The civitates were: (i) Germania prima: Mainz (metropolitan), Strasbourg, Speyer, Wörms; (ii) Germania secunda: Cologne (metropolitan), Tongres.

60 E. John, Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England (Manchester, 1996), p. 128. See also R. A. Markus, “Gregory the Great’s Europe,” Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th series, Vol. 31 (1981), p. 25. See a similar assertion in M. Dal Santo, “Gregory the Great, the Empire and the Emperor,” in A Companion to Gregory the Great, ed. B. Neil and M. Dal Santo (Leiden, 2013), p. 78. Gregory certainly deployed the memory of a Christian empire in his letters to Queen Bertha and King Æthelbert of Kent, urging them to model themselves on Helena and Constantine. See Gregory, Registrum XI, 35 & 37. W. Ullmann, A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages (London, 1972), pp. 54–5, however, understands the Gregorian mission as an attempt on the part of the papacy to strike out on its own course independent of the eastern empire. Yet if Ullmann is correct, then it is difficult to understand why Gregory would have stressed in his letter to Bertha that news of Æthelbert’s steps towards Christianity had reached Constantinople and ‘our most serene emperor’.
addressed to Carolingian rulers and collected in the *Codex epistolaris Carolinus* provide no hint of any such idea and do not in fact even mention the term *Germania*—though they are frequently concerned with Charlemagne’s activities in Saxony. 61 As we shall see below, Charlemagne’s control of the old Roman provinces—including, it seems, a *Germania* which included Saxony—was frequently boasted of in Frankish sources from the 790s onwards, and perhaps even used as a post facto justification for the king’s elevation to imperial status. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the conquest of Saxony was driven by a plan to revive the imperial title on the basis of the reunification of the old western provinces. 62

Despite these problems, Bachrach’s thesis moves our attention in a useful direction, towards the connection between the conquest of Saxony and an emerging Frankish imperial ideology in not just the months but the years before Charlemagne’s imperial coronation. Specifically, while there may not have been an intentional plan to revive the empire through the reconstitution of the old provinces, there is much evidence for the use of traditional Roman provincial nomenclature—occasionally with a *Germania* inclusive of Saxony—to emphasize Charlemagne’s imperial bona fides in the years leading up to his imperial coronation.

The important role that a revived Roman imperial nomenclature played in an emerging Carolingian political ideology in the late eighth and early ninth centuries has long been recognized. 63 For if the old regional names *Gallia, Italia*, and *Germania* regained a certain currency in ecclesiastical circles during the reign of Pippin the Short,

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61 *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, pp. 469–658.
62 Neither is there any interest expressed in *Britannia, Hispania*, or *Africa*, though perhaps for obvious military, political, economic, or even religious reasons.
they were soon to become associated with an emergent imperial political ideology in the
time of Charlemagne. 64 Indeed, a thorough reading of the sources suggests that
Charlemagne’s control of the former Roman provinces of the West, plus a Germania
composed mainly of the expansive Saxon lands east of the Rhine, did, in the view of
some at least, contribute to the Frankish king’s imperial bona fides and was invoked in
texts produced at and under the influence of the Frankish court in order to cast the king in
an imperial light in the years before the coronation.

By far the clearest evidence of the importance of Charlemagne’s control of the
western provinces as an ideological basis for the Frankish king’s new title is found in the
Annales Laureshamenses entry for the year 801. 65 Probably written shortly after the
coronation, and long recognized as an important source on the subject of the coronation,
the Annales claim that Charlemagne was granted the Roman title specifically because of
his control of the imperial provincial ‘seats’. The full entry for 801 reads:

And because the name of ‘emperor’ was now lacking among the Greeks, and they had had
for themselves a womanly empire, then it seemed both to the apostolic Leo and all the holy
fathers who were present at that council, as well as to the rest of the Christian people, that
they ought to call Charlemagne King of the Franks emperor, who held Rome, where the
Caesars were always accustomed to reside, as well as other seats which he held throughout
Italy, Gaul, and also Germany; because all-powerful God granted all these seats into his
power, for that reason it seemed to them to be just, that with the help of God and all the
Christian people entreating he should have that name.

[Et quia iam tunc cessabat a parte Graecorum nomen imperatoris, et femineum imperium
apud se abebant, tunc visum est et ipso apostolico Leoni et universis sanctis patribus qui in
ipso concilio aderant, seu reliquio christiano populo, ut ipsum Carolum regem Franchorum
imperatorem nominare debuissent, qui ipsam Romam tenebat, ubi semper Caesaras sedere
soliti erant, seu reliquias sedes quas ipse per Italiam seu Galliam nec non et Germaniam

64 E. Ewig, “Beobachtungen zur politisch-geographischen Terminologie des fränkischen Großreiches und
1964 (Münster, 1964), pp. 99–140, has suggested that the reemergence of the terms Gallia, Italia, and
Germania may at first be connected in the late eighth century with the movement of ecclesiastical reform,
but
that they were soon used in connection with the “neuem imperialen Anspruch der Franken” (p. 137).
65 Annales Laureshamenses, a. 801. See R. Collins, “Charlemagne’s Imperial Coronation and the Annals of
Lorsch,” in Charlemagne: Empire and Society, ed. J. Story (Manchester, 2005), pp. 52–70.
tenebat; quia Deus omnipotens has omnes sedes in potestate eius concessit, ideo iustum eis esse videbatur, ut ipse cum Dei adiutorio et universo christiano populo petente ipsum nomen aberet.] 66

It has generally been assumed that the passage refers to ‘seats’ in the sense of imperial residences. But while the Romans held many of these in Italy and Gaul, it is unclear what seats in Germany the author of the annals could have had in mind. Helmut Beumann, for example, has suggested that the author could have been referring to Frankfurt, 67 while Peter Classen has wondered whether the author might not simply have tacked on *Germania* to Italy and Gaul in order to round out a list of provinces and did not have any specific German *sedes* in mind. 68 Of course, there is no reason these *sedes* could not refer to Mainz and Cologne, or any of the other *civitates* on the west bank of the Rhine listed in the *Notitia Galliarum* and located in the actual old Roman provinces. However, Henry Mayr-Harting has made the intriguing suggestion that the imperial ‘seat’ of Germany could actually have been Paderborn in Saxony. 69

From 777 onwards, Paderborn was an important royal—and after the coronation, imperial—residence for the Franks. Furthermore, as Mayr-Harting notes, it is possible that Paderborn may have been associated with the idea of empire even before the coronation. It was there that Charlemagne met with the exiled Pope Leo III in the summer of 799 and where plans for the coronation in 800 were likely discussed. Furthermore, it

66 _Annales Laureshamenses*, a. 801. It has been debated precisely what *sedes* in Italy, Gaul and Germany are meant here. Mayr-Harting suggests that the ‘imperial seat’ of Germany may actually be Paderborn, following the line of interpretation which associates that site with the mysterious *Karlsburg* mentioned only a single time in the *Annales Mosellani*, a. 776. But while the imperial resonance of *Karlsburg* (*Karolis* – cf. Constantinople) cannot be discounted, there is no good evidence to think that this is what the Lorsch annalist had in mind. The association of the *Karlsburg* with Paderborn is, furthermore, not definitively settled. See Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 184.


69 Mayr-Harting, “Charlemagne, the Saxons, and the Imperial Coronation,” p. 1122.
has long been suspected that Paderborn should be seen as one and the same with the briefly-existing Karlsburg or Urbs Karoli, a site mentioned by some of the minor annals as having been destroyed by the Saxons shortly after its construction had begun in 776. (The foundation of Paderborn appears to have begun the following year, in 777.) It has long been thought possible that the two residences, Karlsburg and Paderborn, may actually have occupied the same site, with the somewhat ostentatious name of Urbs Caroli—clearly reminiscent of Constantine’s own capital of Constantinople—simply being dropped out of embarrassment after the Saxon destruction. If so, then perhaps the author of the Annales Laureshamenses was, as Mayr-Harting has suggested, thinking of Paderborn, a Carolingian sedes in Saxony, or Germania, imbued with a certain imperial aura due to its having been the site of the meeting with Pope Leo III and, perhaps, its earlier incarnation as an imperial-style residence on the model of Constantinople.

Mayr-Harting’s theory is intriguing in and of itself. However, it may be given some additional weight, for there exists a letter from Alcuin to Charlemagne composed in August 799, mere months before the imperial coronation, in which the Anglo-Saxon adviser to the king uses similar language to the Annales Laureshamenses. In the letter, Alcuin urges the king to leave his current location, referred to with precisely the same language, as sedes Germaniae, to go and restore the pontiff to power. Crucially, in

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71 McKitterick, Charlemagne, p. 165, assumes them to be the same; Springer, Die Sachsen, pp. 184 ff., stresses the room for doubt.
72 Alcuin, Epist. op. 4, ep. 178.
73 Alcuin, Epp., ep. 178, p. 296: “Vestraeque venerande dignitatis potentiam ad huius pestis conpescendam periciei e dulcibus Germaniae sedibus festinare compellit.” Charlemagne ultimately did not heed Alcuin’s advice, preferring instead to wait until November to make his fateful trip to the Holy See. As a grammatical
August of 799, Charlemagne is known still to have been in Paderborn following his meeting with the pope, where the plans for the imperial coronation are generally thought to have been discussed. Therefore, Alcuin refers in his letter to the Frankish royal—and soon to be imperial—palace of Paderborn, probably the former Urbs Karoli, as a sedes Germaniae. Notably, the Annales Laureshamenses are thought to have been composed by Ricbod, one of Alcuin’s students. As such, it is possible that the author of the annals, who wrote some years after his Anglo-Saxon teacher, could have been familiar with Alcuin’s precise words.

More broadly, even earlier than either the Annales Laureshamenses or Alcuin’s reference to a sedes Germaniae, the Opus Caroli regis contra synodum (also known as the Libri Carolini or Caroline Books) advanced a similar view of Charlemagne’s mastery of the Roman provinces as bolstering the king’s imperial bona fides. A theological treatise whose purpose was to critique the ironically misinterpreted outcomes of the Second Council of Nicaea, the Opus was composed in the early 790s, most probably by Theodulf of Orleans, but attributed to Charlemagne himself. It was never officially promulgated but appears to have reached a papal audience where it was intended to glorify the Frankish king as a defender of the correct faith and to denigrate the eastern emperor and his supposedly heretical views. It has been described by Heinrich Fichtenau as an attempt on the part of the Frankish king “to obtain equality of rank with the rulers of the east by raising his own position and discrediting theirs in the eyes of

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note, Alcuin, in characteristic fashion, follows the classical convention of using the plural form to refer to a single residence. Already in 796, Alcuin, had begun to address Charlemagne as “King of Germany, Gaul, and Italy.” See ep. 110, p. 157 (796): “Domino excellentissimo et in omni Christi honore devotissimo Carolo, regi Germaniae Galliae atque Italia, et sanctis verbi dei praedicatoribus humilis sanctae matris ecclesiae filiolus albinus aeternae gloriae in Christo salutem.”

contemporaries”⁷⁵ and by Thomas Noble as “constructing a whole counter-Byzantine imperial ideology for Charlemagne.”⁷⁶ Although never officially promulgated, a draft copy of the document appears to have been shared with the pope. It begins as follows:

In the name of God and our saviour Jesus Christ, here begins the work of the Illustrious and Most Excellent and Worthy Charles, by the grace of God King of the Franks, and by God’s will ruling the Gauls, Germany and Italy and their provinces, against the synod concerning the adoration of images which was stupidly and arrogantly carried out in Greece.

[In nomine domine et salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi incipit opus inlustrissimi et excellentissimi seu spectabilis viri Caroli, nutu dei regis Francorum, Gallias, Germaniam Italianaque sive harum provintias domino opitulante regentis, contra synodum, quae in partibus Graetiae pro adorandis imaginibus stolide sive arroganter gesta est.]⁷⁷

Notably, the *Opus* lowers Constantine VI in rank to a mere king—“rex eorum Constantinus”⁷⁸—and thus to the same level as Charles himself, while simultaneously elevating the Frankish ruler through an insistence on his devotion to the true Christian religion and the Roman church. The author of the *Opus* thus displays a preoccupation with the nuances of royal/imperial intitulature and, it would seem, a view that Charlemagne’s control of some of the former western provinces had an important role to play in a text designed to portray the Frankish king as equal to the Byzantine emperor.

Later in the *Opus*, the author again uses the names of the old Roman provinces to establish Charlemagne’s authority. This time, however, it hints that the Frankish king’s imperial bona fides may not have derived only from the fact that he controlled Gaul, Italy, and Germany—but also that he had converted the Saxons:

⁷⁶ This quotation is Henry Mayr-Harting’s summation of Noble’s argument in a paper delivered at the London University Medieval History Seminar sometime in the early 1990s (Mayr-Harting does not state the exact year; Noble’s online CV lists a paper titled “Tradition and Wisdom in Search of Ideology: The Libri Carolini,” delivered at Ohio State University in 1989). See Mayr-Harting, “Charlemagne, the Saxons, and the Imperial Coronation,” p. 1117.
Because not only the provinces of all the Gauls and Germania and Italy—but even the Saxons and other peoples of the northern region, by God’s will—are known to have been converted by us to the rudiments of the true faith, thus also they care to follow the throne of blessed Peter in all things, just as they desire to come to that place where the keeper-of-the-keys resides.

[Quod non solum omnium Galliarum provinciae et Germania sive Italia, sed etiam Saxones et quaedam aquilonalis plagae gentes per nos Deo annuente ad verae fidei rudimenta conversae, facere noscuntur, / et ita beati Petri sedem in omnibus sequi curant, sicut illo pervenire, quo ille clavicularius exstat, desiderant.] 79

Thus it is not just the control of the provinces themselves that amplify Charlemagne’s glory but his role in promulgating the Christian faith and in securing the allegiance of formerly pagan peoples—most especially the Saxons—to the bishop of Rome.

The passage brings us to the third and final connective theory linking Saxony and the revival of the imperial title under Charlemagne. Johannes Fried has recently argued that Charlemagne’s conquest and Christianization of the Saxons may have been pursued in part to live up to a late antique ideal which saw the emperor as responsible for the defence and extension of the Christian faith. Specifically, Fried argues that Charlemagne’s conquest and Christianization of the Saxons was pursued by the king precisely because it made him appear more “kaisergleich” to audiences both Frankish and papal at a time when the question of the king’s promotion to the imperial rank hung heavy in the air. 80 In Fried’s view, the meeting between king and pope in Paderborn in September 799 in the heart of a newly conquered and Christianized Saxony would have provided an ideal setting for Charlemagne to present himself for all to see “to the representative of St. Peter, to the head of the Church; as a conqueror of heathens and an increaser of Christendom; as a defender of the Church; as a future emperor.” 81 In sum,

then, Fried suggests that the conquest of Saxony may have been pursued by Charlemagne because of the ideological capital that derived from it—ideological capital that in turn was used to purchase imperial status for the Frankish king. As we shall see below, there is much to recommend such a thesis, though it requires some additional refinement and expansion.

The notion that the Roman emperor had a special responsibility for both the defence and extension of the Christian faith stretches back to the earliest days of the Christian empire itself. The origins of such a concept appear to lie in late antique notions of the emperor as both a *domitor gentium* and an *amplificator orbis Romani*. Indeed, in offering an etymological explanation for the title *augustus*, Isidore of Seville suggested that “for that reason Augustus is the name of the empire among the Romans, because they formerly augmented (augerent) the republic by enlarging it. The senate first gave that

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name to Octavius Caesar, because he had increased the lands [of the state], so by that name and title he was consecrated.”

Such ideas were encouraged by early Christian thinkers, who more and more saw the emperor as the natural defender of their faith and its church, which were increasingly seen as coterminous with the empire itself. Already, in a panegyric delivered to Constantine in July 336, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the emperor’s accession, Eusebius of Caesarea spoke of the emperor’s responsibility to combat a “twofold barbarian race,” drawing a direct parallel between the foreign enemies of the state and the demonic forces threatening the church and its body of believers:

Thus, as a victor in truth, he conquered that twofold barbarian race, taming the wild breeds of men with conciliatory embassies – forcing them to recognize, rather than ignore, higher powers and transforming them from a lawless and beast-like life to one rational and lawful – and proving by his very acts that the rough and brutalized race of invisible demons had been conquered long ago by the Higher Power. For while the Common Savior of the Universe punished the invisible beings invisibly, he as the prefect of the Supreme Sovereign proceeded against those so vanquished, stripping their long and utterly dead corpses and distributing the spoils freely among the soldiers of the victor.

Isidore, *Etymologiae*, IX, 16–17, claimed that “Augustus ideo apud Romanos nomen imperii est, eo quod olim augerent rempublicam amplificando. Quod nomen primitus senatus Octavio Caesari tradidit, ut quia auxerat terras, ipso nomine et titulo consecrarentur.”

To Eusebius, then, the worldly progress of the empire was a vehicle for the spiritual progress of the Church, and the emperor as ‘victor’ over barbarians, both physical and spiritual, an agent of God himself.

In the following centuries, the notion that the Roman emperor should be charged with the defence and extension of both empire and church against external ‘barbarian’ forces, by use of arms if need be, was further refined. In the late 370s, Ambrose of Milan—himself a former imperial official—would initiate an important development through the introduction of prayers for the imperial army. In a prayer for the success of Gratian’s army against the Arian Goths, for example, he articulated Constantine’s replacement of the old symbols of Roman imperialism with the new: “Turn, O Lord, and raise the standards of your faith. Here, neither the military eagles nor the flight of birds lead the army, but your name and worship, Lord Jesus.”85

By the turn of the fifth century, the melding of church and empire, and the expectation that the emperor fight in the name of and for the expansion of the Christian religion, had progressed apace. In an oft-cited and highly influential passage of De civitate Dei, Augustine stressed the importance of this expressly imperial duty:

For neither do we say that certain Christian emperors were therefore happy because they ruled a long time, or, dying a peaceful death, left their sons to succeed them in the empire, or subdued the enemies of the republic, or were able both to guard against and to suppress the attempt of hostile citizens rising against them. These and other gifts or comforts of this sorrowful life even certain worshippers of demons have merited to receive, who do not belong to the kingdom of God to which these belong; and this is to be traced to the mercy of God, who would not have those who believe in Him desire such things as the highest good. But we say that they are happy if they rule justly; if they are not lifted up amid the praises of those who pay them sublime honors, and the obsequiousness of those who salute them with an excessive humility, but remember that

they are men; if they make their power the handmaid of His majesty by using it for the
greatest possible extension of His worship.

[Neque enim nos Christianos quosdam imperatores ideo felices dicimus, quia uel diutius
imperarunt uel imperantes filios morte placida reliquerunt, uel hostes rei publicae
domuerunt uel inimicos cius adversus se insurgentes et cauere et opprimere potuerunt.
Haec et alia uitae huius aerumnosae uel munera uel solacia quidam etiam cultores
daemonum accipere meruerunt, qui non pertinens ad regnum Dei, quo pertinens isti; et
hoc ipsius misericordia factum est, neabillo ista qui in eum crederent uelut summa bona
desiderarent. Sed felices eos dicimus, si iuste imperant, si inter lingus sublimiter
honorant et obsequia nimis humiliter salutantium non extolluntur, et se homines esse
meminerunt; si suam potestatem ad Dei cultum maxime dilatandum maiestati eius
famulam faciunt.]^86

Augustine’s meditation on the distinction between ‘happy’ (felices—read Christian) and
‘unhappy’ (infelices—read pagan) emperors has been described as “the earliest of all
Christian specula regum”^87 and was certainly an influential one in the Carolingian
period. ^88 Indeed, it is this passage that Fried sees as determinative in shaping an ideal of
an emperor as an extender of the faith at Charlemagne’s court. ^89 Einhard, of course,
claimed in his Vita Karoli Magni that De civitate Dei was one of the Frankish king’s
favourite books, and so it is not impossible that the passage could have made a direct
impression on the ambitious and status-conscious future emperor. ^90

Augustine’s assertion that ‘happy’ emperors should eschew the traditional but empty
signs of good worldly rule, including the conquest of the enemies of the res publica,
while nevertheless using their worldly power (potestas) to extend (dilatare) the worship
of God to the greatest possible extent would seem at first glance to walk back some of the
more martial implications of Eusebius’s imperial ideal. In fact, however, as the
Christianization of the Roman state had proceeded over the course of the fourth century,

222–223.
the boundaries of empire and church had increasingly become one and the same, so that
the enemies of the *res publica* became the *de facto* enemies of the *ecclesia*, and *vice
versa*. In subsequent centuries, theologians and religio-political theorists would in fact
use the terms *res publica* and *ecclesia* largely interchangably, while continuing to
promote the idea that the extension of the boundaries of both empire and church was the
duty of a Christian emperor.\(^{91}\)

By the sixth century, the justification of the use of force in this duty would be stated
even more forcefully by Gregory the Great. In a letter addressed to Gennadius, prefect
and exarch of Africa, Gregory argued that both the protection of the *sancta res publica*
(thus collapsing together church and state in a wholly unprecedented way) and the
extension of the faith to “neighbouring peoples” (*finitimas gentes*) should be pursued
through the “strength of [the emperor’s] arm” (*sui brachii firmitate*).\(^{92}\) Despite the fact
that the empire in the West was more fiction than fact from the late fifth century onwards,
“ancient habits of thought encouraged the identification of the Empire as the natural setting of Christianity and its divinely sanctioned vehicle,” as Robert Markus observed.93

In the post-Roman West, the idea of a ‘Christian empire’ and of the emperor’s duty both to defend and to extend the borders of that empire survived the end of the empire itself and was preserved by barbarian kings and their advisors, who often kept up the pretense that they ruled as dutiful imperial representatives. It was this idea that Avitus of Vienne appears to have invoked in a letter sent to Clovis on the occasion of the latter’s baptism. The letter offers congratulations to the Frankish king on his conversion to the Christian faith and advice on Christian rule. Crucially, the letter closes with what Avitus claims to be his greatest desire, an exhortation for the king to work for the conversion of foreign pagan peoples:

There is one matter I would have improved. Since God through you makes his people completely His own, I would have you extend from the good treasury of your heart the seed of faith to more remote peoples, whom none of the sprouts of perverse dogma has corrupted, because they are still situated in a state of natural ignorance. Be not ashamed or reluctant to send embassies on the matter and to add to the realm of God, who has raised up yours to such an extent. To the extent that whatever foreign pagan peoples there are, they are ready to serve you for the first time because of the imperium of your religion, while they still seem to have some other property, let them be distinguished rather by their race than their ruler…

[Unum est, quod velimus augeri: ut, quia deus gentem vestram per vos ex toto suam faciet, ulterioribus quoque gentibus, quas in naturali adhuc ignorantia constitutas nulla pravorum dogmatum germina corruperunt, de bono thesauro vestri cordis fidei semina porrigatis: nec pudeat pigeatque etiam directis in rem legationibus adstruere partes dei, qui tantum vestras erexit. Quatenus externi quique populi paganorum pro religionis vobis primitus imperio servituri, dum adhuc aliam videntur habere proprietatem, discernantur potius gente quam principe…]94

The final sentence breaks off midway, and thus it is impossible to glean its full meaning.

Nevertheless, the letter makes clear that the extension of the faith to other peoples was

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understood, by Avitus at least, as a fundamental duty of a Christian ruler and an imperial representative. Moreover, the final sentence of the letter, although difficult to construe, may hint that Clovis, although a mere king, would nevertheless be executing an imperial duty in bringing foreign pagan peoples to Christ. Specifically, Avitus suggests that these peoples would serve Clovis “because of the imperium of [his] religion.” How exactly the word *imperium* should be taken in this sentence is unclear. It could, for instance, be interpreted as ‘rule’ or ‘authority’, as in “[they] are ready to serve you for the first time because of the authority of your religion.” On the other hand, however, the word could actually mean ‘empire’ in the real political sense, as in “[they] are ready to serve you for the first time because of the empire of your religion” (i.e. the Roman empire), suggesting that the weight of the Roman empire itself, of which Clovis was a representative, might be used to persuade conversion among foreign pagan peoples. Such an interpretation could actually make good sense within the context of Avitus’ letter as a whole, which opens with congratulations to Clovis on his baptism and with a celebratory note that both West and East were now governed by Catholic rulers. Furthermore, if it is true, as has sometimes been suggested, that this letter was written shortly after not only Clovis’ baptism but also his apparent acquisition of a consulship from the East, it is possible that Avitus envisioned the extension of the Christian faith to foreign pagan peoples as an imperial duty to be discharged by an imperial agent and as a natural consequence of Clovis’s consular position. In fact, it may be, as Bayet long ago supposed, that

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95 Avitus of Vienne, MGH AA 6.2, p. 75: “Gaudet equidem Graecia principem legisse nostrum: sed non iam quae tanti munieris donum sola mereatur. Illustrat tumult quoque orbem claritas sua, et occiduis partibus in rege non novi iubaris lumen effulgatur.” The eastern Catholic prince in question was Emperor Anastasius, who replaced a perceived heretic on the throne.

“henceforth Clovis appeared to the Gallo-Romans as the delegate of the Emperor, and in consequence, as the representative of that ancient order of things which, in the midst of these troublous times, still remained the expression of the law: his conquests were in a certain manner legitimized.” It is impossible to know how much weight to give Gregory of Tours’ description of Clovis’ donning of the chlamys and adoption of the style *augustus*, but the use of the term *imperium religionis* within the context of a ruler’s mission to foreign peoples is notable as an apparent example of the ideal of the emperor as an extender of the faith in the Merovingian period.

An even more concrete image of the imperial representative as an extender of the faith in the Merovingian era can be seen in a letter from King Theudebert I of Austrasia to Justinian the Great. This letter, which presents similar difficulties of interpretation, again recalls the ideal of the extension of the faith to foreign peoples as the responsibility of the emperor’s agent. The letter begins with greetings to Justinian, whom Theudebert addresses as Lord (*dominus*) and Father (*pater*), and mentions a letter sent by the emperor in the east through two emissaries, Theodore and Salomon. Justinian apparently had made enquiries about the extent of Frankish authority and about which people the Frankish king had subjected to his dominion. In response, Theudebert informs the eastern emperor: “We have received the letter, which the clemency of your empire sent to us,

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97 F. Lot, *The End of the Ancient World*, trans. by P. Leon and M. Leon (Oxford, 1996), p. 322, citing C. Bayet. Lot argues contra Bayet’s suggestion, asserting that the empire was a remote and not particularly well regarded force in Clovis’ Gaul. This assertion ignores the immense role that the empire continued to play in the cultural imagination of sixth-century Gaul and the clear appeals made to its authority by Frankish rulers like Clovis, despite the empire’s physical distance. The dearth of scholarship on relations between Merovingian Francia and Byzantium is set to be addressed by a major new collaborative project at the Freie Universität Berlin helmed by S. Esders and Y. Hen, “East and West in the Early Middle Ages: The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective,” [http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/fmi/institut/arbeitbereiche/ab_esders/forschung/forschungsprojekte/East_and_West_in_the_Early_Middle_Ages_The_Merovingian_Kingdoms_in_Mediterranean_Perspective.html](http://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/fmi/institut/arbeitbereiche/ab_esders/forschung/forschungsprojekte/East_and_West_in_the_Early_Middle_Ages_The_Merovingian_Kingdoms_in_Mediterranean_Perspective.html).
with utter love and devotion of heart, for as you act as our caretaker, so do we spread more broadly the beloved friendship of God through various peoples and provinces.”

Theudebert then goes on to name a list of peoples and regions over whom the Frankish king holds sway, including the Thuringians, the Northswabians, the Visigoths, Italy, and Pannonia, as well as the Saxons and the Jutes, thus asserting a dominion stretching from Pannonia “up to the shores of the oceans.” The letter closes with Theudebert’s ceding of this vast dominion to Justinian himself and with the request that the eastern emperor honour “what he had often promised”—namely that Theudebert and Justinian “should be joined in common advantage.”

This letter, dating to early 534, was written within the context of an unprecedented eastward military push by the Austrasian Frankish king, which brought the Franks into Italy and Pannonia and to the doorstep of the eastern empire. The campaign, it seems, was impressive enough to rattle nerves in Constantinople, for the Byzantine chronicler Agathias even suspected Theudebert of planning an invasion of Thrace. Theudebert, in fact, had laid claim to traditionally imperial territories and was the first Merovingian king to replace the image of the Byzantine emperor with his own on gold coinage. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that Theudebert had aimed to make such imperial

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flirtations explicit.\textsuperscript{102} The Frankish king’s addressing of Justinian as Lord (\textit{Dominus}) and Father (\textit{Pater}) in the relevant letter clearly rejects any pretense of equality with the emperor in the East, at least to the face of the emperor himself. Yet the request to be joined “in common advantage” (\textit{in communi utilitate}) may have implied a hope of formal recognition either as co-emperor in the West or as an official representative of Justinian. Regardless of the precise stakes, Theudebert’s specific references to the progress of the church and the conversion of foreign peoples as support for his request is notable given what we have already seen of late-antique ideas about the export of the faith and the expansion of the empire.

The influence of this late-antique ideal of “imperial mission” in the Carolingian age has long been recognized.\textsuperscript{103} Sacramentary texts of the period, for example, continued to associate the Christian religion with the geographical territory of the Roman empire. The eighth-century \textit{Gelasian sacramentary} implores: “God, You Who prepare the Roman empire by praising the Gospel of the eternal kingdom, stretch your heavenly arms before your servants, these our rulers, so that the peace of our churches should not be disturbed

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\item \textsuperscript{103} I. S. Robinson, “Church and Papacy,” in \textit{Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, 350–1450}, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge, 1988), p. 293. J. M. Schott, \textit{Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity} (Philadelphia, 2008), p. 156, speaks instead of a “shared mission” between empire and church. See also F. H. Russell, \textit{The Just War in the Middle Ages} (Cambridge, 1975), p. 28: “Charlemagne’s far-reaching imperial program of religious, moral and political authority was celebrated by his court scholars, who linked the expansion of Christianity and the interests of the clergy to Charlemagne’s various wars.” This appears to be the same idea towards which John Hines gestures when he claims that the conversion of the Saxons was “enforced by the sword in accordance with Charlemagne’s imperial political ambitions.” See J. Hines, “The Conversion of the Old Saxons,” in \textit{The Continental Saxons from the Migration Age to the Tenth Century}, ed. D. H. Green and F. Siegmund (Woodbridge, 2003), p. 299.
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by the storm of war.”¹⁰⁴ One tenth-century manuscript even changed Romanum imperium praeparasti to Christianum imperium dilastasti, echoing the language of Augustine and Gregory the Great even more precisely.¹⁰⁵ (Whether or not this change predates the manuscript itself is uncertain.)

Importantly, the idea of imperial mission was enunciated even more clearly by ecclesiastics and theologians close to the Frankish royal court in the months and years before the coronation. We have already seen the boast about Charlemagne’s conversion of the Saxons in the Libri Carolini (or Opus regis Carolis contra synodum)—a text clearly intended to argue implicitly for the king’s imperial status to a papal audience in the early 790s. Additionally, however, the active promotion of the extension of ‘the name of Christ’ can be observed in two letters of Alcuin, both written in 796 and both concerning the Saxons. The first, addressed to the clergy in England, urged prayers both for the soul of Pope Hadrian I, who had recently died, and for Charlemagne’s successful extension of the Christian name, probably among the Saxons, whom the Frankish king was campaigning against that summer (though Pippin was also campaigning against the Avars at the same time): “Let your good will also be known, because our lord King Charles greatly desires the prayers of your sanctity for the Lord, whether for the stability of his kingdom itself or for the extension (dilatatio) of the Christian name or for the soul of blessed father Hadrian; because faith of friendship shows the greatest towards a dead friend.”¹⁰⁶ The second, addressed to Charlemagne himself, praised the king for his labour

in extending the name of Christ to the Saxons: “Behold, with how much devotion and care for the extension (\textit{dilatatione}) of the name of Christ you have laboured to soften the hardness of the unhappy Saxon people through the true counsel of salvation.” \textsuperscript{107} Alcuin’s highly specific language in these letters echoes precisely that of Augustine and Gregory, recalling the idea of imperial mission first set out in the patristic period and preserved in the post-Roman West.

\textbf{Rebels, Pagans, and Barbarians}

If the conquest and Christianization of the Saxons served as fodder for the creation of an imperial image of the Frankish king in a traditional Roman Christian mould—as a conqueror of barbarians both physical and spiritual, and as a defender and extender of the faith—the depiction of Saxons as rebels, pagans, and barbarians found in Frankish texts from the early 750s onwards was critical to this project. \textsuperscript{108} As Rosamond McKitterick has observed, “Information about the Saxons in the course of [the Saxon] wars is provided

\textsuperscript{107} Alcuin, \textit{Epistolae}, epp. 110, p. 157 (\textit{post} Aug. 10, 796): “Ecce quanta devotione et benignitate pro dilatatione nominis Christi duritiam infelicis populi Saxonum per verae salutis consilium emollire laborasti. Sed quia electio neendum in illis divina fuisse videtur, remanent huc usque multi ex illis cum diabolo damnandi in sordibus consuetudinis pessime.” Alcuin goes on to explore the same idea of the expansion of the church at the expense of the Avars. Notably, this is the same letter that addresses the Frankish ruler as “King of Gaul, Italy, and Germany,” using the old provincial nomenclature and thus hinting at the imperial connotations of Charlemagne’s war to expand the faith. See also, ep. 202, p. 336, composed June of 800: “armis imperium christianum fortiter dilatare,” with regard not to expanding the geographic borders of the faith but to the strengthening of the faith within the realm.

\textsuperscript{108} H. Fichtenau, \textit{The Carolingian Empire}, trans. P. Munz (Oxford, 1957), p. 63, sees the Avars as more significant with regard to the idea of imperial mission. Yet although the Avars were certainly conquered, they were never successfully Christianized and incorporated as the Saxons were. Indeed, following their conquest the Avars simply disappear from the historical record. Furthermore, as we shall see, they do not appear to have been employed by Frankish and papal authors to support an imperial image for Charlemagne in the same manner as the Saxons. See also C. Erdmann, \textit{The Origin of the Idea of Crusade}, trans. W. Goffart (Princeton, 1977), p. 22: “The defense of Christendom and, often, its extension were held to be the foremost duties of the ruler. First popularized by the popes in their frequent appeals to the secular arm, this teaching was soon taken up by the king of the Franks and his theologians…the most notorious example is that of the Saxons.”
for us by the Franks from their perspective of the Saxons as intransigent rebels against
the benefits of Frankish rule and as pagans resistant to the blessings of Christianity.”

In a somewhat older article, Hans-Werner Goetz made similar comments on the
stereotypical nature of Carolingian depictions of the Saxons, while drawing some
comparison with the ways that these depictions had developed against the Merovingian
and late-antique backgrounds. In general, however, the emergence of an image of the
Saxons as ‘rebels, pagans, and barbarians’ at a particular juncture in Frankish history,
namely with the transition from the Merovingian to the Carolingian era, has passed with
relatively little comment.

In the late Roman period, internal enemies of the empire were branded ‘rebels’ or
‘bandits,’ while external enemies were labelled ‘barbarians’. Roman authors would
raise the specter of barbarian ancestry to cast aspersion on those opposed to the
centralized authority of whichever imperial regime currently held power. With the
advent of Christianity, new categories of enemy were introduced, while old ones came to
have new meaning. In addition to rebels and barbarians, the emperor now also fought

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109 McKitterick, Charlemagne, p. 106.
110 H.-W. Goetz, “‘Sachsen’ in der Wahrnehmung fränkischer und ottonischer Geschichtsschreiber,” in Von
Sachsen bis Jerusalem: Menschen und Institutionen im Wandel der Zeit: Festschrift für Wolfgang Giese
zum 65. Geburtstag, ed. H. Seibert and G. Thoma (Munich, 2004), pp. 73–94. Goetz places most emphasis
on the depiction of the Saxons as ‘rebels’ in the Carolingian period. He does not, however, note the
emergence of the term pagani, which is in my view the more important of the two. Nor does he note
the emergence of the term barbari, which is also important, though for the most part restricted to
hagiographical texts.
111 G. B. Ladner, “On Roman Attitudes toward Barbarians in Late Antiquity,” Viator 7 (1976), pp. 1–26, at
p. 11: “It is not insignificant that since the Augustan age at the latest the term ‘rebel’ was used for the
external foes of the empire, thus by Virgil, Ovid, Livy, Tacitus, Suetonius;” and, at p. 22: “To call hostile
barbarians rebels follows the well known pattern.” On barbarians and the Roman empire in general, see
also G. Halsall, Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 45 ff; M. Maas,
“Barbarians: Problems and Approaches,” in The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity, ed. S. F. Johnson
(Oxford, 2012), pp. 60–91; E. James, Europe’s Barbarians (Harlow, 2009), pp. 1 ff.; and D. Rohrbacher,
The Historians of Late Antiquity (London, 2002), pp. 207 ff.
against ‘heretics’ and ‘pagans’. And, as we have already seen in the case of Eusebius’s panegyric to Constantine, to be barbarian was to be pagan as well—thus a rebel against the Christian religion and by extension the Roman state. Ambrose’s subsequent extension of the term *perfidia*, from secular treason to heresy and ‘unfaithfulness’ in the religious sense might also be noted here.  

This Roman-Christian/barbarian-pagan-rebel dichotomy survived well into the early medieval period, at the same time as it became complicated by the ascendance of Christian ‘barbarian’ groups. At first, the predilection of these groups for Arianism made such problems largely moot. However, complexities arose once again in the early and middle parts of the eighth century with the ascendance of the Catholic Franks, at a time when the papacy in Rome was engaged in the difficult process of extricating itself from the emperors in Constantinople. Pope Gregory II highlighted the apparent irony in a letter to Emperor Leo III: “It is regrettable that the savages and barbarians have become cultured, whilst you as a cultured individual have degraded yourself to the level of the barbarians.”  

It is notable, then, that a marked shift in what might be called a ‘discourse of enmity’ can be observed in the Carolingian period, as authors began more and more to describe the enemies of the Franks using these traditional late-antique terms for imperial enemies. Above all, these terms were applied to the Saxons.

The encounter between Franks and Saxons in the late eighth century was no meeting between strangers, for the two groups had long lived in close proximity. The earliest geographical evidence suggests that they may have been neighbours at least as early as

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the fourth century, and *Franci* and *Saxones* are often mentioned in tandem in the earliest Roman texts. Indeed, Gallo-Roman texts even seem to confuse and conflate them on occasion. In Frankish and Gallo-Roman texts of the Merovingian period, meanwhile, the Saxons are at times depicted as enemies of the Franks, but also as potential allies. In the writings of Gregory of Tours, the Franks alone were described as *barbari*. Critically, the use of the terms ‘rebels’, ‘pagan’, and ‘barbarian’ to define their Saxon enemies began at a time when Frankish political identity was undergoing a major recalibration.

Importantly, the construction of the Saxons as ‘rebels’, ‘pagans’, and ‘barbarians’ ultimately constitutes a reconstruction of the depictions of the Saxons circulated in the Merovingian and late Roman periods. Indeed, it is notable that it is in the first continuation of Fredegar—the first expressly Carolingian work of historical writing,  

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thought to have been composed for the occasion of Pippin III’s coronation in 751—that the Saxons are first marked as rebels, and perhaps more significantly ‘most pagan’, as opposed to the faithful and expressly Catholic Franks. Strikingly, the Merovingian sources never once make reference to the religious difference of the Saxons. And while the Merovingian sources sporadically characterized Saxons as rebels, these also portray them as potential comrades. The *Chronicon* of Fredegar, for example, presents an alternative history in which Franks and Saxons unite to drive a conquering Pompey from Germany.\(^{118}\) In reality, there is evidence for much interaction and cultural similarity in the Merovingian and early Carolingian periods between the two groups, which shared a similar language and material culture, and whose aristocracies intermarried.\(^{119}\) Therefore, it may well have been, as Martin Lintzel long ago argued, that many Saxons, especially of the upper classes, were sympathetic both to Christianity and to the Frankish cause.\(^{120}\) It is notable also that burial mounds, which contravened Charlemagne’s legislation for the region, seem to have re-emerged only in the late eighth century, after decades of Frankish-sponsored, religiously-hued conflict.\(^{121}\)

Both Helmut Reimitz and Rosamond McKitterick have recently argued for the emergence of a recalibrated Frankish political identity in the Frankish historiographical

\(^{118}\) Fredegar, *Chronicon*, MGH SRM 2, p. 46.

\(^{119}\) I refer here to the Merovingian Queens Balthild (*Vita Sancti Balthildis*, MGH SSRM 2, pp. 475–508) and Nanthild (*Liber historiarum Francorum*, MGH SRM 2, p. 315), as well as to the Saxon *dux* Chulderic (Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum*, pp. 328, 385, and 514), whose wife owned land in the south-west of France, and to the *optimas* Aighyna (Fredegar, *Chronicon*, pp. 148 and 160). Charlemagne’s own uncle, Bernhard, had a Saxon wife. See L. Weinrich, *Wala* (Lübeck, 1963), pp. 11–12. Balthild in particular may have been an Anglo-Saxon, though there appears to have been little distinction made between the Saxons of Britain and the Saxons of the continent during this period. See Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 47. A sense of kinship between the two groups appears to have persisted into the eighth century. See Chapter 1, pp. 70–81.

\(^{120}\) M. Lintzel, *Der sächsische Stammesstaat und seine Eroberung durch die Franken* (Berlin 1933).

\(^{121}\) The ban on burials in *tumuli paganorum*—usually interpreted to mean ‘burial mounds’—is outlawed in the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, MGH Fontes iuris 4, c. 22, p. 41. See Effros, “*De Partibus Saxoniae*,” pp. 267–286.
texts of the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Both see a new idea of ‘Frankishness’ in the period following the Carolingian coup d’état, in texts such as the two Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar (composed probably in two installments around 751 and 768), the Annales regni Francorum (composed around 790 and then continued in batches thereafter), and the Annals Mettenses priores (composed around 805). This new conception of ‘Frankishness’ at once broadened the geographical definition of who could be considered a Frank while restricting it politically to those who were faithful to the Carolingian kings. Above all, this new conception of ‘Frankishness’ emphasized the ‘Christianness’ of the Frankish people, in opposition to pagans and heretics. The revised eighth-century prologue of the Lex Salica, for example, which has been seen by some as amounting to “racial propaganda,” declares the Franks “recently converted to the Catholic faith … free from heresy, rejecting barbarian rites with the help of God, keeping the faith.” This new Carolingian Frankish identity was, of course, defined in opposition to other groups, including the iconoclast Byzantines and neighbouring pagan peoples—above all the Saxons. The Annales regni Francorum, for

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123 The Liber historiae Francorum, seems to apply the term ‘Frank’ mainly to Neustrians, referring to ‘eastern’ Franks mainly as Austrasii, though also occasionally Franci superiores. See Liber historiae, cc. 27, 36, 41. For Gregory of Tours, meanwhile, Francia denotes Austrasia.
example, frequently refer to the Franks simply as the *christiani*, in contrast to the *pagani* Saxons.¹²⁶

The undergirding of this new Christian-Frankish ideology was the Carolingian alliance with the pope, whose supposed assent to the coup of 751 gave the Carolingian kings from Pippin III onwards a divine sanction. It is within the context of this assertion of the Carolingians as Christian kings, and of the Franks as a Christian people, and—never far from hand—the alliance with the papacy, that we should seek to understand Frankish depictions of the Saxons as rebels, pagans, and barbarians. Most explicitly, this connection is apparent in the late-eighth/early-ninth century Latin epic known as *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa*.¹²⁷ The text as we have it comes down to us preserved in a single later ninth-century manuscript and is generally thought to be fragmentary in form.¹²⁸ Although the authorship and dating of the poem remain controversial, it is generally thought to have been composed by an individual close to the Frankish court either in the summer of 799 or, alternatively, sometime in the first decade of the ninth century. The text has been studied intensively by literary scholars and has been declared “a turning point in the development of narrative verse during Charlemagne’s reign.”¹²⁹ What concerns us immediately here, however, are not the poem’s literary qualities *per se* but its

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¹²⁶ The Franks are described simply as *christiani* in *ARF*, aa. 773 (vs. Saxons), 776 (vs. Saxons), 778 (vs. Avars), 791 (vs. Avars), 794 (vs. Saxons), 795 (vs. Saxons).

¹²⁷ See Chapter 1, pp. 63–64.

¹²⁸ Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, C 78, ff. 104r.–114v, a miscellany. See H.–W. Stork, “Die Sammelhandschrift Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, C 78,” in *De Karolo rege et Leone papa: Der Bericht über die Zusammenkunft Karls des Großen mit Papst Leo III. in Paderborn in einem Epos für Karl den Kaiser*, ed. W. Hentze (Paderborn, 1999), pp. 105–118. The fragmentary nature of the text is deduced from the poet’s claim that he has already passed through two previous ‘storms’, usually taken to imply two previous books. (“Rursus in ambiguos gravis ammonet anchora calles / Vela dare, incertis classem concredere ventis; / Languida quae geminas superarunt membra procellas”, ll. 1–3.) The poem is widely supposed to have consisted of four books in total, with the fourth perhaps treating the coronation in Rome itself.

status as a statement of Frankish imperial ideology and its employment of the king’s conquest and conversion of the Saxons to support that ideology.

From the outset, the poem’s form and language, which are modelled directly on the Aeneid, are suggestive of Roman imperial grandeur. Like Aeneas, Charlemagne is frequently praised as pius, and is three times praised as augustus,¹³⁰ a title clearly intended to suggest imperial status and one that the king would employ in his official intitulature from 801 onwards.¹³¹ One of the most famous sections of the poem has the king overseeing the building of a city described as Roma secunda and Roma venturae.¹³² The construction of this ‘second’ Rome—which is not otherwise named by the poet—has traditionally been assumed to represent the building of the palace complex at Aachen. However, it has also been suggested that it could be describing the construction of the similar royal buildings at Paderborn.¹³³

The Saxons play a central role in supporting an imperial image of the Frankish king in the Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa. Following a dream-vision of the attack on and mutilation of Pope Leo III in Rome, the poet depicts Charlemagne waking and sending legates to Rome before setting off himself for Saxony, where the army converges:

The troops come together from different parts of the world,
The kindred battle lines hurry beyond the lofty banks of the Rhine,
to tame the rebel Saxon people and to destroy the fierce people with icy iron.

[Agmina conveniunt diversis partibus orbis,
Cognataeque acies properant super ardua Rheni
Litora, Saxonum populum domitare rebellem
Et saevam gelido gentem rescindere ferro.]¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa, MGH Poet. Lat. 1, ll. 94, 367, 374 and 376.
¹³² Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa, ll. 94 and 98.
¹³³ McKitterick, Charlemagne, p. 141.
This neat construction—the paralleling of the Charlemagne’s concern for Leo’s well-being and his attack on Saxony—implicitly depicts Charlemagne as a defender and expander of the church—in other words, as fulfilling the requirements of a Christian Roman emperor.

It should be stressed here that although other groups besides the Saxons were certainly described as ‘rebels’, ‘pagans’, and ‘barbarians’ in the Carolingian period, it is the Saxons who above all occupy a central place in the Carolingian texts of the eighth century. Crucially, I would suggest that the emergence of this fixation on the Saxons as rebels, pagans, and arch-barbarians must be understood within the context of the newly forged ties between the Carolingian kings and Rome, and the expectations those ties implied.

The Carolingians, the Papacy, and Saxony

From the discordant collection of sources on the revival of the imperial title in the West under Charlemagne, an ambiguous picture emerges. Peter Heather has recently emphasized the long resiliency of the imperial ideal in the post-Roman West and the circumstances under which it was revived from time to time. For the most part, however, recent scholarship has taken the stance that the imperial coronation of Charlemagne represented a more-or-less ad hoc response on the part of the papacy to a

135 For a survey of descriptions of the Saxons and other non-Frankish groups as rebels, pagans, and barbarians in Carolingian sources, see Appendix.
137 Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*. 
limited and unexpected political crisis in Rome itself, with relatively little in the way of sophisticated ideological underpinning it.\textsuperscript{138} Chris Wickham, for example, has asserted that “the importance of this title should not be exaggerated; it was only honorific.”\textsuperscript{139}

Rosamond McKitterick writes:

The title was not of any practical importance. It is difficult to see the imperial title as anything more than a bold attempt by the Papacy to describe the achievements and stature of Charlemagne, cock a snook at Byzantium, and define the peculiar relationship that had evolved between the Papacy and the Frankish rulers over the preceding century.\textsuperscript{140}

Similarly, Roger Collins has argued:

The imperial title and coronation at the hands of the pope were the products of particular and limited circumstances, and were by no means the natural ends towards which the king and his advisers had long been working. At best, the coronation was brought about by purely Italian or even Roman circumstances, and was the outcome of the particular events of the years 799–800, helped by the peculiar constitutional position of the current ruler in Constantinople.\textsuperscript{141}

In accordance with this general view of a short and relatively spontaneous imperial coronation is the idea that the development of a Carolingian imperial self-image, mainly to be observed in intitulature and coinage, emerged only in the years after 800.\textsuperscript{142} Such assessments, although hardly representing a consensus, are representative of scholarship that has in many ways sought to counter older historiographical tendencies that may have exaggerated the seeming inevitability of the coronation. Yet while recent scholarship is certainly right that the coronation was not inevitable, it has perhaps gone too far in downplaying both the build-up to the revival of the imperial title and its significance to

\textsuperscript{138} Many scholars see the hints of a more long-term road to empire, such as Alcuin’s employment of the term \textit{imperium christianum} in his letters beginning in 798, as “too ambiguous” to be taken seriously.

\textsuperscript{139} Wickham, \textit{The Inheritance of Rome}, p. 382.

\textsuperscript{140} McKitterick, \textit{The Frankish Kingdoms}, p. 72.

\textsuperscript{141} R. Collins, \textit{Early Medieval Europe 300–1000}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (New York, 2010), p. 291.

\textsuperscript{142} See, again, Wickham, \textit{The Inheritance of Rome}, p. 382; “Imperial imagery began to infuse Carolingian legislation after 800 as well;” and Garipzanov, \textit{Symbolic Language, passim}. Critically, Charlemagne only began using his imperial title on coinage in 812, after it was finally recognized in Byzantium.
contemporaries. In fact, the matter of the revival of the empire in the West was not so quickly or so casually conceived. Nor was it entirely directed by the papacy. Such could hardly have been the case at a time when the Frankish king was at the height of his power and the pope at the lowpoint of his.

If the pope was undeniably a principal actor in the revival of the imperial title, there is also evidence to suggest that Charlemagne and his forebears desired access to the purple for some time and that a Carolingian imperial ideology was supported at the Frankish court before 800. Carl Erdmann argued that it was a “Rome-free” idea of empire, based on the notion of one king ruling over other kings, that constituted the ideological basis of Charlemagne’s revival of the imperial title, and that this idea developed at the Carolingian court. Perhaps most famously, Alcuin described Charlemagne’s realm as an imperium christianum in letters from the middle of June 798 onwards. This term, found in earlier liturgical texts, is not as original as some scholarship has wanted to see it, however. Notably, some manuscripts of the Laudes regiae even speak of an imperium Francorum. (Indeed, it is remarkable that a Neustrian copy of the Old Gelasian Sacramentary makes this alteration around the very time of the ascension of King Pippin I.) The evidence for Alcuin’s ideas regarding an imperium christianum before 800 may

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143 The fact that Charlemagne required a new oath of allegiance from his subjects to himself as emperor following his coronation is evidence enough that the title was seen as being significant (MGH Cap. 1, no. 33, cc. 2–9, pp. 92–93), as is the evident delay in employing the title on Frankish coins until after formal recognition by the Byzantine emperor in 812 (see M. Blackburn, “Money and Coinage,” NCMH, Vol. 2, p. 551).

144 C. Erdmann, Forschungen zur politischen Ideenwelt des Frühmittelalters, ed. F. Baethgen (Berlin, 1951), pp. 22 ff.


147 Garipzanov, Symbolic Language, p. 267.
be ambivalent, but coupled with the Anglo-Saxon’s rhetoric about the *dilatatio* of the name of Christ and his expression in 799 that the Frankish king outranked the other two authorities of the world—the Byzantine emperor in the East and the pope himself—the concept of an *imperium christianum* should probably be seen as evidence of a ramping-up of imperial expectations in the years immediately preceding the coronation, whether or not it had a direct impact on the events of Christmas 800.

Moreover, there is significant evidence that both the Carolingians and the Byzantines had been interested in the prospect of Carolingian imperial status prior to 800 without the pope. Perhaps the clearest evidence that the Carolingians entertained imperial aspirations prior to the year 800 is to be found in a series of proposed Carolingian-Byzantine marriage alliances, which were frequently brokered and just as frequently dissolved from the time of Pippin III onwards. For while Theophanes’ claim that Charlemagne sent envoys to Constantinople in 801 to propose marriage between the Frankish king and the empress Irene is well known, a number of earlier proposed (if ultimately unfulfilled) marriage alliances between Carolingians and the Byzantine imperial family are less often discussed. The engagement of Charlemagne’s daughter Rotrude to Constantine VI from

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148 Alcuin’s statement from June 799 regarding the respective ranks of the three authorities is well known and has been widely discussed. See Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ep. 174, p. 288: “Nam tres personae in mundo altissime hucusque fuerunt: id est apostolica sublimitas, quae beati Petri principis apostolorum sedem vicario munere regere solet; quid vero in eo actum sit, qui rector praefate sedis fuerat, mihi veneranda bonitas vestra innotescere curavit. Alia est imperialis dignitas et secundae Romae saecularis potencia; quam impie gubernator imperii illius depositus sit, non ab alienis, sed a propriis et concivibus, ubique fama narrante crebrescit. Tertia est regalis dignitas, in qua vos domini nostri Iesu Christi dispensatio rectorem populi christiani disposuit, ceteris praefatis dignitatis potentia excellentiorem, sapientia clariorem, regni dignitate sublimiorem. Ecce in te sola tota salus ecclesiarum Christi inclinata recumbit. Tu vindex scelerum, tu rector errantium, tu consolator maerentium, tu exaltio bonorum.” 149 Less frequently noted is Theodulf of Orléans’ assertion that St. Peter himself wished to be replaced by Charlemagne. See Theodulf of Orléans, *Carmina*, no. 32, MGH Poet. Lat. 1, p. 524: “Nam salvere Petrus cum posset in urbe Quirina, / Hostibus ex atriis insidiisque feris, / Hunc tibi salvandum, rex Clementissime, misit, / Teque sua voluit fungier ille vice. / Per se reddit ei membrorum damna pavenda, / Et per te sedis officiique decus. / Caeli habet hic claves, proprias te iussit habere, / Tu regis ecclesiae, nam regit ille poli. / Tu regis eius opes, clerum populumque gubernas, / Hic te caelicolas ducet ad usque choros.”

149 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Hildesheim, 1963), aa. 800–801.
781 until 789 is reported by both Theophanes and Einhard.\textsuperscript{150} That such a marriage was intended to gain access to imperial status is made clear by Theophanes’ report that a Greek tutor was left behind in the West “to teach Erythro (Rotrude) the language and literature of the Greeks and to instruct her in Roman imperial ways.”\textsuperscript{151} Even earlier, however, a papal letter of the mid-760s reports that Pippin III seriously considered marrying his daughter Gisela to the Byzantine Leo IV.\textsuperscript{152} Neither union ever materialized. Nevertheless, the fact that such alliances were proposed suggests that direct access to imperial status through marriage—specifically, by means of imperial offspring—had been a considered possibility at the Frankish court for some time.

In addition to these prospective Carolingian-Byzantine marriages, it may also be that factions at the Byzantine court dissatisfied with the reign of Irene had considered offering Charlemagne the imperial title directly. Evidence for this is found in a short, marginal note in a Cologne manuscript, known to scholarship as the \textit{Kölner Notiz}.\textsuperscript{153} The note reports, tersely and enigmatically, that envoys came from Byzantium in 798 to offer Charlemagne the imperial title, and, notably, that this happened in conjunction with a campaign in Saxony in which the king took a reported third of the country hostage.

Whether or not the two events—the arrival of the Byzantine embassy with an offer of the


\textsuperscript{151} Theophanes, \textit{Chronographia}, ed. C. de Boor (Hildesheim, 1963), aa. 781–782.

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Codex epistolaris Carolinus}, ep. 45, p. 562; \textit{ARF}, a. 767, reports that Pippin III oversaw a synod between Romans and Greeks on the subject of the Holy Trinity and sacred images in that same year.

\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Kölner Notiz}, ed. B. Krusch, \textit{Studien zur christlich-mittelalterlichen Chronologie: Der 84 jährige Osterzyklus und seine Quellen} (Leipzig, 1880), p. 197: “Ab Adam usque ad passionem Christi anni ÛCCXXVIII. sunt anni ab initio mundi secundum veritatem Hebreorum, ut transtulit Hieronimus, usque ad istum annum XXXI. regni Karoli regis—ipse est annus quando hospites [a marginal hand notes \textit{obsides}] accepit de Saxonia tertiam partem populi et quando missi uenerunt de Grecia ut traderent ei imperium—anni ÛDCCCCXCVIII, secundum vero ÛCCLXVIII. anni ab incarnatione domini DCCXCVIII. Cui vero sic non placet, sudet et legat et melius numeret.”
imperial title, and a major victory in Saxony—were connected in the mind of the Notice’s author, is unclear.

In the end, the Carolingian imperial status would not be achieved through Frankish-Byzantine relations but through the mediation of the pope. Leo III’s crowning of Charlemagne on Christmas Day in the year 800, however, represents the culmination of a long, drawn-out process of Frankish–papal entwinement. Above all, the revival of the empire in the West under Charlemagne must be seen within the context of the complex and gradual process whereby the pope in Rome transferred a number of formal imperial prerogatives from the East to the West, including the weighty responsibility of defending the city of Rome and its church against its secular and spiritual enemies. This process came about primarily as a result of the inability of Byzantines to provide adequate military protection to the bishop of Rome and his territories over the course of the eighth century, in combination with the increasing doctrinal differences that developed between East and West during this same period. As Peter Classen has rightly noted, the gradual movement of the papacy from East to West was not smooth or regular. In general, however, transfer of these prerogatives from the Byzantines to the Carolingians moved the Franks gradually—if not inevitably—towards empire. Indeed, the earliest evidence that the Carolingians took on an ‘imperial’ role in the West from early on can be found in the first continuation of the Chronicle of Fredegar, a text generally considered to have been composed in 751 under the commission of the half-brother of Pippin III’s own uncle, Count Childebrand, perhaps in honour of the royal coronation of Pippin III

154 Schramm, *Die Anerkennung Karls des Großen als Kaiser*, p. 31, sees Charlemagne as at least a “quasi-imperator” even before 800.
155 Classen, *Karl der Grosse, das Papsttum und Byzanz*. 
himself. Already at this early date, in a text which stands at the very foot of a new, virulently pro-Carolingian Frankish historiographical tradition, the continuator speaks of the early days of the rise of the Carolingian dynasty under Charles Martel in 739 as a product of the transference of papal allegiance from the Byzantine emperors in the East to the Carolingians in the West:

And indeed at that time blessed Pope Gregory twice sent legations from Rome, the seat of St. Peter the Apostle, to the prince we speak of with great and boundless gifts, as well as keys to the holy sepulchre with the chains of St. Peter, which never before was seen or heard in those times, so that an agreement was reached whereby the pope would withdraw from the side of the emperor and honour the aforesaid prince Charles with the Roman consulship.

[\textit{Eo etenim tempore bis a Roma sede sancti Petri apostoli beatus papa Gregorius claves venerandi sepulchri cum vincula sancti Petri et muneribus magnis et infinitis legationem, quod antea nullis auditis aut visis temporiaribus fuit, memorato principi destinavit, eo pacto patrato, ut a partibus imperatoris recederet et Romano consulato praefato principe Carlo sanctaret.}]^{157}

The same basic idea is communicated by the \textit{Liber pontificalis}, in a passage that is generally regarded as an interpolation, possibly from the 750s.^{158} Of course, the precise constitutional significance of the pope’s gift of the keys of the holy sepulchre and the chains of St. Peter to Charles Martel remains uncertain, as does the significance of the “consulship” which confirmed the transfer of the papacy’s allegiance from East to West. (Notably, however, Gregory III had written to Charles Martel already in 739, addressing the mayor of the palace as \textit{subregulus} or ‘subking’, and thus already beginning the trend of exaggerating the constitutional status of Carolingian rulers.^{159}) What is clear from the reports of the continuation of Fredegar and the \textit{Liber pontificalis}, however, is that already

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^{156} R. Collins, \textit{Die Fredegar Chroniken}. R. McKitterick, “The Illusion of Royal Power,” suggests that both continuations may have been written at the same time, in 768.

^{157} Fredegar, \textit{Continuationes}, p. 178 ff.


^{159} \textit{Codex epistolaris Carolinus}, epp. 1 and 2, pp. 476 and 477.
at the very beginning of the Carolingian period, an idea of the Carolingians as the replacers of the Byzantine emperors in the West was being actively promoted in both Frankish and papal circles; or, such an idea was at least back-projected from the 750s. Moreover, perhaps it is worthy of note that the first Carolingian attempts to convert the Saxons, in concert or perhaps in competition with the mission of Boniface, may have been initiated by Charles Martel at around this same time.\textsuperscript{160} Specifically, it was probably in connection with a campaign of Charles Martel in 738 that the first continuator of the Fredegar chronicle described the Saxons for the first time as ‘most pagan’.\textsuperscript{161} Thus there may have been a certain congruence between the pope’s ‘receding’ from the side of the emperor and confirming the Carolingians as protectors of St. Peter and the beginnings of Frankish attempts to exert ecclesiastical authority over the Saxons.

The papacy, of course, had its own longstanding interests in the Christianization of Saxony. The 720s and 730s saw a marked increase in both missionary and military activity in Saxony, with Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics and Frankish armies working sometimes in tandem and sometimes in competition to gain a foothold and promote the Christian religion in the region. The papacy engaged too in this scramble for Saxony. The papacy’s interest can be observed in a number of papal letters going back as far as the 720s and 730s. Perhaps most famously, there is a letter sent by either Pope Gregory II or Gregory III (the dating is uncertain) preserved in the Bonifatian letter collection. It is addressed “To all the people of the province of the Old Saxons” (\textit{Gregorius papa}


\textsuperscript{161} Fredegar, \textit{Continuations}, p. 177: “Itemque rebellantibus Saxonis paganissimos, qui ultra Renum fluvium consistunt, strenuus vir Carlus, hoste commoto Francorum, in loco ubi Lippia fluvius Renum annem ingreditur sagace intentione transmeavit, maxima ex parte regione illa dirissima cede vastavit, gentemque illam sevissimam ex parte tributaria esse praecepet atque quam plures hospitibus ab eis accept; sicque, oppitulante Domino, victor remeavit ad propria.”
universo populo provinciae Altsaxonum), urging them to accept the new religion and commending them to his representative, Boniface. It is unclear exactly what impression this letter, which is comprised almost entirely of scriptural citations, would have made on the Saxons, but it is significant in illustrating an intensified interest in Saxony by the papacy around this time.

Yet another papal letter concerning Saxony, thought to date to the same period, has been preserved in the *Vita Waltgeri*, a text composed at Herford by the monk Wigand around the year 1200. The authenticity of this letter, which is included as an interpolation into the main narrative of the Life, has long been debated. Recently, however, the letter’s authentic status has been resurrected by Heinrich Wagner. The letter, addressed to Boniface, praises the missionary’s successes in Saxony, naming four Saxon ‘princes’ (*principes*), Eoban, Rutwic, Wulricus, and Dedda, whom Boniface has successfully led “out of the shadows of ignorance and into his marvelous light, so that they now may be a people purchased for God.” The use of the words from 1 Peter, which stress the expectation that individuals should be converted as part of larger groups of ‘peoples’, is interesting in light of eighth-century expectations about missionary goals and norms of socio-political organization. The letter goes on to tell Boniface that a papal

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165 1 Peter, 2:9: “Vos autem gens sancta populus adquisitionis ut virtutes adnuntietis eius qui de tenebris vos vocavit in admirabile lumen suum.”
representative, Dodo, has been sent to Saxony from Rome in order to represent the pope to the receptive principes (presumably they were not sufficiently satisfied with Boniface) and that the Anglo-Saxon missionary should commence felling trees worshipped by the natives (arbores illas, quas incole colunt, monemus ut succidantur), before encouraging Boniface to banish from the church the followers of the heretics Aldebert and Clemens.

This latter epistle must be read beside two papal letters sent from Gregory II to Emperor Leo III, dated probably to 729. Both letters boast of the pope’s influence in the West and the many peoples who are flocking to Gregory’s authority. The second even speaks of an intended trip over the Alps to baptize new peoples, his papal agents apparently not having been acceptable in and of themselves: “Nos viam ingredimur in extremis Occidentis regiones versus illos, qui sanctum baptisma efflagitant.”\(^1\)\(^6\) (As Michael Glatthaar has argued, it is possible that this may refer to a planned trip by the pope to baptize the Saxons, whom Glatthaar sees as the only major Western people as yet un-Christianized.\(^1\)\(^7\) The agents referred to by the pope are likely Boniface and perhaps Dodo.) What is important to note here is the great emphasis that the papacy clearly placed on Saxony during this period and the way in which the idea of the Christianization of the West could be leveraged by the pope in order to put pressure on the Byzantines in the East.


\(^{167}\) M. Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg: Zur politischen Dimension eines Rechtsbegriffs* (Frankfurt, 2004), pp. 526 ff., argues that the leaders of the Franks, the Hessians, the Thuringians, the Bavarians, and the Alemannians were already for the most part Christian; only the Frisians and the Saxons remained. Of course, there were also the Danes/Northmen, but there is no evidence that any missionary activity north of the Saxons was ever conceived before the late eighth century.
The pope would often use Charlemagne’s achievements in the West to shame the emperor in the East, as, for example in a 787 letter addressed to Constantine VII and his mother Irene:

For since such an iniquitous scandal of error which has crept into those parts of Greece, has been abolished, and with God assenting, those images which ought to be venerated in pristine state will be restored, there will be great joy spread through all the wide world, and now you shall rule as victors in triumph over all barbarous nations, with blessed Peter prince of apostles attending with you; just as our son and spiritual coparent Charles, King of the Franks and of the Lombards, and patrician of the Romans, submitting to our urgings, and fulfilling in all ways our will, has laid low and trampled underfoot the barbarian nations in Italy and all parts of the West, mastering their omnipotentatum, and making them subject to himself, has united them under one rule.

[Nam cum talis iniquum erroris scandalum, quod in ipsis Graeciae partibus irrepsit, abolitum fuerit, et Deo annueunte ipsae venerandae imagines restitutae: erit magna laetitia dilecta per universum terrarum orbe, et nunc super omnes barbaras nationes, beato Petro principe Apostolorum vobiscum comitante, eritis in triumphis imperantes victores; sicut filius et spiritualis compater dominus Carolus rex Francorum et Longobardorum, ac patricius Romanorum, nostris obtemperans monitis, atque adimplens in omnibus voluntate, omnis Hesperiae occiduaeque partis barbaras nationes sub suis prosternens conculcavit pedibus, omnipotentatum illarum domans, et suo subiciens regno adunavit.] 168

The representation of Charlemagne in the traditional imperial role of a domitor gentium in an address to the ‘real’ imperial court at Constantinople is noteworthy. The papacy had long used this trope in communications with Carolingian rulers, though it is notable that it appears only to have been employed from the time of Pippin III’s elevation to the kingship. The representation of the achievements of a barbarian king to the Roman emperor himself, however, (and the suggestion that Charlemagne’s achievements could only be aspired to by the Byzantines), is remarkable. Hadrian’s reference to Italy is surely in reference to the Lombards. The pope does not restrict the glory of Charlemagne’s triumphs to the Italian peninsula, however, but extends it to ‘all Westerly parts’. What additional conquests over ‘barbarian nations’ the pope has in mind, he does not say.

Writing as he was in 787, however, it is very possible that he was thinking of the Saxons, whose conquest and conversion only two years before had been marked by the pope’s ordering of an unprecedented three days of prayers and litanies throughout the Christian world. The pope thus shames the eastern emperor by celebrating the achievements of Charlemagne. By promoting the interests of the church and conquering heathen foes, the Frankish king was carrying out the duties of a true emperor.

Such papal letters, which suggest a great concern for the promotion of the church in Saxony, indicate a real interest on the part of the pope to promote and develop the church in Saxony, whether directly or through intermediaries such as Boniface and Charles Martel or personally through his own (proposed) presence. This interest must be seen within the wider context of the papacy’s withdrawal from the Byzantine empire, which was occurring simultaneously. If it was not beforehand, it was clear at this point that the papacy’s future lay in the West. The extension and development of the Church into new lands was therefore of the utmost importance. Thus in the middle decades of the eighth century, the expansionary interests of the nascent Carolingian dynasty and the newly emancipated papacy aligned.

The letters sent from the papacy to the Carolingians, from the time of Charles Martel to around 790, are preserved in the collection of papal correspondence known as the Codex epistolaris Carolinus. This collection, according to its preface, was the product of an effort undertaken at the Carolingian court around the year 790, a full decade prior to the imperial coronation, to recopy and preserve the damaged and deteriorating letters found in the royal chancery. The Codex contains only the letters from the popes, and not

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169 Codex epistolaris Carolinus, ep. 76, pp. 607–608. The letter makes clear that the pope conceived the borders of Charlemagne’s realm and the Christian Church as coterminous, referring to “nostris vestisque finibus.”
the letters from the Carolingian kings themselves, and as such constitutes a valuable but partial account of the Carolingian–papal relationship. Furthermore, the papal letters to the Carolingian kings, at least in the form they currently exist—being the product of both the papal and the Carolingian chanceries—is at once a statement of both papal and Carolingian outlooks. They were undoubtedly produced in order both to preserve and shape the memory of the Carolingian-papal alliance. The awkwardly phrased preface, attributed to Charlemagne himself, may make reference to a second, separate collection of letters from the Byzantine imperium. Or, as has recently been suggested, the ambiguous language may suggest that the papal letter collection itself concerns the rule of an imperium Christianum co-managed by the pope and the Frankish king.\footnote{D. van Espelo, “A Testament of Carolingian Rule? The Codex epistolaris carolinus, Its Historical Context, and the Meaning of imperium,” Early Medieval Europe 21:3 (2013), pp. 254–282.} Either way, as we shall see, the letters of the Codex epistolaris Carolinus, taken as a whole, develop an imperial theme. The collection not only serves as a document of the deterioration of the relationship between the papacy and Byzantium and the building of the Carolingian-papal alliance but also as a witness to the papacy’s role in the development of a Carolingian imperial identity. For the popes praised Carolingian rulers, especially Charlemagne, in increasingly explicit imperial language. Furthermore, the Saxons and the conquest of Saxony are frequently connected to this increase in imperial language. As Achim Thomas Hack has observed, of the many enemies mentioned in the letters, other than the Lombards, “undoubtedly the most prominent among them are the Saxons.”\footnote{A. T. Hack, Codex Carolinus: Päpstliche Epistolographie im 8. Jahrhundert, Vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 2007), p. 317: “zu den prominentisten unter ihnen gehören zweifellos die Sachsen.”} We may go somewhat farther, however, in observing that papal innovations in the use of imperial language to praise the victories of the Carolingians are most
frequently linked with Frankish victories over the Saxons, and especially with the
Frankish Christianization of the Saxons. Indeed, papal letters had long praised the
military victories of Frankish kings in language reminiscent of imperial panegyric. For
example, the letters of the *Codex epistolaris Carolinus* refer time and again to
Carolingian kings’ subjection of ‘barbarian peoples’.¹⁷² The tenor of this language
increased markedly during the reign of Charles the Bald, however, and was frequently—if
not exclusively—associated with campaigns against the Saxons. The first description of
Charles as *trihutorissime*, for example, appears to have followed a campaign
against the Saxons in 778.¹⁷³ The pope’s praise of Charles as a *novus Constantinus*,
meanwhile, followed the campaign and mass baptisms of 777.¹⁷⁴

If popes took a keen interest in Charles’s activities in Saxony, it would seem
that the king also took pains to keep the the papal court informed as to the progress of his
work in the region. There exists a rare piece of Carolingian administrative ephemera in
the form of a scrap of manuscript, thought to date to 784/785.¹⁷⁵ This brief document
appears to consist of a series of talking points for *missi* sent to Rome to report on the
progress in Saxony and to deliver gifts from Saxony. The year 785, of course, was a
significant one for Charles’s work in Saxony. It saw the baptism of the Westphalian
Saxon leader Widukind, along with many more formerly pagan Saxons, and though it

¹⁷² *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, ep. 17, p. 516; ep. 24, p. 528; ep. 26, p. 531; ep. 35, p. 543; ep. 37, p. 550;
590; ep. 66, p. 594; ep. 68, p. 597; ep. 72, p. 603; ep. 73, p. 604; ep. 75, p. 506; ep. 88, p. 625; ep. 89, p. 626.

¹⁷³ *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, ep. 64, p. 591: *trihutorissime*. The letter is dated to 779/780. The most
recent Frankish military campaigns at this time were the Saxon campaigns of 778 and 779 and the Spanish
campaign of 778. Given its disastrous end, the latter campaign would hardly have been cause for
celebration, so the pope’s praise was likely delivered in reference to the king’s victories in Saxony. The
term was used once again in ep. 72, p. 603, composed following yet another Saxon campaign in 782.

¹⁷⁴ *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, ep. 60, p. 587: “quia ecce novus christianissimus dei Constantinus
imperator his temporibus surrexit...”

¹⁷⁵ *ChLA*, Vol. 17, no. 655, s. 64
would not be known at the time, it would begin seven years of peace before a renewed outbreak of war in 792. These events were celebrated in Rome by an unprecedented three days of religious observance, in honour of Charlemagne’s conversion of the Saxons. The document speaks once again to the role that the conquest and Christianization of Saxony appears to have played in the Carolingians’ burgeoning relationship with the papacy—a relationship which culminated in Charlemagne’s attainment of the imperial office.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Saxony was a vital component in the imperial ascent of Charlemagne in the late eighth century. Depictions of the Saxons and their Christianization were deployed by Frankish and papal authors in order to bolster the Frankish king’s imperial image. This project was facilitated by longstanding stereotypical depictions of the Saxons as rebels, pagans and barbarians, which may themselves be seen as byproducts of an even earlier Carolingian attempt to live up to an imperial ideal in the wake of their newfound relationship with the papacy and as replacers of the Byzantine emperors in the East.
Chapter 3:  
The Raw Materials of Empire

And yet it cannot be affirmed (if one speaks ingenuously) that it was the propagation of the Christian faith that was the adamant of that discovery, entry, and plantation; but gold and silver and temporal profit and glory: so that what was first in God’s providence was but second in mass appetite and intention.

– Francis Bacon, *An Advertisement Touching an Holy War* (1622)

At the tail end of 775, a decidedly vexed Pope Hadrian I addressed Charlemagne with the following pointed words:

But we believe that you will remember, dearest and most beloved son, how you addressed us with your own obliging speech when you hastened to the threshold of the blessed princes of the apostles, Peter and Paul: [saying] that, not seeking gold, or gems and silver, or lands and men, had you attained such an exalted rank [*fastigium*], with your army of Franks protected everywhere by God, but by striving to exact justice for Blessed Peter, and to bring the exaltation of the Holy Church of God to completion and to increase our security.¹

Only two years earlier, Charlemagne and his army of Franks had swept into Italy, defeating the pope’s Lombard enemies and conquering the bulk of the Italian peninsula.²

Upon the completion of this conquest, in the summer of 774, the Frankish king took for himself not only the title of *rex Langobardorum*, but also that of *patricius Romanorum*, and possibly also *defensor ecclesiae*, in recognition of his newly solidified role as military protector of the bishop of Rome and his Church.³ Now, however, it seemed the

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² On the Frankish conquest of Italy, see 774, *ipotesi su una transizione*, ed. S. Gasparri (Turnhout, 2008).

³ See Chapter 2.
pope had good reason to fear that Charlemagne had forgotten the true and lofty causes for which he had claimed he fought and for which Hadrian had lent the king and the Frankish army his prayers. First, as Hadrian had already made clear in a string of complaints over the course of late 774 and early 775, Charlemagne had taken no decisive action in the time since the conquest of Italy to restore the cities and territories that the papacy claimed and that had been one of the main causes of the papal dispute with the Lombards in the first place. Second, the king had broken his promise to return to Rome personally in October of 775, failing even to send missi in his place. Finally, when Charlemagne did eventually dispatch missi to Italy, they spurned the pontiff in Rome to parley with Hadrian’s Lombard enemies in Spoleto and Benevento, refusing the commands of the pope’s own envoy to return to the ‘right road’ and meet with the pope.

Given this series of slights, it is little wonder that Hadrian had grown anxious and sought to remind Charlemagne of his duties to Rome. But what of the ‘gold, gems, silver, lands, and men’ to which the pope said Charlemagne alluded? Somewhat surprisingly, Hadrian’s reference to the king’s pursuit of material wealth, the usual accompaniment of successful conquest though subordinated in the king’s expression of his motives, has attracted little in the way of comment over the years. In part, of course, the pope’s

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4 Codex epistolaris Carolinus, nos. 53, 49, 51, 54, and 55. The pope’s claims to these territories were grounded in the so-called ‘Donation of Pippin’, granted in 756. See T. F. X. Noble, The Republic of St. Peter (Philadelphia, 1984), p. 93.
5 The plan for an October visit following a campaign in Saxony is referred to in Codex Carolinus, MGH Epp. 3, nos. 51, 52, and 55.
6 Codex epistolaris Carolinus, no. 56, p. 581
7 S. Abel and B. von Simson, Jahrbücher des fränkischen Reiches unter Karl dem Großen, Vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1888), p. 242, suggest that the passage refers to a promise to abstain from the pursuit of these material interests contained in the oath sworn in Rome the previous year; such an interpretation strains the Latin of the letter, however. P. Jaffé, Regesta pontificum Romanorum, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1885), p. 294, provides no discussion of the passage, nor does W. Gundlach, “Über den Codex Carolinus,” Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde 17 (1892), pp. 525–566 at p. 557. In more recent scholarship, the pope’s rebuke has continued to pass largely without comment, as, e.g., in F. Hartmann, Hadrian I. (772–795): Frühmittelalterliches Adelspapsttum und die Lösung Roms vom byzantinischen
juxtaposition of the pursuit of material and spiritual interests was a rhetorical barb rooted in patristic thought, aimed at skewering the bumptious piety of sinners. At the same time, however, it may be that the pope’s insinuation regarding Charlemagne’s intentions was rooted in a measure of reality. For, in fact, Charlemagne had missed his October appointment in Italy out of the necessity of extending his summer campaign in Saxony, the first undertaken since the Frankish resolution at Quierzy to conquer and Christianize the Saxons. The campaign was an important one, wherein the Frankish army met, came to terms with, and extracted hostages and oaths of fealty from all three of the main Saxon political groupings—the Eastphalians, the Angrians, and the Westphalians (the last, however, submitting only after an apparently unanticipated battle)—before the king returned to Herestelle to celebrate Christmas. This campaign would thus set the stage for the first steps of Saxon integration. The next year, large numbers of Saxon men, women, and children would be baptized at Lippespringe. In addition to the king’s military and political activities in Saxony in 775, however, the *Annales regni Francorum*

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8 Specifically, the pope’s words are evocative of Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum 72*, c. 31: “et ego volui a te in terra quod habent et impii, quod habent et mali, quod habent et facinorosi; pecuniam, aurum, argentum, gemmas, familias; quod habent et scelerati multi, quod habent multae feminae turpes, multi viri turpes.”

9 See Chapter 2, pp. 88–90.

10 The late return from Saxony is suggested by the revised version of the *ARF*, a. 775: “Et tum demum Westfalaorum obsidibus acceptis ad hiemandum in Franciam revertitur.” Böhmer dates the end of the campaign to Oct. 25. The pope was certainly aware of the king’s activities in Saxony. See *Codex epistolaris Carolinus*, no. 52, pp. 574, wherein the pope clearly anticipates the king’s coming directly from Saxony to Italy. See also P. Jaffé, *Biblioteca rerum germanicarum*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1867), p. 194, n. 2. For discussion of communications between the Franks and the papacy, see Chapter 2, pp. 141–144.

11 *ARF*, a. 776: “Et tunc domnus Carolus rex una cum Francis reaedificavit Eresburgum castrum denuo et alium castrum super Lippium, ibique venientes Saxones una cum uxoribus et infantibus innumerabilis multitudo baptizati sunt et obsides, quantos iamdictus domnus rex eis quaesivit, dederunt.” The ‘other’ *castrum* on the Lippe must have been the ill-fated *Urbs Karolis* referred to in some of the minor annals, which was burned in attack the following year, and which may have been the predecessor of the palace complex of Paderborn.
also report that the king “acquired great plunder.”\textsuperscript{12} Perhaps, then, it was this Saxon plunder to which the pope referred when he threw the king’s own words regarding his commitment to the propagation of the Roman Church rather than the pursuit of ‘gold, gems, silver, lands and men’ in his face.

\textbf{Plunder and Tribute}

In an influential 1985 article, Timothy Reuter argued that the expansion of the Frankish state in the second half of the eighth century was fuelled by the plunder and tribute gained by the annual military campaigns of the Carolingian kings.\textsuperscript{13} It was loot taken from enemies, Reuter argued, in the form of gold and silver, arms and horses, and land and slaves, which gave the Carolingian kings their solvency and which in turn allowed them to secure the loyalty of the greater magnates of the realm through the distribution of gifts and benifices. In the absence of a sophisticated market economy, so the thinking goes, predation was the only sure means of maintaining the steady inflow of wealth needed to keep the Carolingian military-political machine afloat and the realm united. In a follow-up publication, Reuter outlined his view of the end of Carolingian expansion and the subsequent fragmentation of the empire in the ninth century as the logical consequences of the successes of the eighth, which had led to “a shortage of victims who were both conquerable and profitable.”\textsuperscript{14} This lack of new opportunities for expansion, in combination with quickly manifesting external threats, occasioned massive structural

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} ARF, a. 775: “Et tunc obsidibus receptis et praeda multa adsumpta et per ter stragia Saxonum facta supradictus domnus Carolus rex ad propria reversus est auxiliante Domino in Franciam.”
\item \textsuperscript{13} T. Reuter, “Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire,” \textit{Transactions of the Royal Historical Society} 5\textsuperscript{th} ser. 35 (1985), pp. 75–94.
\end{itemize}
changes within Carolingian society, Reuter argued, as the empire was forced to swing to a new defence-oriented posture and the rich and powerful of the realm began to focus on internal expansion and an intensified exploitation of the existing resources of the realm. Thus the end of conquest brought the end of Carolingian ‘trickle-down’ feudalism and eventually the end of the empire itself.

In the years since its initial publication, Reuter’s thesis has become something of a touchstone for historians of the Carolingian age, who have seen in it a material rationale for the unprecedented Frankish expansion of the second half of the eighth century. Yet, at the same time, many have questioned its fit where Saxony is concerned. For where Charlemagne’s conquests of other enemies, such as the Lombards and the Avars, are widely acknowledged to have resulted in massive hauls of treasure, most scholars have thought the pickings in Saxony slim in comparison. Paul Fouracre, for example, while finding Reuter’s thesis generally attractive on the basis that “it rests on evidence of performance, rather than intention,” has questioned its suitability for the “relatively poor and pre-monetary Saxons,” suggesting that, if anything, the conquest of Saxony must


16 On the Lombards, see ARF, a. 774: “Et revertente domno Carolo rege a Roma, et iterum ad Papiam pervenit, ipsam civitatem coepit et Desiderium regem cum uxore et filia vel cum omni thesauro eius palatii;” on the Avars, see Einhard, Vita Karoli, c. 13: “Omnis pecunia et congesti ex longo tempore thesaures et spolia pretiosa in proelis sublata, ut merito credi possit hoc Francos Hunis iuste eripuisse, quod Huni prius allis gentibus iniuste eripuerunt.”
have been in the nature of a “long-term investment.” Janet Nelson, meanwhile, has argued that the *Annales regni Francorum* contain only a single reference to the capture of Saxon “gold and silver”—that taken from the pagan shrine known as the Irminsul during Charlemagne’s very first campaign in the region in 772; “thereafter, and usually,” Nelson has professed, “the lure had to be glory—heroic and heavenly.” Bernard Bachrach, too, has emphasized the supposed lack of plunder in Saxony, asserting that following the seizure of the Irminsul treasure cited by Nelson, there would have been little left worth taking from the “relatively impoverished region,” while John France has quipped that in Saxony “the evidence is that hard knocks and harsh conditions were more readily available than plunder.” Stuart Airlie, who has taken a somewhat more charitable view of Saxony’s potential for profit—pointing to evidence for the plundering of villages, but also to the expectation of the payment of the fines of royal justice and the presence of some merchant activity—remains in the end only marginally more optimistic about Saxony’s ultimate material worth, suggesting that, while “Saxony was not a desert,” high-status hostages may have been the region’s most valuable resource. Finally, and in some contrast, Heiko Steuer, writing from an archaeological perspective, has argued against the applicability of Reuter’s thesis to the conquest of the Saxons on wholly different grounds, suggesting that Saxony did in fact represent a valuable economic prize.

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for the Franks, not because it offered plunder and tribute but rather because it lay close to
the burgeoning trading worlds of the North Sea and Baltic; for, as Steuer would see it, by
the time of the conquest “making money through pillage, booty or gifts already belonged
to an earlier phase.”

We shall return shortly to the question of Saxony’s place within the long-distance
trading networks of the North Sea and Baltic and to the possibility that its conquest by the
Franks could have been driven in some part by a Frankish desire to integrate the region
into these networks; for it is true, as Steuer’s essay illustrates, that the plentiful
archaeological evidence that has come to light—much of it in the years since the
publication of Reuter’s thesis—forces us to give consideration to the role of commerce
and exchange in the Carolingian economy generally and in early medieval Saxony in
particular. The Franks may well have been interested in controlling and developing
Saxony’s trade, though perhaps not in quite the way that Steuer has envisioned. For the
time being, however, it is enough to note that a persistent view of the Saxon lands as
materially impoverished and economically stagnant is a longstanding scholarly trope, as
is the conviction that Frankish conquest was driven more by religion and ideology than
economics. Together, these ideas have contributed to a reluctance to take seriously the

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22 H. Steuer, “The Beginnings of Urban Economies among the Saxons,” in *The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 159–192 at p. 159. Bernard Bachrach, for one, pre-emptively dismissed the idea that the conquest of Saxony might have been pursued because of the region’s access to the North Sea and Baltic, arguing that the Carolingians appear not to have attempted to extend their control directly beyond Saxony. See B. S. Bachrach, “Charlemagne’s Military Responsibilities am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung,” in *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung: Das Epos ‘Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa’ und der Papsbesuch in Paderborn 799*, ed. P. Godman et al. (Berlin, 2002), pp. 242–243. The ultimate limits of Frankish conquest should not be confused, however, with possible intentions.

23 The archaeological research on Saxony is found mainly in the series *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* (Oldenburg, 1977–2007) and now *Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung* (Hanover, 2010–). On the massive impact of archaeology on our understanding of the role of trade in the early medieval economy in general, see above all M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300–900* (Cambridge, 2002) and C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, 2005).
economic dimension of the conquest.\textsuperscript{24} Neither the idea that the Saxon lands offered little of material worth nor the idea that the conquest was driven solely by religious ideals, however, stands up to sustained examination.

The tendency to see Saxony as ‘poor’ owes much to inherited scholarly assumptions about the relative poverty of ‘barbarian’ lands, which in turn have their origins in Greco-Roman ethnographic thought. Tacitus, after all, painted a picture of a \textit{Germania} inhabited by peoples who grew poorer and less economically sophisticated the further away they lived from the civilizational anchor of the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{25} By the first half of the eighth century, this same idea of the poverty of barbarian lands—by this time transmuted to ‘non-Christian’ lands generally—had transformed into a kind of early medieval prosperity gospel, as evidenced in Bishop Daniel of Winchester’s 723/724 letter to Boniface, in which the Bishop suggested that the missionary might convince pagans to convert to Christianity by actively contrasting the material prosperity of Christian lands, which boasted oil, wine, and other riches, with the cold and gloomy poverty of the northern pagan regions.\textsuperscript{26} Such ideas have exerted a profound influence on our mental picture of the economic life of barbarian Europe. And as a region frequently thought to have remained frozen in a Germanic Iron Age until its conquest by the Franks, the

\textsuperscript{24} Neither C. Ehlers, \textit{Die Integration Sachsens in das fränkische Reich (751–1024)} (Göttingen, 2007) nor M. Springer, \textit{Die Sachsen} (Stuttgart, 2004), give any significant consideration to the economic dimension of the conquest. Note the absence of economics also in much of the older scholarship, as evidenced in \textit{Die Eingliederung der Sachsen in das Frankenreich}, ed. W. Lammers (Darmstadt, 1970). The foundational and hugely influential work of Martin Lintzel, who saw the Frankish conquest of Saxony in baldly Marxist terms as a class-struggle between the Franks and noble Saxons on the one hand and the free and unfree Saxons on the other, is something of an exception in this regard. See M. Lintzel, “Die Unterwerfung Sachsens durch Karl den Großen und die sächische Adel,” \textit{Sachsen und Anhalt} 10 (1934), pp. 30–70; and M. Lintzel, \textit{Die sächische Stammesstaat und seine Eroberung durch die Franken} (Berlin, 1933).

\textsuperscript{25} Tacitus, \textit{Germania}, c. 5–6.

\textsuperscript{26} Boniface, \textit{Epistolae}, MGH Epp. Sel. 1, no. 23, p. 40: “Et cum ipsi, id est christiani, fertiles terras vinique et olei feraces ceterisque opibus habundantes possidet provincias, ipsis autem, id est paganis, frigore semper rigentes terras cum eorum diis reliquerunt, in quibus iam tamen toto orbe pulsi falsa regnare putantur.”
Saxons are often assumed to have been subject to these same conditions. Assumptions about the poverty of barbarians in general and the Saxons in particular, however, are in fact based more on Greco-Roman and Christian stereotypes than any external evidence. Archaeological evidence, for example, has frequently highlighted this contrast between rhetoric and reality.\(^\text{27}\)

Of course, in the eighth century, everyone in western Europe was ‘poor’ compared to the rich and powerful Franks.\(^\text{28}\) But the Franks did not get to be rich by ignoring their less wealthy neighbours but by conquering and exploiting them. (We may be reminded here of the supposed Byzantine proverb reported—with a clearly perverse pride—by Einhard: “Have the Frank for your friend, but not for your neighbour.”\(^\text{29}\)) Above all, the worth of any region to a conqueror must be assessed within the overall context of his needs and aims.

The notion that the Franks pursued a conscious and more-or-less ‘rational’ economic strategy aimed at the exploitation—through plunder, trade, or a combination thereof—of their conquests has, like the worth of the Saxon lands, been looked upon with skepticism. Again, we find the roots of this conviction in longstanding and often poorly founded ideas, this time regarding the relative sophistication of early medieval states and their capacity for long-term planning. Indeed, in the latest text-book synthesis of the Carolingian age, it has been asserted that there existed no such thing as royal economic

\(^\text{27}\) Pliny the Elder commented specifically on the particularly egregious poverty of the Chauci, a group that modern scholarship has seen as one of the constituent groups of the Saxon confederacy. See Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, 16.1.2. As Dirk Meier has shown, however, the archaeological reality of this region contrasts sharply with its literary representation. See D. Meier, “The North Sea Coastal Area: Settlement History from Roman to Early Medieval Times,” in *The Continental Saxons from the Migration Age to the Tenth Century*, ed. D. H. Green and F. Siegmund (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 37–76 at p. 48.

\(^\text{28}\) On the relative wealth of the Frankish—and particularly the Austrasian—aristocracy in the eighth century, see Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 168 ff.

\(^\text{29}\) Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, c. 16: “ΤΟΝ ΦΡΑΝΚΟΝ ΦΙΛΟΝ EXIC, ΓΙΤΟΝΑ ΟΥΚ EXIC.”

policy in the Carolingian period.\textsuperscript{30} But, while it is true, as Chris Wickham has suggested, that Byzantine and Arab state control of their economies was one of the most significant factors distinguishing the post-Roman East from the post-Roman West,\textsuperscript{31} Frankish kings certainly pursued their own economic interests. Although a highly developed, state-controlled economy on the same scale as in the East might have been absent in the West, Frankish kings frequently intervened in and sought to control economic relations within their lands.\textsuperscript{32}

We will begin, however, with the supposed lack of ‘gold and silver’ in the Saxon lands. For, as the archaeological record clearly shows, the scant references to precious treasure found in the Frankish primary sources can hardly be understood as reflective of the totality of precious treasure in the Saxon lands at the time of the conquest. While Saxony may not have had hoards of treasure on par with that seized from the ring of the Avars, or the \textit{thesauri} of the Lombard kings, treasure was not wholly absent from the region. For example, the famous gold bracteates found near the Danish border,\textsuperscript{33} the hoard of Roman gold coins found closer to Frankish territory in Dortmund,\textsuperscript{34} and the gold and other precious jewellery excavated from various graves\textsuperscript{35} demonstrate that the ‘gold

\textsuperscript{30} M. Costambeys et al., \textit{The Carolingian World} (2011), pp. 260, 329, and 377. But this is patently untrue. There was coinage reform, trade treaties with foreign kings, the regulation of both internal markets and international trade, and a demonstrable attempt to control key entrepots.

\textsuperscript{31} Wickham, \textit{Framing the Early Middle Ages}, pp. 56–150.

\textsuperscript{32} For a more optimistic evaluation of Carolingian economic policy, see C. West, \textit{Reframing the Feudal Revolution} (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 17–105.

\textsuperscript{33} K. Hauck, \textit{Goldbrakteaten aus Sievern: Spätantike Amulett-Bilder der Dania Saxonica und die Sachsen-\textquoteleft Origo\textquoteright bei Widukind of Corvey} (Munich, 1970).

\textsuperscript{34} K. Reglin, \textit{Die Dortmunder Fund Römischer Goldmunzen} (Dortmund, 1908).

and silver’ taken from the Irminsul shrine did not constitute the totality of precious
treasure to be had in the region.\textsuperscript{36}

More importantly, however, to focus exclusively on gold, silver, and other forms of
precious treasure is to take an extremely narrow view of wealth in the early medieval
period. Other kinds of resources, although less flashy, were nonetheless valuable.
Livestock, for instance, was a fundamental form of wealth in the early medieval period,
and the Franks appear to have extracted a substantial amount of it from the Saxons even
before the beginning of the conquest proper. It was most likely following a campaign in
556 that Chlothar I first imposed on the Saxons an annual tribute of 500 cows, a payment
which seems to have lapsed in the time of Dagobert I but which was reinstated by Pippin
III in 747 before being commuted to a tribute of 300 horses in 758.\textsuperscript{37} The degree to which
such payments constituted substantial material profit for Frankish rulers, versus their
importance as symbolic gestures of subservience on the part of the paying parties, is of
course impossible to establish definitively. Given the high cost of compensation for the
theft of cattle and horses specified in the Frankish law codes, however, it can be assumed
that their regular payment was a real boost to the royal fisc.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Such discoveries, of course, represent only treasure that remained \emph{in situ} for modern archaeologists to
find. It is impossible to know if and how much treasure of this kind was seized by the Franks.
\textsuperscript{37} Fredegar, \textit{Chronicle}, IV, 74: “Quinquentas vaccas inferendalis annis singolis a Chlothario seniore censiti
reddebant, quod a Dagoberto cassatum est.” It was in 747, according to the first continuation of the
\textit{Chronicle} of Fredegar, c. 31, that the Saxons “placed themselves under Frankish law, as was ancient
custom, and promised that henceforth they would return to the full payment of tribute they had made in the
time of Chlothar” [“iure Francorum sese, ut antiquitus mos fuerat, subdiderunt et ea tributa quae Chlotario
quondam prestiterant plenissima solutione ab eo tempore deinceps esse reddituros promiserunt”]. \textit{ARF}, a.
758: “Et tunc polliciti sunt contra Pippinum omnes voluntates eius facienda et honores in placito suo
praesentandum usque in equos CCC per singulos annos.” In Thuringia, too, the Franks collected a tribute of
500 pigs.
\textsuperscript{38} Precise valuation of animals in the early Middle Ages is difficult. According to the \textit{Pactus legis Salicae},
\textit{MGH Leges} 4.1, 3.4, p. 31, the set fine for the theft of a cow without calf was 30 \textit{solidi}, in addition to the
return of the cow or its equivalent value. If this fine is to be understood as roughly equivalent to the value
of the animal itself, then the tribute of 500 cows per year would equal 15,000 \textit{solidi}. However, the text’s
final clause suggests that this might not have been the case. Regardless, we would do well here to
If the sources testify to the taking of gold and silver (at least from the Irminsul) and livestock (in the form of tribute, prior to the conquest), however, the vast majority of Frankish references to the taking of plunder and tribute from the Saxons are vague, and tend not to specify what precisely was taken. For example, in the second continuation of the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, it is reported that in 753 Pippin the Short demanded *tributa multa maiora* from the Saxons, without specifying what form this tribute took.  

And during the time of the conquest proper in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, war booty of various but often unspecified kinds continued to be taken in abundance. Indeed, in 774, only two years after the plundering of the Irminsul, one of the Frankish *scarae* sent to harrass the Saxons is reported by the *Annales regni Francorum* to have returned with *praeda magna*—again, in what form the annals do not say; and the next year again in 775, in the campaign that caused Charlemagne to miss his October appointment in Rome, the king is said, as we have already seen, to have returned with *praeda multa adsumpta*.  

In 796, meanwhile, it is reported by multiple sources that Charlemagne attacked Saxony and again took away large amounts of plunder. Clearly, then, Saxony had more to offer in terms of ‘plunder and tribute’ than some scholars have wished to remember the etymological root of the word ‘fee’, or wealth, from *feoh* (OE) / *fiuh* (OHG), cattle. On horses as status symbols, specifically because of their high economic value, see Costambeys et al., *The Carolingian World*, pp. 247–248. The switch from cattle to horses would thus have meant a substantial increase in the value of the tribute; at the same time, it may also have served to blunt Saxon military strength.

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39 Continuation of Fredegar, c. 35: “Convidentes Saxones, penitentia commoti, cum solito timore clementia regis petunt, ut pacem eis concederet, et sacramenta atque tributa multa maiora, quam antea promisserant, redderent et numquam ultra iam rebelles existerent.” It is not clear from the text that the *tributa multa maiora* refers to an increase in heads of cattle exclusively, as suggested by R. Collins, *Charlemagne* (Toronto, 1998), p. 45. 

40 *ARF*, a. 774: “Et dum pervenisset in loco, qui dicitur Ingilinhaim, mittens quatuor scaras in Saxoniam: tres pugnam cum Saxonibus inierunt et auxiliante Domino victores extiterunt; quarta vero scara non habuit pugnam, sed cum praeda magna inlesi iterum reversi sunt ad propria.” Since the unit fought no battles, this *praeda* was presumably taken from civilian targets. 

41 *ARF*, a. 775. 

recognize, even if the sources are not always clear on what form this plunder took.

Notably, however, the *Annales Laureshamenses*’ entry for 796 does report in some more detail what exactly was taken from Saxony. In fact, these annals report that among the great quantity of plunder taken that year were “men, women, and children.”

**Slaves and Human Capital**

Throughout late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, writers and theologians repeated the following etymological explanation for the words *servus* and *mancipia*: “Since a man overcome by another man can be killed by the right of war, because he was saved [servatus] he is called servus; thence also mancipia because he was captured by the hand [manu].” The precise meanings of such terms are, of course, highly contested. Was the *servus* of the early Middle Ages a ‘slave’ in the Classical sense, or a tenured ‘serf’. If the latter, at what point did this meaning shift? And what of the *mancipia*, the *colonus*, and the numerous other categories of ‘unfree’ individuals encountered in the Carolingian sources? Largely abandoning debates over the Germanic versus Roman origins of these categories and the question of a transition from Classical slavery to a ‘feudal’ mode, recent scholarship has emphasized the complicated, varied, and contingent nature of these statuses.

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43 *Annales Laureshamenses*, MGH SS 1, a. 796, p. 37: “Et ipso anno ipse rex Carolus demoratus est in Saxonia cum duobus filiis suis, id est Carolo et Clodoveo, circuivit terram Saxanorum, ubi rebelles fuerunt, incendendo et vastando eam, et captivos inde ducebat, viros et mulieres et parvulos, et praeda innumerabilem multitudinem.”

44 The words originated with Augustine, *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri septem*, ed. J. Fraipont and D. De Bruyne (Turnhout, 1958), 1.153: “Cum enim homo ab homine superatus jure belli possit occidi, quia servatus est, servus est appellatus; inde et mancipia, quia sunt manu capta.” They were repeated verbatim by Isidore and again by Alcuin. See Isidore, *Origines*, 9,4,43; Alcuin, *Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesis*, PL., 100.577B.

Regardless of their precise legal standing, the importance of these unfree individuals to the broader Carolingian economy is widely recognized, as is the continued need to find new sources of unfree labour. The idea that *servus* and *mancipia* were associated with capture in war, meanwhile, speaks to the fact that the capturing of human capital in war—no matter the word we may choose to describe these individuals—was recognized as an important and time-honoured tradition in antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Frankish campaigns in the Merovingian period had involved the capture of individuals for the purpose of servitude, and the practice continued under the Carolingians. Recently, it has been suggested that the taking of human plunder during the Carolingian period may have been even more substantial and more economically important than has traditionally been thought. For if the taking of captives was a major component of Frankish military campaigns in the Merovingian period, it appears to have spiked in the eighth century. Michael McCormick in particular has seen in the Carolingian taking of captives during war the very basis of Carolingian economic expansion and an explanation for the vast numbers of Arab and Venetian coins found in Carolingian archaeological contexts. Specifically, McCormick suggests that these coins must have been paid out by the Franks’ eastern neighbours in return for the only commodity Christian Europeans would have had to offer their far wealthier Muslim neighbours in any abundance: human


48 C. Verlinden, *L’esclavage dans l’Europe médiévale*, Vol. 1 (Brugge, 1955), p. 701. The Saxon *pueri* who killed their slave-trader master in Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, VII.26, are usually thought to have been Anglo-Saxons rather than continental Saxons, but this cannot be established with certainty.
beings.\textsuperscript{49} As McCormick sees it, the bubonic plague in Africa and the Near and Middle East would have created a demand for slaves in those regions at precisely the time that Carolingian military expansion began in earnest. Detailed price-comparisons, based on the scant surviving evidence, illustrate the high relative value of slaves in the Caliphate (where the word is less controversial) in comparison with Europe, thus illustrating the incentive for European export.\textsuperscript{50} Support for McCormick’s thesis is lent by a survey of archaeological finds of iron shackles from the Roman and post-Roman periods by Joachim Henning. Specifically, Henning demonstrates the shift over time from high numbers of shackles dating to the Roman period, to a relative dearth of shackles during the Merovingian period, to a drastic increase in the eighth century. Moreover, unlike in the Roman era, the shackles of the Carolingian period are not found in the interior of the Carolingian realms (in the Roman period, most shackles were found within the empire, presumably for use on agricultural estates), but almost exclusively on its periphery, suggesting the taking of captives from outside or on the borders of the Frankish realm.\textsuperscript{51}

If the taking of captives did in fact increase under the Carolingians, it should be expected that Saxons made up a significant portion of captives taken, given the intensity of Frankish military activity in the region. This expectation is clearly borne out in the sources. The first explicit reference to Frankish slaving activities in Saxony can be found in the first continuation of the \textit{Chronicle} of Fredegar, which describes the suppression of a Saxon rebellion by Pippin III in 747, a campaign that resulted in the leading away of


“many” Saxons into captivity.⁵² In 753, following yet another suppressed Saxon rebellion, Pippin again took captives.⁵³ In the period of the conquest proper, meanwhile, when Frankish armies campaigned in Saxony on a near-annual basis, huge numbers of Saxons appear to have been transported away. The year 782 saw Charlemagne’s infamous slaughter of the supposed 4,500 Saxon rebels at Verden;⁵⁴ at the same time, however, the Annales Petavianni report that “many Saxons were led away in chains to Francia.”⁵⁵ In 783, the revised Annales regni Francorum again report that Saxons were taken captive in large numbers: “An infinite multitude of them was cut down, spoils taken away, and also a great number of them were carried off.”⁵⁶ In 794, the Annales Laurissenses minores (also known as the Chronicon Laurissense Breve) declare that a third of the men were taken: “Proceeding into Saxony, Charles prevailed against the Saxons, leading out from there a third of the men and settling them in Francia.”⁵⁷ And again, in 796, as we have already seen, the Lorsch Annals claim that Charles took away “captives, men, women, and children, and booty, a great multitude.”⁵⁸

⁵² Fredegar, Continuation, MGH SRM 2, c. 31, p. 181: “Quod videntes Saxones, consueto timore conpulsi, multi ex eis iam trucidati et in captivitate missi, regiones eorum igneque crematis, pacem petentes, iure Francorum sese, ut antiquitus mos fuerat, subdiderunt et ea tributa quae Chlotario quondam prestiterant plenissima solutione ab eo tempore deinceps esse reddituros promiserunt.”
⁵³ Fredegar, Continuation, MGH SRM 2, c. 35, p. 182: “Unde et Pippinus rex ira commotus, commoto omni exercitu Francorum, iterum Renum transacto, Saxonia, cum magnu apparatu veniens, ibique eorum patria maxime igne concremavit; et captivos tam viris quam feminis cum multa praedae ibidem fecisset et plurimos Saxones ibidem prostravisset.”
⁵⁴ ARF and Rev., aa. 782.
⁵⁵ Annales Petavienses, a. 782: “et multos vinctos Saxones adduxerunt in Francia.”
⁵⁶ Rev., a. 783: “caesa est eorum infinita multitudo, spoliaque direpta, captivorum quoque magnus abductus est numeros.”
The above reports make clear that the conquest of Saxony resulted in the leading away of captives in great numbers. But were these all necessarily destined for servitude or some other unfree status, or might some of these captives have merely been held for ransom or kept as surety? On this point, there has been disagreement. Louis Halphen once suggested that the Saxons described in the *Lorsch Annals*’ entry for 796 should be understood as hostages rather than ‘slaves’, and Matthias Springer has recently argued the same.\(^{59}\) However, such an interpretation seems unlikely, given the terminology used by the annals. At the heart of this problem is the annals’ use of the word *captivi*. As McCormick notes, *captivi* is normally used to describe war-captives destined for servitude. In support of this conclusion, McCormick points also to the Frankish annals’ apparent care to distinguish between hostages and more general war captives. The use of the term *captivi* in the above passages would thus seem to confirm their status as captives destined for servitude rather than hostages. It is for this reason that the reported 10,000 Saxons from Wigmodia and beyond the Elbe, whom Charlemagne apparently deported along with their wives and children and resettled throughout Francia in 804, are generally thought not to have been destined for servitude.\(^{60}\) Similarly, the author of the so-called *Kölner Notiz* (a brief, apparently contemporary note found in a Cologne manuscript), who reported that “one-third of the people” of Saxony were taken in 798, specified that these Saxons were taken as *hospites*.\(^{61}\) Of course, the term *hospes* had a range of meanings in the early medieval period, including tenants or labourers on an estate who were not

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\(^{60}\) McCormick, *Origins*, p. 748, n. 78.

necessarily subservient to the lord. A later glossator, however, appears to have sought to clarify the meaning of this term by adding the word *obsides*, suggesting that these Saxons were taken as hostages proper.

If the distinction between Saxon war captives destined for servitude and hostages or other such non-‘slave’ captives appears to have been an important one to contemporaries, it would probably be unwise to expect absolute rigour in the use of such terms. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that legal statuses were not immutable. The *Codex Justinianus*, for example, makes clear that *captivi* could be redeemed for a price. In a Frankish context, meanwhile, in his letter to the young Clovis, Remigius of Rheims lectured the young king on his obligation to redeem *captivi*, and Clovis himself made the redemption of *captivi* a condition of immunity to clerics at the First Council of Orléans. And of course, hostages themselves may also have found themselves turned into slaves as a result of violated agreements. How the Franks reacted when the Saxons rebelled and “abandoned their hostages,” as the *Annales regni Francorum* report they did in 776, is not recorded. Regardless of these problems, it surely must have been the case that many of those Saxons taken during the war would have ended up in servitude and that these would have added much to the profits of war.

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63 *Codex Justinianus*, 1.2.21. The article concerns the alienation of church property, which is generally forbidden except in the case of redeeming *captivi*. The context almost certainly entails that these *captivi* were high-status enough to warrant the sacrifice of valuable church property.
64 *Epistolorum Austrasiacae*, MGH Epp. 3, ep. 2, p. 113: “Paternas quascunque opes possides, captivos exinde liberabis et a iugo servitutis absolvas.”
65 *Concilium Aurelianense a. 511*, MGH Conc. 1, pp. 1–114 at p. 114: “id esse iustissimum definimus, ut in reparationibus ecclesiariis, aliminis sacerdotum et pauperum vel redemptionibus captivorum…”
66 As A. J. Kosto, *Hostages in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2012), p. 8, observes, the two categories ‘hostage’ and ‘slave’ were in fact closely linked “from a legal-historical perspective” in the Middle Ages. An example of high-status hostages being commuted into slaves in the Frankish world can be found in Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, III.15.
67 Some seem to have made it to the end of the war with their statuses intact, as indicated by the list of Saxon hostages known as the *Indiculus obsidum Saxonum Moguntiam deducendorum*, MGH Capit. 1, no. 115, pp. 233–234.
If many Saxons were indeed taken as ‘slaves’ by the Franks, there yet remains some uncertainty as to their ultimate destination and how precisely they led to profit. Some, as McCormick has suggested, may have been sold on the open market. Though direct proof of the sale of Saxon slaves to Spain, Africa, and the Middle East is lacking, there exists a good amount of circumstantial evidence for such a practice. It has long been supposed that at least some of the captured Saxons would have been sold further afield. For it is clear that there existed a flourishing slave trade in the early Middle Ages and that some slaves could be transported long distances. The *Pactus legis Salicae* contains a provision for legal action against those individuals transporting *servi* “across the sea,” while the letters of St. Boniface contain evidence for the buying and selling of slaves across the Frankish–Saxon border (though in this case the movement was into Saxony.) There is also a remarkable temporal coincidence between, on the one hand, the plague of the mid-eighth century that as McCormick points out, ravaged the Middle East and Africa and surely depleted its pool of slaves, and, on the other, the first evidence for large-scale Carolingian slaving in Saxony. Indeed, it may be observed that the first reference to Saxon captives, taken by Pippin III in 747, is followed only a year later by the first known evidence for Venice’s supplying slaves to the Caliphate. This evidence comes in the form of an oblique reference in the *Liber pontificalis* to the pope’s ransoming of Christian slaves who were bound for slavery in 748. No Saxons are mentioned as being

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69 *Pactus legis Salicae*, c. 39.2.
saved by the pope. While it is doubtful that many Saxons would have been Christian at this early date, it might be noted that the *Liber pontificalis* would not have mentioned non-Christian slaves, who, needless to say, are unlikely to have been ransomed by the pope. Venice seems a long way to transport Saxon slaves, and it might rightly be asked if the time, labour, and resources spent on such a journey would have been worth the return. But if the price differentials outlined by McCormick are accurate, it likely would have been worth it. Notably, the values of both female and juvenile slaves were generally higher in the Caliphate,\(^{73}\) which could perhaps shine some light on the Frankish sources’ interest in noting the presence of Saxon women and children among the captives. Furthermore, there is evidence for the overland transport of slaves from Central Europe through the Alps and on to Venice during precisely this period.\(^{74}\) Above all, it must be stressed that although captives were surely taken on all Carolingian campaigns, campaigns into Saxony were far and away the most numerous during the reign of Charlemagne and must have yielded the greatest harvest of flesh. The *Vita Eligii*, notably, describes the slaves of many different origins awaiting transport overseas, including “Romans, Gauls, Britons, and Moors, but especially from the tribe of the Saxons, who like some flock driven from their own homes, in those times were being sold abundantly to different places.”\(^{75}\) As McCormick notes, Eligius lived in the seventh century, but his life was re-written in the mid-eighth, and it is thus possible that its description of multitudes of Saxons awaiting transport across the Mediterranean should be taken to


\(^{75}\) *Vita Eligii*, MGH SRM 4, p. 677: “Romanorum, scilicet, Gallorum atque Brittanorum necnon et Maurorum, sed praecluæ ex genere Saxonorum, qui abunde eo tempore veluti greges a sedibus propriis evulsi in diversa distrahebantur.”
represent an intrusion of a contemporary situation into historical setting, at a time when Saxons were beginning to be captured and sold in huge numbers.\textsuperscript{76}

On the other hand, however, it may be that not all Saxon captives were sold to far distant lands. It may be, as Reuter suggested, that many of these Saxon captives were taken as \textit{servi casati}, to labour on estates within the Frankish realm itself.\textsuperscript{77} Frankish estate surveys, after all, testify to the exploitation of all kinds of ‘unfree’ labourers, including \textit{servi}, \textit{coloni}, and \textit{mancipia}. The untangling of the legal statuses of these groups is extremely difficult. What can be said with certainty is that the productivity of the Carolingian estate relied on this mixed pool of unfree labourers. The clearance and cultivation of new land in the east, meanwhile, which proceeded apace with Frankish expansion, would also have required the presence of such individuals. Indeed, the estates of Saxony, eastern Francia, and Bavaria are thought to have relied on slave labour to a greater extent than the estates of the West, and it is possible that many of these slaves may have derived from Saxon campaigns.\textsuperscript{78} It may even be the case that it was captured Saxons who were responsible for the numerous villages in eastern Francia and Bavaria named Sachsenheim, Sachsendorf, etc.\textsuperscript{79} It is also likely, however, that some captives may have been pressed into servile status \textit{in situ}, without ever being transported out of Saxony or relocated. The smaller estates of Saxony, as Rösener has demonstrated, relied heavily on unfree labour, and the advent of ecclesiastical foundations in the region

\textsuperscript{76} McCormick, \textit{Origins}, p. 775, n. 156.
\textsuperscript{77} T. Reuter, “Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire,” \textit{Transactions of the Royal Historical Society}, 5\textsuperscript{th} ser. 35 (1985), p. 77. The \textit{servi casati} were unfree labourers with the use of their own plots of land.
\textsuperscript{78} On the extensive use of slaves in Bavaria, see C. I. Hammer, \textit{A Large-Scale Slave Society in the Early Middle Ages: Slaves and Their Families in Early Medieval Bavaria} (Aldershot, 2002).
certainly also depended on the use of slaves.\footnote{W. Rösner, “Zur Struktur und Entwicklung der Grundherrschaft in Sachsen in karolingischer und ottonischer Zeit,” in \textit{Le grand domaine aux époques mérovingienne et carolingienne/Die Grundherrschaft im frühen Mittelalter}, ed. A. Verhulst (Gent, 1985), pp. 173–207.} Chapter 15 of the \textit{Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae} even required that “to each church the people of the area of its jurisdiction are to make over a homestead and two \textit{mansi} of land; and for every 120 men among them, nobles and likewise freemen and \textit{liti}, they are to hand over one \textit{servus} and one \textit{ancilla} to the said church.”\footnote{\textit{Capitulatio de paribus Saxoniae}, c. 15: “Ad unamquamque ecclesiam curte et duos mansos terre pagenses ad ecclesiam recurrentes condonant, et inter centum viginti homines, nobiles et ingenuis similiter et litos, servum et ancillam eidem ecclesiae tribuant.”}

All this being said, however, there remains a significant complication with McCormick’s idea that the Carolingian economy was driven mainly by the selling of human flesh—at least when it comes to Saxony. For if the selling of human chattel was really as profitable as all that, then why did the Franks not simply continue to mine these resources? Why bother with the expense and risks of the conquest and administration of the region? And why Christianize the Saxons, who otherwise would have remained pagan, and thus fair game for slaving and unaffected by the mild and ineffectual objections of the church to the buying and selling of Christians as objects of human traffic? The Franks were, after all, already getting the cows—and horses, and slaves—for what must have been far less than the cost of a permanent military occupation and the maintenance of the new institutions of royal and ecclesiastical government in the region. On this basic point, McCormick’s thesis falters. Clearly, as profitable as slaving might have been for the Franks, it cannot have been their sole economic interest in Saxony. If it had been, there would have existed no incentive to change the status quo since conquest and Christianization would have led ultimately to the taking of fewer Saxon slaves.
Control of the area admittedly would have opened up yet other slaving frontiers. Indeed, it is in the second half of the ninth century that a new term for slave—sclavus, taken from the ethnonym for the Slavs who dwelt east of the Saxons—is first registered.\(^82\)

**Land**

That the Frankish conquest of Saxony resulted in the confiscation of large swathes of Saxon lands for the Frankish royal fisc is without doubt.\(^83\) Serious disagreement exists, however, as to whether the confiscation of land should be understood as having been an intentional goal of conquest at its outset or an incidental result. Long ago, in a foundational study of Carolingian royal properties in Saxony, Karl Rübel argued that land along the major roadways of the region, including the Hellweg, as well as the main routes along the Diemel and Lippe, was taken first and foremost for the short-term aim of securing supply-lines for the Frankish army and providing staging-posts for subsequent

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\(^82\) See MGH DD 3, nos. 66 and 117.

\(^83\) Over a century of scholarship has produced a relatively detailed picture of the possessions of the Frankish royal fisc in the region, though it is still incomplete. K. Rübel, *Reichshöfe im Lippe-, Ruhr- und Diemelgebiet und am Hellwege* (Dortmund, 1901) and *Die Franken, ihr Eroberungs- und Siedlungssystem im deutschen Volkslande* (Bielefeld, 1904); A. Hömberg, *Probleme der Reichsgutsforschung in Westfalen* (Berlin, 1960); G. Droege, “Fränkische Siedlung in Westfalen,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 4 (1970), pp. 271–288; W. Metz, “Probleme der fränkischen Reichsgutsforschung im sächsischen Stammesgebiet,” *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 31 (1959), pp. 77–126 and W. Metz, *Das karolingische Reichsgut* (Berlin, 1960); W. Rösener, “Zur Struktur und Entwicklung der Grundherrschaft in Sachsen in karolingischer und ottonischer Zeit,” in *Le grand domaine aux époques mérovingienne et carolingienne/Die Grundherrschaft im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. A. Verhulst (Gent, 1985), pp. 173–207. Most recently, see Ehlers, *Integration*. Only the large foundations of Corvey and Werden possess records stretching back to the first half of the ninth century. As a result, scholars have often been tempted to fill in the gaps by means of assumption and inference, back-projecting evidence for royal land-ownership from the Ottonian and later medieval periods into the Carolingian era and drawing conclusions about Frankish or royal settlement based on the interpretation of toponymic evidence. Patterns of private land-ownership during the Carolingian period are less well understood. Importantly, it is clear that not all of the land was taken. Some pagan Saxons who had resisted Charlemagne managed to retain control of their hereditary properties after the conquest and even to wrest away lands from Saxon relatives who had supported the king. As late as the time of Louis the Pious, petitions were still being made by families asking for assistance in recovering lands they claimed as their own, which had been taken from them during the time of the conquest.
campaigns. Thus, while Rübel argued that these initial confiscations did in the end turn into the basis of the Carolingian, and then later Ottonian, royal fisc in Saxony, in his view, this was not their initial purpose. More recently, J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, has suggested that “in Alamannia, Thuringia, Frisia, and Saxony we read of the estates of defeated kings or magnates fisci ditionibus redactae. This was not the purpose of the foreign expeditions of Pippin III and Charlemagne, but it was one outcome of them.”

Hans-Dietrich Kahl, too, in a detailed study of the motives and stages of development of the conquest, argued that direct, formal rule of the land was not an original aim of the Franks but occurred only after the failure to influence the independent adoption of Christianity.

Regardless of whether or not the acquisition of land was a motivating factor from the outset of the conquest, it certainly appears to have become one relatively early on. That this was so should come as little surprise, given that that the Frankish state was, after all, built on the back of a society that was fundamentally agrarian in nature. Land produced the food that fed both rich and poor alike, and the vast majority of people’s time, energy, and resources went into its cultivation. Its distribution in the form of benefices, furthermore, was the primary means by which the king secured the military and political support of both the secular aristocracy and the church. Carolingian administrative

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documents both royal and ecclesiastical, such as the *Brevium exempla*, the *Capitulare de villis*, and the various surviving polyptychs, speak to the concern taken that the management of this land be carried out in a regular and organized manner. It has been argued that it was in part new organizational methods introduced during the Carolingian period—in particular the bipartite estate—which made possible an increase in agricultural output in the Frankish lands in the eighth century and ultimately the expansion of Carolingian power. To such an end, more land was always needed, and Frankish kings worked aggressively with the intention of accumulating as much of it as possible. Indeed, even in the Merovingian period, Frankish kings surely confiscated new lands in the territories they had conquered from the Goths and the Burgundians, while at the same time seizing land internally from enemies and criminals—whether real or imagined. (Of course, the balance between the acquisition and alienation of land by the Merovingian *fisc* remains an open question.) Charles Martel’s confiscation of Frankish ecclesiastical lands in the second quarter of the eighth century, though perhaps exaggerated somewhat

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89 For example, Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, MGH SRM 1, II.37, p. 88: “Qui [Theoderic] abiens, urbes illas a finibus Gothorum usque Burgundionum terminum patris sui dicionibus subjugavit.”


after the fact, represented a continuation of this trend of internal confiscations. And if the confiscations of church land for the purpose of endowing secular supporters was anywhere near as extensive as the later history of Hincmar of Rheims claimed it was, then it may even indicate a certain dwindling of opportunities for confiscation within the Frankish realm and thus provide an explanation for a shift to outward expansion in the second half of the eighth century. This second period of outward expansion involved both the confiscation of existing estates and the clearing of ‘new’ land, especially in the heavily forested east.

The confiscation of Saxon estates during the conquest itself must be seen within the larger context of Frankish eastward expansion. References to *capturae* (*bifang* or *biuanc* in German-speaking areas) are common from the beginning of the eighth century onwards. Such clearances are noted throughout the Frankish realm, with a particular concentration in border areas in the Spanish march and east of the Rhine. The area in which Frankish clearance and settlement was perhaps most intensive, however, was the great forest known as the Odenwald, the northern edges of which lay in an area where Frankish and Saxon populations resided close by each other and where there may have been significant competition over land.

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93 MGH DD 1, no. 166, p. 224; no. 167, p. 225; no. 143, p. 195.
95 Much of the Odenwald was old fiscal land, but from at least the mid-eighth century large swathes of it were granted out for clearance and cultivation by the Carolingian kings to the monastic foundations of Amorbach, Worms, Lorsch, and Fulda. See C. Wickham, “European Forests in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200*, by C. Wickham (London, 1994), p. 179; D.
The jostling between Franks and Saxons is hinted at in the *Vita Sturmi*, which recounts Sturm’s attempts to find a suitable location for the foundation of the monastery that would eventually become Fulda in the forest known as Bochonia, on the northern edges of the Odenwald. Before settling on the eventual site of Fulda, Sturm first sought out another location further downstream. This first site would eventually become the abbey of Hersfeld. However, at the time of Sturm’s initial survey, Boniface warned him off the location: “You have indeed found a place to stay,” Boniface told Sturm, when the location was described to him, “[however] I am very afraid for you to hold on to it on account of its proximity to a barbaric race; for there are, as you know, ferocious Saxons close by. On account of which, go seek for yourself a place to live that is remoter and further from there, where you can live without danger.”

The description of the Saxons as *feroces* and as a *gens barbarica* is typical of Carolingian historiography of the period. Indeed, the *Vita Sturmi* is thought to have been written shortly after its subject’s death in 779, in the midst of the conquest and at a time of heightening tensions, when the intensified vilification of the enemy appears to have

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96 The *Vita Sturmi* describes this whole area, located within a larger area known as the forest of Bochonia, as being part of a great *silva*. It is further charcterized as a *solitudo vasta* and *desertum horrendum*. However, while the landscape east of the Rhine was certainly heavily forested, the differences between Saxony and eastern Francia were likely not so stark. (It was only the northern regions of Saxony that were marshy.) Moreover, significant clearing had already begun in this area by the turn of the eighth century. In reality, however, this description of the settlement and clearance of virgin forest is more monastic *topos* than fact. Archaeological excavations have shown that the monastery site of Fulda at least was constructed on top of a previous Merovingian-era settlement, including an apparent fortification and a church, and the original foundation of Hersfeld, too, so near the Saxons, may not have been as wild as all that. See Wickham, “European Forests,” in *Studies in Italian and European Social History*, pp. 156 ff; J. Raaijmakers, *The Making of the Monastic Community of Fulda, c.744–c. 900* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 28–30 and 155–157.

been a priority of Frankish propagandists. The questionable reliability of the text’s reporting (especially with regard to chronology) has long been remarked upon. Still, the author’s general assertion that Frankish eastward expansion was curtailed by a Saxon presence in the area of Bochonia is noteworthy. The picture of Sturm’s apparent retreat from the contested area of Hersfeld and his eventual settlement at the site of Fulda is revealing of what appears to have been a genuinely intensified competition for land between Franks and Saxons in the first half of the eighth century. For at the same time as the Franks had been moving east, clearing and colonizing land in the Odenwald and elsewhere, the Saxons, too, had been moving south and west, bringing the two groups into increasingly close contact. In the 690s, according to Bede, the Saxons conquered a group known as the Boructuarii—perhaps to be identified with the more widely-known Bructeri—in territory that appears to have been formerly Frankish, while in 715, several minor annals report a Saxon conquest of another possibly Frankish-identified group called the Chattuari in the vicinity of the lower Rhine. Around the same time, according to the earliest Life of Boniface, large parts of Thuringia voluntarily surrendered to Saxon rule in preference to their two deeply unpopular Frankish-appointed dukes.

The result of Saxon and Frankish convergence in these areas east of the Rhine appears to have been a mixed population with complex and probably highly competitive

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98 The initial foundation of Hersfeld in the 730s by Sturm had thus been abortive and the abbey would only be re-established by Lull in 769, when the threat from the Saxons was considered to have lessened. 99 Bede, HE, 5.10. The name Boructuarii appears only in the HE. It is often assumed to be an alternate or corrupted form of Bructeri, a group known from the imperial period onwards and normally thought to have been incorporated into the Franks. If the identification with the Bructeri is accurate, then this places Saxon encroachment in what was then still called the Brukterergau—in today’s Ruhr region. The change in political rule in this region may be reflected in the archaeological record: C. Grünewald, “Frühmittelalterliche Gräberfelder im Münsterland,” in Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit: Karl der Große und Papst Leo in Paderborn: Beiträge zum Katalog der Ausstellung Paderborn 1999, p. 252. 100 See Annales sancti Amandi, a. 715; Annales Tiliiani, a. 715; Annales Petaviiani, a. 715; and Annales mettenses priores, which seem to misdate the event to a. 716. 101 Willibald, Vita Bonifatiae, MGH SRM in usum scholarum 57, c. 6, p. 33.
land-interests. Ian Wood, for one, has seen evidence for land-ownership across both sides of the Frankish-Saxon border in the areas of the lower and middle Rhine prior to the conquest. Moreover, in this ‘Wild East’, as it has been described by some scholars, distinctions between Franks and Saxons may have been somewhat blurry. It is in fact in the neighbourhood of Bochonia that we have the best evidence for the existence of Saxon families friendly to the Carolingian cause. A diploma dated to 811, for example, affirmed the property rights of a certain Saxon count known as Bennit, whose father, named Amalung, had settled in Bochonia, in the land between the Fulda and the Werra, during the time of the conquest. The diploma speaks of Amalung’s villa, named Uuluisanger, “which at that time both Franks and Saxons inhabited.” This property, the charter states, in lingua eorum dicitur biuanc (Latin captura), suggesting that the land in question had been granted for the purpose of clearance. Another diploma, produced two years later in 813, confirmed the hereditary property of yet another Saxon, this one named Asig (also known as Adelrich), whose father, Hetti, had left Saxony during the conquest, sworn allegiance to Charlemagne, and likewise settled in a place where there were “both Franks and Saxons” before clearing land in Bochonia in a place between the Fulda and Werra rivers.

The impression created is thus one of mixed settlement and mixed allegiances in the borderlands between the two groups, where land was quickly being acquired, cleared, and put under cultivation. As such, it is perhaps not so surprising that Einhard, in his *Vita*

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103 See the various essays in *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 12 (1999).
105 *Ibid.*: “quam tunc temporis Franci et Saxones inhabitare videbantur.”
Karoli Magni, describes the origins of the war as lying in precisely such a claustrophobic and highly competitive environment:

There were also underlying causes, which could disturb the peace daily, namely the borders between us and them, which passed almost everywhere through the open, except in a few places, where great forests or mountain ridges divided by a clear boundary (limite) the lands (agros) of each, in which killings and rapine and burnings never ceased to happen back and forth.\footnote{Einhard, \textit{Vita Karoli}, c. 7: “Suberant et causae, quae cotidie pacem conturbare poterant, termini videlicet nostri et illorum poene ubique in plano contigui, praeter pauc\textit{a} loca, in quibus vel silvae maiores vel montium iuga interiecta utorumque agros certo limite determinant, in quibus caedes et rapinae et incendia vicissim fieri non cessabant.”}

This well-known passage constitutes the only direct, contemporary Frankish comment on the underlying causes of the Frankish-Saxon war. As Einhard clearly states, the ultimate cause of the war lay, in his own view, in a Frankish determination to put to rest longstanding disputes that habitually arose because of the long and poorly defined border between the two peoples.

For the most part, scholars have seen in Einhard’s passage evidence that the conquest was a kind of pre-emptive defensive strategy on the part of the Franks, aimed at establishing a secure buffer zone against the Saxon threat. And, in a broad sense, this is surely one part of the puzzle. The Saxon encroachments outlined above had presumably put the Franks on alert, and the violence that Einhard claims occurred back and forth between between the two peoples may indeed have included large-scale military actions that may have increased in the middle decades of the eighth century. At the same time, however, Einhard’s description of ‘killings and rapine and burnings’ between Franks and Saxons sounds suspiciously like the kind of local violence that could have erupted in communities living in close proximity and competing over land and resources. Indeed, the ‘killings and rapine and burnings’ may have been more akin to local land-disputes and feud violence. The term \textit{agri} used by Einhard to describe the respective lands of the
Franks and Saxons is usually taken to mean the ‘territorial’ lands of the two peoples. However, the word is one with a wide range of meanings. To be sure, it can be and certainly was employed by both Roman and early medieval authors to refer to the territorial lands of populations, and can also mean ‘open country’ in general, both of which senses fit the context of Einhard’s passage. Additionally, however, the word has the more technically restricted meaning of productive lands, or fields. (The original meaning of *limes*, too, has agricultural resonance, referring to the boundaries between *agri*.) This reflects the technical usage of the late antique Latin treatises on land surveying, known as the *Agrimensores*, one of the only known surviving examples of which is known to have existed at Fulda where Einhard himself was educated and worked as a scribe drawing up private charters for land donations to the monastery before eventually becoming a significant landowner in his own right. It is entirely possible that Einhard, a scholar with an interest in both Classical knowledge and in practical matters of property, might have known the *Agrimensores* at Fulda. He was certainly influenced by another text from Fulda’s library, namely Suetonius’ *De vita Caesarum*,

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108 P. E. Dutton translates the term accurately enough, though with a certain ambiguity, as ‘lands’ (*Carolingian Civilization: A Reader*, p. 31); D. Ganz, *Einhard and Notker the Stammerer* (London, 2008), p. 23, similarly as ‘land’; L. Thorpe translated the word as ‘territories’ (p. 61); S. E. Turner left the word out altogether (p. 26).

109 This is certainly how it was used in the charter evidence of the Carolingian period. See, e.g., MGH DD, no. 127, p. 177: “Similiter vero in alio loco infra Renum in loco qui dicitur Lubringouva…quicquid ibidem predictus Ottakar habuit tam terris agris quam vineis et hortis, cultis et incultis, in quarto vero loco videlicet in Gunzinheim, sicut ibidem praedictus fidelis noster visus est habuisse et super fluvium Noraha pratum unum.” (This example, dated to 779, confirms lands in Wormsgau and Mainz for Fulda.)


which it is generally agreed served as the model for his *Vita Karoli Magni*. And as Rosamond McKitterick has noted, we should fully expect an interest in such practical texts by the lay landowning sector of society. If Einhard did know the surveying text, then his use of the term *agri* could suggest that the land in the contentious frontier-zone between Franks and Saxons was agricultural land specifically, as the evidence for both Frankish and Saxon clearance and settlement in Bochonia would suggest, and that competition over arable land was a significant factor in bringing about the conflict between Franks and Saxons. It is here that we may also remark that, according to the *Vita Sturmi*, one of the saint’s concerns in locating a suitable site for the construction of a monastery was the systematic surveying of the land and examination of the quality of the soil.

The confiscation of Saxon estates is reported in all the major narrative sources of the conquest and appears to have occurred from an early date if not from its very outset. Indeed, once the decision had been reached that Saxony should be conquered and permanently annexed to the Frankish realm, the necessities of establishing Frankish royal agents and Christian episcopal and monastic foundations in the region demanded the

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acquisition of large amounts of land in support of this effort. The entry for 776 in the *Annales regni Francorum* reports that the Saxons were made to surrender their *patria* to the *dicio* of Charlemagne.\textsuperscript{115} In and of itself, of course, such a description does not imply the actual transferral of any Saxon land to the Frankish royal fisc but merely the subjection of the Saxon lands (*patria*) to the authority (*dicio*) of the king. The following year, however, the threat of confiscation appears to have been explicitly leveraged against the Saxons. For in 777, the Saxons promised that should they ever break their vows either to the Christian faith or to Charlemagne and his sons, they would surrender both their freedom (*ingenuitas*) and their property (*alod*).\textsuperscript{116} Again, then, there appears not yet to have been any direct seizure of land at this point, with the Saxons merely being made to mortgage their freedom and their inheritable property against the maintenance of their promises.

Of course, it is possible that the *Annales regni Francorum* may not tell the whole story. By 776, after all, construction had begun on the *castrum* or *civitas* which some of the minor annals call the *Urbs Caroli* or *Karlsburg*, perhaps on the same site as the later Paderborn, where the first recorded church in the Saxon lands was consecrated the very next year.\textsuperscript{117} It is difficult to imagine this land not already belonging to the royal fisc at this point, and it must presumably have been obtained either by expropriation or, one

\textsuperscript{115} *ARF*, a. 776: “Et Saxones perterriti omnes ad locum, ubi Lippia consurgit, venientes ex omni parte et reddiderunt patriam per wadium omnes manibus eorum et spo ponderunt se esse christianos et sub dicione domni Caroli regis et Francorum subdiderunt.”

\textsuperscript{116} *ARF*, a. 777: “Ibique multitudo Saxonum baptizati sunt et secundum morem illorum omnem ingenuitatem et alodem manibus dulgtum fecerunt, si amplius inmutassent secundum malam consuetudinem eorum, nisi conservarent in omnibus christianitatem vel fidelitate supradicti domni Caroli regis et filiorum eius vel Francorum.” The unusual verb *dulgo* (*dulgeo*) is of unknown origin, but may derive from *indulgeo*. It appears already in the Merovingian period (Niermayer, *Mediae Latinitatis*, p. 362.) In the *ARF*, it is used to mean both ‘to pledge’ and, more directly, ‘to surrender/abandon’. See J. N. Adams, “The Vocabulary of the *Annales regni Francorum*,” *Glotta* 55:3/4 (1977), pp. 257–282 at pp. 279–280. The conditional clause of the 777 entry seems to imply the former meaning.

\textsuperscript{117} For the *Urbs Caroli*, see *Annales Mosellani*, *Annales Petaviani*, and *Annales Maximiani*, aa. 776; for the church, see *Annales Petavianses*, a. 777. See also Chapter 1, p. 25, and Chapter 2, p. 92.
would think less likely, by gift. By 799, land was certainly being taken on a significant scale. It was in this year, according to the *Annales Laureshamenses*, that Charlemagne deported Saxons along with their wives and children, confiscated their properties, and “divided that land of theirs among his faithful, that is bishops, priests, counts, and other vassals.”

By the completion of the conquest, vast amounts of Saxon lands had been confiscated either to be held as royal estates or granted out to Frankish and Saxon *fideles*.

**Fines, Renders, and Taxes**

The subjection of the Saxon lands to Carolingian authority and the imposition of both comital and ecclesiastical frameworks brought with them the myriad pecuniary obligations of the Frankish state. Many of these obligations, as they applied to the Saxons, are outlined in some detail in the surviving legislation particular to Carolingian Saxony: the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* (usually thought to have been issued in 782/785); the later *Capitulare Saxonicum* (issued in 797); and the *Lex Saxonum* (issued probably in 802). Taken together, these three texts suggest that the imposition of Frankish legal frameworks was an important means of wealth-extraction in the Saxon lands. The fines outlined for a variety of offences in these texts, for example, accrued

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118 *Lorsch Annals*, a. 799: “Et dnmns rex inde tullit multituidinem saxanorum cum mulieribus et infantibus, et collocavit eos per diversas terras in finibus suis, et ipsum terram eorum divisit inter fideles suos, id est episcopos, presbyteros, comites et alios vassos suos.”

119 How much land was taken during the early years is impossible to know. The estimate of 1/4 –1/3 of the land in Westphalia put forward by A. K. Hömberg relies too much on the assumption that later royal lands had their origins in this early period, as G. Droge, “Fränkische Siedlung in Westfalen,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 4 (1970), p. 273, rightly notes.


121 For an introduction to these texts, see Chapter 1, pp. 49–54.
mainly to the royal fisc—though the count presumably also received a share.¹²² Other financial rights, however, were distributed more widely among both the fisc and the various landholders and supporters of the Frankish regime in the region.

In the wake of the conquest, new Carolingian-backed secular and ecclesiastical authorities in the region—both those imported from abroad and those native elements friendly to the Frankish cause—were given substantial opportunities for financial exploitation of the subject population. Chapter 64 of the *Lex Saxonum*, for example, stipulates that a free man under the *tutela* of *nobilis cuiuslibet* who wants to sell his property must first offer it to the noble before his own family. There were also more regular Frankish pecuniary obligations, imposed now for the first time in Saxony.¹²³ The *Capitulatio de partibus Saxonum*, for example, speaks of the payment of both the *census* and the tithe.¹²⁴ The term *census* could have a wide range of meanings in the early medieval period, including something approaching a more formal tax.¹²⁵ In addition, the *Capitulatio* refers to a number of additional financial obligations including the payment of the *fredus* (a legal fine paid to the fisc); the *bannus* (a fine imposed for disobeying a royal command) and the much vaguer *redibutio* or ‘payment’. Far and away the most important pecuniary obligation imposed by the Franks, however, and the one which appears to have occasioned the greatest resentment in Saxony, was the ecclesiastical tithe.

¹²³ The best and most recent detailed overview of the taxation situation in the Frankish state can be found in Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 102 ff. For the Merovingian period, see W. Goffart, “Old and New in Merovingian Taxation,” *Past and Present* 96:1 (1982), pp. 3–21.
¹²⁴ *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, c. 16: “Et hoc Christo propitio placuit, ut undecumque census aliquid ad fiscum pervenerit, sive in frido sive in quacumque banno et in omni redibutione ad regem pertinente, decima pars ecclesiis et sacerdotibus reddatur.”
At the time of the conquest, the compulsory ecclesiastical tithe is thought to have been a relatively recent introduction to the Frankish realm. While the notion that Christians should pay a tenth of their income to the church had deep roots in Old Testament scripture and patristic thought, actual payment seems to have remained an intermittent and perhaps largely voluntary gesture throughout much of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Relatively few references to the tithe are known from the Merovingian era, and it is generally thought that the tithe was probably not strictly enforced during this period. It was around the middle of the eighth century that there appears to have come into effect a far more strenuous insistence on the payment of the tithe. This new insistence may be attributed to the general church-reform spirit of the era.

In a letter to Archbishop Lull of Mainz (probably c. 748), for instance, Pope Zacharias

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127 The first is MGH Conc. 1, pp. 137–138 in a letter written by the bishops of the province of Tours, c. 567, which stipulated that “ex omni facultate decimae offerantur” and “tremisses de mancipiis et pro uno quoque filio.” The second is found in Chapter 5 of the Council of Mâcon of 585: “decimas fructum omnis populus ad pauperum usum et captivorum redemptionem inferat MGH Conc. Aev. Mer., p. 167. The third is in Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, VI, 6, in which Gregory recounts a story about a prophecy of an attack by the Lombards made by a certain Hospacious, a holy man at Nice, which envisioned the consequences of the Lombards’ destruction: “The tithes are not paid, the poor are not fed, the naked are not clothed, strangers are not received with hospitality or satisfied with food.” This last passage would seem to suggest that the collection of the tithe was only interrupted during a period of crisis.
appears to clarify the expectations and obligations of the regular payment of the tithe.\textsuperscript{128} The content of this letter, however, might be contrasted with that of another, this one of 765, also addressed to Lull, in which Pippin insisted on the payment of the tithe as an accompaniment to thanksgiving and litanies following a poor harvest.\textsuperscript{129} The context of this latter letter—the emergency situation of a poor harvest—would suggest that tithes were still not paid regularly even then. By 779, however, the so-called \textit{Capitulary of Herstal} demanded regular payments. Its assertion “that everyone is to give his tithe and that they are to be disbursed at the order of the pontiff,” stresses both the universality of the tithe and its subjection to episcopal authority, while giving no hint that its collection was a mere emergency response.\textsuperscript{130}

In fact, however, a gulf can be seen, as is often the case, between the requirements outlined in the legislation and lived practice. Even in 794 it seems that many people in Francia paid the tithe unwillingly if at all.\textsuperscript{131} Both Arn of Salzburg and Agobard of Lyons indicated that their parishioners would at times rather use their crops as votive offerings in the case of the former, or as payment to sorcerers in the case of the latter, than pay their tithes.\textsuperscript{132} As John Eldevik has noted, the significance of the tithe can, in a certain sense, be found as much in the power-relations that it created between those with the

\begin{thebibliography}{132}
\bibitem{128} Boniface, \textit{Epistolae}, ep. 83, pp. 184–187: “Decimas vero fidelium, quae in ecclesiis offeruntur, non sint in potestate offerentis ad distribuendum, quoniam sanctorum patrum constituata continent quattuor exinde ab episcopo debere fieri portiones.”
\bibitem{129} MGH Epp. sel. 1, no. 118, p. 254: “Et sic previdere faciatis et ordinare de verbo nostro, ut unusquisque homo, aut vellet aut rollet, suam decimam donat.”
\bibitem{130} MGH Capit. 1, no. 20, c. 7, p. 48: “De decimis, ut unusquisque suam decimam donet, atque per iussionem pontificis dispensentur.”
\bibitem{131} MGH Capit. 1, no. 28, cap. 25.
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authority to collect it and those with the obligation to pay it as in its real financial worth.\textsuperscript{133}

In Saxony, the tithe appears to have been imposed swiftly and with determination by the Franks. Two chapters of the \textit{Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae}, the earliest of the Saxon legislative texts, refer to the payment of the tithe by all individuals of all social levels.\textsuperscript{134} By 796, the payment of the tithe in Saxony appears to have become a controversial issue amid the prospect of another large-scale mission, this time following the conquest of the Avars. It was in this year that Alcuin wrote a series of letters decrying the imposition of the tithe in Saxony for its bad effects on the conversion effort. Again, he implies that the payment of tithes was neither universal, regular, nor palatable even in Christian lands. “You are a preacher of piety, not an exactor of tithes,” Alcuin wrote in a letter to Arn of Salzburg, suggesting that the Avar mission should learn from the mistakes made in Saxony. Chief amongst these errors was the too-early and too-strenuous insistence on the payment of the tithe; for, Alcuin claimed, “the tithe, it is said, has subverted the faith in Saxony.”\textsuperscript{135} In a second letter of that same year, Alcuin wrote to Charlemagne himself, congratulating him on his conquest of the Avars but urging him not to impose the tithe, making an implicit critique of the treatment of the Saxons, whose

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\textsuperscript{133} J. Eldevik, \textit{Episcopal Power and Ecclesiastical Reform in the German Empire} (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 34–35.
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae}, c. 16: “Et hoc Christo propitio placuit, ut undecumque census aliquid ad fiscum pervenerit, sive in frido sive in qualicumque banno et in redibutione ad regem pertinens, decima pars ecclesiis et sacerdotibus reddatur;” c. 17: “Similiter secundum Dei mandatum praecipimus, ut omnes decimam partem substantiae et laboris suis ecclesiis et sacerdotibus donent: tam nobiles quam ingenui similiter et liti, iuxta quod Deus unicuique dederit christianus, partem Deo reddant.”
\textsuperscript{135} Alcuin, \textit{Epistolae}, MGH Epp. 4, ep. 107, p. 154: “Et esto praedicator pietatis, non decimarum exactor, quia novella anima apostolicae pietatis lacte nutrienda est, donec crescat, convalescat et roboretur ad acceptionem solidi cibi. Decimae, ut dicitur, Saxonum subverterunt fidem.”
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time of salvation, Alcuin lamented, had not yet come. Similarly, in a letter addressed to Charlemagne’s chamberlain Meginfred, Alcuin blamed the tithe, along with the general harshness of Charlemagne’s laws, for the Saxons’ aversion to the Christian religion.

But was the tithe really imposed more harshly in Saxony than it was in other areas under Frankish rule, as Alcuin’s letters would suggest? There is some evidence that it might have been. It has been argued that the tithe may have been particularly important in Saxony because of the relatively small size of the church endowments found there.

Furthermore, the rapid proliferation of Eigenkirchen in Saxony may have been motivated by a desire to attain the financial rights associated with the church, including the collection of the tithe. As it has often been noted, although the tithe should technically only have been paid to parish priests, before being handed over to the local bishop, secular landlords with proprietary churches often attempted to gain access to the tithe, and indeed the boundary between parish churches and Eigenkirchen often became

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Frankish pecuniary obligations, most importantly the tithe, were yet another way in which the Franks were able to extract wealth from Saxony.

Such payments as the tithe, the *census*, and the numerous judicial penalties imposed upon the Saxons by the Franks, it is generally assumed, were not paid in coin, but in kind. Indeed, Saxony appears to have functioned largely without coinage both prior to and in the decades immediately following the Frankish conquest. For while we have already seen some evidence for coin-hoards in the region, archaeology reveals much less coinage in Saxony than in Francia or even Frisia. It was not until 833 that money was first minted in the region, when Louis the Pious granted minting privileges to the monastery of Corvey. Furthermore, the *Capitulare Saxonicum* appears to presume the continuation of a largely coin-less (or at least monetizing) economy, offering as it does the equivalences between coin money and various measures of grain, cattle, and honey.

**Mining and Minerals**

That said, there may in the end be some small evidence for Saxony’s participation in the Carolingian monetary economy after all, even if relatively little coinage was used in day-to-day transactions in the region. The focus of Frankish land-policy in Saxony seems undoubtedly to have been the clearing and cultivation of the soil, but the landscape offered other resources as well. Salt, for example, had been extracted at sites like Soest.

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140 Regesta historiae Westfáliae 1, Codex diplomaticus (Münster, 1847), p. 8.

since ancient times, and likely constituted an important aspect of local aristocratic power bases.\footnote{C. Grünewald, “Archäologie des frühen Mittelalters vom 5. bis zum 9. Jahrhundert in Westfalen: Ein Überblick,” p. 75: \url{http://www.archaeologie-ostwestfalen.de/bilder/publikation/AIO9-PDF/Gruenewald.pdf} (accessed May 25, 2017).} This lucrative industry certainly continued under Frankish rule.\footnote{Steuer, “The Beginnings of Urban Economies,” p. 166; W. Melzer, “Soest zur Karolingerzeit,” in \textit{799: Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit}, ed. C. Stiegmann and M. Wemhoff (Mainz, 1999), pp. 365–373 at p. 365.} Perhaps even more importantly, however, the Harz mountains, near Saxony’s southeastern border with Thuringia, contained copper, lead, iron, and silver. Silver extraction in the Harz is traditionally thought to have begun in the tenth century. According to Widukind of Corvey, the opening of \textit{venae argenti} in the 960s by Otto the Great was one of the most significant events of the emperor’s reign, and one which significantly enhanced the wealth of the Saxon emperors.\footnote{Widukind of Corvey, \textit{Res gestae Saxonicae}, MGH SRG in usum scholarum 60, III, 63, p. 137–138.} Recent archaeological research in the Harz mountains, however, suggests that both copper and silver ore-extraction and smelting were in fact carried on throughout the ancient and early medieval periods, and that a significant phase of reorganization and centralization of mining and smelting activities can be dated to the years around 800.\footnote{L. Klappauf, “Studies of the Development and Structure of Early Metal Production,” in \textit{Aspects of Mining and Smelting in the Upper Harz Mountains}, ed. C. Segers-Glocke and H. Witthöft (St. Katharinen, 2000), p. 22. Klappauf points to an evident shift from widely-dispersed smelting sites to closely clustered smelting sites around this time.} The close temporal proximity of this apparent shift in organization and the advent of Frankish rule in Saxony is of course highly suggestive.\footnote{Bachrach, \textit{Charlemagne’s Early Campaigns}, pp. 54–55; 197, n. 92; 659; 689, has also noted the publication of these highly suggestive results.} It is likely that these changes may have been related to Carolingian royal intervention. Royal control
and exploitation of these mines, so evident in the Ottonian period, may indeed have their origins in the period of the conquest.

Silver was, of course, vital to the Carolingian economy. The switch from a gold to a silver standard of coinage has long been recognized as one of the hallmarks of the economy of the Carolingian age. Pirenne saw in this transition a signal of waning European wealth. However, it has also been suggested that the switch could have been undertaken in order to facilitate exchange within the realm. Outside the realm, too, it could have facilitated trade with economies both in the North Sea and the Mediterranean. As Rory Naismith has observed, no fewer than five kingdoms around the north sea undertook coinage reforms in the middle eighth century: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, and Francia. Saxony, both before and after the conquest, appears for the most part to have been excluded from trade in coin.

As Rory Naismith has also observed, however, the remarkable coinage reforms undertaken across the northern world, including in the Carolingian realm, coincided with an apparent drying up of silver bullion in the eighth century. If this apparent reorganization of mining practices in the Harz mountains was indeed a result of Frankish intervention in the region, it should not be surprising. After all, silver was an essential

147 Pippin’s coinage reform of 755 is recorded in MGH Capit. 1, no. 13, pp. 31–32. Charlemagne’s coinage reform of 793/4, which included a provision for novii denario, is recorded in MGH Capit. 1, no. 28, pp. 73–78 at 74. See also L. Kuchenbuch, Versilberte Verhältnisse (Göttingen, 2016); B. Kluge, Deutsche Münzgeschichte von der späten Karolingerzeit bis zum Ende der Salier (Sigmaringen, 1991); P. Spufford, Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 22; J. Graham-Campbell and G. Williams (eds.), Silver Economy in the Viking Age (Walnut Creek, 2007); B. Cook and G. Williams, Coinage and History in the North Sea World, c. 500–1250: Essays in Honour of Marion Archibald (Leiden, 2006); S. Coupland, Carolingian Coinage and the Vikings: Studies on Power and Trade in the Ninth Century (Aldershot, 2007); P. Grierson, Medieval European Coinage (Cambridge, 1986); K. F. Morrison with H. Grunthal, Carolingian Coinage (New York, 1967).


resource for the Carolingian economy, especially as the need for silver coinage for trade intensified over the course of the eighth century. Francia itself is known to have had only one significant deposit of silver, at Melle, in Western Gaul, which saw increased mining activity in the time of Charlemagne.\textsuperscript{151}

If Harz silver was exploited by the Franks in order to make up for the dwindling supplies at Melle, it could perhaps explain the mysterious Carolingian coins stamped with the words \textit{METALL GERMAN}. These silver coins are the only Carolingian money not to bear the name of a recognizable Roman \textit{civitas}, and so it has remained unclear where they were produced. Traditionally, the words have been interpreted as a shortened form of ‘German metal’, indicating a place of minting east of the Rhine. Recently, however, it has been suggested that the stamp may just mean ‘genuine metal’.\textsuperscript{152} This interpretation, however, is inconsistent with the usual practice of stamping Carolingian coins with a Latin place name, usually a \textit{civitas}. Saxony, never having been part of the Roman empire, however, did not have a \textit{civitas}. Frankish sources of the Carolingian period, however, consistently refer to the region as a whole as \textit{Germania}, and so a coin minted in Saxony (or alternatively minted in commemoration of the addition of the new territory) might plausibly bear this designation, showing a connection with if not a participation in the wider Carolingian monetary economy.

Commerce and Trade

Plunder and tribute, including slaves, land and its various monetary rights, judicial fines and taxes, and mineral resources, were clearly no trifles to the Franks, and the appropriation of these resources to the royal fisc and their distribution to the various secular and ecclesiastical interests involved in the conquest clearly formed an important avenue of wealth-generation. As such, it can hardly be claimed, as by Heiko Steuer, that at the time of the Frankish conquest plunder and tribute “belonged to an earlier phase.”

Nevertheless, Steuer’s assertion that access to and control of trade would have constituted an important incentive to Frankish conquest in the region must be given serious consideration in light of recently revised views on the relative importance of trade within the Carolingian economy.

This recent reevaluation has resulted more than anything from the efflorescence of archaeological fieldwork in post-WWII Europe. In particular, the excavation of trading centres known as ‘emporia’ or ‘wics’, located around the North and Baltic Seas, has resulted in material evidence for inter-regional trade that outstrips the written record. In almost all instances, moreover, these new trading centres appear to have been royal initiatives. That the Frankish rulers of the eighth century sought to control and profit from this trade is apparent. For the Franks, two of the most important of these trading centres were:

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156 Wickham, Framing the Early Middle Ages, p. 594.
centres were Quentovic and Dorestad. In Quentovic, located opposite Kent on the continental side of the English Channel, both the entry and exit of individuals and the importing and exporting of goods had been tightly controlled by the Frankish crown since at least the beginning of the sixth century, and the town may even have been founded by royal initiative.\textsuperscript{157} Royal taxes and tolls levied there have been seen as a critical source of income for the Frankish royal fisc and necessary for the support of Frankish military might.\textsuperscript{158} Meanwhile, Dorestad, located in Frisia, was initially operated by the Frisians, but conquered by Pippin II in 695, and was at least as important as Quentovic. Other important trading centres such as Hamwic (modern Southampton) in England, Hedeby in Denmark, Kaupang in Norway, and Birka in Sweden linked together the regional economies of northern and western Europe. They also served as hubs of both import and export for goods with Byzantium and the Near East. As Steuer has argued, with Saxony existing right in the middle of these important centres, “it would not have made sense to keep this region out of the widespread network of new economic activities.”\textsuperscript{159}

Traditionally, the scholarly valuation of trade in both the pre- and post-conquest periods in Saxony has been low. Georges Duby, for example, advanced pre-conquest Saxony as an example of a Germanic economy preserved in its “pure state,” both less developed than and closed off from those provinces that had been touched by Roman civilization,\textsuperscript{160} while Hans-Dietrich Kahl asserted that Saxony lay beyond the reach of

\textsuperscript{157} R. Hodges, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Achievement} (London, 1989), pp. 84–86.
\textsuperscript{159} Steuer, “The Beginnings of Urban Economies,” p. 159.
merchants and long-distance trade.\textsuperscript{161} After the conquest, too, Saxony’s economy has long been considered to have remained generally underdeveloped and for the most part devoid of trade. Such a view of the Saxon economy is rooted in the supposed pre-monetary nature of the region, and the expectation—made clear in the \textit{Lex Saxonum}—that barter was and would continue to be the basic method of exchange.

In fact, however, there are numerous indications that Saxony was part of a wider inter-regional economy.\textsuperscript{162} In the first place, the written evidence for merchant activity in Saxony prior to the conquest is not as scanty as often suggested. As we have already seen, there is good evidence for the buying and selling of slaves across the Frankish-Saxon border in the early decades of the eighth century. From an archaeological perspective, there is evidence that everyday goods like ceramics and glass had been traded across the frontier since Roman times, connecting Saxony with networks stretching from the Mediterranean to Scandinavia.\textsuperscript{163} Physical evidence for inter-regional trade in Saxony can be found in the large numbers of coloured glass beads of Near Eastern origin found in the region.\textsuperscript{164} These beads appear quite suddenly in the archaeological record beginning in the late eighth century. Their distribution suggests a pattern of trade through the eastern Mediterranean and Balkans and into eastern Europe and Scandinavia. Interestingly, Saxony falls within the range of distribution, along with

\textsuperscript{162} C. Redlich, “Handelszentren an der Elbe und die Marwedeler Fürstengräber,” in \textit{Studien zur Sachsenforschung} 1, ed. H.-J. Hässler (Hildesheim, 1977), pp. 325–342, outlines the evidence for the Elbe as a conduit of trade between the Mediterranean and Scandinavia as far back as the second century AD.
Denmark and the Slavic lands to the east, but Francia, along with Italy and the rest of western Europe, do not. The timing of the arrival of these beads, during the time of the Frankish conquest, however, is puzzling and deserves further consideration. A chance find of a Venetian coin in Saxony, dated to around the year 800, highlights the networks that Saxony was a part of, illustrating a link between the region and the great Mediterranean slaving port.\(^\text{165}\)

We have already encountered the preoccupation of the *Vita Sturmi* with the economic development occurring in the eastern borderlands between the Franks and Saxons, made clear in its focus on surveying and the acquisition and cultivation of land. However, the text also reveals some incidental information regarding the possible presence of Slavic merchants in the region.

Then the eager explorer of places, looking all over the mountainous places and plains, inspecting the mountains and valleys, considering the fountains and streams and rivers with his sharp gaze, went on his way, to be sure keeping the psalms in his mouth. With his mind raised to heaven he prayed to God, staying nowhere except where night compelled him to stay. And then wherever he spent the night anywhere, he cut down trees with an iron tool that he carried in his hand and made a circular fence for the protection of his animal, lest wild beasts, which were very numerous there, should devour it. He himself, with the sign of the cross on his forehead, laid down to rest without fear. And so the holy man, adorned with weapons of the spirit, covering his whole body with the breastplate of justice, guarding his breast with the shield of faith, protecting his head with the helmet of salvation, girded with the sword of the Word of God, went forth to do battle against the devil. Then one day, while he was walking along, he came to a road leading from the country of the Thuringians to Mainz that the merchants use, where a broad road goes over the river Fulda. There he found a great number of Slavs swimming in the river and washing themselves. When the animal on which he was riding saw their naked bodies, he began to shake with fear, and even the man of God shuddered at the smell of them. They, in the custom of all pagans, began to mock him, and when they tried to hurt him, they were held back and stopped by divine power. One of them, who was their interpreter, asked him where he was going. He replied that he was on his way to a hermitage further on.

[Tunc avidus locorum explorator ubique sagaci obtutu montuosa atque plana perlustrans loca, montes quoque et colles vallesque adspiciens, fontes et torrentes atque fluvios considerans, pergebat Psalmos vero in ore retinens, Deum gemitibus animo ad caelum levato orabat, ibi tantummodo quiescens, ubi eum nox compulsit habitate. Et tunc quando]

alicubi noctabat, cum ferro quod manu gestabat, sepem cae
dendo ligno in gyro
composuit, ad tutamen animalis sui, ne ferae, quaram perplura ibi multitudo erat, illud
devorarent. Ipse autem, in Dei nomine signo crucis Christi fronti impresso, securus
quiescebat. Sic vir sanctus armis spiritualibus perornatus, loricà iustitiae totum corpus
induens, scuto fidei pectus muniens, caput galea salutis protegens, gladio verbi Dei
accinctus, ad certamen contra diabolum processit. Tunc quadam die dum pergeret,
pervenit ad viam, quae a Turingorum regne mercandi causa ad Magontiam pergentes
ducit; ubi platea illa super flumen Fuldam vadit, ibi magnam Sclavorum multitudinem
reperit eiusdem fluminis alveo natantes, lavandis corporibus se immersisse; quorum nuda
corpora animal cui praesidebat pertimescens, tremere coepit; et ipse vir Dei eorum
foetorem exhorruit, qui more gentilium servum Domini subsannabant, et cum eum
laedere voluisset, divina potentia compressi et prohibiti sunt. Unus autem ex illis qui
erat ipsorum interpres, interrogavit eum quo tenderet? Cui ille respondit, in superiorem
partem eremi se fore iturum.

The text’s description of an east-west trade-route and the presence of Slavs
(presumably merchants) in the vicinity of the eventual site of the monastery of Fulda is
revealing of the extent of overland commerce in central Germany, even within the forest
itself. The presence of an interpreter in particular would seem to indicate ongoing contact
between the Germanic- and Slavic-speaking regions. As we have already seen, the
Frankish acquisition of land early in the conquest of Saxony was concentrated along
major transport routes, most importantly the major east-west route known as the
Hellweg. Control of this conduit was vital for the establishment of military supply
lines; but at the same time, control of the Hellweg would also have meant control of the
significant trade which moved along it. Notably, the very name of the Hellweg may
provide evidence of its importance for trade. Etymologists disagree over the meaning of
the ‘Hell’ component in the word. It may simply derive from the Germanic term for
‘light’ or ‘open’ in the sense of ‘broad’, but it may also derive from Celtic ‘Hel’ for salt,

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166 Egil, Vita Sturmi, MGH SS 2, c. 7, pp. 368–369. These events are supposed to have taken place in the
year 736.
167 For an overview of scholarship on the Hellweg, see J. W. Bernhardt, Itinerant Kingship and Royal
Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, c. 936–1075 (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 177–178; and, with a
perhaps suggesting one of the key goods that was moved along the road from ancient times. Notably, Soest, a major source of salt in the region, lay along this very route.¹⁶⁸

Even more explicit in its suggestion of the importance of trade with the Slavic lands to the east, however, is the royal decree known as the Thionville, or Diedenhofen capitulary, probably promulgated in 805/806 in the immediate aftermath of the conquest of Saxony.¹⁶⁹ This text addresses a number of issues regarding the regulation of trade at various markets in eastern Francia and Saxony. Merchants and goods entering the empire at these eastern border posts would then have proceeded along inland routes towards the Rhine and the Frankish heartland. The capitulary clearly shows that the newly acquired region was to play a vital role within the overall functioning of the Carolingian economy. Chapter 7 of the Thionville capitulary outlines the regulations for a series of apparent centres of power along the eastern border of Saxony, and the line which would come eventually to be known as the *limes Saxoniae*.¹⁷⁰ It is especially concerned with a prohibition on the trading of arms and armour beyond the border:

Concerning those merchants who go to the regions of the Slavs and the Avars, how far they ought to proceed with their business—that is: to the parts of Saxony up to Bardowick (or Bardowiek?), where Hredi oversees things; and to ‘Schezla’, where Madalgaudus oversees things; and to Magdeburg, where Aito oversees things; and to Erfurt, where Madalgaudus oversees things; and to Hallstadt, where Madalgaudus oversees things; to Forchheim and to Pfreimt and to Regensburg, [where] Audulfus oversees things; and to Lauriacum, [where] Warnarius [oversees things]. And so that they do not to consider arms and mail there to sell, if any are found carrying these, let everything they are carrying be taken from them, a half part being being taken to the palace, but the other part divided equally between the abovesaid *missi* and the discoverer.

¹⁶⁸ On salt production in the Carolingian period generally, see A. Verhulst, *The Carolingian Economy* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 80–82. Louis the Pious granted control of coastal salt springs to Corvey, which also lay along the Hellweg.

¹⁶⁹ Thionville Capitulary, MGH Leges II, ed. A. Boretius (Hanover, 1883), 143-145.

¹⁷⁰ On the *limes Saxoniae*, see M. Hardt, “Limes Saxoniae,” in *RGA* 18, pp. 442–446.
Erpesfurt praevideat Madalgaudus; et ad Halazstat praevideat item Madalgaudus; ad Foracheim et ad Bremberga et ad Ragenisburg praevideat Audulfus, et ad Lauriacum Warnarius. Et ut arma et brunias non ducant ad venundandum; quod si inventi fuerint portantes, ut omnis substantia eorum auferatur ab eis, dimidia quidem pars partibus palatii, alia vero medietas inter iamdictos missos et inventorem dividatur.]

This chapter, which describes a series of settlements located along the eastern Carolingian frontier—Bardowick (or Bardowiek), the uncertain locale of ‘Schezla’, and Magdeburg being located within Saxony itself—highlights the importance of the developing towns, ecclesiastical foundations, and central places in Saxony as market centres. It also highlights the sometimes underestimated importance of overland trade with the Slavic lands to the east.

But if the capitulary of Thionville is concerned with preventing the export of relatively expensive, high-status, and dangerous commodites of weapons and armour, it is also concerned with the more mundane. Chapter 4, for example, focuses on the export of foodstuffs outside the imperial frontiers:

Concerning this: if there should occur famine, disaster, pestilence, bad weather, or any other kind of tribulation, our edict cannot be awaited, but the mercy of God must be prayed for at once. And in the present year concerning the lack of food, let whoever helps just as he can and not sell his produce at an excessively high price and certainly no food is to be sold outside our empire.

[De hoc si evenerit fames, clades, pestilentia, inaequalitas aeris vel alia qualiscumque tribulatio, ut non expectetur edictum nostrum, sed statim depraecetur Dei misericordia. Et in praesenti anno de famis inopia, ut suos quisque adiuvet prout potest et suam annonam non nimirum care vendat; et ne foris imperium nostrum vendatur aliquid alimoniae.]

This anticipatory prohibition against the selling of food during times of crisis makes sense within the context of a pre-industrial society and economy, in which a poor harvest could have deadly consequences. What attracts our attention here, however, is the

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171 MGH Capit. 1, no. 44, c.7, p. 123.
172 This was really Steuer’s main point, that Frankish conquest and settlement promoted the development of such central places.
173 MGH Capit. 1, no. 44, c. 4, pp. 122–123.
capitulary’s prohibition on selling foodstuffs specifically outside (foris) the empire, for it suggests that long-distance trade may not have been reserved only for precious items. It is not clear from the capitulary whether the selling of foodstuffs across relatively long distances was something that occurred regularly or only during times of crisis—when scarcity would have driven prices higher, offsetting the costs of transportation.

Regardless, it is certainly clear from other capitulary evidence, such as the *Capitulare de villis*, that surplus produce from royal estates was often sold. And while such activity is often assumed to have focused on local markets,\(^\text{174}\) it is not impossible that interregional trade of foodstuffs might have been more common than generally assumed.

What certainly appears to be true is that a not-insignificant infrastructure for interregional trade existed, in the form of bridges, ferries, and market-places. Chapter 13 of the Thionville Capitulary makes this clear:

Concerning tolls, it is our will that the ancient and just tolls regarding bridges as well as ferries and markets be exacted, but that new or unjust ones, where either ropes are stretched across, or ships pass under bridges or some situations as these, in which no help is furnished to those travelling, that these not be exacted. Likewise, they are also not to be exacted either from those who are taking their things without the intention of selling them from one house to another, or to the palace or the army. But if there should be situation where it is unclear, it should be investigated at our next assembly that we have with those missi.

[De teloneis placet nobis, ut antiqua et iusta telonea a negotiatoribus exigantur, tam de pontibus quam et de navigiis seu mercatis; nova vero seu iujusta, ubi vel funes tenduntur, vel cum navibus sub pontibus transitur seu et his similia, in quibus nullum adiutorium iterantibus praestatur, ut non exigantur; similiter etiam nec de his qui sine negotiandi causa substantiam suam de una domo sua ad aliam ducent aut ad palatium aut in exercitum. Si quid vero fuerit unde dubitetur, ad prosumpl placitum nostrum quod cum ipsis missis habituri sumus interrogetur.]\(^\text{175}\)

The assertion that such tolls were ‘antiqua’ is also worthy of note, for it makes clear that trade in Saxony was not only significant but long-standing.\(^\text{176}\)


\(^{175}\) MGH Capit. 1, no. 44, c. 13, p. 124–125.

\(^{176}\) Boretius points to MGH Capit. 1, no. 13, c. 4, issued by Pippin III in 754.
lands would certainly have been desirous if they provided more access to and control of trade and tolls.

In sum, the written and archaeological evidence of long- or medium-distance, inter-regional trade suggests a Carolingian economic vision that extended beyond plunder and tribute to commerce—on some scale—and the exaction of tolls. Moreover, it is clear that Saxony played an integral role within this vision.

**Conclusion**

The Frankish state was able to become an empire because it, and the powerful secular and ecclesiastical elites who made it up, were incredibly rich. This wealth, however, had to be constantly built up and replenished, a goal which was pursued through a diverse economic strategy. Plunder, tribute, and commerce were all important to this strategy. Contrary to scholarly opinion, it seems that Saxony had much to offer in all of these areas. In Saxony and elsewhere, Charlemagne may indeed have been fighting in part for ‘Blessed Peter’ and ‘the Holy Church of God’, as he had assured the pope in 774. ‘Gold, or gems and silver, or lands and men’, however, were not antithetical to this pursuit, but essential to it.
Chapter 4: 
The Empire of the Mind

Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end.
– John Stewart Mill, On Liberty

By 804, the long and bloody conquest of Saxony was complete, at least insofar as the military subjugation of the Saxon lands and people was concerned. But while resistance to Frankish rule may have been crushed by a generation of war, and the skeleton of Frankish royal and ecclesiastical government established in the lands between the Rhine and the Elbe, it was hardly the case that the Saxons “were joined together with the Franks and made one people ( unus populus ) with them,” as Einhard optimistically declared in his Vita Karoli Magni . Indeed, Einhard’s rhetoric notwithstanding, subjection to a Frankish military regime and its administrative structures did not usher the Saxons smoothly into a just and equal union with their Frankish conquerors, nor were the Saxons simply “left to rule their own lands by their own laws and customs, under Frankish kings,” as is sometimes asserted. Above all, there still remained the difficult task of inculcating the formerly pagan and acephalous Saxons with the attitudes, outlooks, and ideals of their Frankish conquerors, including a deeper grounding in the Christian religion. For although

1 For a summary, see M. Costambeys et al., The Carolingian World (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 73–75.
the Christianization of the Saxons had been the stated aim of the conquest from its very outset, initial Frankish efforts in this arena during the years of the conquest proper had focussed almost exclusively on forcible baptisms, the imposition of the tithe, and the proscription of pagan religious practices, to the extent that the catechizaton of the Saxons was still very much a work in progress by the end of Einhard’s career.4 When attention was finally turned to the instruction of the Saxons in the theological and historical tenets of the faith, moreover, it did not take place in a vacuum but was intimately bound up with imparting the ideologies, structures, and practices of Frankish imperial rule.5 This fourth and final chapter will thus turn to the realm of mentalités and to the question of a changing Saxon worldview in the years and decades following the end of the Frankish conquest, with a particular emphasis on the transference of Frankish religio-political

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4 For discussion, see M. L. Colish, *Faith, Force and Fiction in Medieval Baptismal Debates* (Washington, D. C., 2014), p. 256. Frankish religious policy in the time of the conquest is best known from the infamous *Capitulatio de partibus Saxonieae*, MGH Fontes iuris 4, pp. 37–44, which mandates death for a variety of offences against both the king and the church. The capitulary stipulates Sunday church attendance (c. 18), but otherwise makes no educational provisions. Alcuin, notably, spoke out vociferously against such policies to both the king and his ministers, arguing that forcible baptisms and a too-early and too-strenuous imposition of the tithe not only ignored long-established catechetical conventions but also served to stiffen Saxon resistance and even risked the new converts’ very souls by putting them at greater risk of apostasy. See Alcuin, *Epistolarum*, MGH Epp. 4, epp. 110 and 111. The need to educate the still superficially converted Saxons in the early 830s prompted Abbot Warin of Corvey to request the composition of the first full-length treatise on the sacrament of the Eucharist in the Latin West. See Paschasius Radbertus, *De corpore et sanguine domini*, “Prologus,” CCCM 16, pp. 4–5. On the treatise and its Saxon context, see C. Chazelle, “The Eucharist in the Early Middle Ages,” in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. I. C. Levy et al. (Leiden, 2012), pp. 204–249, at pp. 205–211.

ideologies to the conquered Saxons. Specifically, it will examine representations of empire and imperial rule in the Old Saxon biblical epic known as the *Heliand*.\(^6\)

Composed in the first half of the ninth century to acquaint the conquered and still only superficially converted Saxons with the fundamentals of their new faith, the *Heliand* renders the religion’s central historical narrative—that of the birth, life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ—in the traditional Germanic idiom of alliterative verse. Crucially, however, the *Heliand* constitutes no slavish translation and versification of the traditional gospel story but freely adapts its source material in ways that appear to signal a shift in setting from the Roman-occupied Judaea of the canonical Gospels to a landscape and social milieu more evocative of north-west Europe in the early Middle Ages. It is on the basis of such changes that the *Heliand* has on occasion been described as a ‘Germanization’—or more recently a ‘Saxonization’—of the Gospel.\(^7\) To date, however, far less attention has been paid the *Heliand*’s equally significant amplification of the wider imperial context of the gospel narrative, which it achieves through a meticulous depiction of imperial structures of rule and administrative practices. In these changes, the *Heliand* presents a highly ambivalent vision of empire for a Saxon audience still grappling not only with the rudiments of their new faith but with their place as subjects within a Christian-Frankish empire.


Provenance and Composition of the Heliand

The Old Saxon Heliand consists of 5,983 extant lines of alliterative verse, nearly twice the length of the Old English Beowulf—a text with which the Heliand shares a similar alliterative style as well as a large number of formulaic phrases—and only slightly shorter than Otfrid of Weissenburg’s roughly contemporary Old High German Evangelienbuch, which eschewed alliteration for rhyming couplets. It is preserved in two nearly complete manuscripts (M: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cgm. 25; and C: London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A.VII) and four fragments (V, in the Vatican; P, in Berlin—originally in Prague; S, in Munich—originally in Straubing; and the recently discovered L, in Leipzig). Its language is that of the ‘Old’ or continental Saxons, as it existed around the turn of the ninth century at the time of their conquest and Christianization by the Franks.

Despite its significant length and apparently broad dissemination, however, the *Heliand* remains one of the more enigmatic and controversial documents of the early medieval period. There is little consensus, for example, on such fundamental questions as the poem’s authorship, audience, and place and circumstances of composition. Various well- and lesser-known figures have been proposed as authors over the years, including Gottschalk of Orbais, the Saxon monks Edelfrid and Haterich (mere names in the Reichenau annals), the Frisian poet Bernlef, an anonymous “poet-monk (perhaps also an ex-warrior),” and, most recently, an illiterate though “learned monk (or perhaps more than one)…and a scribe.” More commonly, the poem’s authorship is frequently associated with—if not attributed directly to—Hrabanus Maurus and Paschasius Radbertus. Efforts to fix the poem’s place of origin, meanwhile, have generally focussed

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14 The two names were originally suggested as possibilities by J. A. Schmeller, *Heliand*, Vol. 2 (Munich, 1840), p. xv. According to the Reichenau annals, Haterich was said to have been an *episcopus* who had arrived at Reichenau with an “insignem librorum…thesaurum.”


on Fulda, Werden, and Corvey. The questions of the Heliand’s intended audience and date of composition are moderately less fraught. Nearly all scholars accept that the original language of the poem pinpoints a Saxon audience for the Heliand, and, more precisely, the Saxon aristocracy whose Christianization and integration into the structures of the Frankish state were of the utmost importance to the Franks. As for the poem’s date, a terminus post quem of 822 is generally accepted for the Heliand on the basis of the poet’s apparent use of Hrabanus Maurus’s commentary on Matthew, while the dates of the manuscripts—which cluster around the middle of the ninth century—provide a rough terminus ante quem of about 850, with the sheer number of manuscripts and divergent readings suggesting a probable date of composition somewhat earlier than that. Complicating all of these questions, however, is the existence of two possible Latin ‘prefaces’, unconnected with any manuscript tradition but nevertheless widely accepted as genuine, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

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18 The argument for Fulda rests essentially on i) the belief that the Heliand’s author is thought to have based the poem on the Latin Diatessaron text of the Fulda-penned Codex Fuldensis (a belief since debunked: see C. W. M. Grein, Quellen des Heliand [Cassel, 1869], p. 49; and W. L. Petersen, Tatian’s Diatessaron [Leiden, 1994], pp. 108–110); ii) that Hrabanus Maurus’s commentary on Matthew may have been an important additional source for the author; and iii) the fact that Fulda, and Hrabanus Maurus in particular, is associated with the production of a number of other vernacular religious works, including Otfrid’s Evangelienbuch. Against Fulda is the poem’s use of the word of pascha (Heliand, ll. 4205, 4461, 4564, 5144, and 5261) instead of Ostern for Easter. The former was used at Cologne and in Westphalia, while the latter was used at Fulda and Mainz.

19 R. Drögereit, Werden und der Heliand (Essen, 1951), points to the use of the letter ƀ, which is associated in particular with Werden. He also argues the ‘M’ manuscript to have been composed at Werden.

20 B. Bischoff, “Die Schriftheimat der Münchener Heliand-Handschrift,” Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur 101:2 (1979), pp. 161–170, argues that the M manuscript was composed at Corvey.


The *Praefatio* and *Versus*

In 1562, the Reformation theologian M. Flacius Illyricus published two brief Latin texts under the respective titles *Praefatio in librum antiquum lingua Saxonica conscriptum* and *Versus de poeta et interprete huius codicis*. Both have long been associated with the *Heliand*, but it is the prose preface which has attracted the greatest attention and which, if authentic, has the most to say about the *Heliand’s* compositional circumstances, authorship, and audience. Specifically, the *Praefatio* speaks of a translation and versification of both the Old and New Testaments into the *lingua Theudisca* or *lingua Germanica*, commissioned by a certain *Ludouicus piissimus Augustus* and carried out by “a certain man of Saxon stock, who was regarded by his people as a poet of no small talent.”

According to the author of the preface, the purpose of this project was to instruct both the “lettered” (*litterati*) and the “unlettered” (*illiterati*) in the Christian faith. As such, the *Praefatio* would seem to provide a very specific historical context for the *Heliand*: the aftermath of the Frankish conquest and Christianization of the Saxons.

Of course, the lack of direct manuscript attestation casts an undeniable shadow over the credibility of the *Praefatio*. In addition to the lack of manuscript context, however, various other objections have been raised from time to time. For example, in the nineteenth century, it was observed that where the preface claims that the poet had produced versions of both the Old and New Testaments, the *Heliand* testifies only to a translation of the New Testament. The discovery of a similarly versified Old Saxon

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26 E. Windisch, *Der Heliand und seine Quellen* (Leipzig, 1868), p. 3, states that “nicht die geringste Spur des alten Testaments zu finden sei.”
Genesis in 1894, however, laid this particular doubt to rest.\textsuperscript{27} (Indeed, the survival of a fragment of the \textit{Heliand} in that same manuscript would seem to add additional credence to the preface.\textsuperscript{28}) Today, its generally Carolingian Latin style, along with its description of the poem’s division “into fitts” \textit{(per vitteas; cf. Old English fitt)}—a term unlikely to have been known to a late medieval or early modern forger—have tipped the weight of opinion in favour of the \textit{Praefatio}’s acceptance.

If the ninth-century pedigree of the \textit{Praefatio} and its probable association with the \textit{Heliand} are today generally accepted, some questions about the preface still remain. Foremost is the problem of the identity of the preface’s \textit{Ludouicus piissimus Augustus}. For although it was once taken as self-evident that this referred to Louis the Pious—an assumption apparently bolstered by the preface’s claim that the work was composed “in the time of the empire” \textit{(imperii tempore)}—it has also been argued that the preface’s \textit{Ludouicus} could refer to Louis the German, a figure more commonly associated with the production of vernacular literature.\textsuperscript{29} It has been observed that the phrase \textit{imperii tempore} need not demand an association with Louis the Pious, for, in the first place, it could be that the poem was composed under Louis the German in the period when his father was still alive,\textsuperscript{30} and second, the empire was not necessarily understood by contemporaries to be defunct following the death of Louis the Pious.\textsuperscript{31} Indeed, the evidence in favour of

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\textsuperscript{27} The manuscript was found in the Vatican (MS ‘V’, above) by Karl Zangmeister. The existence of an Old Saxon model for the Old English text had been predicted on metrical and linguistic grounds by Eduard Sievers. See A. N. Doane, \textit{The Saxon Genesis} (Madison, 1991), p. 7.
\textsuperscript{28} MS V, see above.
\textsuperscript{30} Haubrichs, \textit{Die Anfänge}, p. 278.
\textsuperscript{31} E. J. Goldberg, \textit{Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817–876} (Ithaca, 2006).
\end{flushright}
Louis the German is not overwhelming, in essence boiling down to a claim by Louis the Pious’s biographer Thegan that Louis rejected the ‘pagan songs’ (*poetica carmina gentilia*) he had learned in his youth, whereas a significant amount of the Old High German writing preserved today is associated with the reign of Louis the German.\(^{32}\) In the first place, the *poetica carmina gentilia* described by Thegan need not refer expressly to vernacular songs.\(^{33}\) Moreover, it is likely that Thegan included the detail about Louis the Pious’s rejection of ‘pagan songs’ primarily in order to establish a contrast between Louis and his father Charlemagne, who reportedly attempted to have recorded the “barbarous and ancient songs, which were sung about the deeds and wars of ancient kings.”\(^{34}\) The use of the vernacular, meanwhile, especially for the purpose of religious education, had long been understood as a necessity. In the *Vita Gregorii*, for example, Saint Boniface is described as paraphrasing a Gospel passage into the vernacular for the benefit of a young Gregory of Utrecht,\(^{35}\) while at the Council of Tours in 813, the delivery of homilies in both Romance and Germanic languages was recommended, so that they could be understood more widely.\(^{36}\) Given this background, it seems unrealistic to presume the cessation of the use of the vernacular under Louis the Pious, his own personal literary preferences notwithstanding.

As for the *Praefatio*’s claim that the poet worked ‘in the time of the empire’, it is true that it need not imply a composition of the poem before 840. (Though it would certainly seem to imply a certain distance on the part of the *Praefatio* itself.) However, in a later

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\(^{34}\) Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, MGH SRM 25, c. 29: “barbara et antiquissima carmina, quibus veterum regum actus et bella caneabantur.”
\(^{35}\) Liudger, *Vita Gregorii*, MGH SS 15.1, p. 68.
\(^{36}\) *Concilium Turonense, a. 813*, MGH Conc. 2.1, pp. 286–293 at p. 288: “Et ut easdem omelias quisque aperte transferre studeat in rusticam Romanam linguam aut Thiotiscam, quo facilius cuncti possint intellegere quae dicuntur.”
passage, the preface speaks of the work of poetic composition being carried out not just ‘in the time of the empire’ but also of the poet carrying out the work of composition at the behest of “imperial commands” (iussis imperialibus). This claim would seem on its face to suggest that the command to compose the Old Saxon poems came from an emperor, which Louis the German never was. Perhaps most persuasively, however, Hans Hummer, in the most recent sustained analysis of the preface, has argued persuasively for an identification with Louis the Pious, observing that while Louis the German was at times referred to as both pius and Augustus, he was never in his own reign described as piissimus Augustus, while Louis the Pious was frequently referred to as such in literature, charters, and diplomas. As Hummer concludes, “it is difficult to see how anyone composing, or reading, the Praefatio either in the 830’s, when Louis the Pious was still ruling, or in the 850’s, when he was dead, would have associated the title with Louis the German.”

As for the Praefatio’s authorship, it has occasionally been argued, by those who see the Heliand as stemming ultimately from Fulda and the milieu of Hrabanus Maurus, that it may have been authored by Hrabanus himself. Attention may also be drawn, however, to similarities in language between the Praefatio and another Carolingian intellectual often been associated with the Heliand, Paschasius Radbertus. There exists a striking parallel between the language of the Praefatio and that of Paschasius’s Vita Adalhardi (a text detailing the life and career of Adalhard, cousin of Charlemagne and

39 See Kartschoke, Altdeutsche Bibeldichtung, p. 45, for a summary, though Kartschoke himself is skeptical.
first abbot of the Saxon monastery of Corvey). Specifically, the preface describes how Louis “tried to order and establish…the many advantages of the Republic (Reipublicae)…and keep in check every noxious (nociva) and superstitious things by stifling them,” while Paschasius speaks of how Adalhard “administered the affairs of his church (res ecclesiae suae)…cutting down noxious (nociva) and superfluous things.” The parallel between the two passages, manifesting in the parallels between res publica and res ecclesia and the shared use of the rare word nociva, is certainly striking.

Paschasius’s commentary on Matthew has long been identified as one of the Heliand’s likely source texts, and he has even been proposed as an author of the poem. He was deeply engaged in the work of missionizing the Saxons, working for several years at Corvey and composing the De corpore et sanguine, the first known longform exposition on the Eucharist, for the express purpose of instructing Saxon Christians still struggling with the rudiments of their new faith. Notably, Paschasius also comments elsewhere on Saxon song. In his Egloga duarum sanctimonialum, Paschasius refers directly to “the Saxon” at Corvey “lamenting in a song,” which he contrasts to the “peasant celebrating in the Roman and Latin language.” Although hardly definitive, the similarities between the Praefatio and the Vita Adalardi are suggestive of influence, or even a shared authorship.

40 See Chapter 1, pp. 45.
The *Heliand* as Cultural Translation

Beyond the fundamental questions of when, where, and by and for whom the *Heliand* was composed, scholarship has long revolved around a number of controversies regarding the poem’s relative indebtedness to a literary vs. an oral compositional tradition and its status as a product of cultural adaptation. On these questions, research has long been divided between two broad interpretational streams, sometimes characterized as the *interpretatio christiana* and the *interpretatio germanica*. The first of these approaches focusses on the poem’s origins in a Christian biblical and exegetical literary tradition. This ‘Christian’ line of interpretation of the *Heliand* focusses foremost on an attempt to identify the poem’s probable Latin sources and to a lesser extent on poem’s place within a wider Carolingian Christian literary context. The ‘Germanic’ line of interpretation, meanwhile, focusses on an exploration of the poem’s relationship to a Germanic oral culture of poetic composition and on the relative presence of Germanic (often read as ‘pre-Christian’) ideas and attitudes. A subset of this latter scholarly strain, it should be noted, with roots in an idealized and outdated nineteenth-century Romantic view of Germanic antiquity, has understood the *Heliand* as an example of the ‘Germanization’ of Christianity.

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46 The roots of such scholarship can be traced to A. F. C. Vilmar, *Deutsche Altertümer im Heliand als Einkleidung der evangelischen Geschichte* (Marburg, 1845). These ideas have seen new light in J. C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity* (Oxford, 1990), and, with regard to the *Heliand* in particular, Murphy, *Saxon Savior*. 
It was the poem’s first modern editor, Johannes Andreas Schmeller, in a brief prologue to the 1840 second volume of the text, who first proposed that the Heliand was modelled primarily on a Latin translation of the second-century gospel harmony known as the Diatessaron of Tatian. Since that time, a veritable cottage industry has grown up attempting to identify specific ancient and early medieval textual influences, especially in parts of the poem which seem to diverge from either Tatian or the four canonical gospels. Proposed possible sources have included commentaries by Bede, Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus, and Paschasius Radbertus, among others. Overall, however, the exercise is greatly complicated by the compilatory nature of early medieval exegetical writing, to the extent that, as J. J. von Weringha has rightly noted, “there always remains an amount of uncertainty in determining whether a particular passage of the poem is based on some commentary or must be ascribed to the poet’s own invention or not.”

If the Heliand’s ultimate indebtedness, however murky, to a Latin Christian literary tradition is certain enough given the poem’s essential subject matter, it is equally clear that many of the poem’s innovations cannot be explained through an appeal to ancient and early medieval Latin Christian sources alone but stem instead from a largely independent Germanic poetic tradition. We have already encountered the poetica carmina gentilia rejected by Louis the Pious and the barbara et antiquissima carmina of ancient kings and wars enjoyed by Charlemagne. While these need not necessarily have been songs rendered in the Germanic vernacular, nevertheless it seems clear enough that

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48 See Huber, Heliand und Matthäusexegese; C. A. Weber, “Der Dichter des Heliand im Verhältnis zu seinen Quellen,” Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur 64 (1927), 1–76; Grein, Die Quellen des Heliand; and Windisch, Der Heliand und seine Quellen; W. L. Peterson, Tatian’s Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship (Leiden, 1994).
49 von Weringha, Heliand and Diatessaron, p. 41.
a tradition of vernacular poetry did exist in the Germanic-speaking regions of early medieval Europe and that this tradition existed in some tension with Christian literary culture. Of course, Anglo-Saxon England appears to have had by far the most developed (or at least today best preserved) tradition of vernacular poetry, the majority of which is religious in nature. Some of this appears to have intentionally adapted Christian religious themes to suit local Anglo-Saxon attitudes and outlooks, such as the *The Dream of the Rood*, which has traditionally been interpreted as recasting Christ’s crucifixion as a moment of triumph in war. Anxieties about the mixing of religious and secular themes are also apparent, however. Alcuin famously complained in 797 of the enthusiasm of the monks at Lindisfarne for heroic songs, proclaiming rhetorically: “What has Ingeld to do with Christ? Narrow is the house: it cannot hold both. The king of heaven will not hold communion with pagan and reprobate so-called kings; because the eternal king reigns in heaven, and the depraved pagan laments in hell.” While it is hard to know how widespread Alcuin’s viewpoint was, his letter indicates that monks at Lindisfarne actually were singing secular songs of kings and war and that the small amount of early medieval continental secular vernacular literature that survives—both in Germanic and in Latin—was preserved in monastic scriptoria. Indeed, Otfrid of

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50 For a wider discussion of coexistence of and tensions between oral and written culture, see Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past*, pp. 222–256.
54 Perhaps the two best-known continental examples are the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, in W. Braune and E. A. Ebbinghaus (ed.), *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, 17th ed. (Tübingen, 1994), pp. 84–85, and the Latin *Waltharius*, in MGH Poet. 6.1, pp. 24–85. For discussion of the *Hildebrandslied*, see J. K.
Weissenburg appears to have composed his *Liber Evangeliorum*—composed roughly contemporaneously with the *Heliand*—in part to address the problem of the popularity of such songs. In his preface addressed to Liutbert, Archbishop of Mainz, he wrote:

> While once the sound of useless things beat upon the ears of certain men of the greatest esteem, and the obscene song of laymen disturbed their sanctity, I was asked by certain brothers of worthy memory, and especially by the words of a certain reverend lady by the name of Judith, demanding urgently that I should write some of the Gospels for them in German (*Theotisce*), so that some small reading of this song might wipe out the play of worldly voices; and occupied with the charm of the Gospels in their own language, they will learn to let go the sound of useless things.

To Otfrid, then, it would seem that providing a version of the Gospels in the vernacular language was thought of as a solution to the allure of secular songs. Yet his use of the Frankish language also demanded a degree of defensiveness, for it was not one of the ‘three sacred languages’ of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

In the case of the *Heliand*, as in Otfrid and the Old English religious poems, the mere act of translating the words of the Gospel into a new language involved an act of cultural adaptation. For example, the Old Saxon word *drohtin* (lord), frequently used in the *Heliand* to refer to God and Jesus, had a long history in the Germanic languages, originally denoting the military leader of a *comitatus* or warband, while the term *uurd*, employed by the poet for something like the Christian notion of ‘providence’, had an

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original pagan meaning more akin to ‘fate’. Of course, it is impossible to know precisely how such terms might have resonated with a ninth-century Saxon audience.

Would Jesus, as drohtin, have been perceived as the leader of a warband, and his disciples his comitatus? Or did the invocation of uurd imply the importation of pagan Saxon religious beliefs into a Christian poem? Such questions, of course, are hardly answerable.

Nevertheless, certain kinds of cultural adaptation in the Heliand are more clear-cut. For example, no known biblical or exegetical source makes reference to a helmet of invisibility (heliðhelm) like the one worn by Satan in the Heliand, but similar magical articles of clothing are known from elsewhere in the medieval Germanic poetic tradition. On a more prosaic level, in the Heliand shepherds become “horse-boys” (ehuscalcos), Christ goes not into a desert but a “forest” (uualdes), wine becomes “cider” (lîð), and the ship on the sea of Galilee is described as “high-horned” (hôh hurnidskip), perhaps suggesting the high-prowed vessels of the Viking age. Yet more subtle changes revolving around family life, social class, etc., which may also derive from the poet’s own immediate social milieu, can also be detected. Such features of the poem were given an extreme interpretation by Vilmar, who, fifteen years after the poem’s initial modern publication in 1830, put forth his influential and controversial view of the

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58 D. H. Green, Language and History, pp. 384–388.
60 Heliand, l. 388, p. 20. Notably, sheep certainly were a common feature of early medieval Saxon life. See D. Meier, “The North Sea Coastal Area: Settlement History from Roman to Early Medieval Times,” in The Continental Saxons, pp. 37–70 at p. 69; and W. Dörfler, “Rural Economy of the Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century,” in The Continental Saxons, pp. 133–158. The emphasis on horses may thus imply adaptation to suit the tastes of the Saxon nobility.
61 Heliand, l. 1124, p. 46.
63 Heliand, ll. 2266 and 2907, pp. 85 and 107.
Focussing on scenes which he saw as incorporating Germanic attitudes towards nature, family, war, and the afterlife, Vilmar’s interpretation of the *Heliand* was rooted in the romantic nationalism of his day and in nineteenth-century assumptions about an ancient pan-Germanic culture that have been discredited.

Lately, such ideas have seen renewed life, albeit in modified form. In particular, G. Ronald Murphy has sought to revive the essential kernel of Vilmar’s thesis, while ostensibly stripping it of its “conservative, nationalistic tone and his almost insulting acceptance and use of the clichés of German cultural superiority.” Crucially, where Vilmar did not see the immediate historical context of the poem as relevant, claiming that there was “neither Roman hierarchy nor Frankish sword” present in the poem, Murphy seeks to reinterpret the *Heliand* within a highly local context, rightly noting that while the word ‘German’ would probably have meant little to the poem’s original audience, the words ‘Frank’ and ‘Saxon’ certainly would have. As such, Murphy argues that the poem should be understood not as a ‘Germanization’ but as a “saxonization (sic) and a northernization (sic) of the Gospel.” Given the *Heliand*’s immediate compositional context, its apparent shifts in landscape and social milieu should almost certainly be seen

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64 Vilmar, *Deutsche Altertümer*.


67 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 3.


69 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 4. Of course, none of these terms appears in the *Heliand* itself. Though the poem does appear to take a keen interest in the distinction of different ‘ethnic’ groups within Roman Judaea. See A. Scheufens, “Begriffe des Ethnischen im ‘Heliand’,” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 60:1 (2005), pp. 51–66.

70 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 4.
as evoking a world more closely resembling Carolingian Saxony than the Tacitean Germania seen by Vilmar. Murphy’s modification of Vilmar’s argument is only partially successful, however, for his ‘Saxons’ in fact differ little from Vilmar’s ‘Germans’.

Indeed, Murphy falls into many of the same assumptions regarding the uniformity of pre-Christian Germanic religious and social life as does Vilmar, while at the same time often tending towards highly fanciful interpretations. In one instance, for example, Murphy suggests that the dove alighting on Christ’s shoulder during his baptism in the river Jordan should be seen as a stand-in for one of Odin’s ravens, while in another he interprets a reference to the “word of God” (godspell) ‘felling’ (from fallan) evil as an explicit reference to Boniface’s ‘felling’ of the sacred oak of Jupiter. Ultimately, Murphy argues that that the Heliand poet “does not hesitate to incorporate the most profoundly pagan beliefs into his Gospel epic,” an assertion that hardly bears up to a theological analysis of the text.

If Murphy’s attempt to historicize the Heliand fails in the end to measure up to its promise, his emphasis on a local Saxon context nevertheless represents a significant and healthy development in the study of the poem, for the adaptation of the Gospel to local circumstances has been a consistent feature of Christian missionary strategy throughout the religion’s existence. Moreover, such a view easily accords with early medieval and Carolingian practices regarding the representation of the biblical past. Alcuin writes in

[71] Murphy, Saxon Savior, p. 79–80.
[73] Murphy, Saxon Savior, p. 33.
[75] Perhaps one of the best analogies would be the so-called Huron Carol, composed in the Huron/Wendat language in the early seventeenth century by the Jesuit Priest Jean de Brébeuf, in which—at least in its received form—the Christ child is ‘wrapped in a rabbit skin’, attended by ‘hunters’ rather than shepherds, and presented with ‘fox and beaver pelts’ rather than gold, frankincense, and myrrh. See J. Steckley, “Huron Carol: A Canadian Cultural Chameleon,” The British Journal of Canadian Studies 27:1 (2014), pp. 55–74.
his *Liber de animae ratione* that a reader with no direct experience of far-distant times and places can still conjure an image of these in his or her mind. Specifically, Alcuin writes that a reader “does not imagine the actual walls and houses and squares of Jerusalem, but whatever he has seen in other cities known to him, these he fashions as being possibly like those in Jerusalem; from known shapes he fashions a thing unknown.”

The famous ninth-century Utrecht Psalter, for example, depicts scenes from the Psalms featuring contemporary clothing and material culture. This is surely the kind of imaginative reworking we should keep in mind when approaching the *Heliand* and its apparent shifting of the Gospel setting.

One of the more notable aspects of this transposition is the *Heliand’s* emphasis on empire and practices of imperial rule. For example, *Roma* is never mentioned once in the *Diatessaron*, *Romani* only once, and *Caesar* 10 times. In contrast, *Rome*, *Roman*, and various compounds of these terms appear in the *Heliand* 8 times, and ‘Caesar’ (*kèsur*) 21 times. This amplification of empire in a poem aimed at a Saxon audience still coming to grips with its place in a Christian Frankish empire seems highly significant. Murphy again has made some preliminary observations on the potential significance of the parallels between the original Gospel setting of Roman-occupied Judaea and Saxony in the wake of the Frankish conquest. Here too, however, his conclusions require further refinement. Murphy points, for example, to the *Heliand’s* numerous descriptions of Christ being bound in chains, a detail certainly found in the *Diatessaron* but amplified in

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77 K. van der Horst et al. (ed.), *The Utrecht Psalter in Medieval Art* (Turnhout, 1996).
the *Heliand*, as possibly having resonance for a Saxon audience which had probably seen its share of conquest and capture during the years of the conquest. So too, Murphy points to the *Heliand’s* emphasis on Herod’s foreignness and his having been appointed from the Caesar in Rome. Specifically, Murphy argues that “our poet has not only managed to transpose the geographical situation of Palestine into that of Saxony, but also the geopolitical situation as well.” Ultimately, Murphy asserts that the *Heliand* is “motivated by a deep sympathy for the Saxon people, so recently and violently converted to Christianity” and that the *Heliand* “contains dark tones of dissatisfaction with the ‘pan-Germanic’ Frankish power in Aachen.”

In fact, a more thorough reading of those passages of the poem which deal with empire undercuts Murphy’s insistence on the *Heliand’s* ‘sympathetic’ stance towards the poem’s colonial subjects. There is no straightforward parallel between Romans/Franks and Jews/Saxons. Nevertheless, by rewriting the central text of the Christian religion with an emphasis on imperial structures of rule, the administrative practices which maintained that structure, and the ideologies that justified it, the *Heliand* presents a vision of Christian history that inculcates its audience with the workings of empire.

**Writing and the Book**

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79 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 20.
80 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 20.
81 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. vii.
82 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 4.
83 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 20.
The opening lines of the *Heliand* offer an explanation of the content and historical origins of the Gospel. They read as follows:

There were many whose hearts told them that they should begin to tell the mysteries, the Word of God, the wonders that the powerful Christ carried out in words and deeds among mankind. There were many of the wise who wanted to praise the teaching of Christ, the holy Word of God, and wanted to write brightly in books with their own hands, telling how the sons of men should carry out His commands. Among all these, however, there were only four who had the power of God, help from heaven, the Holy Spirit, the strength from Christ to do it. They were chosen. They alone were to write down the Gospel in books, and to write down the commands of God, the holy heavenly word. No one else among the heroic sons of men was to attempt it, since these four had been picked by the power of God: Matthew and Mark, Luke and John were their names. They were dear to God, worthy of the work. The ruling God had placed the Holy Spirit firmly in those men’s hearts, together with many a wise word, as well as a devout attitude and a powerful mind, so that they could lift up their voices to chant that gospel. There is nothing like it in words anywhere in this world. Nothing can ever glorify the Ruler, our dear Lord, more. Nor is there anything that can better fell every evil creature or work of wickedness, nor better withstand the hatred and aggression of enemies. This is so, because the one who taught them the gospel, though he had a strong heart was mild and good: he was its master, the noble Lord.

These four were to write it down with their own fingers; they were to compose, sing, and proclaim what they had seen and heard of Christ’s powerful strength—all the many wonderful things, in word and deed, that the mighty Lord Himself said, taught, and accomplished among human beings—and also all the things which the Ruler spoke from the beginning, when He, by His own power, first made the world and formed the whole universe with one word. The heavens and the earth and all that is contained within them, both inorganic and organic, everything, was firmly held in place by the divine Words.

[Manega uuâron, the sia iro mòd gespôn, ....................... , that sia bigunnun uuord godes, reckean that girûni, that thie rîceo Crist undar mancunneâa măriða gîfrumida mid uuordun endi mid uuercun. That uuolda thô uuîsara filo liudo barno lobon, lêra Cristes, hêlag uuord godas, endi mid iro handon scriban berehtlico an buok, huô sia scolding is gibodscipi frummian, firiho barn. Than uuârun thoh sia fiori te thiu under thera menigo, thia habdon maht godes, helpa fan himila, hêlagna gêst, craft fan Criste, – sia uurðun gicorana te thio, that sie than ëuangelium ênan scoldun an buok scribanendi só manag gibod godes, hêlag himilisc uuord: sia ne muosta helîðo than mèr, firiho barno frummian, neban that sia fiori te thio thuru craft godas gecorana uurðun, Matheus endi Marcus, – só uuârun thia man hêtana – Lucas endi Iohannes; sia uuârun gode lieba, uuirôiga ti them giuuirkie. Habda im uualdand god,
The above passage is an amalgam of the sentiments of Luke 1:1–2, a passage which suggests that there had been earlier attempts to set down the story of Christ’s life, and John 1:1, which focuses on the creative power of the Word of God. The Heliand expands greatly on these essential kernels, however, providing for its Saxon audience a thorough and necessary orientation to the historical background and significance of the forthcoming narrative. The lines are remarkable in their entirety, but one specific aspect stands out especially: the emphasis on writing and the book. For the Heliand does away with the more equivocal Latin construction “to compose the story” (ordinare

84 Heliand, ll. 1–42. All English translations of the Heliand are adapted from Murphy, The Heliand.
85 Luke 1:1–2: “Quoniam quidem multi conati sunt ordinare narrationem quae in nobis completae sunt rerum sicut tradiderunt nobis qui ab initio ipsi viderunt et ministri fuerunt sermonis.”
86 John 1:1: “In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum.”
87 On the adaptation of this passage, see Windisch, Der Heliand und seine Quellen, p. 46, who remarked that the additions of the Old Saxon text “sind dem Bibeltexte fremde Gedanken.”
narrationem) of Luke, opting instead for the specific and highly physical “write brightly in books with their own hands” (mid iro handon scrîban berehtlico an buok).

The description of writing mid iro handon, echoed in variant form as “write with fingers” (fingron scrîban) at l. 32, is nowhere to be found either in the canonical gospels or in the Diatessaron. Though within the Old Testament, of course, writing with hands, and especially with fingers, is often associated with God Himself, as in the writing of the Ten Commandments in Exodus and the episode of the Writing on the Wall in the Book of Daniel.\(^88\) Moreover, both Luke and the Diatessaron are clear that what is being communicated are the eyewitness accounts of Christ’s life—not God’s ‘commands’ (gibodskepi), as the Helian\(d\) has it. Notably, however, Hrabanus Maurus, in his short poem on writing and God’s Law, employs similar finger-imagery to emphasize the divine import of scribal work:

Since the benign Law of God rules the wide world in mastery, how holy it is to write out the law of God. This activity is a pious one, unequalled in merit by any other which men’s hands can perform. For the fingers rejoice in writing, the eyes in seeing, and the mind examining the meaning of God’s mystical words. No work arises which age, full of years, does not destroy, nor wicked time overturn: only things written in books renew what has been. The finger of God carved things written on rock well fitted for them when he gave the Law to his people. These things written show in their record Everything that is, has been, or is to come.

[Lex pia cumque dei latum dominans regit orbem, Quam sanctum est legem scribere namque dei! Est pius ille labor, merito cui non valet alter Aequiparare, manus quem faciet hominis. Nam digiti scripto laetantur, lumina visu, Mens volvet sensu mystica verba dei. Nullum opus exsurget, quod non annosa vetustas Expugnet, quod non vertat iniqua dies: Grammata sola carent fato, mortemque repullung,

\(^{88}\) Deuteronomy 9:10; Daniel 5:5.
Praeterita renovant grammata sola biblis.
Grammata nempe dei digitus sulcabat in apta
Rupe, suo legem cum dederat populo,
Sunt, fuerant, mundo venient quae forte futura,
Grammata haec monstrant famine cuncta suo.]\(^{89}\)

In Hrabanus’s poem, a direct parallel is thus drawn between the fingers of the scribe and the finger of God, which work in tandem to set down and preserve divine law, just as in the *Heliand*.

To a ninth-century Saxon audience, both writing and the book would have been inescapably bound up with the ‘laws’ of both Christianity and Frankish rule.\(^ {90}\) At the end of the ninth century, they were still thought of as such, as when the so-called Poeta Saxo proclaimed that:

If any little spark of letters
or any tiny knowledge of art illuminates my mind,
shall I not justly give to Charles a eulogy of praise,
since it was through him that I was privileged to acquire this good?
Our parents were unacquainted not only with the documents of faith, but were totally ignorant with respect to all alphabets.

[Si qua meam scripturarum scintillula mentem
artis et illustrat si qua scientiola
nonne dabit iuste Carolo praeconia laudum
per quem nancisci tale bonum merui?
Nostri non solum fidei documenta parentes,
Sed penitus cunctos nescierant apices.]\(^ {91}\)

As the Poeta makes clear, writing was conceived by the Saxons themselves as a product of their conquest and conversion. Moreover, as Rosamond McKitterick has argued, there was “an insistence from the second half of the eighth century onwards on the central role of texts for the consolidation and harmonization of Christian religious faith and practice,


\(^{90}\) Cf. Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7: “Quia Saxones, sicut omnes fere Germaniam incolentes nationes, et natura feroces et cultui daemonum dediti nostraeque religioni contrarii neque divina neque humana iura vel polluere vel transgredi inhonestum arbitrabantur.”

\(^{91}\) Poeta Saxo, *Annales de gestis Caroli in libri quinque*, MGH Poet. 4.1, p. 56.
for the transmission of knowledge, and for the exercise of justice and government.\textsuperscript{92} Royal pronouncements on the importance of literacy, such as that found in Charlemagne’s missives on education such as the \textit{De litteris colendis} and \textit{Admonitio generalis}, point out the degree to which Carolingian rulers recognized the value of writing to the Frankish state, and it is clear too that the administration of the Frankish realm relied on written communication and written documentation to a far greater extent than was once thought.\textsuperscript{93} We will return to the importance of writing as an instrument of Frankish imperial bureaucracy later in this chapter.

Given that writing in and of itself was fundamentally a technology of power in the Carolingian empire and long before, the \textit{Heliand}’s specific use of the word \textit{buok} in the above passage, and throughout the poem, holds particular significance. While the Old English cognate \textit{boc} did not always in and of itself mean \textit{codex},\textsuperscript{94} the \textit{Heliand} passage nevertheless implies such a meaning. In the early Middle Ages, \textit{codices}—especially Gospel \textit{codices}—functioned as both repositories and transmitters of knowledge (cf. Hrabanus), and as sacred objects in their own right. In his monumental study of European literature in the Latin Middle Ages, Ernst Robert Curtius contended that “it was through Christianity that the book received its highest consecration.”\textsuperscript{95} To Dhuoda, a ninth-century Frankish noblewoman, it was a simple truism that “God is learned about through books.”\textsuperscript{96} Indeed, books had a certain role to play in even the earliest stages of the process of Christianization. In a letter from St. Boniface to the abbess Eadburga, written

\textsuperscript{92} R. McKitterick, \textit{History and Memory in the Carolingian World} (Cambridge, 2004), p. 6.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Boc} could mean \textit{codex}, charter, and even writing in general.
in 735, for example, the Anglo-Saxon missionary requested that the recipient of the letter “write down for me the epistles of my lord St. Peter the apostle, for the honour and reverence of the holy scriptures [they impart] on the eyes of the worldly among whom I preach.”

Boniface’s letter suggests how the impressive physical appearance of Gospel codices could be just as important in gaining an initial foothold with Christian converts as the contents of those books. Given the use of such books in the initial stages of the conversion process, is it possible that the Helian’s reference to ‘writing brightly’ in fact refers to the creation of de luxe Gospel codices such as the Codex Aureus and Codex Argenteus? Regardless, within the overall context of Carolingian book culture, the Helian’s reference to ‘bright, shining books’ takes on an importance beyond mere literary flourish.

Finally, it is commonly asserted that the pre-conquest Saxons were ‘illiterate’, or more commonly in recent literature, ‘preliterate’. Indeed, we have already seen the Praefatio’s reference to the poem’s audience as illiterati. Should we accept the definition of ‘literate’ current in the Middle Ages, meaning the ability to read and write in Latin, this characterization would certainly be true, for Latinity came only with Christianity and Frankish rule. In a more generous sense, however, the pre-conquest Saxons had access to literacy in the form of a runic alphabet that was known and used in the region in the

97 Boniface, Epistolae, MGH Epp. sel. 1, ep. 35, p. 60.
99 Notably, the trope of ‘bright, shining books’ is also found in the Anglo-Saxon literary corpus, a similarity which has so far passed without comment in Helian scholarship and which has certain implications for the question of the relationship between the Old Saxon and Old English poetic traditions. See Christ in Judgement, in The Exeter Anthology, Vol. 1, ed. B. J. Muir (Exeter, 1994), pp. 82–110 at p. 109: “Hy bracon cyninges word, beorht boca bibod” (the passage refers to those being condemned to hell); and Ælfric, Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection, Vol. 2, ed. J. C. Pope (London, 1968), p. 631: “Me comon lytle ær to twegen Godes englas, and brohton me ane boc, seo wæs beorhte scinende, ac heo wæs swyðe gehwede, and heton me rædan.” On the broader question of the relationship between Old Saxon and Old English verse, see U. Schwab, Einige Beziehungen zwischen alsächsischer und angelsächsischer Dichtung (Spoleto, 1988).
centuries before the advent of Frankish rule. Given this, it is not impossible the phrase *reckean that girûni* at l. 3 could mean the literal writing of runes, with a possible pun on a dual meaning of ‘runes’ and the broader meaning of ‘mysteries’ or ‘secrets’. In any event, the poet’s emphasis on the physicality of the act of writing using fingers is notable given the recent introduction of Latin scribal culture to Saxony.

**Orosian Understandings of Empire**

Immediately following the *Heliand*’s description of the writing of the four Gospels, the poem again departs significantly from its likely models by providing its audience with a further historical excursus that situates the poem’s narrative in an explicitly Roman-Christian temporal framework:

> The Lord then determined which of the peoples was to rule the greatest territory, and at what times the ages of the world were to come to an end. One age still stood before the sons of men; five were past. The blessed sixth age was to come by the power of God, the Holy Spirit, and the birth of Christ. He is the best of all healers come here to the middle

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101 Murphy, *Heliand*, p. 3. The word is normally interpreted as ‘mysteries’ or ‘secrets’. Some of Murphy’s other arguments regarding runes remain less convincing. For example, in translating the passage in Fitt 3 in which Zacharias writes down the name of John the Baptist, Murphy interprets the word *bôc* at l. 232 as “beech-wood stave”, and the verb *uurîtan* at l. 233 as ‘carve’. In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that *bôc* is anything other than an alternate form of *buok* or *bôk* (this latter form is used to refer to the same object a mere three lines below, at l. 235), and while it is true that *uurîtan* can at times specifically mean ‘carve’ rather than simply ‘write’, the word *giscrîƀ* (from *scrîƀ*, which Murphy reserves solely for “writing with ink on parchment”), is actually employed in this same passage at l. 231 to describe Zacharias’ act of ‘writing’; moreover, the poem’s description of the intended product of Zacharias’ ‘writing’ as a *brêf* (‘a letter’), at l. 230, would again seem to go against Murphy’s runic interpretation. For the preceeding, see Murphy, *The Heliand*, p. 11.
world, to be a help to many, to give human beings an advantage against the hatred of the enemy and the hidden snare. At that time the lord God granted to the Roman people the greatest kingdom. He strengthened the heart of their army so that they had conquered every nation. Those soldiers from the city of Rome had won an empire. Their lords were in every land and they had authority over the people of every noble lineage.

[endi gifrumid after thiu,
   huilic than liudscepi landes scoldi
   uuidost giuualdan, ethho huar thiu uueroldaldar
   endon scoldin. Én uuas iro thuo nōh than
   firio barnun biforan, endi thiu fībi uuârun agangan:
   scolda thuo that sehsta sâliglico
   cuman thuru craft godes endi Cristas giburd,
   hêlandero bestan, hêlegas gêstes,
   an thesan middilgard managon te helpun,
   firio bannon ti frumon uuiô fiundo nîô,
   uuiô dernero duualm.
   Than habda thuo drohtin god
   Rômanoliudeon farliuuan rîkeo mêsta,
   habda them heriscipie herta gisterkid,
   than sia habdon bithuungana thiedo giuuilica,
   habdun fan Rûmuburg rîki giuunnan
   helmgitrôsteon, sâton iro heritogon
   an lando giuuem, habdun liudeo giuuald,
   allon elitheodon.¹⁰²]

The description of time as being divided into six ages, as the Heliand claims, derives ultimately from Augustine’s conception of the sex aetates mundi.¹⁰³ The idea was a ubiquitous trope in early medieval Christian thinking, and Carolingian annalists, who saw the events of their own day as unfolding within the sixth and final age of the world, left behind numerous manuscripts in which the reigns of Frankish kings were grafted seamlessly onto this basic framework.¹⁰⁴ However, it was Augustine’s student, Orosius, who built upon and modified the historical thinking of his teacher in his own Christian apology, the Historiae adversum paganos, creating a new, specifically imperial chronological schema in contrast to Augustine’s. In the Historiae, Orosius describes a

¹⁰² Heliand, ll. 43–60.
¹⁰³ Augustine, De catechizandis rudibus, c. 22.
¹⁰⁴ Chronica de sex aetatibus mundi usque ad 810, ed. G.H. Pertz, MGH SS 2, p. 256. See also Dei Pippini regis victoria Avarica, MGH Poetae latini aevi Carolini 1, pp. 116–117, at p. 117: “Qui conclusit regnum crande, amplum, potentissimum, quae regna terrae non fecerunt usque ad diem actenus, neque cesar et pagani, sed divina gratia. Gloria aeterna patri, gloria sit filio;”
universal history in which time is divided not just into six ages but more specifically into four empires or kingdoms (Orosius prefers *regnum over imperium*), the last of which was the Roman empire, into which Christ was born.\footnote{Also influential on both Augustine and Orosius was the sequence of empires described in the Book of Daniel 2:1–4 and 7: 1–4. See M. Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400–1500* (Manchester, 2011), pp. 91–92 Notably, there existed a roughly contemporary Old English version of Orosius. See The Old English Orosius, ed. J. Bately (London, 1980).} Crucially, Orosius saw the subjection of one power to another as a divinely-mandated institution: “But if powers come from God, all the more so do kingdoms (*regna*) from which the remaining powers proceed. And if there are various kingdoms, all the more reasonable is it that one of the kingdoms be supreme, to which the power of the other kingdoms is entirely subject.”\footnote{Orosius, *Historiae* 2.1: “Quapropter omnem potestatem a Deo esse omne ordinationem, et qui non legerunt sentiunt et qui legerunt recognoscunt. Quod potestates a Deo sunt, quarto magis regna, a quibus reliquae potestates progrediviuntur, si autem regna diversa, quanto aequius regnum aliquod maximum, cui reliquorum regnorum potestas uniuersa subicitur.” Trans. by A. C. Murray, *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader* (Toronto, 2008), p. 22.}

By including an Augustinian/Orosian excursus, the *Heliand* orients its Saxon audience within a Christian sense of time based on imperial chronology. The passage is also remarkable, however, for its repeated emphasis on empire as a divinely-mandated institution. The *Heliand* poet asserts that it is God who determines which people “should have power over the widest land” (*landes scoldi uuîdost giuualdan*).\footnote{Such additions and digressions support the idea that the *Heliand* was conceived of as didactic in nature. The *Heliand*’s description of Rome’s subjugation of thieda gihuilica is echoed by the Poeta Saxo in a Frankish context: “Adde tot Europae populos, quos ipse subegit, quorum Romani nomina nescierant” (Godman, p. 343).} For example, in lauding the military might by which the Romans established their empire—attacking “each people” (*thieda gihuilica*) and successfully subjugating them\footnote{*Heliand*, l. 54.} the poet is nevertheless clear that Romans possessed the world’s “greatest kingdom” (*riki mêst*) only because God had given it to them.\footnote{*Heliand*, l. 43-45.} The introduction thus swiftly imparts a compelling ideological lesson: that empire—established by military conquest—is an ancient and
natural state of affairs, in which the God-granted *giuuald* [authority] of one people over another is established (l. 59).

These additions seem clearly significant in the context of the Saxons’ ninth-century political situation, subject as they were to Frankish dominion. The revived Roman empire of the Franks was an assiduously cultivated conceit in the entitulature, documents, and coinage of the Carolingian imperial court. Indeed, Charlemagne’s *renovatio imperii Romani* explicitly established the Franks as the continuators of Roman imperial authority. Yet the Franks’ Roman empire was also a lived reality to its Saxon subjects, who, after being defeated and forced to accept the Christian faith, faced forced resettlement, strict legal codes, and the endurance of a Frankish rule that would fundamentally reshape their society. With these early lines, the *Heliand* quickly establishes for its Saxon audience a Christian sense of time, in which the divine nature of empire and imperial authority was understood as essential.

**Imperial Structures of Rule**

If the *Heliand* conveys an idea of empire as both an ancient and a divinely-mandated institution and a present reality, then it also strives to make clear how that institution manifested itself on earth. The *Heliand*’s report that the Romans “set their lords in each land, have power over all the noble peoples” (“sâton iro heritogon an lando gihuem, habdun liudeo giuuald, allon elitheodon”) and that the *kēsur* “sat Herod among that

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111 See Introduction, p. .
112 See Chapter 1, p. 11.
113 *Heliand*, ll. 58–60.
crowd” (“satta [Erodes] undar that gisiði”) describes an essentially colonial
dynamic. Furthermore, two key points about King Herod himself emphasize the
colonial dynamic as well: first, that he was not from the same “lineage” (cnuosles) as the
people of Judea; and second, that his power stemmed from outside the borders of Judaea,
specifically from Rome (Rûmuburg). In the lines following the description of the
Romans’ conquest of peoples and establishment of local representatives, the poem relates
in detail how one of these representatives went about ruling those peoples:

In Jerusalem, Herod was chosen to be king over the Jewish people. Caesar, ruling
the empire from the city of Rome, placed him there—among the warrior
companions—even though Herod did not belong by lineage to the noble and well
born descendents of Israel. He did not come from their kinsmen. It was only thanks to
Caesar in the city of Rome, who ruled the empire, that the nobles of Israel, those
fighting men renowned for their toughness, had to obey him. They were Herod’s very
unwavering friends—as long as he held power, for as long as he had authority over
the Jewish people.

Herod, of course, hardly constitutes a positive figure within the poem’s narrative.

Nevertheless, these details serve to reinforce the Heliand’s imperial focus by telescoping
the audience’s concentration beyond Judaea to Rome, marking Herod as an agent of

114 Heliand, l. 64.
115 OS heritogo is related to the modern German Herzog (duke, dux). In early medieval Saxony, however,
the position may have been equivalent to the pre-conquest satrapae. See G. Waitz, Deutsche
116 Heliand, ll. 42–72.
foreign rule separated from his subjects by blood and geographic origin. Herod was in historical fact a descendant of an Edomite convert to Judaism, whose authority in Roman Judaea derived from Roman appointments—first as governor of Galilee, then as tetrarch, and then as King of the Jews—rather than from inherited title. Given that neither the Diatessaron nor the Gospels themselves specifically mention either that Herod is not a member of the same ethnic group as his subjects, or that his title and authority derived from Roman appointment, the Heliand poet’s decision to focus on and amplify these details directly following an excursus on empire is highly notable. Specifically, it would appear to characterize Herod in a way that might seem familiar to a Saxon audience that was ruled by Frankish representatives.

The Heliand’s characterization of the Jews as hildiscalcos, or warriors, who are obedient to Herod “only” (neuan) because he derived power from Rome through the emperor’s favour is likewise a significant addition. An otherwise unattested compound of the common Germanic words “battle” (hild) and “servant” (scalc), hildiscalc suggests a dependent relationship between Herod (and by proxy the emperor) defined by the Jewish warriors’ obligation to serve in battle. This entire addition is curious, as nowhere in the

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117 On the historical Herod and his relationship with Rome, see the essays collected in D. M. Jacobson and N. Kokkinos (eds.), Herod and Augustine (Leiden, 2005). The Heliand’s assertion that Herod is a foreigner and not of the same ‘lineage’ (cnuosle) as his subjects may derive from Hrabanus Maurus’s commentary on Matthew, but probably ultimately from the Latin translation of Josephus’ Bellum Judaeorum, which was widely available in the libraries of the ninth century. See Hrabanus Maurus, Commentariorum in Mattheum Libri Octo, PL: “sub herode rege, qui primus de alienigenis in gente Judaeorum rex fuit, principatum semper, usque illud tempus de propria eorum gente tenentibus, juxta illud, quod Jacob patriarcha olim ipsis praedixerat: ‘Non auferetur’, inquit, ‘sceptrum de Juda, et duic de femoribus ejus, donec veniet qui mittendus est, et ipse erit exspectatio gentium’. On the inclusion of Josephus in Carolingian libraries, see Dutton, Carolingian Civilization, p. 497.

118 On the possible original meaning of the common Germanic term scal (skalk*) as “a person who carries an obligation,” see D. A. E. Pelteret, Slavery in Medieval England (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 302. Other appearances of scalc in the Heliand are huscalsc and marhscalc: ‘horse-servant’, ‘stable-boy’, or ‘ostler’. In other texts, scale is employed to mean ‘disciple’, and there is also the office of mariscalc—the old comes stabularius. The term thus seems to imply dependence and perhaps subordination, but across the social spectrum.
Diatessaron or the canonical Gospels is there any specific mention of Jewish warriors serving Herod. In the reality of ninth-century Saxony, however, subjection to the Carolingian empire came with the obligation of military service.\textsuperscript{119} Indeed, the Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae, issued probably in 782, demands military service, with later decrees specifying its precise terms of service.\textsuperscript{120} Saxon units are mentioned as serving with the Frankish army already in 782, 787, 789, and 795.\textsuperscript{121} The fact that the warriors in the Helian are said to have been “so obedient” (sô gihôriga)\textsuperscript{122} to Herod because of his imperial backing is thus an interesting remark, leaving it uncertain as to whether the Jewish warriors were ‘so obedient’ out of fear or loyalty.

The emphasis on Herod’s foreignness and the Roman origins of his power are echoed later in the Helian, in its treatment of Pontius Pilate, another hardly-positive representative of imperial rule. Once again, the Helian makes subtle alterations that may have resonated with its ninth-century Saxon audience. Specifically, while the relevant passage in the Diatessaron begins the same, with a bound Christ being led to judgement, the Helian soon digresses into a description of the foreign origin of Pilate’s authority, a description that accords in a number of respects with the poem’s depiction of Herod:

Then wrathful men took Him, God’s Son, still in irons, and led Him to where the people had its assembly house. There were many thanes there, surrounding their governor. He was their lord’s delegate from Rome and held the lord’s authority over


\textsuperscript{120} Capitulatio, c. 18: “Ut in dominicis conventus et placita publica non faciant, nisi forte pro magna necessitate aut hostilitate cogente;” and c. 34: “Interdiximus ut omnes Saxones generaliter conventus publicos nec faciant, nisi forte missus noster de verbo nostro eos congregare fecerit…;” MGH Capit. reg. Franc. 1, n. 49, c. 2, concerns varying obligations for Saxons fighting in different regions.

\textsuperscript{121} F.-L. Ganshof, Frankish Institutions under Charlemagne, trans. B. and M. Lyon (Providence, 1968), pp. 59 and 152

\textsuperscript{122} Helian, l. 68.
this kingdom. He had come from Caesar, the emperor, and was sent to the Jewish people to rule the realm—he gave them advice and support. Pilate was his name, he was from Pontusland, born to that people.

As with Herod, we are immediately alerted that Pilate’s authority stems from Rûmuburg, that he was sent to rule the Jews by the kêsur, and that he is a foreigner “from Pontusland, born to that lineage (“fan Ponteo lande cnôsles kennit”). The audience is reminded yet again that political authority within Judaea stems from abroad. The kêsur and Rûmuburg remain constantly in the background of the poem’s main action, reminding the audience that the local events are dependent on a geographically removed and unseen power—a power that is implicitly threatening but that can nevertheless provide “advice” and “support.”

With the addition of these points, the author supplies specific details about his conception of ‘empire’ that are not found in the original source-texts—details that appear to derive from a Frankish historical consciousness and accord with the Frankish structures of empire. For the depictions of both Herod and Pilate as enforcers of foreign rule accord with the historical reality of the administration of the Frankish empire. Specifically, these depictions recall the Frankish comital system.124

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123 Heliand, ll. 5121—5130.
124 Indeed, it is notable that the Old High German translation of the Diatessaron preserved in the Codex Sangallensis translates Pilate’s title of praeses as grauo=comes. See Tatian, ed. E. Sievers, 2nd ed.
royal/imperial authority, Frankish or sometimes local rulers acted essentially as governors and had a great deal of personal autonomy in their execution of that authority. Ultimately, however, their authority stemmed from a royal—and after 800, imperial—authority. In Saxony, such figures were particularly important. Counts are reported in both the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* and the *Capitulare Saxonicum* as the foremost officials governing in Saxony. The depictions of Pilate and Herod in the *Helian* thus present highly ambiguous figures. On the one hand, of course, both play overwhelmingly negative roles within the poem’s overall narrative. On the other, however, they enforce the normalcy of foreign hegemony in a manner that may well have been recognizable to a ninth-century Saxon audience.

**Imperial Administration**

Such structures of imperial rule are further emphasized throughout the *Helian* at points where Christ and the Jewish people come into contact with Roman administration. Often, these interactions are depicted in ways that accord with Carolingian administrative practices. In the passage describing the collection of the census, for example, we find an emphasis on imperial representatives and, again, an importance placed on writing not found in any of the poem’s known sources:

Then there came a decree from Rome, from the great Octavian who had power

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(Paderborn, 1892), 199.10. On the position of the count in the Carolingian period, see Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions*, pp. 27–28. On the position in the Merovingian period, see A. C. Murray, “The Position of the Grafio in the Constitutional History of Merovingian Gaul,” *Speculum* 61:4 (1986), pp. 787–805. It is sometimes suggested that only Saxons were appointed as counts after the conquest, but several minor annals make clear that both Franks and Saxons were appointed as counts. See, e.g., *Annales Maximiniani*, MGH SS 13, a. 782, p. 21: “Carolus iterum cum Saxonibus conventum magnum habuit ad Lippiaebronnom, et constituit super eos comites ex nobilibus Francis atque Saxonibus.”

125 Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions*, p. 27
126 *Capitulatio*, cc. 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 34. See Chapter 1, pp. 50 and 51.
over the peoples, a command (ban) and a message from Caesar to his wide realm, sent to every king enthroned in his homeland and to all Caesar’s lords governing the people of any territory. It said that everyone living outside their own country should return to their homeland upon receipt of the message. It stated that all the warrior heroes were to return to their lord’s land, each one was to go back to the lineage of which he was a family member by birth in a town.

That command was sent out over the whole world. People came together at all the towns. The messengers who had come from Caesar were men who could read and write, and they wrote everyone’s name down very carefully in a report—both land and people—so that no individual could escape from paying the taxes which each warrior had on his head.

[Tho uuarò fôn Rûmuburg rîkes mannes
obar alla thesa irminthiod Octuiânas
ban endi bodskepi obar thea is brêdon giuuald
cumin fôn them kêsure cuningo gihuîlicun,
hêmîtteandiun, sô uuido sô is heritogon
obar al that landskepi liudio giuuealdun.
Hiet man that all thea elilendiun man iro ôôil söhtin,
helîdûs iro handmahal aneggen iro hêrron bodon,
quâmi te them cnôsla gihue, thanan he cunneas uuas,
giboran fôn them burgiun. That gibod uuarò gilêstid
ôbar thesa uuîdon uuerold. Uuerod samnoda
te allaro burgeo gihuuem. Forun thea bodon obar all,
thea fôn them kêsura cumana uuârun,
bôkspâha uueros, endi an brêf scribun
suiôo niudîco namono gihuîlican,
ia land ia liudi, that im ni mahti alettian mann
gumono sulica gambra, sô im scolda geldan gihue
heliôo fôn is hôbda.]127

Here, we find yet more elaboration and expansion that departs from the Diatessaron and the Gospels, with the Heliand once again drawing attention to the extra-regional nature of imperial power. Again, the authority of the “command and message” (ban endi bodskepi) derives from the emperor at Rûmuburg, and it is from the emperor that the authority of “kings” (cuningos) and “lords” (heritogos) derives. While a notion of the universal nature of the command is present in the corresponding passage of the Diatessaron,128 the Heliand adds information about local authorities deriving their power from the emperor, thus recalling the poem’s intruductory description of the establishment of regional

127 Heliand, ll. 339-356.
128 Tatian, ed. E. Sievers (Paderborn, 1892), 2nd ed., 5.11: universus orbis and al these umbiuuerft; cf. the Heliand’s brêdon giuuald and uuîdon uuerold.
governors. Furthermore, the *Diatessaron*’s claim that the practice of ordering people back to their native cities was first thought of by a Syrian *praeses* is excised,\(^{129}\) intensifying the impression of a centralized imperial structure and removing a reference that may have been obscure and distracting in a Saxon context. Instead, emphasis is placed on the empire’s agents’ recording of the people’s names. The fact that it is peoples (*irminthiod, liudī*) who are the subject of domination recalls the introduction’s normalizing conception of empire as the rule of one ‘nation’ over others, while the movement within this passage from wider humanity (*irminthiod*) to smaller groups (*cnōsal* and *cunni*) to individuals (*namono gihuiclan*) emphasizes the permeation of imperial authority into each person’s life. The description of this individualized type of record-keeping certainly resonates with aspects of Frankish administrative practice. Of course, early Frankish kings took over the administration of late Roman Gaul, including the keeping of tax records.\(^{130}\) In the Carolingian period, however, Matthew Innes and Rosamond McKitterick have observed a veritable obsession with lists, including “lists of peasant labourers, lists of estates, lists of possessions, lists of books, lists of the dead.”\(^{131}\) To these examples can be added the manuscripts in which oath-takers’ names were recorded in lists by the *missi* and counts for delivery to the king.\(^{132}\) Within a Saxon context, there is at least one surviving list that accords in a particular way with the description given in the *Heliand*. The *Indiculus obsidum Saxonum Moguntiam deducendorum* provides a list of Saxon hostages and their minders, all ordered to come to Mainz at Easter 804/805. In this document, each Saxon

\(^{129}\) Tatian, ed. E. Sievers (Paderborn, 1892), 2\(^{nd}\) ed., 5.11.
\(^{132}\) MGH Capit. 1, no. 181.
hostage is identified by his personal name, the name of his father, and whether he belonged to “de Westfalahis,” “de Osfalahis,” or “de Angrariis.” The identification of individuals with their regions of origin in the *Indiculus* thus offers a striking parallel with the description of imperial administrative practice found in the *Heliand*, in which “the lord’s messengers…wrote everyone’s name down very carefully in a report—both land and people.”

Interestingly, the term *ban* in the above passage is one of the small number of Germanic words adapted to a Frankish legal context, where it is widely used to mean the king’s royal power “to command or to prohibit and to punish any transgression of his orders or prohibitions.” The term appears in numerous places in both the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* and the *Capitulare Saxonum*. The passage thus suggests that the right to power over subject territories and peoples (*ia land ia liudi*) was seen to emanate from Rome—a significant statement given the historical context of the *Heliand*’s Saxon audience, whose own people and land were subject to a foreign power.

Another notable transformation in this passage is the addition of messengers to whom the summoned people must report, the “lord’s messengers” (*hêron bodon*). The inclusion of such emissaries in the *Heliand* is fitting given the importance of such figures to the administration of the Frankish empire. The so-called *missi dominici* could be sent on special assignments or be permanently appointed to different regions of the empire. It was the role of the *missi* to act as liaisons between the Frankish ruler and his local

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133 *Indiculus obsidum Saxonum Moguntiam deducendorum*, MGH Capit. 1, no. 115, pp. 233–234. See also Chapter 1, p. 56.
134 Ganshof, *Frankish Institutions*, pp. 11–12
representatives, to ensure that justice was rendered in the king’s name, and to collect taxes and document their payment. The imposition of financial obligations was obviously one of the primary incentives to conquest in the ancient and medieval worlds, and the Franks imposed tithes and extracted tribute from the Saxons as soon as they could. Indeed, according to Alcuin, the swift imposition of the tithe may have been one of the most important reasons for the Saxons’ frequent rebellions. What is more, the emperor’s “messengers” (bodon) in the Heliand are “book-wise men” (bôkspa ha uueros) who write very carefully “in a report” (an brêf). Notably, Carolingian capitularies spell out clearly that missi were to be literate. For the Saxons, a previously largely preliterate culture, writing and documentation would have been concomitant with the arrival of the Frankish empire, as would new financial obligations and the presence of foreign agents.

The combination of these elements, along with the increased emphasis on the origins of imperial rule in this passage, continues the Heliand’s imperial discourse in terms more reminiscent of the ninth-century Frankish empire than of its model texts. The additions and elaborations so far discussed seem to represent a grafting of ninth-century, Frankish conceptions of empire and colonization onto an ancient base-text only incidentally concerned with these themes.

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137 Ganshof, Frankish Institutions, p. 24
138 Ganshof, Frankish Institutions, pp. 35 ff. The ‘Render unto Caesar’ passage in Tatian (126.3) is rendered in the Heliand (ll. 3215b – 3223a) with a few minor but interesting changes. Caesar is not explicitly mentioned, but the disciples (and the audience) are admonished to pay to their uuer oldhêron, their worldly lords.
140 MGH Epp. 4, No. 56.
141 The capitulary of 802 demands that missi send the emperor written reports. See MGH Capit. 1, no. 33, cc. 1 and 40, pp. 92 and 98.
Conclusion

What are we to make of the *Heliand*'s emphases on empire and its depictions of the ideologies, structures, and practices of imperial rule? It is clearly too much to say that the *Heliand* is an allegory of the political situation in post-conquest Saxony: such an intention is nowhere made explicit in the poem. Nevertheless, the political circumstances of first-century Judaea as described in the Old Saxon text are described in terms that seem to stem from ninth-century conceptions of imperial ideology and imperial practice, transferred to a landscape and social setting that the Saxons could easily have recognized as their own. The original social and cultural context of the Gospels would have been far removed at the time of the poem’s composition, and, as we have seen, such adaptations of the biblical setting were not uncommon in the early medieval period. Within a Carolingian Saxon context, such an adaptation would surely have resonated with its audience’s own direct experience of Frankish imperial power. Crucially, however, there is no clear moral statement inherent in the poem’s depiction of empire, despite its clear depiction of both Herod and Pilate as the local representatives of Roman imperial power. Through a description of empire—and of the subjection of one people to another—as a divinely-mandated political order, and by imprinting on the central historical episode of the Christian faith details of imperial government that may have been familiar to its audience, the *Heliand* presented a ninth-century Saxon audience with a historical vision in which empire was a key organizing principle. Ultimately, then, the vision of empire created by the *Heliand* is a highly ambivalent one.
Conclusion

That the conquest of Saxony forever altered the lands between the Rhine and the Elbe is evidenced by the region’s subsequent medieval and modern history. The imperial coronation of Otto I at Rome in 962 and the taking up of the mantle of Charlemagne’s revived Roman empire, including its ideological underpinnings and administrative apparatus, by the Saxons themselves speak to the ultimate effects of the Frankish colonization of Saxony. As in so many other historical examples of colonization, however, a more granular assessment of the effects of Frankish conquest and rule on the Saxon lands is hampered by a dearth of good internal evidence for the social, political, and religious conditions of the region in the pre-conquest period and by the highly tendentious, self-justifying accounts of the conquerors. Nevertheless, an interpretation of the conquest as a process of colonization allows for a fresh consideration of a number of longstanding historiographical problems.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the Carolingian period produced a comparatively large number of sources dealing with the Saxons and their conquest, including the Frankish ‘secular’ political histories and annals, hagiography, legislation, and court poetry. In addition to these Frankish sources, a small number of Anglo-Saxon and papal texts are also available, as well as the Old Saxon material. It is these texts that constitute the essential historical evidence for the conquest. As we have seen, however, the primary sources for the conquest hardly represent objective reportage of the events that they describe but are rather highly tendentious and often politicized tracts aimed at promoting and legitimizing highly particular points of view. Frankish texts such as the *Annales regni Francorum* and Einhard’s *Vita Karoli Magni* in particular, composed in close connection
with the Carolingian court, appear to omit and dissemble in order to assert a vision of the conquest as a righteous war waged by a Christian people against a heathen and oath-breaking enemy.

Crucially, this Frankish vision of the conquest was hardly arbitrary but arose atop highly specific historical foundations. As we saw in Chapter 2, the precise ideological justification of the conquest as a war aimed at the defence of the Church and the extension of the faith was rooted in longstanding ideas about the prerogatives of Christian emperors. As the Carolingians became increasingly involved in papal affairs in the second half of the eighth century, Frankish kings came more and more to take on the responsibilities traditionally fulfilled by the emperors in Constantinople with regard to the Roman Church and its bishops. The conquest of Saxony saw the Carolingians make good on these responsibilities in the first clearly attested example of an offensive war carried out in the name of the expansion of the Christian faith. The Christianization of the Saxons, including the establishment of an ecclesiastical infrastructure, was clearly a necessity if the Franks meant to rule the lands between the Rhine and the Elbe. At the same time, however, it also provided the Franks, and Charlemagne in particular, with a legitimate justification for the conquest and an opportunity to project an imperial self-image on an international stage.

It is clear that the conquest of Saxony was not driven solely by ideological forces. For, despite the lofty claims of the Frankish sources, the Carolingian empire was sustained principally by material wealth and by the ability of the Frankish kings to reward their followers. As discussed in Chapter 3, economic incentives also played a crucial role in the Frankish expansion into Saxony. Indeed, despite longstanding skepticism regarding
Saxony’s economic potential, I hope to have demonstrated that the region had in fact much to offer in terms of plunder and tribute, human capital, land, mineral resources, and access to the trading worlds of the North Sea and Baltic.

Finally, the process of Frankish colonization also gave rise to processes of cultural translation and mediation in Saxony. As we have seen in Chapter 4, the inculcation of the Saxons with Frankish attitudes, outlooks, and ideals was not straightforward but had to be approached through a degree of compromise with the target culture. The Christian religion—refracted through a Frankish lens—was transferred to the Saxons in their own Old Saxon language and in a native literary medium. In the Old Saxon Hêliand (as in other contexts where Christianization and colonization coincided with cultural translation, for example the Huron Carol composed in the Algonquin/Wendat language in seventeenth century Ontario), the foundational narrative of the colonizing faith was rendered in terms familiar to the colonized population. At the same time, however, this method of cultural adaptation also created spaces for resistance. For instance, although the Old Saxon Hêliand presents a picture of Roman imperial rule as historically ancient and divinely mandated, it also offers a view of Roman imperial administration that is not wholly flattering.

These chapters have demonstrated the usefulness of colonization as an analytical framework for the study of the conquest of Saxony, shedding new light on some old problems. In the first place, the debate regarding the relative importance of ideological vs. material incentives for Frankish expansion into Saxony may find some tentative resolution within a framework that accommodates both the material and ideological fields. At its heart, the Carolingian empire was sustained by material wealth, and
Saxony—contrary to common opinion—offered a surfeit of it in the form of plunder and tribute, human capital, land, minerals, the imposition of new financial obligations, and access to the trading worlds of the North Sea and Baltic. At the same time, however, the material realities of the Carolingian empire were legitimized through appeals to longstanding ideologies of Christian rule, including late-antique imperial ideals regarding the prerogative to defend and extend the Roman Church. In Saxony, these economic and ideological interests intertwined, perhaps as in no other region conquered by the Franks. Moreover, if the simultaneous pursuit of both economic and ideological objectives in Saxony is clear enough, then the fact that these were pursued not in a haphazard manner but with forethought, as would seem to be the case, should occasion a serious reappraisal of the capacity of early medieval government for long-term strategic planning.

If a colonial framework allows for a clearer analysis of the forces driving Frankish expansion into Saxony, then it also provides a suitable construct for the examination of the dynamics at play in the subsequent Frankish rule of the lands between the Rhine and the Elbe. The Frankish military occupation of Saxony, the cooption of those Saxon elites willing to support the colonial regime, and the imposition of legislation aimed at the suppression of Saxon religious, legal, and political autonomy, anticipate patterns of colonial occupation familiar from the modern era. The ultimate inculcation of the colonized population with the attitudes, outlooks, and ideals of the colonizer, moreover, is equally evident—though, as we have seen in the example of the *Heliand*, the reception of such ideas could be filtered through the cultural viewpoint and experiences of the colonized.
Of course, unlike many modern examples of colonization, the conquest of Saxony did not signify an encounter between two wholly alien and hitherto unfamiliar cultures, nor was there a massive technological gap between the two groups. Nevertheless, the religious difference between the Christian Franks and the pagan Saxons was hardly insignificant, and the Franks did possess at least one technological advantage over the Saxons in the form of their access to the written word. Indeed, it was through writing that the Franks were able to set down indelibly a version of the conquest that has largely persisted throughout the ages. In doing so, the Franks managed to colonize the Saxons’ own history as well. Despite this fact, it is my hope that this thesis has demonstrated some ways of getting behind the Frankish propaganda and getting at a more holistic picture of the conquest of Saxony.
### Appendix:

**Saxons and Others in Carolingian Sources**

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242
### Texts

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</table>

# = number of times ethnonym appears in text (does not include place names, e.g. Saxonia)
R = Rebels (rebelles; perfidia; defectio; abandonment of fides; other references to disloyalty)
P = Pagans (pagani; references to conversion or baptism; does not include references to lack of fides unless a religious context is otherwise made clear)
B = Barbarians (barbari; use of traditional barbarian adjectives, e.g. saevus, ferox, etc.; or as the subjects of dominatio or cause of triumphus, etc.)

Further comments:

The tables above represent the results of a preliminary survey of references to and representations of non-Frankish peoples found in Carolingian sources (See Chapter 1). Much recent scholarship has focussed on the nature of a shifting Frankish identity in the Carolingian period—in particular the apparent movement away from smaller, regionally-based ethnonyms and qualifiers (e.g., Franci austrasii, neustrii, etc.) and group-names towards a more all-encompassing vision of a Frankish people defined by its allegiance to the Carolingian house and the Roman Church.
Ethnonyms (#): The ethnonyms tabulated above do not represent an exhaustive list of the peoples encountered in the Carolingian sources. Some peoples, for example, appear only a very few times throughout the sources and have thus been left out for reasons of space, while many other of the groups included are also known by smaller, regionally-based names (e.g. Westphalians, etc.—a later, fuller tabulation could include these). Furthermore, for reasons of simplicity and consistency, as well as to make clear the relative importance of the representation of these groups as ‘peoples’, the figures found in the # columns represent the number of appearances of the ethnonyms proper, omitting references only using pronouns and place names (e.g., Saxonia).

Rebels (R): Frankish sources in the Carolingian period demonstrate a marked fixation on the concept of fidelity and rebellion (hardly surprising in the wake of a coup d’état, when questions about the legitimacy of Carolingian rule must have been urgent). Recent scholarship has stressed the importance of the dual political/religious sense of terms such as fides and perfidia, especially with regard to the Saxons. But, while such a dual meaning had certainly been clear to late antique and early medieval writers from Ambrose onwards, the use of such terms in the sources examined here appears to focus more usually on the secular dimension.

Pagans (P): The advent of the Carolingian dynasty saw a new emphasis placed on religious orthodoxy as an underpinning of a newly constituted idea of ‘Frankishness’. As with the new Carolingian emphasis on political loyalty, a shift towards a more strenuously asserted orthodoxy in the Carolingian period is hardly surprising, given the role of the papacy in lending legitimacy to the new dynasty. The references to ‘pagans’ tabulated above—including the term paganus, and references to the various missi and conversion—do not include references to enemies as heretics or those otherwise seen as oppositional to the Roman Church.

Barbarians (B): The Gallo-Roman bishop and historian Gregory of Tours—our most important source for the early years of Frankish Gaul—uses the word barbari exclusively to refer to the Franks. By the middle of the ninth century, Nithard spoke of Charlemagne’s greatest achievement as his having “subdued the fierce and iron hearts of Franks and barbarii” (Nithard, Historiae, 1.2) while Thegan reviled those bishops who had been “raised up from barbarous nations” (Thegan, Gesta, c. 43). In the results tabulated above, depictions of peoples as ‘barbarians’ have been counted not only on the basis of the explicit use of the term barbarus, but also on the use of adjectives traditionally used for barbarians and on the use of traditional imperial vocabularies of triumph to describe victories over those peoples.

As stated above, these results are presented as a preliminary survey. In some cases, doubts regarding what exactly constitutes an example of a representation of ‘rebellion’ or a representation of ‘paganism’ could certainly exist. Nevertheless, the numbers are helpful in giving shape to a rough picture of the relative importance of Saxons—and their representations as rebels, pagans, and barbarians, in Carolingian sources.
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