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Imports and Embargos of Imperial Concepts in the Frankish Kingdom. The Promotion of Charlemagne's Imperial Coronation in Carolingian Courtly Culture

Introduction: Charlemagne's Imperial Coronation and its Early Medieval Context

In 1864 when Western Empires struggled for supremacy on the global scene, the British historian James Bryce published a successful book entitled *The Holy Roman Empire*. Quite naturally, Bryce began his outline of thousand years of history with the time of Charlemagne's reign and aspiration of the imperial title. With regard to this pivotal point of his subject, Bryce arrived to the following conclusion:

The coronation of Charles is not only the central event of the Middle Ages, it is also one of those very few events of which, taking them singly, it may be said that if they had not happened, the history of the world would have been different.¹

The world is not the same as it was in Bryce's times. In the meantime, Empires, which perceived themselves in the line of tradition of Charlemagne's medieval empire, emerged and (luckily) vanished. Still, even for

1 The quotation is from the edition of 1950, Bryce, James Viscount: *The Holy Roman Empire*. Macmillan and Co: London 1950, p. 50. For Bryce Charlemagne's imperial coronation was truly unparalleled. Even among other groundbreaking events of 'world history', it appeared to be unique. Would not Charlemagne have achieved it, the renewal of the Roman Empire in the West would never have happened. Bryce went on: "The assassins of Julius Caesar thought that they had saved Rome from monarchy, but monarchy came inevitable in the next generation. The conversion of Constantine changed the face of the world, but Christianity was spreading fast, and its ultimate triumph was only a question of time. Had Columbus never spread his sails, the secret Western sea would yet have been pierced by some later voyager; had Charles V broken his safe-conduct to Luther, the voice silenced at Wittenberg would have been taken up by echoes elsewhere. But if the Roman Empire had not been restored in the West in the person of Charles, it would have never been restored at all."

a world changed entirely, the imperial coronation of the Frankish King Charlemagne (768–814) by the hands of Pope Leo III (795–816) in Rome on Christmas Day 800 undoubtedly represents one of the central events in the medieval History of the Latin West. Monographs on the legendary Frankish King, as well as school- and textbooks on medieval history concede remarks and even entire chapters to it.² Charlemagne’s imperial coronation still represents one of the few medieval dates which are both commonly known and at the same time influential for the conceptions of history of past and present European political culture.³ The Roman events have left a permanent impact especially on the conception of history in France and Germany – as imagined heirs of the Frankish Realm and its famous emperor.⁴ Yet, also for more specialized disciplines, in Carolingian Studies as well as in scholarship on medieval constitutional history Charlemagne’s transformation from a king of barbarian peoples into *imperator Romanorum* and *augustus*, remains a permanent focal point of scholarly debate.⁵

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- 2 See from the large body of literature for instance, Weinfurter, Stefan: *Karl der Große. Der heilige Barbar*. Piper: Munich 2013, pp. 225–247; Fried, Johannes: *Karl der Große. Gewalt und Glaube*. Beck: Munich 2014.
 - 3 For a critical of assessment of Charlemagne’s suitability as a figurehead of a unified European identity, Nelson Janet L.: “Charlemagne ‘father of Europe’?”. In: Id. (ed.): *Courts, Elites, and Gendered Power in the Early Middle Ages. Charlemagne and Others*. (Variorum Collected Studies Series 878). Ashgate: Aldershot 2007, pp. 3–20; Fried, Johannes: “Ein dunkler Leuchtturm. Über die Verklärung Karls des Großen zum Vater Europas”. In: Aust, Stefan / Schmidt-Klingenberg, Michael (eds.): *Experiment Europa. Ein Kontinent macht Geschichte*. DVA: Munich 2003, pp. 40–60. On this issue already, Fuhrmann, Horst: “Das Papsttum und das kirchliche Leben im Frankenreich”. In: *Nascita dell’Europa ed Europa Carolingia. Un’Equazione Da Verificare 19–25 Aprile 1979*, vol. 1. (Settimane di Studio Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull’Alto Medioevo 27). Presso la Sede del Centro: Spoleto 1981, pp. 419–456, p. 424.
 - 4 Even today, the national anthem ‘El Gran Carlemany’ remembers the ‘Great Charlemagne’ as father and founder of the Andorran nation.
 - 5 Latowsky, Anne A.: *Emperor of the World. Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority 800–1229*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca / New York 2013.

Even though the euphoric opinion on the first imperial coronation in the medieval West expressed by James Bryce has not gone unchallenged,⁶ the outstanding importance of the Roman events is generally accepted. This praise uttered by modern societies and scholars is, however, in contrast to the accounts given by the two central contemporary sources. Their version of the events is rather laconic, and the picture they draw is by no means consistent.⁷ Still, the constituent elements and the approximate order of events that took place at the *Confessio of St. Peter* can be deduced from these “prime witnesses”, that is the “Royal Frankish Annals” (“*Annales regni Francorum*”) and from Leo's *vita* given in the “*Liber Pontificalis*”.⁸ At the end of the Christmas service Leo III made Charlemagne Emperor (*imperator Romanorum*) by placing a precious crown on his head. Then, the gathered Roman people acclaimed him by invoking three times: *Karolo piissimo Augusto a Deo coronato, magno et pacifico imperatore, vita et victoria!*⁹ Praises of Saints (*laudes*) were sung. According to the Frankish Annals, an *adoratio* followed, which is to be understood as the ritual *pro-*

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- 6 See for instance Geoffrey, Barraclough: *History in a Changing World*. Greenwood Press: Westport Connecticut 1984, pp. 109–110.
- 7 Cf. Nelson, Janet L.: “Warum es so viele Versionen von der Kaiserkrönung Karls des Großen gibt”. In: Jussen, Bernhard (ed.): *Die Macht des Königs. Herrschaft in Europa vom Frühmittelalter bis in die Neuzeit*. Beck: Munich 2005, pp. 38–54; Patzold, Steffen: “Geheimnis eines Weihnachtstages”. In: Pieper, Dietmar / Saltzwedel, Johannes (eds.): *Karl der Große: der mächtigste Kaiser des Mittelalters*. DVA: Munich 2013, pp. 137–149.
- 8 Duchesne, Louis (ed.): *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, vol. 2. De Boccard: Paris 1955, no. 98: Leo III, ch. 23–24, pp. 7–8; Kurze, Friedrich (ed.): *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a 741 ad. a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*. (MGH SS rer. Germ. 6). Hahn: Hanover 1895, ad. a. 801, p. 112. Peter Classen gives an analysis and contextualisation of these constitutive elements in Classen, Peter / Fuhrmann, Horst / Märkl, Claudia (eds.): *Karl der Große, das Papsttum und Byzanz. Die Begründung des karolingischen Kaisertums*. (Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters 9). Jan Thorbecke Verlag: Sigmaringen 1988, pp. 62–74.
- 9 *Liber Pontificalis*, ch. 23, p. 7. The acclamation given in the Frankish Annals only slightly differs, *Annales regni Francorum*, ad. a. 801, p. 112: *Carolo augusto, a Deo coronato magno et pacifico imperatori Romanorum, vita et victoria!*

skynesis bestowed to the ancient emperors.¹⁰ The “*Liber Pontificalis*” sums up the crowning by concluding that all this made Charlemagne Roman Emperor.¹¹ Peter Classen has argued that this liturgical procedure including coronation, acclamation and *proskynesis* was apparently influenced by Byzantine ritual. In 800, Pope Leo assumed the role of the Patriarch of Constantinople or the emperor himself who administered the coronation of his son as co-emperor.¹² Yet by changing the order of coronation and acclamation, he augmented his own importance within the ritual.

The papal historiography, then, adds that immediately after the coronation Leo anointed the Emperor’s son Charles (d. 811) as king (ch. 24).¹³ The “Royal Frankish Annals” pass over this royal anointing of Charles [the younger], Charlemagne’s eldest legitimate son and potential principal heir, and instead continue their account with the trial against Leo, which had been the apparent cause for Charlemagne’s last journey to Rome. The Frankish source also conceals the reactive response of the new emperor and his family, which the rest of chapter 24 of the papal biography contends: Charlemagne is said to have spent the rest of the day bestowing rich liturgical gifts to the church of St. Peter and the other papal basilicas.¹⁴ Thirteen objects, such as silver tables, a votive crown, and a paten with a KAROLO engraving are described and their weight accurately catalogued. Apparently, Charlemagne and his family proved themselves grateful and

10 Davis, Raymond: *The Lives of the eight-century Popes (Liber pontificalis)*. (Translated Texts for Historians 13). Liverpool University Press: Liverpool 2007, p. 188, n. 60.

11 *Liber Pontificalis*, ch. 23, p. 7: *et ab omnibus constitutus est imperator Romanorum*.

12 Classen, pp. 62–63.

13 *Liber Pontificalis*, ch. 23, p. 7: *Ilico sanctissimus antistes et pontifex unxit oleo sancto Karolo, excellentissimo filio eius, rege, in ipso die Natalis domini nostri Iesu Christi*.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8: *Et missa peracta, post celebrationem missarum, obtulit ipse serenissimus dominus imperator mensa argentea cum pedibus suis, pens. lib. Sed et in confessione eiusdem Dei apostoli obtulit una cum praecellentissimos filios suos reges et filiabus diversa vasa ex auro purissimo, in ministerio ipsius mensae, pens. lib. Sed et corona aurea cum gemmis maiores, quae pendet super altare, pens. lib. LV; et patena aurea maiore cum gemmis diversis, legente KAROLO, pens. lib. XXX.*

above all as well prepared. If one is not to refuse the Frankish gifts to papal Rome as mere fiction, one has to infer that the Frankish King was neither taken by surprise nor that he even rejected his new imperial position.¹⁵ The named objects must have been at hand right after the ceremony. Moreover, they had to be crafted and collected, probably during the summer of 800 before Charles finally left *Francia* for Rome. Leo III came to meet the Franks at Mentana (Nomentum) twelve miles north of Rome on 23 November.¹⁶ The following day, Charlemagne and the Frankish delegation entered the city. Consequently, they had been in the Holy City only for a month, which hardly left time enough to commission all the luxurious and personalized artifacts. The votive crown, which might have been similar to the famous Visigothic crown of King Recceswinth (d. 672), was kept in St. Peter and survived there at least until the 11th century.¹⁷ After the year 800/01, Charlemagne never returned to Rome.¹⁸ His imperial coronation was therefore the most likely occasion for the crown and the other objects to arrive there, which adds to the reliability of the “*Liber Pontificalis*” depiction of the events.

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- 15 Cf. Becher, Mathias: “Das Kaisertum Karls des Großen zwischen Rückbesinnung und Neuerung”. In: Leppin, Hartmut / Schneidmüller, Bernd / Weinfurter, Stefan (eds.): *Kaisertum im ersten Jahrtausend: wissenschaftlicher Begleitband zur Landesausstellung “Otto der Große und das Römische Reich. Kaisertum von der Antike zum Mittelalter”*. Schnell & Steiner: Regensburg 2012, pp. 251–270; Classen, p. 67.
- 16 Even this reception of the Frankish King by the Pope was symbolically charged and hinted at the things which were about to happen. According to the Roman protocol the popes honoured emperors by receiving them at the twelve-mile-landmark. The parties involved in the meeting certainly were aware of the fact that Charlemagne was treated like a Roman Emperor already one month before his actual coronation. *Annales regni Francorum*, ad a. 800, p. 111; Kaufhold, Martin: *Wendepunkte des Mittelalters. Von der Kaiserkrönung Karls des Großen bis zur Entdeckung Amerikas*. Thorbecke: Ostfildern 2004, pp. 11–17; Weinfurter, pp. 232–233.
- 17 Duchesne, p. 38, n. 36.
- 18 Schieffer, Rudolf: “Charlemagne and Rome”. In: Smith, Julia Mary Howard (ed.): *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West. Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*. (The Medieval Mediterranean 28). Brill: Leiden 2000, pp. 279–295, here pp. 279–280.

One can explain the shift and difference in the way the Frankish and Roman sources describe Charlemagne's imperial rising. Both had a natural interest in presenting their respective sovereigns as the true leading protagonist. Problems of medieval long distance communication then caused the creation of divergent recollections of the Roman events. The official Frankish historiography chose to downplay the role of the Papacy, as well as the importance of the city of Rome and its inhabitants as factors for Charlemagne's elevation.¹⁹ Instead, it stresses that by accepting the *nomen imperatoris* Charles only received the title suitable for his fullness of power. Thus, the pope did not grant a higher status to the Frankish King, but only acknowledged the *status quo* Charles had already achieved by himself.²⁰ At this crucial moment, the Carolingians opted for an adoption of the ancient Roman title of Emperor. In the future, they were able to use its ideological and symbolic implications as instruments of their own rule. Yet at the same time, the politically influential circles around the Frankish King avoided to concede increased importance to their Roman partners, the donors of the title. The acceptance of the new title was therefore conditional and happened in a selective way. As we have already seen, some aspects of imperial culture at hand were tacitly adopted, while others were deliberately glossed over or changed.

In the following, this paper wants to ask for some of the long-term developments within the Frankish realm, but also on the level of transcultural politics, which prepared the Carolingians for their new imperial role. To that end, it discusses Frankish receptions and concepts of transcultural

19 Cf. Classen, pp. 68–73; Nelson 2005.

20 In this context, it is significant that by this time, Frankish scholars extensively made use of late antique *nomen*-theory, which demanded that *nomen* and *res* had to be in accord with one another. Especially Theodulf of Orléans had applied it in his dogmatic work the *Libri Carolini*, cf. Ertl, Thomas: "Byzantinischer Bilderstreit und fränkische Nomentheorie. Imperiales Handeln und dialektisches Denken im Umfeld der Kaiserkrönung Karls des Großen". *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 40, 2006, pp. 13–42; Freeman, Ann (ed.): *Opus Caroli regis contra Synodum (Libri Carolini)*. (MGH Conc. Suppl. 2,1). Hahn: Hanover 1998, pp. 54–58; liber 4, c. 23, p. 547. Theodulf's impact on contemporary Frankish imperial concepts can hardly be overestimated. He might have even had a hand in the concrete proceedings, which led to Charlemagne's imperial coronation. Therefore, some of his relevant sources will be discussed below, see from n. 58.

hegemony of the other contemporary powers, especially Byzantium, and of the ancient Roman Empire, which were influential in the years around the turn of the century.²¹ Showing that imperial concepts and practices were an issue in Frankish political culture at this stage and that Charles or at least his learned advisors were conscious of problems revolving around this issue means to contradict the traditional judgement that Charles was surprised or unwilling to accept his new title. On the contrary, it helps to prove that by the year 800, imperial concepts were not only in the horizon of Frankish political culture but even a matter of creative appropriation. Consequently, Charlemagne's coronation seems less dependent on the very moment, or even the characters of the main protagonists, but on the structural, political and cultural constellations in this period. This, however, means to counter the outstanding singularity of the Roman events, which for instance James Bryce attributed to them.²²

Instead, the following remarks want to investigate into practices of imports and embargos of imperial concepts in the Frankish Kingdom around the turn of the century. The 780s and 90s appear to be crucial years for setting the course for the revival of the imperial institution in the West by the Franks. The article will therefore present political developments as well as contemporary statements which witness to an ongoing debate on imperial concepts and traditions in the Carolingian Empire. This aims at moving away from the rather contingent single event of the coronation by bringing processes and structural continuities, which led there, to the fore. In this context, the following remarks quite generally understand 'imperial rule' as a mode of direct and indirect hegemony over distinct, independent political and cultural entities.²³ This for the Franks new form of exercise of power exceeded the gentile and territorial horizon, which had become the common reference frame of the so-called Barbarian kingdoms after the

21 Pohl, Walter: "Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West: Introduction". In: Id. / Heydemann, Gerda: *Post Roman Transitions. Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West*. (Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 14). Brepols: Turnhout 2013, pp. 1–46.

22 Cf. n. 1.

23 Holtzmann, Robert: "Der Weltherrschaftsgedanke des mittelalterlichen Kaisertums und die Souveränität der europäischen Staaten". *Historische Zeitschrift* 159, 1939, pp. 251–264, here pp. 251–252.

dissolution of the Roman Empire in the West. The new plenitude of power not only enhanced Charlemagne's sphere of influence. It also entailed new resources for Carolingian self-presentation and brought about extended expectations of Frankish and non-Frankish protagonists towards the king.

The terms "import" and "embargo" used in the title of this contribution obviously originate from commercial language. In the present context, they serve to highlight that opting for or against imperial concepts was a deliberate choice that had a longer history within the Frankish kingdoms.²⁴ There were not only model cases of historical empires at hand, which the Franks could adopt or refuse. There were also external cultural and political entities involved, as we have already seen with regard to Papal Rome. This paper follows the leading assumption that Charles' *nomen imperatoris* was above all a relational title for the Carolingians.²⁵ It functioned to signal varying

24 This applies to both the political history and the history of political thought: already the Merovingian King Childeric (d. 481/82) had received the *paludamentum* and a treasure of 100 solidi paid by the Emperor. This regalia designated him as a confederate king of the Roman Empire (*foederatus rex*). Even though he still was a 'Barbarian' king, Childeric simultaneously reinforced his power by connecting it to imperial traditions, cf. Ewig, Eugen: *Die Merowinger und das Frankenreich*, 5th ed., Kohlhammer: Stuttgart 2006, pp. 78–79: "Siegelring, Fibel, Mantel und Münzschatz kennzeichneten den Vater Chlodwigs [i.e. Childeric] als Förderatenkönig und römischen Offizier. [...] Purpurtunica, Chlamys (langer Festmantel kaiserlicher Würdenträger, wohl mit Gold und Purpur durchwirkt) und Diadem bildeten die *vestis regia*, die Kaiser Anastasius 508 zugleich mit dem Recht der Akklamation verlieh". Pitz, Ernst: *Die griechisch-römische Ökumene und die drei Kulturen des Mittelalters. Geschichte des mediterranen Weltteils zwischen Atlantik und Indischem Ozean 270–812*. (Europa im Mittelalter 3). Akademie Verlag: Berlin 2001, pp. 251–253; Lebecq, Stéphane: "The Two Faces of King Childeric. History, Archaeology, Historiography". In: Noble, Thomas F. X. (ed.): *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*. (Rewriting Histories). Routledge: London 2006, pp. 327–344, pp. 331–336.

25 This purpose is to a certain extent reflected in the carefully chosen title used in the charters: *Karolus serenissimus augustus a deo coronatus magnus pacificus imperator Romanorum gubernans imperium, qui et per misericordiam dei rex Francorum et Langobardorum*, cf. note 116. Of course, the legal issues are predominant here. Nevertheless, the chosen form deliberately avoided styling Charles as *imperator Romanorum*, which had become a common expression in the West since the fourth century and which would have matched the gentle elements of Charlemagne's royal titles. Charles did not become the emperor

relationships between the Carolingian King and entities in and outside his direct sphere of influence. I, thus, understand the affirmative or critical reference to the imperial title or existing empires as a deliberate strategy of communication to organize or to modify these reciprocal relationships. In order to illustrate this, some remarks on the constellations of power in the West of the 8th century are due.

Charlemagne's Imperial Coronation – Expression of a Changed Topography of Power

The Roman events of 800 figure as an epochal watershed and a potential starting point of the Early Middle Ages in general.²⁶ Charlemagne's coronation focuses characteristic features of the era, for instance the newly-achieved importance of Germanic peoples and their realms as successors of a by then decomposed, but in a conceptual sense still influential Roman Empire. Therefore, modern historians have seen the imperial coronation of Charlemagne not only as the climax of his own reign, but also as that of a long-term emancipation process.²⁷ Under command of the Franks, a 'Barbarian West' established itself as a new political power confronting the hitherto predominant powers: that is the Roman papacy and the Byzantine Empire. By the 8th century, both suffered from internal struggles and continuous attacks from the outside by heathen peoples, such as the Bulgars, Avars and Saracens.²⁸

of the Romans, which would have emphasized the importance of the Roman citizens or their sovereign the pope. Instead, the wording interrelated the title with the Roman Empire, which Charlemagne controlled. This concept conveyed by the *intitulatio* used in imperial charters is in line with the presentation of the "Annals of Lorsch", see note 56. Classen, pp. 70–73; Classen, Peter: "Romanum gubernans imperium. Zur Vorgeschichte der Kaisertitulatur Karls des Großen". *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 9, 1952, pp. 103–121.

26 For the vast literature on the imperial coronation and its groundbreaking ramifications, see for instance Scharer, Anton: "Die Kaiserkrönung Karls des Großen 800". In: Scheibelreiter, Georg (ed.): *Höhepunkte des Mittelalters*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 2004, pp. 59–69; Kaufhold, pp. 11–17.

27 Kaufhold, pp. 12–13; Pohl, Walter: *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung und Integration*, 2nd ed., Kohlhammer: Stuttgart 2005, pp. 16–38.

28 Gantner, Clemens: "New Visions of Community in Ninth-Century Rome: The Impact of the Saracen Threat on the Papal World View". In: Pohl, Walter / Gantner, Clemens / Payne, Richard (eds.): *Visions of Community in the Post-*

On the other hand, Constantinople and Rome had defended their status as universal centres of Christendom in an otherwise atomized world of *gentes* and territories. Consequently, the high esteem and self-perception both the papacy and the Eastern Roman Emperor in Constantinople enjoyed were in contradiction to the pragmatic power they could actually exercise.

Contrasting with the situation of the established Christian powers, the Franks had come to rule the West.²⁹ Charlemagne continued a policy of

Roman World. The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100. Ashgate: Burlington 2012, pp. 403–421. Since the beginning of the 7th century, the Duchy and City of Rome were under constant threat of the expansion of the Lombard Kingdom. After the Lombards had conquered Pavia in 572, the city served as their capital. In the years to follow, they pushed forward into central and southern Italy, which was officially still under Byzantine rule but left on its own. Though they still were subjects of the Byzantine Emperor, this left the bishops of Rome in the uneasy situation to look for a new protecting power. Under their first Carolingian Kings, Pepin III and Charlemagne, the Franks finally took this position. Thereby the aspiring Carolingians dynasty broke the traditional Frankish-Lombard alliance and instead used the papacy's religious prestige in order to reinforce their young kingship. In 754, for instance, Pope Stephen II took refuge in the Frankish kingdom and had to ask for Frankish support against the Lombard king Aistulf. On this occasion, he reaffirmed the new Frankish King Pepin by anointing him and his sons as kings, cf. *Annales regni Francorum*, ad. a. 754, p. 13; Duchesne, Louis (ed.): *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, vol. 1. De Boccard: Paris 1955, no. 94: Stephanus II, chap. 24–27, pp. 447–448. On the alliance between the Carolingians and the papacy, see Engels, Odilo: "Zum päpstlich-fränkischen Bündnis im 8. Jahrhundert". In: Goetz, Hans-Werner / Berg, Dieter (eds.): *Ecclesia et regnum. FS Franz-Josef-Schmale*. Winkler: Bochum 1989, pp. 21–38; for the Carolingian use of ecclesiastical prestige, cf. Drews, Wolfram: *Die Karolinger und die Abbasiden von Bagdad. Legitimationsstrategien frühmittelalterlicher Herrscherdynastien im transkulturellen Vergleich.* (Europa im Mittelalter 12). Akademie Verlag: Berlin 2009, pp. 66–67.

29 Classen, p. 1: "Beide Papsttum und Kaisertum, verstanden sich als christliche, von Gott unmittelbar gesetzte Institutionen und zogen ihre Kraft aus den Überlieferungen des Imperium Romanum. Aber während das Papsttum in der verkümmerten Stadt Rom selbst an den Rand des Reiches gedrängt war, dafür aber weit über die Reichsgrenzen hinaus seine geistliche Autorität in der wachsenden lateinischen Kirche zu wahren und zu steigern vermochte, sah sich das Kaisertum seit dem 7. Jahrhundert faktisch auf einen kleinen Teil des alten Römischen Reiches beschränkt, es beherrschte ein Reich fast ausschließlich griechischer Sprache und Kultur. [...] Niemals gab es den zuletzt von Justinian

military expansion already his grandfather, Charles Martel (d. 741), and his father, Pepin (d. 768), had pursued. After a phase of decline during the last generations of the Merovingian dynasty, under the first Carolingians the Frankish Kingdom started to impose its rule over surrounding regions such as Thuringia, Frisia and Aquitaine. Ruled by dukes with king-like powers, the latter had gained relative independence from an only nominal Frankish hegemony. Charlemagne and his predecessors crushed these duchies and opened them to imminent Frankish rule. In 788, Charlemagne finished this process when he finally deposed the Bavarian Duke Tassilo III in a show trial, accusing his Agilofing cousin of perjury (*harisliz*) committed 25 years ago.³⁰ Allegedly, Tassilo had deserted Charles' father Pepin in 763, though according to the "Royal Frankish Annals" Tassilo had been the Frankish King's vassal since 757; as such, he would have been obliged to take part in the king's campaign against Aquitaine. Now in 788, Charles gathered Franks, Bavarians, Lombards and Saxons for the trial at Ingelheim. The assembly, even Tassilo's fellow Bavarians, made further allegations against him. The certainly carefully selected representatives of the *gentes*, who formed the new *regnum Francorum*, demanded capital punishment for treason and conspiracy with the Avars. Albeit, Charles showed mercy. Tassilo and his son Theodo were imprisoned in Jumièges, a monastery closely allied with the Carolingian family. The message of Tassilo's fall was evident: Franks, Bavarians, Lombards and even the only recently conquered Saxons had a share in the administration of the multi-gentile Frankish Kingdom. Harmony, consensus and participation could be attained, but fidelity towards the Carolingian King was indispensable to the vision of community.

With the displacement of Tassilo, duchies, which could claim independent lordship over single *gentes*, had ceased to exist.³¹ Instead, the Carolingians established control by introducing loyal members of a so-called

verwirklichten Anspruch auf die Universalherrschaft im ganzen Mittelmeerraum auf, vor allem nicht in Italien."

30 *Annales Regni Francorum*, ad a. 788, p. 80. Zehrfeld, Klaus: *Karl der Große gegen Herzog Tassilo III. von Bayern: Der Prozess vor dem Königsgesicht Ingelheim 788*. Pustet: Regensburg 2011.

31 Summarizing Steiger, Heinhard: *Die Ordnung der Welt. Eine Völkerrechtsgeschichte des karolingischen Zeitalters (741 bis 840)*. Böhlau: Cologne 2010, pp. 27–30.

Frankish Reichsaristokratie as counts, bishops and abbots or holders of other judicial and military services (*honores*). Royal envoys, *missi dominici*, safeguarded a close connection with the Frankish court. On visitation journeys, they held the assizes and double-checked that local officials fulfilled their duties towards the realm. Finally, they reported to the king, keeping him well informed of developments and problems in his vast and diverse empire.³² And yet, these practices of rulership should not be misunderstood as an attempt of strict equalization. In order to stabilize Carolingian hegemony, it was indispensable to respect local rationalities and elites. The Frankish aristocracy was by far more than a mere instrument in the hands of the Carolingian King; its members had to be regarded as the King's partners.³³ If feasible, the office of *missus dominicus* was given to an agent who already had bonds with the area (*missactium*) he was about to control. Hereby, local *magnates* could profit from a royal office by exercising power on behalf of the king. Material rewards and social prestige bound them to the throne. At the same time, the king assured himself of local power bases and fidelity of the elites.³⁴ Besides, peoples were still judged by their gentile laws, which Charlemagne codified, and if possible corrected but never replaced by a single Frankish law. In this manner, one must regard the *regnum Francorum* as a multi-ethnic, heterogeneous conglomerate of different legal spaces, which required a unifying cohesion.³⁵

32 Hannig, Jürgen: "Zentrale Kontrolle und regionale Machtbalance. Beobachtungen zum System der karolingischen Königsboten am Beispiel des Mittelrheingebietes". *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 66, 1984, pp. 1–46, pp. 2–7.

33 Airlie, Stuart: "Charlemagne and the Aristocracy. Captains and Kings". In: Story, Joana E. (ed.): *Charlemagne. Empire and Society*. Manchester University Press: Manchester 2006, pp. 90–102, here pp. 91–93.

34 See for instance, c. 34 of the "Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae": *Interdiximus ut omnes Saxones generaliter conventus publicos nec faciant, nisi forte missus noster de verbo nostro eos congregare fecerit; sed unusquisque comes in suo ministerio placita et iustitias faciat. Et hoc a sacerdotibus consideretur, ne aliter faciat*. Schwerin, Claudius von (ed.): *Leges Saxonum und Lex Thuringorum*. (MGH Font. iur. Germ. 4). Hahn: Leipzig 1918, pp. 43–44; Hannig, pp. 9–14.

35 On the religious character and the use of the church as an instrument to rule this multi-ethnic empire, Padberg, Lutz E. von: "Die Diskussion missionarischer Programme zur Zeit Karls des Großen". In: Godman, Peter / Jarnut, Jörg / Johaneck, Peter (eds.): *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung. Das Epos "Karolus Magnus et*

Carolingian Power and Cultural Politics

As Charlemagne waged war in the East against the non-Christian Saxons and Avars, the situation described above exacerbated. The Avar khagan surrendered in 796. Along with his people, he was baptized; the rich, over long time accrued Avar treasure, became Frankish booty and was distributed among the Christian princes in the West in order to augment Charlemagne's fame as spearhead of Christianity.³⁶ Already in 785 after years of fierce warfare, the *dux Saxonum* Widukind, leader of Saxon resistance against the Franks, surrendered and was baptized in the royal palace at Attigny. From a Frankish point of view, both heathen peoples could be regarded as subdued and led on a way to Christianity at the end of the 8th century.³⁷ As early as 774, Charlemagne had conquered the once allied Lombard Kingdom. He deposed and replaced King Desiderius. On this occasion, Charlemagne and his Frankish soldiers came to know the imperial cities of Pavia and Ravenna, where the antique Roman heritage was ever-present.³⁸ In the libraries of these north

Leo papa" und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799. Akademie Verlag: Berlin 2002, pp. 125–143, here pp. 141–143; Fuhrmann, 1981, pp. 429–437.

- 36 See for instance a letter by Charlemagne to the Mercian King Offa (d. 796), Dümmler, Ernst (ed.): *Epistolae Karolini aevi*. (MGH Epp. 4,2). Weidmann: Berlin 1895, Alcuin, ep. 100, pp. 144–146, esp. p. 146: *de thesauro humanarum rerum, quem dominus Iesus nobis gratuita pietate concessit, aliquid per metropolitanas civitates transmisiimus. Vestrae quoque dilectioni ad gaudium et gratiarum actiones Deo omnipotenti dirigere studuimus unum balteum et unum gladium Huniscum et duo pallia sirica; quatenus ubique in populo christiano divina predicetur clementia et nomen domini nostri Iesu Christi glorificetur in aeternum.*
- 37 Cf. *Annales Regni Francorum*, ad a. 785, p. 69–70; ad a. 795, p. 96: *etiam venerunt missi tudun, qui in gente et regnum Avarorum magnam potestatem habebat; qui dixerunt, quod idem tudun cum terra et populo suo se regi dedere vellet et eius ordinatione christianam fidem suscipere vellet*; ad a. 796, p. 98: *In eodem anno tudun secundum pollicitationem suam cum magna parte Avarorum ad regem venit, se cum populo suo et patria regi dedit; ipse et populus baptizatus*; Patzold, Steffen: "‘Einheit’ versus ‘Fraktionierung’: Zur symbolischen und institutionellen Integration des Frankenreichs im 8./9. Jahrhundert". In: Pohl / Gantner / Payne (as n. 28), pp. 375–390, p. 375.
- 38 Pohl 2013, pp. 2–3; Luchterhandt (as n. 39), p. 106: "Die Eroberung des Langobardenreichs im Sommer jenes Jahres [774] brachte auch die Begegnung mit den Eliten einer ethnisch heterogenen Gesellschaft, deren Lebensformen der

Italian cities and monasteries, the works of classical authors had survived. Late-Antique architecture such as the imperial basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna deeply impressed the Franks, which would prove influential for royal Frankish construction programmes in the future.³⁹ Columns – and in 801 even the late-antique equestrian statue which was said to portray the Ostrogothic King Theodoric –, were imported to Aachen as *spolia* from the 780s onwards.⁴⁰ These not only lent their splendour to the new Frankish capital, but – what is more important – also put the Frankish Kingdom itself into a reference frame of world history. By having access to artefacts originating from imperial display of power and by importing them into the centre of his reign, Charlemagne could prove his own significance in line with these historical role models.

Moreover, personnel helped to foster this process of an intensified emulation of antiquity for the sake of political culture. The first scholars leaving a lasting impact on the Frankish Court were Lombards.⁴¹ The scholars Paulinus of Aquileia, Peter of Pisa and a little later Paul the Deacon joined their new King Charlemagne in the aftermath of the fall of their Lombard Kingdom. They were the first to contribute to his glory by means of poetry; poetry, which

Spätantike noch näher standen als die der romanisierten Gebiete des Frankenreichs und deren Herrschaft trotz der politischen und wirtschaftlichen Umbrüche eine erstaunliche Kontinuität vorweisen konnte. [...] In Mailand, Pavia, Monza, Verona und Ravenna nahm das Königtum Paläste in Besitz, deren bisherige Eigentümer sich schon im 7. Jahrhundert den lokalen Führungsschichten akkulturiert und etliche Rituale, Symbole und Rechtstraditionen der römischen Welt adaptiert hatten.”

39 On this issue, see the contributions in Pohle, Frank (ed.): *Karl der Große, Charlemagne. Orte der Macht: Essays*. Sandstein Verlag: Dresden 2014, especially Luchterhandt, Manfred: “Rom und Aachen. Die Karolinger und der päpstliche Hof um 800”, pp. 104–113; Ranaldi, Antonella / Novara, Paola: “Karl der Große, Ravenna und Aachen”, pp. 114–121; Meckseper, Cord: “Antikenrezeption in der Baukunst Karls des Großen. Rückbezug oder Fortschreibung?”, pp. 160–169, for a critical assessment of Rome as a role model.

40 Cf. Gundlach, Wilhelm (ed.): *Codex Carolinus*. (MGH Epp. 3,1). Weidmann: Berlin 1892, pp. 476–657, Hadrian I, ep. 81, p. 614; Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 26, pp. 30–31.

41 Bullough, Donald A.: “Aula renovate”. In: Id. (ed.): *Carolingian Renewal. Sources and Heritage*. Manchester University Press: Manchester 1991, pp. 123–160, pp. 130–131.

was full of references and allusions to classical panegyrics. From the beginning, copying entire verses was common among Carolingian poets. Imitation of Vergil and Ovid would become one of the common features of Carolingian courtly poetry.⁴² As we shall see below, this not only helped to revive forms of antique poetry, it also allowed to parallel contemporary constellations with the glorious past of the Augustan Age. Ovid, Horace and Vergil had dedicated their epic poetry to the emperor, competed for his favour and had consequently helped to immortalize him. The international scholars and poets, who from the 770s onwards became increasingly aware of the Frankish King, acted similarly. The poetic *spolia* functioned as a bridge, which renewed the personal constellations of the Augustan Court in their own days. The use of Vergil and Ovid as role models for Carolingian poets also helped to parallelize the addressees of the panegyric verse, Augustus and Charlemagne.

Overall, under Charlemagne the *regnum Francorum* stretched from the Adria in the South to the Shores of the North Sea, and from the Ebro in the West to the Elbe. Annual warfare had brought its elites into contact with Christian and non-Christian *regna*. This had not only proved a relative dominance of the Frankish forces, but also familiarized the Franks with commodities and ideas beyond their rather restricted cultural horizon.⁴³ However, not only warfare increased the Frankish action scope. The 'diplomatic field' also mirrors that around the turn of the century, the Carolingians made use of more sophisticated practices of government. Where the Franks were not able to establish direct influence by conquest or military campaigns, they sent or received embassies. The Frankish court cultivated diplomatic relations with Christian courts and religious centres in Britain, Spain and Byzantium, but also with the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn Ar-Rašīd (d. 809).⁴⁴

42 Contreni, John Joseph: "Getting to know Virgil in the Carolingian Age: The Vita Publii Virgiliti". In: Garver, Valerie Louise / Phelan, Owen M. (eds.): *Rome and Religion in the Medieval World: Studies in Honor of Thomas F. X. Noble*. (Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West). Ashgate: Farnham 2014, pp. 21–45, pp. 22–28; Godman, Peter: *Poetry of the Carolingian*. Duckworth: London 1985, pp. 8–9.

43 Cf. Prielzel, Malte: "Lernen durch Krieg. Die Feldzüge Karls des Großen und die Weltsicht der politischen Elite". In: Pohle (as n. 39), pp. 58–65.

44 See for instance the account of the year 797/98 in the *Annales regni Francorum*, pp. 101–102.

Charlemagne pursued a policy of alliance or matrimony with the Mercian King Offa and Alfonso II of Asturias (d. 842). Exchange of presents loomed large in this context.⁴⁵ Even though the intended arrangements, for instance the marriages of Charlemagne's daughters, were scarcely put into practice and had little or no impact on the international relations, presents offered an excellent occasion for grandstanding. Received gifts could be interpreted as tokens of respectful appreciation or even as tributes of distant rulers, who acknowledged Frankish superiority.⁴⁶ The gifts themselves henceforth embodied and represented their exotic origin for the Frankish Court, which in this way could assure itself of its central position within a network of global relations.

In 802, the most prominent of these presents arrived at Aachen: it was the Asian elephant Abul Abbas. Hārūn Ar-Rašīd had given it to the Frankish delegation, which had left for Bagdad in 797. In his new environment Abul Abbas was a sensation, he accompanied the emperor on his journeys and therefore bestowed his exotic charisma to the Carolingian Court. Even though there is a good case to believe that the Frankish envoys Lantfried and Sigismund had asked for the elephant or that the Caliph had given it to Charlemagne as an act of generosity towards an equal or even inferior ruler, the Frankish contemporaries must have seen Abul Abbas as a token of Charlemagne's global

45 Cf. note 36. See also the contribution by Tobias Hoffmann in this volume.

46 The relations with King Alfonso II of Asturias are a good point in case here. In the 790s, his Christian kingdom in the North of the Iberian Peninsula suffered from annual military campaigns by the emirate of Córdoba. For this reason, Alfonso was looking for Frankish support. He sent envoys to Charlemagne (797/98) and his son Louis, who ruled the adjacent kingdom of Aquitaine. The Asturians came with gifts and Muslim captives, which were allegedly spoils of the war against the 'infidels'. Though there are no reliable indications that by doing so Alfonso accepted a subordinate role to Charlemagne or even became his vassal, the Frankish sources, Einhard in particular, suggest the opposite. Alfonso allegedly insisted being Charles' subordinate (*proprium suum*). Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 16, p. 19: *Auxit etiam gloriam regni sui quibusdam regibus ac gentibus per amicitiam sibi conciliatis. Adeo namque Hadefonsum Galleciae atque Asturicae regem sibi societate devinxit, ut is, cum ad eum vel litteras vel legatos mitteret, non aliter se apud illum quam proprium suum appellari iuberet.* Cf. *Annales Regni Francorum*, ad a. 798, p. 102; Pertz, Georg Heinrich (ed.): *Vita Hludowici Pii imperatoris*. (MGH SS 2). Hahn: Hanover 1829, pp. 604–648, ch. 8, p. 611; Bronisch, Alexander Pierre: "Asturien und das Frankenreich zur Zeit Karls des Großen". *Historisches Jahrbuch* 119, 1999, pp. 1–40.

rank. The elephant was among a number of political luxurious gifts that from a Frankish point of view attested their cultural pre-eminence.⁴⁷ When Abul Abbas died in 810, the official "Royal Frankish Annals" reported his death.⁴⁸

- 47 It is remarkable that on the flipside, Frankish gifts were not interpreted as tributes but used as christening gifts or similar distinctions for foreign rulers. According to this logic, Frankish legates and their gifts alike epitomized Frankish superiority at the foreign courts. Some anecdotes in Notker's late 9th century *Gesta Karoli* are instructive examples of this constellation. The monk of Saint Gall, who wrote on behalf of Charlemagne's great-grandson Charles III, repeatedly reports diplomatic missions. Even though the source value of the work is rather limited, its accounts reveal that the Franks assessed their own significance in situations of diplomatic contact. One story in chapter 9 of the second book, which deals with Charlemagne's warfare and 'foreign policy', tells us how a Frankish delegation visited the court of Hārūn Ar- Rašīd. The Caliph appeared rather unimpressed by the Frankish gifts but only asked to test the hounds he had asked for. Their chance comes immediately, when a lion terrorizes the peasant population. Despite the long journey, the Franks and their dogs do not hesitate to lead off the uneven fight and valiantly kill the beast. The antagonistic characterization of both opponents is telling. The 'Germanic' hounds and their Frankish handlers, whose swords have been tempered in Saxon blood (*gladiis in Saxonum duratis sanguine*), kill the 'Persian' lion. The incident opens Hārūn's eyes. He not only relates the bellicose might and willpower of the Frankish hounds and envoys directly to Charlemagne himself, but also decides to surrender the Holy Land to the Franks and to act as Charlemagne's governor (*advocatus / procurator*) only. In the fictitious anecdote Frankish virtues, that is valour and religious zeal, manifest, and ultimately justify Charlemagne's imperial rule: *Qui iussa complentes et acerrime advolantes, a Germanicis canibus Persicum leonem comprhensum, Yperboreę venę gladiis [in Saxonum] duratis pro sanguine peremerunt. Quo viso, nominis sui fortissimus heres Aaron (i.e. Hārūn), ex rebus minimis fortiozem Karolum deprehendens, his verbis in eius favorem prorupit: Nunc cognosco, quam sint vera, quę audivi de fratre meo Karolo, quia scilicet assiduitate venandi et infatigabili studio corpus et animam exercendi cuncta quę sub cęlo sunt, consuetudinem habet edomandi. [...] dabo quidem illam [i.e. the Promised Land] in eius potestatem, et ego advocatus eius ero super eam; ipse vero, quandocunque voluerit, vel sibi opportunissimum videtur, dirigat ad me legatos suos, et fidelissimum me procuratorem eiusdem provintię redituum inveniet.* Haefele, Hans F. (ed.): *Notker der Stammler. Taten Kaiser Karls des Großen (Notkeri Balbuli Gesta Karoli Magni imperatoris)*. (MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S. 12). Weidmann: Berlin 1959, liber 2, ch. 9, p. 64. Cf. Giese, Martina: "Kompetitive Aspekte höfischer Jagdaktivität im Frühmittelalter". In: Becher, Matthias / Plassmann, Alheydis (eds.): *Streit am Hof im Frühen Mittelalter*. (Super alta perennis. Studien zur Wirkung der Klassischen Antike 11). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2011, pp. 263–284, pp. 275–276; 280–281.
- 48 *Annales regni Francorum*, ad a. 810, p. 131.

Even though only few had access to these foreign objects, their presentation and circulation casted a truly imperial light on Charlemagne. Through the exchange of envoys, Charlemagne presented himself as a ruler who received valuable gifts or even tributes from princes all over the world, and who himself showed the imperial virtue of generosity (*largitas; liberalitas; magnitudo*) by bestowing rich gifts on them in return.⁴⁹ It is significant that in the years before and after Charlemagne's imperial coronation, this development reached a peak. The Frankish King thus made himself felt, where he was not able to conquer. Michael Borgolte outlines that during Charlemagne's rule the Franks dramatically spread their political horizon. Long-distance trade as a central aspect of intensified cultural contacts increased. The Franks sent and received embassies to and from Jerusalem and ecclesial princes of the Holy Land. Here, Charles supported Christian communities in Muslim ruled territories such as a Latin Monastery on Mount Olivet.⁵⁰ Around 808/10 he even established a community of 17 *sanctimoniales* there.⁵¹

All this supports the notion that one might speak of a Frankish Empire even before Charlemagne actually acquired the title. Not only had the Franks successfully expanded their sphere of direct and indirect influence through various means. They had also come into intensified contact with the cultural and political entities near and far. In Carolingian political culture, this new constellation instigated questions on the nature of the Frankish Kingdom. These questions were answered by adopting forms of imperial

49 Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 23, p. 26.

50 *Ibid.*, ch. 27, pp. 31–32: *Circa pauperes sustentandos et gratuitam liberalitatem, quam Greci eleimosinam vocant, devotissimus, ut qui non in patria solum et in suo regno id facere curaverit, verum trans maria in Syriam et Aegyptum atque Africam, Hierosolimis, Alexandriae atque Cartagini, ubi Christianos in paupertate vivere conpererat, penuriae illorum conpatiens pecuniam mittere solebat; ob hoc maxime transmarinorum regum amicitias expetens, ut Christianis sub eorum dominatu degentibus refrigerium aliquod ac relevatio proveniret.*

51 Borgolte, Michael: "Karl der Große. Ein Global Player?". In: Segelken, Barbara (ed.): *Kaiser und Kalifen. Karl der Große und die Mächte am Mittelmeer um 800*. Philipp von Zabern: Darmstadt 2014, pp. 16–23. Cf. McCormick, Michael: *Charlemagne's Survey of the Holy Land. Wealth, Personnel, and Buildings of a Mediterranean Church between Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Humanities). Dumbarton Oaks 2011, esp. pp. 77–91.

self-presentation. Ultimately, the Christmas events of the year 800 left no doubt: now there was a triad of powers. The Frankish King Charles and his 'capital' Aachen had to be considered as players on a global scale.⁵² This clearly was meant to be a convulsion of the established power relations between the Frankish West and Byzantium. The latter had to interpret the acquisition of the imperial title by the Franks as a usurpation and, therefore, as an act of immediate aggression.⁵³ Charles' biographer Einhard consequently set his account of the imperial coronation in the context of the confrontation between the Franks and the Byzantine Empire. He concluded his famous comment on Charlemagne's initial reluctance of his new imperial title by portraying the hostile reaction of the Eastern Roman Emperors (*Romani*).⁵⁴ According to the claim to universal power, which the imperial title implied, there could be one emperor only. From the Greeks' point of view, in the year 800 Empress Eirene held this office (792/97–802).⁵⁵ Even though, she had seized power by dethroning her own son and rightful emperor, Constantine VI (780–797). But although the rule of a woman was a novelty, which was not unchallenged in Byzantium, the imperial throne was by no means vacant.⁵⁶ Despite the fact that Charlemagne at no time used

52 Hauck, Karl: "Von einer spätantiken Randkultur zum karolingischen Europa". *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 1, 1967, pp. 3–93.

53 Ostrogorsky, George: *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates* (Byzantinisches Handbuch part. 1, vol. 2). Beck: Munich 1963, p. 155.

54 Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 28 p. 32: *Quo tempore imperatoris et augusti nomen accepit. Quod primo in tantum aversatus est, ut adfirmaret se eo die, quamvis praecipua festivitas esset, ecclesiam non intraturum, si pontificis consilium praescire potuisset. Invidiam tamen suscepti nominis, Romanis imperatoribus super hoc indignantibus, magna tulit patientia.* On Charlemagne's initial refusal of the new title, which is best understood as a topos of humility, as a *recusatio imperii* that Einhard borrowed from antique Lives of Emperors and hagiography, Kaufhold, p. 12.

55 Ohnsorge, Werner: "Das Kaisertum der Eirene und die Kaiserkrönung Karls des Großen". *Saeculum. Jahrbuch der Universalgeschichte* 14, 1963, pp. 221–247, here pp. 225–230.

56 This is exactly the impression contemporary Frankish sources, e.g. the "Annales Laureshamenses", tried to convey when they denigrated Irene's regiment as *femineum imperium*: *Annales Laureshamenses*, ad a. 801 c. 34 (MGH SS 1), p. 38. *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*

the imperial title to expand his reign or to justify war against Byzantium,⁵⁷ a multiplication of confined empires was per se inconceivable. Consequently, the Greeks had to understand the Frankish gambit as an unveiled attack on their supremacy. From Einhard's report, one can deduce that the acquisition of the imperial title further impaired the tense diplomatic relations between the East and the West. The conflict only ended in 812 when Eirene's successors took an interest in stabilizing their own precarious rule by securing their Western frontier, and Charlemagne himself aimed at securing his own succession.

By now, we have seen that at the end of the 8th century, there were decisive developments on the macrostructural level of power politics, which gave rise to the notion that the Frankish King de facto had achieved an imperial status. The outward relations of the *regnum Francorum*, both hostile and peaceful, improved in favour of the Franks at this time. Albeit, the intensified contact instigated the question of how this successful, yet at the same time young and heterogeneous empire would conceptually stabilize and position itself among the established powers. With this sketch as a background, I want to turn to individual but apparently influential utterances on this problem. In order to do so I am going to take a couple of contemporary works by Theodulf of Orléans (d. 821) as point of departure.

Theodulf of Orléans as an Arbiter of Frankish Imperial Concepts

Why might Charlemagne's Visigothic advisor Theodulf be a useful source for questions on Frankish imperial politics? Around the turn of the century, the bishop of Orléans, one of the main protagonists of the so-called Car-

sanctis patribus qui in ipso concilio aderant, seu reliquo christiano populo, ut ipsum Carolum regem Franchorum imperatorem nominare debuissent, qui ipsam Romam tenebat, ubi semper Caesaris sedere soliti erant, seu reliquas sedes quas ipse per Italiam seu Galliam nec non et Germaniam tenebat; quia Deus omnipotens has omnes sedes in potestate eius concessit, ideo iustum esse videbatur, ut ipse cum Dei adiutorio et universo christiano populo petente ipsum nomen aberet.

57 Classen, p. 91.

olingian Renaissance, was at the zenith of his power.⁵⁸ Spatially and conceptually close to the Frankish King, he was not only well-informed about the issues which moved the Carolingian Court and Realm. At that time, he was also a politically influential agent himself.⁵⁹ Therefore, his oeuvre lends itself as a highly informative source for anyone who wants to analyse concepts of lordship and their direct influence on political decision-making in the pre-800 period.

Born around 760 in the North of the Iberian Peninsula, it is safe to assume that Theodulf arrived in the Frankish Kingdom by the beginning of the 780s. He was most likely among the stream of Visigothic refugees who had endorsed the Frankish campaign of 778, and who had to bear the bitter consequences once Charles' expedition, which was directed against the Emirate of Córdoba, had failed at the city walls of Saragossa.⁶⁰ As a refugee – or expatriate (*exul*) how he programmatically labelled himself in one of his first poems to the Frankish King – he crossed the Pyrenees for the Frankish Kingdom, where his rise to power is virtually without paral-

58 On the much debated expression 'Carolingian renaissance', Staubach, Nikolaus: "‘Cultus divinus’ und karolingische Reform". *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18, 1984, pp. 546–581. In defence of the term, Godman, p. 80.

59 For a sketch of Theodulf's mobility, see Tigolet, Claire: "Les élites et la mobilité à l'époque carolingienne: L'exemple de Théodulfe d'Orléans". In: *Des sociétés en mouvement. Migrations et mobilité au Moyen Âge*. (Histoire ancienne et médiévale 104). Publications de la Sorbonne: Paris 2010, pp. 237–241; Alexandrenko, Nikolai A.: *The Poetry of Theodulf of Orléans. A Translation and Critical Study*. Tulane University: Ann Arbor 1970, pp. 3–8. The given English translations of Theodulf's poems are taken from here.

60 Freeman, Ann: "Theodulf of Orléans: A Visigoth at Charlemagne's Court". In: Fontaine, Jacques / Pellistrandi, Christine (eds.): *L'Europe héritière de l'Espagne wisigothique. Colloque international du C.N.R.S., tenu à la Fondation Singer-Polignac (Paris, 14–16 mai 1990)*. (Collection de la casa de Velázquez 35). Casa de Velázquez: Madrid 1992, pp. 185–194. On the whole, the failed Frankish military campaign against the Muslim-ruled Iberian Peninsula engulfed Charlemagne's reign in a crisis. It was consequently concealed during his lifetime. This painful memory must have meant an unfavourable starting condition for Theodulf, who only used to hint at the reasons for his presence in the Frankish Realm or his Iberian descent. Cf. Abel, Sigurd (ed.): *Jahrbücher des fränkischen Reiches unter Karl dem Großen*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. Duncker & Humblot: Leipzig, pp. 294–302; Jarnut, Jörg: "Chlodwig und Chlothar. Anmerkungen zu den Namen zweier Söhne Karls des Großen". *Francia* 12, 1984, pp. 247–253.

rels among Charles' non-Frankish advisors.⁶¹ Having claimed a place close to the king, he made his voice heard in the contemporary discourses and thereby partook in the formation of the political culture of the Carolingian Empire.⁶² Directly ordered by King Charles himself, he gave official opinions on theological issues that no doubt also comprised political overtones. This holds true for his statements on the *flilioque*-controversy, his explanation of the baptismal-ordo, which is introduced by a kind of Frankish social contract, or his involvement in the reform synods of 813, to name just a few.⁶³

Among Theodulf's politically influential utterances, the "Libri Carolini" as a polemically charged Frankish reaction to the Second Council of Nicaea of 787, which rehabilitated iconodule practices and proponents in the Byzantine church, are a good point in case to start with. Theodulf used this dogmatic debate as a forum to both promote his view on the Frankish King Charles and to ridicule and refute the Emperors residing in Constantinople. The concept of the "Libri Carolini" is an excellent example for the application of both concurrent strategies of absorption (import) and rejection (embargo) of imperial aspirations. The work as a whole presents Charlemagne, the Frankish King himself, as its author.⁶⁴ Not unlike

61 Theodulf, carmen 23 v 28. In: Dümmler, Ernst (ed.): *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini* 1. (MGH Poetae 1). Weidmann: Berlin 1881, pp. 480–482, p. 481.

62 On the genuine link between theology and politics in the Carolingian era, Nagel, Helmut: *Karl der Große und die theologischen Herausforderungen seiner Zeit. Zur Wechselwirkung zwischen Theologie und Politik im Zeitalter des großen Frankenherrschers*. (Freiburger Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 12). Peter Lang: Frankfurt 1998.

63 Theodulf, *Libellus de processione Spiritus sancti*. In: Willjung, Harald (ed.): *Das Konzil von Aachen 809*. (MGH LL Conc. Suppl. 2,2). Hahn: Hanover 1998, pp. 313–382; Theodulf, *De Ordine baptismi*. *Migne PL* 105, 1864, coll. 223–240; Cf. Haendler, Gert: *Epochen karolingischer Theologie. Eine Untersuchung über die karolingischen Gutachten zum byzantinischen Bilderstreit*. (Theologische Arbeiten 10). Evangelische Verlagsanstalt: Berlin 1958, pp. 99–101; Werminghoff, Albert (ed.): *Concilia aevi Karolini (742–842)*. (MGH LL Conc. 2,1). Hahn: Hanover 1906, pp. 273–285.

64 Meyvaert, Paul: "The Authorship of the 'Libri Carolini'. Observations Prompted by a Recent Book". *Revue bénédictine* 89, 1979, pp. 29–57; Id.: "Medieval Notions of Publication: The 'unpublished' Opus Caroli regis contra synodum and the Council of Frankfurt (794)". In: Id. (ed.): *The Art of Words. Bede and Theodulf*. (Variorum Collected Studies Series 913). Ashgate: Aldershot 2008,

Constantine the Great – and there is no doubt that the first Council of Nicaea 325 actually stood in the conceptual background of the Frankish response –, Charles is alarmed by heretical confusion, on which he is informed by the records of the Greek council. If we link the “*Libri Carolini*” and the subsequent Council of Frankfurt in 794, the role of the Frankish King as defender of the orthodox faith becomes clear. Already the opening *praefatio* clarifies that in this regard Charles is by no means restricted to his own kingdom. Whereas the “*Libri Carolini*” put argumentative effort in denying the Greek council's status as *ecumenical* by making it a Greek and thus local “problem”, the work's *intitulatio* introduced Charles and his mission as follows:⁶⁵

In nomine Domini et Salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi. Incipit opus inlustrissimi et excellentissimi seu spectabilis viri Caroli nutu Dei regis Francorum, Gallias, Germaniam Italiamque sive harum finitimas provintias opitulante regentis, contra synodum, que in partibus Graetiae pro adorandis imaginibus stolide et arroganter gesta est.

In the situation of Charlemagne's imperial coronation, which caused just another crisis with Byzantium, the “*Annals of Lorsch*” repeated this territorial motive as another proof of Charles' just claim to imperial power.⁶⁶ We might assume Theodulf as the paragon of this line of thought. Already at the end of the 780s, he linked the notion of Charlemagne's quasi-universal power, which became evident in his control over the former provinces of the Roman Empire, with the Frankish King's authority concerning dogmatic issues.⁶⁷ In contrast to Charles' comprehensive sphere of influence, the

pp. 78–89; Dahlhaus-Berg, Elisabeth: *Nova Antiquitas et Antiqua Novitas. Typologische Exegese und isidorianisches Geschichtsbild bei Theodulf von Orléans*. (Kölner Historische Abhandlungen 23). Böhlau: Cologne 1975, p. 216.

65 *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, praefatio, p. 97.

66 See n. 56.

67 On the manifest parallels between the diction of the “*Annals of Lorsch*” regarding the imperial coronation and Charlemagne's titling in the about ten years older “*Opus Caroli regis*”, Nelson, Janet L.: “The libera vox of Theodulf of Orléans”. In: Chandler, Cullen J. / Stofferahn, Steven (eds.): *Discovery and Distinction in the Early Middle Ages. Studies in Honor of John J. Contreni*. Western Michigan University. Medieval Institute Publications: Kalamazoo 2013, pp. 288–306, pp. 292–293. Like this already Classen, pp. 60–73. With regard to the form of the title already Caspar, Erich: “Das Papsttum unter frän-

Byzantine Emperor Constantine VI and his council are consistently talked down. Never is the present Emperor referred to by his title, his predecessor Constantine V is even explicitly only addressed as *rex*.⁶⁸ The only one Theodulf consistently calls *imperator* is Constantine the Great. Apart from continuous mocking, which is supposed to ridicule the arrogance of the Greeks and their absurd heretical ideas,⁶⁹ the “Opus Caroli” compares the claim for the veneration of images with the idolatrous image cult of the evil King / Emperor Nebuchadnezzar.⁷⁰

Empress Eirene also got her share. Under the heading *Quia mulier in synodo docere non debet, sicut Herene* [i.e. Eirene] *in eorum synodo fecisse legitur* (Opus Caroli III, c. 13), Theodulf attacks her for the dominant position she arrogated in the synod. While the Greek council fathers had celebrated her as the ‘new Helena’, Theodulf found just another role model for her.⁷¹ He not only quoted passages from the New Testament, among them 1 Cor. 14, 1 Tim. 2 or Luke 7, in order to claim a humble and passive position for women in church hierarchy, but at the end of the chapter Theodulf also invoked the negative example of queen Athaliah from the Old Testament (2 Kings 11 / 2 Chron 22).⁷² She was a suitable model (*typus*) to denigrate both Eirene and the decisions of the council. Athaliah was the daughter of the infamous King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, two outstanding paragons of blasphemy, who waged war against the true faith in Israel’s God YHWH. The biblical narrative tells us that Athaliah not only continued the idolatry of her parents, but that she also patronized her son Ahaziah. As queen mother, she used her power to lead her son and Israel astray promoting the cult of Baal.

kischer Herrschaft”. *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 54, 1935, pp. 132–266, p. 260–262.

68 *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, praefatio, p. 99. As a notorious iconoclast and initiator of the council of Hiereia 754, Constantine V functions as the other negative paragon of Byzantine extremes, which Theodulf contrasts with the Frankish *via regia* that is in perfect accord with the faith of the fathers.

69 *Ibid.*, liber 1, c. 1, p. 105: *I. De eo, quod Constantinus et Herena in suis scriptis dicunt: Per eum, qui conregnat nobis Deus*. Cf. the introduction by Ann Freeman, p. 24.

70 *Ibid.*, liber 3, c. 15, pp. 402–403.

71 *Ibid.*, liber 3, c. 13, pp. 385–391; Cf. Nelson, 2013, p. 294.

72 *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, liber 3, c. 13, pp. 390–391.

Besides the cautionary tales of this biblical villains, whom Theodulf presents as templates for the current Byzantine Emperors, the “Opus”, most notably book III chapter 15, uses the Greek council’s pleading for the cult of images as a stepping stone for a negative assessment of imperial practices in general. To Theodulf and the Franks, it is revealing that the emperors had their own effigies and images venerated. However, this imperial ceremony could by no means be an argument for the return to iconodule customs, as the fathers of Nicaea II had claimed, but was ultimately nothing but a proof of the blatant hubris of the Emperors.⁷³ Theodulf’s rhetoric drives an argumentative wedge between the first and second council of Nicaea.⁷⁴ It is said that the latter had nothing in common with its glorious forerunner: whereas in 325 the holy faith was safeguarded, the council of Constantine and his mother Eirene, who are by no means a new Constantine and Helena, is a menace to orthodoxy. In addition, there could be no talk of an ecumenical rank. Neither was there the need for a seventh council in salvation history, nor were there representatives of all churches present; after all, in 787 there had been no bishops of the Frankish Church.⁷⁵ Accordingly the “Libri Carolini” most of the time avoid the toponym “Nicaea” when speaking of this synod, but instead call it “Bythinian” (eight times).⁷⁶ Theodulf only refers to Nicaea II when he exposes it as a distorted picture of its glorious forerunner. Consequently, Theodulf aimed at disconnecting Eirene and her church council from the ecumenical tradition, which the Greeks themselves were so eager to demonstrate. Imperial orthodoxy was now in the hands of someone else; according to the “Opus Caroli”, this was the Frankish King Charlemagne.

On the whole the stance of the “Opus Caroli” towards the empire still existing in the East and its theological scope is best understood as an act of Frankish emancipation. It appears to be a form of “provincializing” the East. Theodulf, as the spokesman of Carolingian theology, makes the

73 Mayr-Harting, Henry: “Charlemagne’s Religion”. In: Godman / Jarnut / Johaneck (as n. 35), pp. 113–124, p. 116: “[...] allowing veneration of their own images, that is by Babylonian pride, [the Byzantine Emperors] had lost their power and entitlement to be Roman Emperors.”

74 *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, Introduction, p. 46; liber 4, c. 13, p. 519.

75 *Ibid.*, introduction, p. 46; liber 4, c. 13, p. 521; Dahlhaus-Berg, pp. 208–209.

76 *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, p. 128 n. 1.

about-face concerning the religious veneration of images a Greek ‘problem’ that is a spatially restricted heresy. More or less ten years before Charles’ own imperial coronation, the Franks not only critically assess and refuse Byzantine’s religious-dogmatic authority. In fact at this stage one can already perceive the tendency to imperialize Charles’ own standing and self-awareness in ecclesiastical regards. The treatise was therefore profoundly informed by relational-politics; and it was the Visigoth Theodulf as the mastermind behind this sweeping undertaking, who organized the relationship between the Frankish Kingdom and the Eastern Roman Empire.

Aside from statements requested by the king himself, Theodulf also used rather subtle channels to communicate his conceptions of Charles’ kingship – here the corpus of his poems is the place to look at. Theodulf’s key position generally allows getting insights into the discourses of his time, from where we can also highlight complementary or conflicting opinions on political thought. This also extends to the thematic complex of imperial rule.

On this issue, Theodulf conveys a rather differentiated, one might say ambiguous view. Still, it is safe to assume that he was able to advance his opinions to Charles – both in the longer period of the 780s and 90s as well as in the summer of 800 when Charles was leaving for Rome. Charlemagne’s itinerary is quite revealing in this context: before finally crossing the Alps and arriving at Rome on 24 November, Charles used the summer for a round trip to visit Centula (Saint-Riquier), the monastery of Saint Martin at Tours, and Orléans. The years before Charles had spent most of his time in the still troubled territories of the Saxon borderlands. His last visits to the Somme- and Loire regions date back to 797 and even 782.⁷⁷ As Charles seldom travelled *in Gallias*, his visit there must have had profound reasons. Most likely, he was conferring and preparing his journey to Rome with his at that time most influential advisors Angilbert and Alcuin, who were by that time abbots in Centula and Tours, and the bishop of Orléans, Theodulf.

77 It is even more instructive that the *Regesta Imperii* record almost no legal issues Charles had dealt with on his journey. As it seems the purpose of his visit was exclusively devoted to the preparation of the upcoming journey to Rome. The last visits in the area without even specifying the places properly have to be derived from the historiographical sources.

In line with scholars like Elisabeth Dahlhaus-Berg, Peter Brommer and Dieter Schaller, it is even safe to assume that Theodulf was the only one of these learned advisors to accompany Charles to Rome,⁷⁸ where he would intervene on behalf of Pope Leo III in the trial against him. Though there is no explicit evidence for Theodulf's stay in Rome in his own records, Theodulf's involvement in the Roman events can help to explain why Leo rewarded him with the *pallium*, the symbol of archiepiscopal dignities. We can infer this from a letter for Theodulf written by Alcuin.⁷⁹ In a letter (Ep. 225) dating from April 801, Alcuin, who himself had not joined the Frankish delegation but was well informed by his near student Wizo Candidus,⁸⁰ complimented Theodulf on the honour he had recently obtained. Faithful to Rome and the papacy, Alcuin was shocked by the news of Leo's overthrow and mutilation. Now that the affairs had been settled in favour of the pope, he expressed his thanks to Theodulf that the Visigoth had imposingly championed Leo's cause.⁸¹ As a rhetorically gifted advocate of the pope, Theodulf had apparently used the council (*conventu publico*), which had to judge the allegations against Leo, as a platform.⁸²

78 Dahlhaus-Berg, p. 11; Schaller, Dieter / Peter Brommer: "Art. Theodulf von Orléans". In: Wachinger, Burghart et. al. (eds.): *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 9. De Gruyter: Berlin 1995, cols. 764–772; here col. 765.

79 Alcuin, ep. 225, pp. 368–369.

80 On Wizo / Witto Candidus' life and close relation to Alcuin, Löwe, Heinz: "Zur Geschichte Wizos". *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 6 (1943), pp. 363–373; Close, Florence: "L'itinéraire de Candide Wizo. Un élément de datation des oeuvres anti-adoptianistes d'Alcuin? Note sur les Lettres 41 et 204 de la Correspondance d'Alcuin". *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 103.1 (2008), pp. 5–21.

81 RI n. 369–370, p. 164.

82 Alcuin, ep. 225, p. 368, ll. 16–21: *Maxime, quia filius noster Candidus, vester fidelis famulus, plurima bonitatis insignia nobis de vestrae beatitudinis nomine narrare solet: vel quam libera voce in conventu publico veritatis testimonia protulisses; vel quam honestis moribus inter maiores minoresque personas tuae beatitudinis foret conversatio; etiam quam pia et relegiosa sedulitate ecclesiastica coleres officia; vel qualiter impias disceptationes odio haberes*. On this letter and Theodulf's role in the trial against Leo III, Nelson, Janet L.: "The libera vox of Theodulf of Orléans". In: Chandler / Stofferahn (as n. 67), pp. 288–306, here pp. 292–294.

It seems that in return for his service, Theodulf received the honour of the archiepiscopal *pallium*. The diocese of Orléans was not enhanced in status, but remained to be the subject to the metropolis of Sens.⁸³ Consequently, Theodulf's *pallium* must be seen as a badge of personal distinction, which he earned as defender of the pope. Apparently, in the winter of 800/801, it was not only the Frankish King Charlemagne who reached the peak of his reign. It is revealing that the Visigoth, as by the time one of Charles' closest advisors, would return from Rome with the nominal rank of an archbishop.

The impression that Theodulf was in the centre of events is further corroborated by his poem entitled "Ad Regem" (Carmen 32). Theodulf was among a growing circle of poets who wrote panegyrics – a former prerogative of the Roman Emperors – to praise Charlemagne.⁸⁴ Skilled in the classics of the Augustan Age like no other, Theodulf acquired a reputation as

83 Though after 801 Theodulf was addressed as *Aurelianensis Ecclesiae archiepiscopus* in imperial charters and letters, the Frankish hierarchy still rated him as bishop. Among the witnesses of Charlemagne's last will, for instance, Theodulf does not occur in the first rank but is listed after the archbishops as the first of the bishops, cf. Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 33, p. 41. In the same way Theodulf had composed a treatise on the orthodox form of baptism in 812. As we can see from its letter of dedication, he did so on behalf of his metropolitane Magnus of Sens. Like other archbishops, Magnus had received Charlemagne's survey on this issue and redirected it to his learned subject Theodulf to answer the emperor's request. This procedure shows, however, that Theodulf and his diocese remained part of the see of Sens. Theodulf, ep. 24, pp. 533–534; Cf. Hahn, August (ed.): *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche*. Olms: Hildesheim 1962, p. 70.

84 It is telling that his earliest poetic work commissioned by, and addressed to the king is a *carmen figuratum* (carmen 23, pp. 480–482). After all, there is only a small number of Carolingian poems which belong to this sort of visual poetry. Theodulf chose a *carmen quadratum* Optantius Porphyrius had created for Constantine as a template for his own composition. In order to win the Frankish King's favour, Theodulf thus made reference to the famous Christian emperor and applied forms that invoked antique glory, cf. Schaller, Dieter: "Die karolingischen Figurengedichte des Cod. Bern. 212". In: Jauß, Hans Robert (ed.): *Medium aevum vivum. Festschrift für Walther Bulst*. Carl Winter: Heidelberg 1960, pp. 22–47, here pp. 25; 37–47; Ernst, Ulrich: *Carmen Figuratum. Geschichte des Figurengedichts von den antiken Ursprüngen bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*. (Pictura et poesis 1). Böhlau: Cologne 1991, pp. 188–187.

a court poet, which has sometimes eclipsed his political importance. However, like many of Theodulf's works addressed to the Carolingian Court, Carmen 32 is more than panegyric praise of the Frankish King, which had become so numerous by the 790s. Theodulf composed his "Ad Regem" as a welcome address for Charlemagne in a moment of uncertainty, between Leo's departure from Paderborn, where he had resorted after his Roman adversaries had tried to mutilate him, and Charles' arrival in Orléans in May 800. Theodulf applied the poem as a strategic instrument to set the course for the things to come by ascribing features of highest sovereignty to the Frankish King. With regard to imperial concepts, "Ad Regem" is important because it presents Charles as the one and only Champion of Christendom.

Your prosperity is the glory of the Christian people, to whom keeper and father you are. Keeper of treasures you are, avenger of sacrileges, donor of honours, whatever you do happens under the leadership of God.⁸⁵

Theodulf argues that Charles' and divine governance are but one. To this end the titles he chose weave a conceptually dense web, which puts Charlemagne in the frame of great emperors. Theodulf took the entire fifth verse from Prudentius' "Contra Symmachum", a fourth century apologetic poem against the restitution of paganism in Rome.⁸⁶ Here, the triad *Tutor opum es, vindex scelerum, largitor honorum* originally referred to Augustus, whom Prudentius portrays as the prototype of emperorship and the saviour of Roman commonwealth. In addition *scelus* – "wickedness" / "sacrilege" carries religious overtones and thus alluded to the religious authority of the emperor as the *pontifex maximus*. In the summer of 800, Theodulf obviously wanted to adopt this tone, but he went the extra mile. In Carmen 32, parallel to the panegyrics of Eusebius of Caesarea to his ideal or rather idealized Christian Emperor Constantine, Charles is the central authority of Christianity. His authority, but also his duties towards the

85 Theodulf, carmen 32, pp. 523–524, ll. 3–6: *Nam tua prosperitas decus est et gloria plebis Christicolae, cui tu tutor es atque pater. Tutor opum es, vindex scelerum, largitor honorum, Quaeque facis fiunt haec moderante deo.*

86 Tränkle, Hermann (ed.): *Prudentius. Contra Symmachum. Gegen Symmachus.* (Fontes Christiani 85). Brepols: Turnhout 2008, liber 2, pp. 196–197, ll. 429–440.

church exceed the Frankish *Reichskirche*. Both have become universal.⁸⁷ To emphasize this, Theodulf in his poem even poetically overrode the allegorical parallel between Saint Peter and the Roman Bishop as his vicar – a connection that Leo’s predecessors had forcefully tried to establish particularly in their correspondence with the Carolingians.⁸⁸ The present events in the other centres of the Christian world – Rome, Constantinople and Jerusalem – give rise to the notion that Charles might substitute not only the Emperor. Carmen 32 seems to suggest that he might even enter into a direct relationship with Saint Peter, the Prince of the Apostles:

For although Peter, in the Quirinian city [i.e. Rome], could have saved him [Leo] from malicious enemies and wild treacheries, he sent him to be saved by you, most merciful king, and he wishes that you function in his stead.⁸⁹

Theodulf did stop short explicitly calling Charlemagne *vicarius beati Petri*, a title and alliance the eighth-century popes had successfully claimed for themselves,⁹⁰ but l. 28 (*Teque sua voluit fungier ille vice*) is obviously in the same semantic field. With regard to the Frankish King’s comprehensive ecclesiastical status, Theodulf was well in line with the preeminent figure among Charlemagne’s advisors, Alcuin of York.⁹¹ Analogous to Theodulf’s poem, Alcuin’s letter from June 799 (Ep. 174) expressively shows that from his point of view, Charlemagne’s rule had achieved world-historical importance. As all other Christian sovereigns relevant for salvific history, that

87 Rzehulka, Ernst: *Theodulf, Bischof von Orléans, Abt der Klöster St. Benoît zu Fleury und St. Aignan in Orléans*. Wrocław 1875, p. 39.

88 See for example *Codex Carolinus*, epp. 6; 7; 45, pp. 488–493; 560–563; Clauß, Jan: “Die Salbung Pippins des Jüngeren in karolingischen Quellen vor dem Horizont biblischer Wahrnehmungsmuster”. *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 46, 2012, pp. 391–417, pp. 407–409.

89 Alexandrenko, p. 215; Theodulf, carmen 32, p. 524, ll. 25–28; *Nam salvare Petrus cum posset in urbe Quirina, Hostibus ex atris insidiisque feris, Hunc tibi salvandum, rex clementissime, misit, Teque sua voluit fungier ille vice*.

90 See for instance Alcuin’s titling of Leo III in n. 92.

91 For Alcuin’s influence on Charlemagne’s reign and Carolingian culture, see from the large body of literature the contributions in: Tresp, Ernst / Schmuki, Karl (eds.): *Alcuin von York und die geistige Grundlegung Europas. Akten der Tagung vom 30. September bis zum 2. Oktober 2004 in der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen*. (Monasterium Sancti Galli 5). Verlag am Klosterhof: St. Gallen 2010.

means the pope and the Roman *basileus*, had failed or vanished, it was up to the Frankish King to safeguard the welfare of the entire Christian world:

There have hitherto been three persons of greatest eminence in the world, namely the Pope, who rules the see of St. Peter, the chief of apostles, as his successor – and you have kindly informed me of what has happened to him; the second is the Emperor who holds sway over the second Rome – and common report has now made known how wickedly the governor of such an empire has been deposed, not by strangers but by his own people in his own city; the third is the throne on which our Lord Jesus Christ has placed you to rule over our Christian people, with greater power, clearer insight and more exalted royalty than the aforementioned dignitaries. On you alone the whole safety of the churches of Christ depends.⁹²

One can add that Alcuin's description of Constantine VI's situation not only seems to downplay the Byzantine Emperors' religious competence by calling him a *saecularis potentia*, who is in addition restricted to the Second Rome. Alcuin also strengthened Charlemagne's standing in the sacral sphere. Analogous to Theodulf, who portrayed Charlemagne as the chosen one of Saint Peter – virtually replacing the pope –, in Alcuin's figure of thought it is Christ himself who elected the Frankish King as the one and only champion of his people. All this was undoubtedly a confident acquisition, or maybe even a usurpation of comprehensive imperial privileges in ecclesiastical regards. In this sense, Charlemagne's rule has been rightly termed *theocratic*.⁹³ The royal advisors wrested notions of supremacy es-

92 Alcuin, ep. 174, pp. 287–289, here p. 288: *Nam tres personae in mundo altissime hucusque fuerunt: id est apostolica sublimitas, quae beati Petri principis apostolorum sedem vicario munere regere solet [...] Alia est imperialis dignitas et secundae Romae saecularis potentia; 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 dignitatibus potentia excellentiorem, sapientia clariorem, regni dignitate sublimiorem. Ecce in te solo tota salus ecclesiarum Christi inclinata recumbit.* Translation by Allott, Stephen: *Alcuin of York. c. A.D. 732 to 804. His Life and his Letters.* William Sessions: York 1974, p. 111.

93 Especially the Franks' conduct at councils mirrors the outstanding importance of Charlemagne prior to his imperial coronation: once more the council of Frankfurt of 794 is a good point in case here. Its canons, which are collected in form of a capitulary and therefore show the close link between the ecclesial and the secular sphere, not only demonstrate the active participation of the King, they

pecially in the sacral sphere from the traditional dignitaries and credited them to the Frankish King, instead.

There remains the question as to what extent we can also speak of embargos in the delicate moment prior to Charlemagne's imperial coronation. Are there elements of an imperial display of power which the Franks assessed negatively or perhaps even refused, as Theodulf had already done a decade earlier in his "Opus Caroli regis"? For this question, one can use again Carmen 32 ("Ad Regem") as point of departure: the Imperial cities of Rome and Constantinople are at best neutrally estimated. In this context, one should note that "Ad Regem" does not explicitly mention "Rome" as the site of the shocking events of Leo's overthrow, but instead uses the odd paraphrase *in urbe Quirina*.⁹⁴ Besides, the supremacy in worldly demands of the city of Rome is entirely bypassed. Even worse, Theodulf

even derive their authority and legal force from his acceptance. After 800 this status was enhanced even further. The five parallel reform councils of 813 held at Reims, Mainz, Chalon-sur-Saône, Tours, and Arles all convened on behalf of the emperor, who also stipulated their agendas. However, Charlemagne's power did not stop here. He did not only convoke the church meetings. The council fathers obediently asked the king for his approval. They considered their own decisions as recommendations, which the emperor himself could approve or reject, Fuhrmann, 1981, pp. 442–453; Cf. Alexandrenko, p. 11.

94 The expression makes visible Theodulf's (Iberian) cultural matrix. It is possible that Theodulf used the term because he had more detailed information on the assault on Leo III than we possess today. The attack took place on the Feast of Saint Mark (April 25) while the pope was celebrating the *litania maior* Procession. Perhaps the group around Paschalis and Campulus struck when the procession was near the *collis Quirinalis* one of the Seven Hills of Rome only a kilometre away from San Marco. However, Theodulf might have had something else in mind, as in l. 25 he did not refer to the hill but the entire city (*urbs*). Isidore of Seville had mentioned Quirinus in his "Etymologiae". In liber 8, c. 11 Quirinus, the mythical founder and first king of Rome, served as a negative example of the pagan practice of deifying mortal humans. Of course, Isidore depicted this as a void yet demonic form of manipulation. Theodulf's erudition in Isidore's works as well as the further Rome-critical context of Carmen 32 suggest that he might have intended this negative implication for the Eternal City as well. Lindsay, Wallace Martin (ed.): *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi etymologiarum sive originum*, vol. 1 (Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca oxoniensis). 3rd reprint. Oxford University Press: Oxford 1966, liber 8, c. 11.1–4, pp. 331–332.; for Theodulf's familiarity with Isidore's works, see Dahlhaus-Berg, *passim*.

as well as Alcuin portray the inhabitants of the First and Second Rome (= Constantinople) as vicious, treacherous, decadent and even heretic so that they extremely contrast with the pious Franks. Both overthrow their divinely ordained masters and therefore become accomplices of chaos. While Charles “consoles, soothes, shelters, honours, nourishes” not only Pope Leo,⁹⁵ but also the Christian people as a whole, whose order Charles ensures,⁹⁶ Theodulf parallels the citizens of Rome with Judas, the betrayer of God (*proditor [...] dei*). In order to show the collective dimensions of their crime, he goes on: “A seditious crowd followed Judas in this respect: he wanted the death of the Lord; the crowd the death of the head of the church.”⁹⁷ In these verses, Theodulf dramatically contrasts his expectations of Charlemagne with the subversive frenzy of the Roman citizens. While the latter follow in the footsteps of Judas and work for the destruction of the Christian church, Theodulf conceptionally tied together St. Peter and Charlemagne. With his panegyric “Ad Regem”, Theodulf thus called on the Frankish King to follow St. Peter's lead and to undo the blasphemous crimes the Romans had committed against their head (*Reddidit haec Petrus, quae Iudas abstulit ater*).

One might object to this argument that the Franks indeed held the Holy City of Rome in high esteem.⁹⁸ The graves of the Princes of the Apostles Peter and Paul could be revered here. The palaces, churches and triumphal arches of the Eternal City mirrored the ancient glory of Imperial Rome. One might retort that the radiance of imperial and sacral Rome had only been temporarily eclipsed by the *crimen majestatis* committed against the pope. After all, Charlemagne and his father Pepin had developed an interest in the city; the first Carolingian kings richly bestowed

95 Theodulf, carmen 32, p. 523, ll. 13–14: *Quem [Leo] bene suscepit tua, rex, miseratio clemens, Solatur, mulcet, perfovet, ornat, alit.*

96 *Ibid.*, p. 523, ll. 7–8: *Arma es pontificum, spes et defensio cleri, Per te pontifices iura sacrata tenent.*

97 *Ibid.*, p. 523, ll. 17–20: *Reddidit haec Petrus, quae Iudas abstulit ater, hic quia confessor, proditor ille dei est. Seditiosa cohors Iudam est hac parte secuta, Ille necem domini, praesulis ista volens; cf. Alexandrenko, p. 215.*

98 Schieffer, pp. 279–281.

Roman churches.⁹⁹ However, if one expands the search for Theodulf's appraisal of contemporary and ancient Rome to the entire corpus of his poems, it becomes clear that he did not share the fascination with the capital of the Roman Empire, which became so prevalent around the turn of the century among the Frankish elite.¹⁰⁰ On the contrary, in Carmen 7, Theodulf recalled the pagan past of the city. Rome had indeed devoted herself to Christ, but the poet inextricably linked the antique roots of the city to its abhorrent pagan traditions, its from a Christian stance demonic cults and the fratricide, which marked the birth of the city.¹⁰¹ Apparently, there was some kind of discourse on Frankish identity going on: should "foreign" agents, thoughts and goods, which more and more found their way into courtly culture, play a prominent role in the formation of an imperial Frankish identity, or should the Franks instead ward off such influence? Probably some of Charlemagne's habits, retained by Einhard in his biography, are not recorded incidentally. Concerning the royal cos-

99 Cf. Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 27, p. 32: *Colebat prae ceteris sacris et venerabilibus locis apud Romam ecclesiam beati Petri apostoli; in cuius donaria magna vis pecuniae tam in auro quam in argento necnon et gemmis ab illo congesta est.*

100 Another instance for the new Frankish sense of life inspired by Roman culture is the so-called Paderborn Epic. Composed shortly after Charlemagne's imperial coronation, it is imbued with the logic of Aachen as a second Rome. The King himself presides over its construction, cf. *Karolus magnus et Leo papa*. In: Dümmler, Ernst (ed.): *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini* 1. (MGH Poetae 1). Weidmann: Berlin 1881, pp. 366–379, ll. 92–98, p. 368: *Rex Karolus, caput orbis, amor populique decusque, Europae venerandus apex, pater optimus, heros, Augustus: sed et urbe potens, ubi Roma secunda Flore novo, ingenti, magna consurgit ad alta Mole, tholis muro praecelsis sidera tangens. Stat pius arce procul Karolus loca singula signans, Altaque disponens venturae moenia Romae.* Cf. Ratkowsitch, Christine: *Karolus Magnus – alter Aeneas, alter Martinus, alter Iustinus. Zu Intention und Datierung des 'Aachener Karls-epos'.* (Wiener Studien, Beiheft 24). Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Vienna 1997.

101 Theodulf, *De eo quod avarus adglomeratis diversis opibus satiari nequit*, pp. 460, ll. 49–54: *Urbsque prius, daemon, tua, iam nunc dedita Christo, Quod caput orbis ovans, quod pia mater habet, Fraternali aspersos quae temnens sanguine muros, Caelica regna petit, fana profana fugit, Haudque lupa eolit hunc alitum, sed virgine natum, Statque in apostolico robore fixa cluens.*

tume, Einhard reports that Charles used to wear the traditional style of dress, and leaving no doubt he states that this was according to Frankish fashion.¹⁰² Then, to render all misunderstanding impossible, Einhard explains to his readers how these typical Frankish garments looked like. It indeed appears to be adequate to speak of cultural embargoes at this point, as Einhard continues:

Foreign clothes as beautiful as they might have been he rejected. Indeed, he never accepted to don them. Only once in Rome respecting the wish of Pope Hadrian and a second time on the request of his successor Leo he put on a long Tunic and the Chlamys and also shoes of Roman fashion.¹⁰³

Of course, one should not overstate this isolated passage. However, assorted with further evidence such as Wahlafrid Strabo's (829) critical poem on the equestrian statue of Theoderic the Great, which Charles in an act of *imitatio* put in front of his imperial palace,¹⁰⁴ it becomes clear that there was indeed an inner-Frankish discourse on how to fend off external absorptions of this outstanding Frankish King. Around the turn of the century, Theodulf conveyed his stance on this issue as well. In his didactic poems, the Visigoth fought vices such as greed, judiciary corruption for the sake of material gain, or vain-loving showiness. Best known for this parenetic intention is Theodulf's famous poem on his journey as *missus dominicus* from 798.¹⁰⁵ Here he lists objects the people of *Septimania*, his *missactium*, offered him as bribes:

102 Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 23, p. 27: *Vestitu patrio, id est Francico, utebatur.*

103 *Ibid.*, p. 28: *Peregrina vero indumenta, quamvis pulcherrima, respuebat nec unquam eis indui patiebatur, excepto quod Romae semel Hadriano pontifice petente et iterum Leone successore eius supplicante longa tunica et clamide amictus, calceis quoque Romano more formatis induebatur.*

104 Epp, Verena: "499–799: Von Theoderich dem Großen zu Karl dem Großen". In: Godman / Jarnut / Johaneck (as n. 35), pp. 219–229; Thürlemann, Felix: "Die Bedeutung der Aachener Theoderich-Statue für Karl den Großen (801) und bei Walahfrid Strabo (829). Materialien zu einer Semiotik visueller Objekte im frühen Mittelalter". *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 59, 1977, pp. 25–65.

105 From the large body of literature on Theodulf's "Ad iudices", see for instance Fuhrmann, Manfred: "Philologische Bemerkungen zu Theodulfs Paraenesis ad iudices". In: Luig, Klaus / Liebs, Detlef (eds.): *Das Profil des Juristen in der europäischen Tradition. Symposium aus Anlass des 70. Geburtstages von*

One offered both crystal and gems from the East [...]. Another brought a large number of fine golden coins, which were struck with Arabic letters and characters, and coins of white silver imprinted with a Roman stamp [...].¹⁰⁶

Further attempts to corrupt the judge of Carmen 28 as well as the purity of the soul in another parenetic poem already cited (Carmen 7) describe Arab rugs, fine worked cups probably of Roman origins, the riches of the fantastic Island of Ceylon, gems, spices and ivory of India, fragrant from Assyria, the riches of Persia, Sheba, Baghdad and Cordoba.¹⁰⁷ The list could be endlessly pursued, as the first 31 verses of the poem are nothing but an enumeration of stunning riches hailing from near and far realms and fabled countries. The most striking object among the offered bribes in the “Contra Iudices”, however, is a vessel (*vas aliquod signis insigne vetustis*) depicting the twelve labours of the demigod Hercules, which he took on to ascend to the Olympus.¹⁰⁸ Theodulf shows his poetical genius to give a detailed description of the narrative of classical pagan mythology. But his *ekphrasis* – the vivid depiction of the ancient hero Hercules, who functioned as icon and paragon of the Roman emperors¹⁰⁹ – has a twist. As Lawrence Nees has shown in a persuasive study on this very passage of Theodulf’s poem, the poet transforms his antique literary templates to attack not only the heroic figure of Hercules, but also imperial Roman traditions which stand conceptually close to the myth of Hercules. Making some alterations

Franz Wieacker. Gremer: Ebelsbach 1980, pp. 257–277; Geary, Patrick J.: “Judicial Violence and Torture in the Carolingian Empire”. In: Karras, Ruth Mazo / Kaye, Joel B. / Matter, E. Ann (eds.): *Law and the Illicit in Medieval Europe*. (The Middle Ages Series). University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia 2008, pp. 79–88, here pp. 83–86.

106 Theodulf, carmen 28, p. 498, ll. 170–176: *Ariete quo tali mens male pulsa ruat. Hic et cristallum et gemmas promittit Eoas, Si faciam, alterius ut potiatur agris. Iste gravi numero nummos fert divitis auri, Quos Arabum sermo sive character arat, Aut quos argento Latius stilus inprimit albo, Si tamen adquirit predia, rura, domos*; Alexandrenko, p. 166.

107 Theodulf, carmen 7, pp. 460–462.

108 Theodulf, carmen 28, pp. 498–499, ll. 179–204.

109 For Hercule’s role in Roman ruler cult, cf. Bellen, Heinz: “Adventus Dei. Der Gegenwartsbezug in Vergils Darstellung der Geschichte von Cacus und Hercules. (Aen. VIII 184–275)”. *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 106.1, 1963, pp. 23–30.

on Virgil's pro-Augustan Epos the "Aeneis",¹¹⁰ Theodulf subtly transforms the ancient hero into a rather monstrous passion-ridden brute, whose life does not end with Hercules' ascent to heaven and *apotheosis*. While Emperor Commodus had himself depicted as Hercules at the end of the second century, Theodulf now disavowed him as a role model for the Frankish King, whose vigour the court poets praised and who would soon become emperor.

One is to wonder why Theodulf made a connection between all these foreign, but at the same time for Frankish recipients so highly attractive objects and deadly sins or practices, which endangered the Frankish Realm as a whole. Besides, many of the mentioned commodities stemmed from empires which threatened the Franks at that time, or are ascribed to fallen empires. Due to their bad press in the biblical narrative, which proved so influential for Charlemagne's reign, these empires such as Assyria, Babylon / Baghdad and Persia had a rather bad reputation for being wicked, idolatrous enemies of God's chosen people.¹¹¹ In this way in the decade before the imperial coronation, Theodulf repeatedly warned against what he saw as inherent vice of the Roman manner of imperial power and downside of unlimited supremacy: megalomaniac, blasphemous hubris. In Theodulf's poetry, the mentioned objects represented their cultural place of origin and thus had to be regarded as allusions to alien influence and political

110 Virgil, *Aeneid* 8, 185–275; Nees, Lawrence: *A Tainted Mantle. Hercules and the Classical Tradition at the Carolingian Court*. (The Middle Ages Series). University of Pennsylvania Press: Pennsylvania 1991, passim; pp. 28–30. For a critical assessment of Nees, see Staubach, Nikolaus: "Odysseus und Herkules in der karolingischen Kunst. II. Herkules an der "Cathedra Petri". In: Keller, Hagen (ed.): *Iconologia sacra. Mythos, Bildkunst und Dichtung in der Religions- und Sozialgeschichte Alteuropas: Festschrift für Karl Hauck zum 75. Geburtstag*. Walter de Gruyter: Berlin 1994, pp. 383–402.

111 Garrison, Marry: "The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an identity from Pippin to Charlemagne". In: Hen, Yitzhak / Innes, Matthew J. (eds.): *The Uses of the Past in the early Middle Ages*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2000, pp. 114–161; Rieber, Ernst: *Die Bedeutung alttestamentlicher Vorstellungen für das Herrscherbild Karls des Großen und seines Hofkreises*. University of Tübingen 1949; Kottje, Raymund: *Studien zum Einfluss des Alten Testaments auf Recht und Liturgie des Frühen Mittelalters. (6.-8. Jahrhundert)*. (Bonner historische Forschungen 23). Röhrscheid: Bonn 1964.

options, which were on the table when the Visigoth addressed his verse to the Carolingian Court.

On the other hand, there is also some evidence for positive reception of foreign agents and objects in the poetry of Theodulf. Albeit, the poet made sure to tie the transfer of commodities and tributes together with narratives of conversion or submission to Christianity. As the Frankish King Charles was the excellent embodiment of the Christian faith, the military subjugation of Saxons and Avars becomes equivalent to their Christianization in Theodulf's poems of the mid 790s. In his famous poem on the Carolingian Court "Ad Carolum Regem" (Carmen 25) from 796, Theodulf envisioned that other non-Christian peoples such as the Arabs, who by the time were ruling Theodulf's native land, were to follow the actual surrender of the Avars. According to this idea of universal expansion including pagan peoples from all over the world, the Frankish Kingdom became an empire, an intrinsically Christian one, however.¹¹²

Behold with joyous heart the manifold gifts which God has sent you from the realm of Pannonia. And so give pious thanks to almighty God on high, make offerings to Him generously, as you always have done. The heathen peoples come prepared to serve Christ; you call them to Him with urgent gestures. Behind the Huns with their braided hair come to Christ, once fierce savages, now humbled in the faith. Let them be accompanied by the Arabs. [...] Cordoba, send swiftly your long amassed treasures to Charlemagne who deserves all that is fine! As the Avars come, the Arabs and Nomads should come too, bowing neck and knee before the king's feet.¹¹³

In sum Theodulf's poems on political theory – or better political theology – feature a recurring pattern of what I have called imports and embargos: non-Christian contemporary influence on the Frankish ethos of rule (*Herrschaftsethos*) must be fought off because the blind adaption of imperial fashions to express Charles' supremacy will inevitably damage the Frankish body politic. On the other hand material revenues of military expansion may be "imported" and enjoyed, but only if they are assuredly marked as devotions to the king as embodiment of a Christian realm. In this way, Theodulf made sure to interpret material gains as tributes to Charles

112 On Alcuin's concern about the Christian character of Charlemagne's empire, expressed in the term *imperium Christianum*, Classen pp. 77–79.

113 Theodulf, carmen 25, p. 484, ll. 33–46; Godman, p. 153.

as a champion of Christianity. Luxury objects and gifts, whose centrality for political culture we have seen before and which added to the imperial radiance of the Carolingian Court, lost their foreign danger and instead proved the religious devotion of the Frankish King. Charles' advisors, the epistolary correspondence with Christian rulers as well as the "Annales Regni Francorum" emphasize that these spoils of Christian triumph were first and foremost reinvested for the benefit of the church. This argument allows once more turning to Carmen 32 and Theodulf's address to the king:

Hail blessed king, be strong through long times and may the one who is the supreme good grant to you all prosperous things. For your prosperity is the honor and glory of the Christian people, whose keeper and father you are.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Each subject area, which this article could only briefly touch upon, would allow for further insights in a process of 'imperialization' of Frankish politics and thought in the phase before the year 800. This article merely aimed at illustrating that there was indeed a discursive culture on issues such as Charles' highly symbolic building programme, recognition by and intensified contact with foreign realms, and last but not least Charles' privileges and obligations in the religious field. All these phenomena mutually influenced one another; they all reveal the striking importance of cultural contacts for the self-perception of the *regnum Francorum* around the turn of the century.

When Charles started his journey to Rome, many predominantly legal aspects of his future imperial rule were still unsettled.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, in the

114 Alexandrenko, p. 214.

115 This primarily concerns the relation towards Byzantium. The very few sources mirror that by the year 800 several options were on the table for the Franks. These could range from the total negation that there actually was an Emperor on the Byzantine throne, as did the "Annals of Lorsch", cf. n. 56, to the option of two emperors, each one with a delimited (Eastern or Western) power sphere, which would prove most viable in the long run. The title βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων, which emphasizes the continuity of the Roman Empire, already had a longer history in Byzantine literature and historiography but became official title of the Byzantine Emperors only after the issues with the Franks had been settled in 812, cf. Classen, pp. 94–97.

last decades of the 8th century various ideas, demands and reflections on the nature of Charles' present kingship had repeatedly been brought forward by making use of different communication strategies. Although one should abstain from calling these statements 'concepts' in the sense of elaborate or comprehensive models based on a restored (Roman) Emperorship, many of them convey the notion that Charles' reign had by this time long achieved a quasi-imperial quality. Charles and his contemporaries were well aware of the Frankish hegemony over geographically, culturally and ethnically distinct peoples. Even so, as the foreign powers triggering and inspiring Carolingian imperial aspirations posed a threat to Frankish identity at the same time, negotiations on the ethos of the Frankish reign became necessary. The central advisors, such as Theodulf, were on the one hand fascinated by this emergence on the stage of world history; on the other hand, they tried to direct this process of 'imperialization' into the right, which is into Christian channels. The intitulatio *Karolus serenissimus augustus a deo coronatus magnus pacificus imperator Romanorum gubernans imperium, qui et per misericordiam dei rex Francorum atque Langobardorum* is to be seen as an bundling epitome,¹¹⁶ which helped to display relationships Charles maintained in- and outside his direct sphere of influence.

In this sense, the imperial title was a relational instrument expressing a global significance, which by the grace of God the Frankish King had successfully claimed for himself. Charlemagne's advisors had already attributed imperial qualities to him in the two decades before the turn of the century. As we have seen in the case of Theodulf, this could simultaneously entail that the established powers were denied imperial power. Making use of political poetry, but also of dogmatic debate, Theodulf took pains to diminish the Byzantine Emperors' as well as the Papacy's authorities. In turn, he ascribed forms of imperial ritual, splendour and authority to his champion, Charlemagne. On Christmas Day of the year 800, the Frankish King was consequently prepared to fill a conceptual vacuum of imperial power, which his learned advisors had helped to create. They had done so by imports and embargos of imperial concepts.

116 Mühlbacher, Engelbert (ed.): *Die Urkunden der Karolinger*. (MGH DD Kar. 1). Hahn: Hannover 1906, p. 77; no. 197, p. 265.