

To Avoid Future Peril: Signs, Portents and Prophecy in the Carolingian world (ca. 771-840)

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the appropriation of divine authority and affirmation in Carolingian politics between 771 and 840, exploring several key questions about the perceived relationship between rulers, their realms, and God, as well as how God was understood, interpreted, and invoked politically. Such argumentation was understood as prophetic, since it relied upon claims to know God's mind and will, whether through direct inspiration or through the interpretation of signs and portents. This study argues that in order to understand the widespread use of prophetic authority throughout ninth-century Carolingian political debates, one must appreciate its development during the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. These rulers and the intellectual culture they fostered set the tone and established the limits of how far one could go in invoking the will of God within Carolingian politics. This dissertation explores the experimentation with performative claims of divine approval, guidance, or inspiration at the rulers' behest or in their names, and how such behavior created the perfect conditions for the use of prophetic claims to support and oppose the Carolingian political order. Offering further insight into motivations for the Carolingian reform movement, this study illuminates the fundamental importance of maintaining, and being seen to maintain, divine support within Frankish political thought. Only by understanding Charlemagne's comparably reserved and cautious claims of divine guidance, and Louis' desperate hunger for inspiration and divine direction, can one understand the dynamic transformation of political debate in the Frankish world in the ninth century.

For Madelyn

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Abbreviations

<i>AB</i>	<i>Annales Bertiniani</i> , F. Grat, J. Vielliard, S. Clémencet, L. Levillain (eds.), <i>Annales de Saint Bertin</i> (Paris, 1964)
<i>AF</i>	<i>Annales Fuldenses</i> , F. Kurze (ed.), <i>Annales fuldenses sive Annales regni francorum orientalis</i> , MGH SSRG 7 (Hanover, 1891)
<i>AG</i>	<i>Admonitio Generalis</i> 789, A. Boretius (ed.), MGH Cap. I, no. 22 (Hanover, 1883) pp. 53-62
<i>AP</i>	<i>Annales Petaviani</i> , G. Pertz (ed.), MGH SS I (Hanover, 1824) pp. 7-19
<i>ARF</i>	<i>Annales regni francorum</i> , F. Kurze (ed.), <i>Annales Regni Francorum inde ab a. 741. usque ad a. 829., qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi</i> , F. Kurze (ed.), MGH SSRG 6 (Hanover, 1895)
<i>AX</i>	<i>Annales Xantenses</i> , B. von Simson (ed.), <i>Annales Xantenses et Annales Vedastini</i> , MGH SSRG 12 (Hanover, 1909)
<i>CC</i>	<i>Codex Carolinus</i> , W. Gundlach (ed.), <i>Codex epistolaris Carolinus</i> , MGH Ep. III, pp. 469-657
<i>CCSL</i>	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
<i>CCCM</i>	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis
<i>CP</i>	<i>Concilium Parisiense</i> 829, A. Werminghoff (ed.), <i>Concilia aevi Karolini</i> , MGH Conc II, 2, pp. 605-680
<i>De litteris colendis</i>	<i>Epistola de litteris colendis</i> , MGH Cap. I no. 29, pp. 78-79
<i>EASE</i>	M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes, D. Scragg (eds.), <i>The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England</i> , 2 nd ed. (Oxford, 2013)
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
<i>Epistola generalis</i>	<i>Hludowici et Hlotharii Epistola Generalis</i> , E. Waitz (ed.), MGH Cap. II, no. 185 (Hanover, 1878) pp. 3-6
<i>HL</i>	Paul the Deacon, <i>Historia Langobardorum</i> , G. Waitz (ed.), MGH SSRG 48 (Hanover, 1878) pp. 49-242
<i>HR</i>	Paul the Deacon, <i>Historia Romana</i> , A. Crivellucci (ed.), <i>Pauli Diaconi Historia Romana</i> (Rome, 1914)

LEM	Paul the Deacon, <i>Liber de episcopis Mettensibus</i> , in D. Kempf (ed. and trans.), <i>Paul the Deacon: Liber de episcopis Mettensibus</i> (Paris, 2013)
MCK	R. McKitterick, <i>Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity</i> (Cambridge, 2008)
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
MGH Cap. I	A. Boretius (ed.), <i>Capitularia, Legum Sectio II, Capitularia regum francorum I</i> (Hanover, 1883); II A. Boretius, V. Krause (eds.), (Hanover, 1987)
MGH Conc.	A. Werminghoff (ed.), <i>Concilia, Legum Sectio III, Concilia: II</i> (Hanover, 1906–1908)
MGH Ep.	<i>Epistolae III–VII (= Epistolae merowingici et karolini aevi</i> (Hanover, 1892–1939)
MGH Poet.	E. Dümmmler, L. Traube, P. von Winterfeld, K. Strecker (eds.), <i>Poetae latini aevi carolini</i> (Hanover, 1881–1899)
MGH SS	<i>Scriptores in folio</i> , 30 vols. (Hanover, 1824–1924)
MGH SSRG	<i>Scriptores rerum germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi</i> , 63 vols. (Hanover, 1871–1987)
NCMH	R. McKitterick (ed.), <i>The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume II c. 700–c. 900</i> (Cambridge, 1995)
PL	J.-P. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia cursus completus, series Latina</i> , 221 vols. (Paris, 1841–1864)
<i>Quaestiunculae in Daniele</i>	Peter of Pisa, <i>Minor Questions on Daniele</i>
RARF	<i>Revised ARF</i> , F. Kurze (ed.), <i>Annales regni francorum unde ab. a 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales laurissenses maiores et Einhardi</i> , MGH SSRG 6 (Hanover, 1895)
RI	J. F. Böhmer, E. Mühlbacher, J. Lechner (eds.), <i>Regesta Imperii I. Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern 751–918</i> (Hildesheim, 1908)
RB	<i>Revue bénédictine</i>
<i>Vita Karoli</i>	Einhard, <i>Vita Karoli Magni</i> , in O. Holder-Egger (ed.), <i>Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni</i> , MGH SSRG 25 (Hanover, 1911)

Wattenbach-Levison-Löwe W. Wattenbach, W. Levison, H. Löwe, *Deutschlands
Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter. Vorzeit und Karolinger*,
vols. 1-6 (Weimar, 1952-1990).

As Saint Patrick said: 'because of the injustice of the king, there will be misfortune within his own family, dissent of wife as well as sons, famines among his peoples, pestilence, infertility of the land and also the sea. The fruit of the land will be struck by diverse storms, and [the unjust king] will be conquered by his enemies and driven from the kingdom.'

Cathwulf to Charlemagne, ca. 774

He who reads holy scriptures, reflects on ancient histories, and contemplates the way the world works will discover that kings, kingdoms, and peoples have been destroyed because of sins of this kind. And while powerful foreigners pillage unlawfully, our own people rightly perish.

Alcuin of York to King Aethelred I of Northumbria, ca. 793

We can conclude with greatest certainty from these external signs that we who do not please the Lord in all things internally are forced to bear such evils externally.

Charlemagne to Bishop Ghaerbald of Liège, ca. 807

'Why have you not acted to obey the word of God?' She responded, 'Lord, I am a worthless person, and I do not dare bring forward such things in public.' As a result of this, the interlocutor said, 'you will not enjoy your eyesight until you set forth these things before the king.' After many days she went into the presence of the king, she related everything, and she received eyesight.

Anonymous, *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman*, ca. 818

God himself did not say to you, neither through an angel, nor through a prophet: I regret having ordained things like this, just like He said to Samuel concerning Saul.

Archbishop Agobard of Lyons to Louis the Pious, *On the Division of the Empire*, ca. 829

What is the difference if the human race should be forewarned of the threatening wrath by the announcement of a man, an angel, or a star? Only this is necessary: that the appearance of the star I have seen is understood as not without meaning, but as warning mortals, so that by performing penance and praying for the mercy of the Lord they might strive to avoid the future danger.

Einhard to Louis the Pious, ca. 838

We must not fear anything except Him, the Creator of us and of that star. But as we are sinners and unrepentant, we cannot praise and wonder at His mercy enough, Who deigns to warn our ignorance with such signs. Because this portent designates me as well as all people generally, therefore let us do all things in our ability and knowledge to improve, lest perhaps we are found unworthy of the mercy for which we have already asked, prevented by our unrepentant state.

Louis the Pious, according to the Astronomer, *The Life of Emperor Louis*, ca. 840

Introduction

I. The Shape of this Study

Matthew Gillis has recently stated that “prophecy was always connected with political power in the Carolingian world.”¹ Similarly, Karl Ferdinand Werner argued that for early medieval rulers, “Gott war der erste Faktor jeder ‘Realpolitik.’”² But how was prophecy connected with political power? How did God figure into Carolingian political life? In this dissertation I will demonstrate how God and the claims to know or interpret His will became central features of Carolingian political discourse. This dissertation analyzes efforts to authorize political actions or views through claims of divine inspiration or through the interpretation of divine communication, itself conveyed through signs and portents. Focusing on the reigns of Charlemagne (d. 814) and Louis the Pious (d. 840), I explore how these Carolingian rulers and their elites claimed to interpret and pronounce the mind and will of God, and how such behavior fostered the creation of a dominant form of political discourse in the ninth century. In this dissertation I explore the intellectual environment surrounding Charlemagne and Louis the Pious in order to illuminate how the proclamations made by both rulers set the tone and established the limits of how far one could go in claiming to know the will of God within Carolingian political debate.

The foundations for this transformation were laid with the persistent efforts to claim divine support and reform society to achieve such divine support in Charlemagne’s reign.

¹ Gillis, *Heresy*, 191, citing Dutton, *Politics*.

² Werner, “Gott,” 108-109.

Scholars drawn to Charlemagne's court used claims to know God's will to advise and admonish the king just as evidence demonstrates Charlemagne's own openness to divine communication in many forms. By the 790s, Charlemagne and his elites used claims of divine inspiration and the ability to interpret portents to address crises and turn potential disasters into positive opportunities to reinforce Charlemagne's rule. From 814 to 829, Louis built upon Charles' successful use of the prophetic, strengthening many of his proclamations and decisions by claiming divine inspiration. By the second part of his reign, from 829 to his death in 840, Louis' public desire for divine inspiration and his anxiety about correctly performing God's will created the perfect conditions for prophetic interpretation to proliferate and ultimately be used in the rebellions against him. By the end of Louis' life in 840, as I will demonstrate, his legacy was defined by the prophetic and only by understanding this critical feature of Carolingian rulership can we begin to understand the political culture that had developed by the mid-ninth century. As a result of Charles' and Louis' reigns, the interpretation and appropriation of God's will was used by all sides in the political debates of the ninth century and beyond.

Defining the Prophetic

In order to understand the function of appropriating divine authority and affirmation in Carolingian political discourse, it is necessary to refine the phenomenon under investigation while casting a wide net across many varied sources. I have chosen to refer to this phenomenon as 'the prophetic' because, despite the differences inherent in the many expressions of this phenomenon of appropriation and interpretation, in the eighth- and ninth-

century sources their unifying feature remained the communication of God's will.³ Using the prophetic as the primary category of investigation has its difficulties because, as a literary scholar noted, "the task of sorting prophets from other verbal artists, or of distinguishing prophecy from other literature is, in some ways, futile."⁴ Approaching the prophetic as a "conglomeration of modes and traditions," a recent study of the prophetic in the Middle Ages has suggested that

if we look beyond the common but incomplete notion of prophecy as mere fortune-telling to its original meaning as 'speaking out' or 'speaking before' (before an audience physically rather than before an event temporally), we discover inspired speakers who act as mouthpieces for God (or gods), and for whom future events serve only tangentially in the project of informing and refining human behavior in the present. We also find a prophetic discourse that undergirds much of the political and social (as well as theological) ideology of the fifth through sixteenth centuries.⁵

By de-emphasizing but not dismissing the predictive aspect of the prophetic, and focusing on the claim to divine inspiration or revelation, we move closer to understanding the prophetic as it appears in the period under investigation. In her study of prophecy in Haimo of Auxerre, Sumi Shimahara reinforced this notion by demonstrating that Carolingian intellectuals used

³ For examples of eighth- and ninth-century authors reflecting the prophetic character of such appropriation and interpretation, see Cathwulf, *Epistola*; Alcuin, *Epistolae* 108 and 122; Agobard, *de divisione imperii*; Einhard, Ep. 40; Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*.

⁴ Becker, "Twain," 131. This difficulty is plainly apparent in a recent study of medieval prophecy, E. Ridsen (et al.) "Introduction," 3, specifically in the attempt to demarcate a "prophetic 'mode'" as "a claim of special authority or access to privileged or sacred information; predictive language; 'authorizing devices' that may include obscurity, pseudonymity, style patterned after divine or magical sources; adaptability, or encouragement to reinterpret or revise interpretation to fit current needs; a slippage of genre afforded by the intersection of history, epic, homily, saint's life, and sometimes even romance and drama—the viability of prophecy in 'literary' texts depended on such flexibility to allow subversion (of destructive practices) and stabilization (of salvific ones) to work simultaneously."

⁵ Ridsen (et al.), "Introduction," 3.

the same language to describe prophets, preachers, and scriptural interpreters.⁶ Her arguments are confirmed by early medieval reference works, such as the *Liber Glossarum*—a massive glossary that circulated widely throughout the major Carolingian libraries by the reign of Charlemagne—that defined *propheta* as *predictor* or *praedicator*, and defined prophecy as “the revelation of hidden things of the past or present or future as a result of divine inspiration.”⁷ Balancing the vatic with the interpretive, the prophetic in the Carolingian world was a means of revealing otherwise hidden knowledge by experiencing divine inspiration or interpreting signs.⁸

⁶ Shimahara, “Prophétiser,” 58-59.

⁷ *Liber glossarum*, PR2002; PR2008: Prophetia [Profetia] est rerum latencium preteritarum uel presencium uel futurarum ex diuina inspiratione manifestatio. This distinction resonates with the definition of the prophetic in other influential, encyclopedic works circulating in Carolingian scriptoria, namely Isidore of Seville’s (d. 636) *Etymologiae* and Hrabanus Maurus’ (d. 856) *De Universo*. Hrabanus preserved Isidore’s entire definition of prophets and prophecy in his later work, which explained that “those whom the pagans called *vates*, these are called *prophetas* by us, like ‘pre-speakers’ (*praefatores*), because they speak (*praedicare*) about the past and prophesy about future things. Those known to us as prophets (*prophetae*), were called ‘seers’ (*videntes*), because they saw those things that others do not see, and foresee things that hidden in mystery. That is why it has been written about Samuel: Let us go to the seer (*videntem*) (1 Kings 9:9). That is why Isaiah said: I saw (*videre*) the Lord seated upon a throne, raised up on high (Isaiah 6:1). Also, that is why Ezechiel said: the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God (Ezechiel 1:1).” Isidore, *Etymologiae*, VII.viii.1-3: Quos gentilitas vates appellant, hos nostri prophetas vocant, quasi praefatores, quia porro fantur et de futuris praedicunt. Qui autem [a] nobis prophetae, in Veteri Testamento videntes appellabantur, quia videbant ea quae ceteri non videbant, et praespiciebant quae in mysterio abscondita erant. Hinc est quod scriptum est in Samuele: Eamus ad videntem. Hinc Esaias: Vidi, inquit, Dominum sedentem super thronum excelsum et elevatum. Et Ezechiel: Aperti sunt caeli et vidi visiones Dei. Cf. Hrabanus Maurus, *Universo*, cols. 71B-72A.

⁸ For several examples and variations throughout the period under investigation and beyond, see Alcuin, Ep. 19, 55: Vos maritima habitatis, unde pestis primo ingruit. In nobis impletum est, quod olim per prophetam *praedictum* est. Alcuin, Ep. 58, 102: Et esse pueros, de quibus antea ille per prophetam predixit. Alcuin, Ep. 88, 132: Et in lectionis studio die noctuque desudans quaere Christum in litteris prophetarum praedictum, et in evangelica ostentum auctoritate. Alcuin, Ep. 97, 141: Hoc de te tuoque itinere prophetatum esse, quis dubitat? Si Christum sibilla eiusque labores praedixit venturum, cur non Naso Homerum eiusque itinera praececinat? Alcuin, Ep. 135, 204: Nam corporali visione rex cernebat in pariete litteras perscriptas, cuius nec spiritus informatus fuit, ut eas, licet videret, legere potuisset, nec mens inluminata intellegere eas. Alcuin, Ep. 138, 217: Numquid Deo abscondi possunt scelera nostra, qui omnia videt, novit et considerat? Ab homine possumus abscondere, quae agimus, et non Deo. Nonne David praesente Nathan propheta, qui se arguebat pro suo peccato. Gregory IV, Ep. 17, 230: Vos autem fidelem et cultorem pietatis pontificem dehonestandum praedictis absque iniuria sedis, quod omnino falsum est. Agobard, Ep. 18, 234-235: Et multa huiusmodi ridiculosa et fantastica, quarum inventoribus congruere mihi videntur illa, quae Dominus per Iezechielem prophetam adversus falsos

This conflation of categories (vatic and rational) that came to define the prophetic in the Carolingian period was crystallized by a letter from Einhard to Louis the Pious. In the letter, commenting on the sudden appearance of a supernova, Einhard asked:

what is the difference, if the human race should be forewarned of the threatening wrath by the announcement of a man, an angel or a star? Only this is necessary, that the appearance of the star I have seen is understood as not without meaning, but as warning mortals, so that by performing penance and praying for the mercy of the Lord they might strive to avoid the future danger.⁹

Einhard equated divinely-inspired, human utterances, angelic visitations, or manifestations of the natural world as means of divine communication. Further, he compared such communication, and his own role in interpreting the nova, with the warnings spoken by the biblical prophets Jonah and Jeremiah.¹⁰ Einhard's conclusion was that his interpretation of the nova as divine communication was decidedly prophetic, and this same conclusion resonates throughout the eighth- and ninth-century sources under investigation in this dissertation. Just as this emphasis on the interpretation or revelation of divine communication came to unify

prophetas loquitur dicens: 'Vae prophetis insipientibus qui sequuntur spiritum suum et nihil vident.' Et post pauca: 'Vident vana et divinant mendatium dicentes, ait Dominus, cum Dominus non miserit eos et perseveraverunt confirmare sermonem. Numquid non visionem cassam vidistis et divinationem mendacem loquuti estis et dicitis, ait Dominus, cum ego non sim loquutus. Hrabanus, *Epistola* 31, MGH Ep. V, p. 460: Si autem aliquis mihi opponit ac dicit: quomodo eveniunt illa, quae illi divini et prophetae falsi praedicunt futura? *Concilium Meldense-Parisiense* a. 845-846, 396: Ut Dominus per Moysen praeceperat, tubis clangere, id est manifestissima praedicatione voluntatem Domini insonare; postquam ab ipsis pia memoriae Hludowici divini augusti temporibus ecclesia diversis et adversis ceperat vexationibus fatigari, in qua, ut propheta longe multo ante defleverat. *Capitula Pistensia* a.862, 303: Sed diabolo satagente supervenientibus perturbationibus tam a paganis, quam a nominatenus christianis miserabiliter excitatis, incepta bona defecerunt, et in tantum in hoc regno mala horribilia increverunt, ut in nobis videamus et sentiamus completum, quod olim est per prophetam praedictum.

⁹ Einhard, Ep. 40, 130: Quid enim interest, utrum homine vel angelo vel stella nuntiante inminens ira generi predicetur humano? Hoc tantum est necessarium, ut intelligatur supervacuum non fuisse sideris visi apparitionem, sed admonuisse mortales, ut penitendo et Domini misericordiam invocando futurum certent declinare periculum.

¹⁰ Einhard, Ep. 40, 130.

the understanding of the prophetic in the Carolingian period, it encompassed predictive and prognostic efforts, *parrhesia*, calls for reform, and more besides. These categories were fluid and flexible, and proved difficult for any individual or group to monopolize. Nevertheless, the kings, emperors, bishops, and others who used the prophetic found in it a powerful voice at every level of Carolingian political discourse.

Scholarly Approaches to the Prophetic in the Carolingian Period

There is no deep historiographic field for the prophetic in the Carolingian period. Nevertheless, having established what the prophetic is, I will now turn to how it has been studied as part of the politics during the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. I intend to use the category of the prophetic to reframe and reinterpret the transformation of Carolingian political discourse. As a new category, the prophetic has been touched upon but not yet centralized within early medieval scholarship. In recent years, it has been engaged with more frequently as scholars of Carolingian Francia have begun to address the problem David Ganz highlighted when he argued that Louis the Pious' reign could not be understood without considering "ideology to be evidence at least as important as Realpolitik."¹¹ Paul Dutton and Mayke de Jong have sought to address this issue and have become the leaders in the debates regarding the appropriation and invocation of the divine in Carolingian politics.¹² While both Dutton and de Jong acknowledge that the sources for eighth- and ninth-century

¹¹ Ganz, "Epitaphium Arsenii," 537-550.

¹² Paul Dutton's contribution is exemplified by his monograph, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln, 1994), as well as his collected essays in *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York, 2004). Mayke de Jong's contribution comes primarily in her monograph, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814 – 840* (Cambridge, 2010).

politics demonstrate that, in Karl Ferdinand Werner's words, for early medieval rulers "Gott war der erste Faktor jeder 'Realpolitik,'" ¹³ their emphases on political dreaming or admonition and criticism in Louis's reign focuses their interests on a narrow range of the expressions of the prophetic.

Although Dutton's emphasis on dreams and visions and de Jong's and her students' focus on admonition and *parrhesia* have established the main lines of argument in scholarship regarding the prophetic, their approaches have placed unhelpful limitations on the discussion as well. ¹⁴ Influenced by other scholarship on prophecy and by the larger and more dynamic sources for Louis the Pious' reign, in scholarship the prophetic has been inescapably linked to times of civil unrest or as merely another form of *parrhesia* in the Carolingian period. ¹⁵ For example, while Dutton argued that Louis the Pious' openness to criticism from sources claiming to reveal God's will increased criticism of the ruler, de Jong and others have argued that such voices of prophetic dissent were infrequent and had only marginal political impact. ¹⁶ By focusing on the connection of prophecy to conflict and by allowing the evidence for Louis' reign to color everything that came before, these discussions have illuminated the most dramatic uses of the prophetic and their consequences. This dissertation complements this discussion by analyzing the origins and antecedents of Louis'

¹³ Werner, "Gott," 108-109.

¹⁴ For recent examples of the debates informed by the approaches of these scholars to the prophetic, see Booker, "Murmurs;" Shimahara, "Prophétiser," 51-80; van Renswoude, "The Word," 379-399.

¹⁵ For the first point, see Dutton, *The Politics*, 124, citing Thomas, *Religion*, 425, and the influence of this more recently in Gillis, *Heresy*, 191. For the second point, see Booker, *Convictions* and the surveys of early medieval *parrhesia* in Van Renswoude, "License to Speak," and de Jong, "Admonitio," 315-338.

¹⁶ Dutton, *The Politics*, 78-79; de Jong, *Penitential*, 136-137, recalling Levison, "Politik," 229-246.

own prophetic claims in his father's reign and by situating the dreams, visions, royal admonitions, and correction within the varied array of interwoven expressions of the prophetic.

Another longstanding field of inquiry sensitive to the ideology emphasized by David Ganz focuses on the theocratic aspects of Carolingian rulership.¹⁷ While far from the first rulers in the Latin West to embellish their authority with spiritual claims, the Carolingian period produced much discussion of the divine origins of royal authority as well as the responsibilities such origins imposed.¹⁸ Scholars in this field have explored how Charlemagne and Louis were compared to biblical rulers, tasked with the spiritual guidance of their realm, and responsible for its salvation and that of its members.¹⁹ These royal models and responsibilities laid the groundwork for the royal use of the prophetic, also opening the way for the varied means of claiming divine approval and assistance, and for interpreting divine judgement and guidance.

In his seminal essay on early medieval historical writing, Karl Ferdinand Werner argued that perceptions of royal dependence on God and responsibility to lead their peoples and realms directed rulers to rely upon historians and other advisors to interpret signs from

¹⁷ For an excellent survey of the scholarship, see Patzold, "Argument," 279-300. Compare Patzold's position with those in the collected volume, Erkens (ed.), *Königtum*.

¹⁸ While the starting point remains H. H. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, see also more recent appraisals including de Jong, "Discourse," 87-102; H. H. Anton, "Königsvorstellungen," 270-330; Suchan, "Kirchenpolitik," 1-27.

¹⁹ For a survey of the comparison between Carolingian rulers and biblical kings, see Garipzanov, *Symbolic*; Erkens' chapter "Davidkönigtum und karolingisches Kaisertum" in *Herrschersakralität*; de Jong, "Empire," 191-226. For an overview of the study of royal responsibilities for salvation and the church in the early middle ages, see the developing work in M. de Jong's article series, de Jong, "State," 241-254; *eadem*, "Ecclesia," 113-126; *eadem*, "Church," 103-135. Compare de Jong's conclusions with the earlier and more royally focused approach of Fried, "Herrschaftsverband," 1-43 and the criticisms of Fried's approach in Goetz, "Regnum," 110-189.

God and reveal His will.²⁰ Despite Werner's convincing arguments, the dramatic increase in the interest in, and interpretation of, signs and portents in eighth- and ninth-century Carolingian historical writing has garnered relatively little attention.²¹ Below I will demonstrate how the developing language of signs and portents in historiography acted as a sort of barometer, growing in parallel with royal interest in divine guidance and affirmation, and that such interest also created opportunities to interpret God's mind and will within political discourse.

The last scholarly field that indirectly illuminates the Carolingian claims of divine affirmation and revelation is focused on the reform movements often referred to as the Carolingian Renaissance.²² While J. J. Contreni has cautioned that Carolingian reforms should be understood as "pulling together preexisting developments and harnessing them to the general idea of societal reform," it remains true that these efforts often produced innovative solutions to the problems faced by Frankish elites.²³ These reform efforts, as summarized by

²⁰ Werner, "Historiograph," 106.

²¹ The study of signs and portents in historiography has remained very isolated and focused, rarely establishing the place of such features of historical texts within broader discourses. An attempt to use modern climatology and science to understand such portents can be seen in Dutton's collaborative article with M. McCormick, P. Dutton, and P. Mayewski, "Volcanoes," 865-895 and Dutton, "Observations," 167-180; and his chapters "Of Carolingian Kings and their Stars," in *idem*, *Mustache*, pp. 93-128, and "Civil Wars and Worse" in *Politics*, 113-156. Compare Dutton's approach with the study of 'natural exegesis' discussed by M. C. Ferrari, "Aura," 163-177. For a more superficial reading of Augustinian approaches to interpreting theophanic manifestations in history see Foot, "Plenty," 15-41. Compare Foot's agnosticism regarding the interpretation of signs and portents with Scott Ashley's similar approach in "Symbols," 34-50. Finally, although not the primary focus of her article, Mary Garrison analyzed Alcuin's biblical frame for interpreting signs and portents, among other things, in Garrison, "Bible," 68-84.

²² J. J. Contreni has offered the best foundational surveys of Carolingian reforms in "Pursuit," 106-141 and *idem*, "Carolingian Renaissance," 709-757. The other classic introduction remains Brown, "Introduction," 1-51. For a better understanding of the scope of these reform efforts, see Patzold, "Veränderung," 63-99. Rosamond McKitterick explored the critical connections between the ruling family and the reforms in her early monograph *Frankish Church*.

²³ Contreni, "Education," 9-25.

Rosamond McKitterick for Charles' reign under the contemporary term *Correctio*, included "the reformation and reconfiguration of all peoples under Charlemagne's rule to create a Christian realm in its institutional structures, moral behavior and personal convictions."²⁴ Turning from hindsight to a contemporary perspective, she amended the definition by adding that Charlemagne, and other Carolingian kings, understood "the ecclesiastical and the secular spheres" of their society as "one whole sacred realm" for which the king was responsible, and that this "particular vision of society [was] apparent from early in Charlemagne's reign onwards, even if the various elements for its fulfilment were devised piecemeal over the decades of his reign."²⁵ This developing effort to reform the Frankish realm occurred alongside the evolving notions of Frankish kingship and its responsibilities, and Johannes Fried has argued that these efforts were grounded in the royal responsibility for the salvation of the realm, something Charlemagne pursued by cultivating "Wissenschaft zum Heil," learning for salvation.²⁶

Unfortunately, however, many modern scholars of Carolingian *Correctio* maintain a narrow view of all that salvation entailed, especially in regards to the royal responsibility for these reforms.²⁷ In this study, I bring the motivations for reform efforts into conversation with the more focused study of Carolingian kingship and its sacral elements. As Martina Blattman

²⁴ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 306.

²⁵ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 310. This definition synthesized the ideas of M. de Jong, "Ecclesia," 113-132; *eadem*, "Church," 103-104.

²⁶ Fried, "Artes liberales," 39-40.

²⁷ In her synthetic account of Charlemagne's reform efforts, J. Davis, *Practice*, 397, argued that "the most basic and consistent idea of Charlemagne's governance was the need to achieve salvation for the king and his people. This became a common structuring idea of early medieval rulership, one which Charlemagne helped familiarize."

noted, scholarship tends to focus much more on the connection between rulers and the spiritual salvation of their people, or the largely misunderstood and mischaracterized Germanic *Königsheil*, rather than on the royal connection with the secular security and success of a realm.²⁸ In order to demonstrate the multifaceted motivations for Charlemagne's reform efforts, and how those efforts encouraged the perceived need for divine guidance and revelation, I will draw together these two schools of thought and suggest that the salvation that motivated Carolingian *Correctio* had as much to do with the hereafter as it did with the health of the realm and its subjects. As I will argue, this immediate need to reform the realm and all who lived in it formed the catalyst for many expressions of the prophetic throughout the period under investigation.

Finally, because key points of this dissertation are focused on the contextualization and analysis of royal pronouncements, I must be clear that when I refer to Charlemagne or Louis the Pious I do not claim to be recovering an authentic voice. Although many of these royal pronouncements were written in the voice of the ruler, I understand them as representative both of the ruler's thinking and that of his advisors.²⁹ I do not claim that Charles or Louis were quite as educated as their biographers claimed, and yet I do not think it is justified to assume they were mere cyphers either.³⁰ Therefore, while the Charlemagne and

²⁸ For a detailed overview of what German scholarship refers to as *Sakralkönigtum*, or sacral kingship, see Blattman, "Unglück," 80-102. For a study of the actual sources for supposed Germanic sacral kingship, and the immense problems present in earlier scholarship, see Picard, *Sakralkönigtum*.

²⁹ For a detailed survey of attempts to recover the authentic voice of Charlemagne, see Nelson, "Voice."

³⁰ For two differing sides to this question, see Fried, *Karl*, 48, who argued that Charles believed all that he was taught and reflected it back. On the other side, see Mayr-Harting, "Religion" 113-124, who argued that Charles was far more engaged in the ideas promulgated from his court.

Louis the Pious that one encounters in this dissertation may bear some resemblance to the authentic rulers, they are the rulers in their official capacity, as they and their advisors portrayed them.

II. A History of the Carolingian use of the Prophetic from ca. 770 to 814

Taking Power and Understanding Rulership

In order to frame my analysis of the sources, some chronological context is necessary. When Pippin III died in 768, he had already established certain practices that would dominate the brief joint reigns of his sons, Carloman (d. 771) and Charles, or Charlemagne (d. 814).³¹ First, Pippin's reign was dominated by yearly campaigns against the Aquitainians, Saxons, Lombards, Bavarians, and others in and around claimed Frankish territory.³² Second, Pippin was invested in the reform of the legal and ecclesiastical aspects of the realm, efforts complementary to the third legacy of Pippin's reign: the creation of the royal court.³³ Although Pippin appeared satisfied to focus his efforts north of the Alps, occupied as he was with the yearly military campaigns and resuscitation of the Frankish royal office, in 754 Pope Stephen came north to plea for Frankish aid against the Lombards in Northern Italy.³⁴ As a part of their

³¹ On Pippin's rise to the kingship of the Franks and his rule, see Wood, "Usurpers," 15-31; Stuart, "Aristocracy," 109-127; Reimitz, "Königtum," 277-320.

³² For a brief overview of Pippin's wars, see Fouracre, "Gaul," 96-101.

³³ For a survey of Pippin's reforms and their role in the beginnings of the Carolingian reforms and renewal, see Collins, *Charlemagne*, 104-105. On the motivations for Pippin's reforms, see Hen, "Christianization," 163-177. Rosamond McKitterick has demonstrated that the use of literacy increased dramatically under the Carolingians, beginning with Pippin III in *Written Word*, 23-32. On critical element in Pippin's reforms was the influence of Pippin's adviser, Chrodegang of Metz, explored in Claussen, *Reform*, and Ewig, "Beobachtungen," 67-77.

³⁴ Angenendt, "Königserhebung," 179-209.

negotiations, Stephen anointed Pippin, his wife, and his children, and created (at least in theory) a bond between the Carolingian royal house and the papacy, a bond that led Pippin to invade and attack the Lombards twice.³⁵ With growing military power, an expanding royal court, ambitions to reform the religious life in the realm, and a tenuous obligation to the papacy, by his death in 768 Pippin had laid a foundation that would enable Charlemagne to far exceed his father's ambitions.

Charlemagne's reign began in 768 alongside his brother Carloman, whose death in 771 ended an unfriendly sharing of power and set the stage for the first major new conquest of Charlemagne's reign.³⁶ Concluding his father's re-integration of Aquitaine in the Frankish realm, Charlemagne then turned his gaze towards Lombard Italy, where his brother Carloman's family and supporters fled after his death.³⁷ Throughout the 770s Charlemagne successfully conquered Aquitaine, Lombard Italy, and conducted regular campaigns into Saxony as well, building on the efforts of his father and establishing himself in a powerful position among the Frankish nobility.³⁸

Nearing the end of the decade, however, Charlemagne's rule would again be challenged, this time on several fronts. After invading al-Andalus in 778, Charlemagne learned of a massive Saxon revolt and in the process of returning to oppose it Charlemagne's forces

³⁵ Fouracre, "Gaul," 98.

³⁶ Airlie, "Charlemagne," 96-98 argued that the familial crises between the brothers was more threatening than later Frankish historians admitted. For a detailed survey of the historiographic rewriting of this early part of the reign, see Davis, *Practice*, 380-389.

³⁷ On the Frankish support for Carloman, see Airlie, "Charlemagne," 97.

³⁸ Fouracre, "Gaul," 101-103.

suffered an embarrassing defeat as Basques destroyed the rear guard and killed several notable figures.³⁹ In addition to these military troubles, several annals reveal that Francia suffered from a particularly bad famine that caused deaths throughout Charlemagne's territories.⁴⁰ In response to these crises, at a royal assembly in 779 at Herstal Charlemagne and his advisors promulgated two capitularies that combined economic and spiritual measures to ease the pressures the crises placed on the realm.⁴¹ In these capitularies we get our first glimpse of Charlemagne's public efforts to act "according to the will of God" and to strive to bring his realm into a state pleasing to God by coordinating three-day fasts, litanies, and almsgiving.⁴² While these efforts would be repeated and adapted throughout Charlemagne's reign, it must be acknowledged that the capitularies were accompanied by little explanation regarding the invocation of God's will and how to do it.

Because only later repetitions of such actions were accompanied by lengthy explanation, we are wise to turn to more closely contemporary evidence to illuminate the ideas and motivations of Charles and his advisors.⁴³ Such evidence is not lacking, since the 770s and early 780s witnessed the building of what J. J. Contreni identified as the first

³⁹ *ARF*, a.778-779, 50-54.

⁴⁰ On the broader context of this crisis, see Mordek, "Kapitular," 1-52 and Ganshof, "Une crise," 133-148. For the famine itself see *Annales Mosellani* a.778, MGH SS 16, pp.496-497; *Lorsch Annals Breues*, a. 778, Katz (ed.), 32; *Chesne Fragment*, 31.

⁴¹ Janet Nelson described the response as a "social experiment" in "Religion," 497.

⁴² *Capitulare haristallense*, MGH Cap. I no. 20, 47: congregatis in unum sinodale concilio episcopis, abbatibus, virisque inlustribus comitibus, una cum piissimo domno nostro secundum Dei voluntatem pro causis oportunis consenserunt decretum. *Capitulare prop praesente tribulatione*, c.l.a, 50: Ut unusquisque episcopus III missas et trea psalteria cantent, I pro domno rege, alia pro exercitu Francorum, tertia pro presente tribulatione.

⁴³ Notable examples of such reverse projection I seek to avoid is de Jong, *Penitential*, 6, 154-155, and Patzold, "Pater noster," 200-201.

generation of scholars connected to the Carolingian court.⁴⁴ Many of these scholars came from Lombard Italy, including Paul the Deacon and Peter of Pisa, the latter of which Einhard remembered as Charlemagne's first teacher.⁴⁵

Among their contributions to the intellectual circles around Charlemagne, Peter of Pisa's *Minor Questions on Daniel* was preserved at Charlemagne's request and survives as more of a biblical *Fürstenspiegel* in the guise of an exegetical text.⁴⁶ Offering historical parallels to events throughout Charles' early reign, Peter explored how God's favor determined the fates of earthly rulers and how those rulers could seek and preserve such favor. Another Lombard contribution to Charlemagne's intellectual milieu, Paul the Deacon was commissioned to write his *Book of the Bishops of Metz* by Angilram of Metz, the bishop of Metz and the head of Charlemagne's royal chapel.⁴⁷ Celebrating primarily St. Arnulf of Metz and those who claimed descent from him, the Carolingians, Paul claimed that he learned of the great signs and miracles that assured God's favor for the Carolingians from Charlemagne himself. Further, Paul's well-documented interest in signs and portents in his other works made him the ideal figure for exploring the portentous foundations of the ruling house. Both of these works,

⁴⁴ Contreni, "Bishops," 29. For broader surveys of the various generations of scholars connected to the Carolingian court, see Contreni, "Pursuit," 106-141.

⁴⁵ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.24, 30: In discenda grammatica Petrum Pisanum diaconem senem audivit, in ceteris disciplinis Albinum cognomento Alcoinum, item diaconem, de Britannia.

⁴⁶ The *Quaestiunculae in Daniele* survives in the manuscript Brussels Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België ms. II 2575, 1v-17v. On this manuscript, see Gorman, "Peter," 240-242. The most recent edition of Peter's *Minor Questions on Daniel* is Krotz and Gorman (eds.), *Peter of Pisa*, 203-221. While I will cite the pagination in Krotz and Gorman's edition, I will also include the folio number and text directly from the manuscript, Brussels Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België ms. II 2575, because the edition preserves the corrections made by E. Martène, the first modern editor of the text, and structures the text following the PL edition. Thus, for example, the text will be cited as *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 203, 1r.

⁴⁷ Kempf, *Paul the Deacon*, 4-7.

products of the court culture Charlemagne cultivated, reveal an interest in knowing God, gaining his affirmation, and learning to interpret God's will.

This same interest appears in a little-studied letter Charlemagne received from Pope Hadrian in the mid-780s. In the letter, the pope recalled that Charlemagne had learned of a monk named John who claimed to have received revelations about the poor state of the church, and after hearing John's tale Charles sent him to the pope.⁴⁸ John's revelations offered a powerful rebuke of various ecclesiastical leaders, and expressed great concern for the state of Christianity as a whole: Charlemagne's favorable opinion of the visions is confirmed by his command to Hadrian that the pope should listen to John's revelations and not punish him or harm him in any way.⁴⁹ Although this exchange was unique, this interaction with the monk John enunciated the connection between Charlemagne's interests in reform and in learning God's will for his realm.

Reforming the Realm and Proclaiming Divine Affirmation

As the backdrop for John's revelations, the 780s witnessed amidst the yearly campaigns several serious threat to Charlemagne's rule that prompted, in 789, some of the most influential reform activity of his reign. In 785 Charlemagne found himself facing a rebellion led by Hardrad, a noble from the eastern parts of his realm, as well as a famine in

⁴⁸ Hadrian to Charlemagne, *Ep. 88, Codex Carolinus*, MGH Ep. III, pp. 624-625. The most scholarly attention this episode has drawn is in Noble, *Republic*, 283-284.

⁴⁹ Hadrian to Charlemagne, *Ep. 88, CC*, p. 625.

parts of his realm.⁵⁰ After quelling the rebellion and momentarily gaining the upper hand against the Saxons, Charlemagne then had to deal with the most viable threat to his rule, his cousin Tassilo, the duke of Bavaria.⁵¹ While Charles deposed Tassilo in 788 without any major battles, the effort put into the deposition and its justification emphasizes just how great a threat Tassilo posed to Charles' reign.⁵²

In 789 Charlemagne and his advisors promulgated the text known to historians as *Admonitio generalis*, a text that united a vision of Charles as a divinely supported and guided ruler comparable with biblical kings and the drive to reform the realm.⁵³ The royally guided *Correctio* outlined in the *Admonitio generalis* was also clarified in the circular letter promulgated around the same time known as *On the Cultivation of Letters*, with both documents establishing the need to correct moral behavior and liturgical precision "so that those who eagerly desire to please God by correct living will not fail to please Him by correct speaking," and that God might "deign to preserve us and our kingdom with His protection for eternity."⁵⁴ In addition, it is notable that Charlemagne and his advisors used subtle apocalyptic prophecy to add urgency to the reforms they proposed in the *Admonitio generalis*.⁵⁵ While the

⁵⁰ McKitterick, *Perceptions*, 68-71, and Nelson, *Opposition*, 13-26. On the famine in 785, see Hadrian to Charlemagne, *Ep.* 76, CC, 608.

⁵¹ For more on Tassilo, his family, and the threat they posed to Charlemagne's claims of legitimacy, see Diesenberger, "Stimmen," 105-121 and McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 121-127.

⁵² On Charlemagne's efforts to control Bavaria, see Airlie, "Narratives," 93-119.

⁵³ For the connection between the cluster of reforms in 789 and the previous political instability, see Reimitz, *History*, 340.

⁵⁴ *De litteris colendis*, 79: ut Deo placere appetunt recte vivendo, ei etiam placere non negligent recte loquendo. AG, praefatio, 53: sua protectione nos nostrumque regnum in aeternum conservare dignetur.

⁵⁵ AG, 62: quia scimus temporibus novissimis pseudodoctores esse venturos, sicut ipse Dominus in euangelio praedixit, et apostolus Paulus ad Timotheum testatur. Ideo, dilectissimi, toto corde praeparemus nos in scientia veritatis, ut possimus contradicentibus veritati resistere. For a survey of the apocalyptic thinking in the decades before 800, see Brandes, "Tempora," 49-79.

profound influence these documents have had on subsequent generations has made them frequent touchstones in any discussion of Carolingian Francia, for our purposes they establish the central thrust of Charles' regime to correct the ways of learning God's mind and will, and then to act accordingly to maintain divine favor.

While the prominent influence of another of Charlemagne's scholars, Alcuin of York, has been detected in the *Admonitio generalis*, his influence in Charlemagne's reign became more pronounced in the 790s.⁵⁶ Frequently drawing a comparison between Charlemagne and the biblical prophet-king David, Alcuin's influence can also be seen in his frequent penchant for interpreting signs and portents in his correspondence, and for modelling his interactions with Charlemagne and other rulers on the actions of biblical prophets.⁵⁷ As the correspondence between Charles and Alcuin attests, Alcuin's taste for interpreting signs and portents made him an ideal source for Charlemagne to consult about the interpretation of potential signs and portents.⁵⁸ Alcuin's approach to interpreting divine communication and inclination to prophesy himself on occasion left a profound impact on Charlemagne and his advisors, as well as an impact on the prophetic discourse that became evident near the end of Charles' reign.

⁵⁶ On Alcuin, one should begin with Bullough, *Alcuin*.

⁵⁷ For studies of nicknames and worldplay more broadly in Alcuin's writing, see Garrison, "Social," 59–79; eadem, "*Praesagium*," 107–127.

⁵⁸ Alcuin, Ep. 155, 252: et de Marte, qui anno praeterito in Cancri sidere solis lumine humanis obtutibus interceptus est, quid sentias: an naturali sui cursus ratione an solis? Vi an prodigio actum sit, ut iter duorum annorum uno conficeret.

During Alcuin's time in Francia, when he was in frequent contact with Charlemagne, the king found himself again turning to the practice of three-day fasts, litanies, and almsgiving from 779, only now in the context of a dangerous campaign against the Avars and a devastating horse plague in 791.⁵⁹ In a letter to his wife Fastrada, Charles orchestrated similar services throughout his kingdoms so that God "might deign to grant us peace, health, victory, and a favorable campaign, and that in his mercy and loyalty He might be our helper, our counsellor, and our defender in all of our difficulties."⁶⁰ The efforts outlined in the letter suggest two clear purposes: first, to seek God's help and second, to publicize their efforts to do so. In the 790s, documents promulgated in Charlemagne's name increasingly seek to publicize Charlemagne's efforts to gain and maintain divine support, and to emphasize that Charles has long enjoyed such support.

One such effort, completed in the early 790s, is the first redaction of the *Royal Frankish Annals*, the closest thing to an "official history" produced at the Frankish court.⁶¹

While the court historians used the annals to accomplish several ends, much of the motivation for the first redaction appears to have been the opposition Charlemagne faced in

⁵⁹ Their efforts are detailed in Charlemagne to Fastrada, Ep. 20 in MGH Ep. IV, pp. 528-529. On the horse plague, see *RArf* a.791, 89-91: Facta est haec expeditio sine omni rerum incommodo, praeter quod in illo, quem rex ducebat, exercitu tanta equorum lues exorta est, ut vix decima pars de tot milibus equorum remansisse dicatur. For contemporary example of the effects of a similar epizootic plague, see *ARF* a.810, 131: Tanta fuit in ea expeditione (to Saxony) bouum pestilentia, ut pene nullus tanto exercitui superesset, quin omnes usque ad unum perirent; et non solum ibi, sed etiam per omnes imeritori subiectas provincias illius generis animalium mortalitas inmanissime grassata est.

⁶⁰ Charlemagne to Fastrada, Ep. 20, 528-529: Dei misericordiam deprecantes, ut nobis pacem et sanitatem atque victoriam et prosperum iter tribuere dignetur, et ut in sua misericordia et pietate nobis adiutor et consiliator atque defensor in omnibus angustiis nostris exsistat.

⁶¹ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 31. For a survey of the vast literature on the common scholarly approaches, see Reimitz, "Königtum," 277-280. For McKitterick's inversion of the traditional approach, see *Perceptions*, 65-89.

the 780s.⁶² In line with Charlemagne's letter to Fastrada, the court historians used the first redaction of the *Royal Frankish Annals* (ending in 788) to argue that Charlemagne's rapid rise to power had been enabled and affirmed by God.⁶³ The *Royal Frankish Annals* were far from the only ventures into the effort to write God prominently into the Carolingian rise to power. From 790 to 810, recent history became a place to debate Carolingian rule. Prominent responses to the assertions made in the *Royal Frankish Annals* utilized signs, portents, and prophetic comparisons to challenge or support the court narrative, most notably by the anonymous authors of the *Chesne Fragment* and the *Petau Annals*.⁶⁴ While the author of the *Chesne Fragment* used techniques utilized earlier by Cathwulf, Paul the Deacon, and Alcuin to juxtapose negative signs and portents and Charlemagne's activity, the author of the *Petau Annals* compared Charlemagne to Moses and John the Baptist, and argued that God specifically confirmed every territory conquered by Charlemagne. Such historiographical use of the prophetic would not become universally utilized for several decades. Even in the later stages of Charlemagne's reign, however, it had already begun to figure prominently in political debate.

Seeking Revelation and Controlling Meaning

In the final decade of Charles' reign, he faced a series of personal and political crises and his responses would not only provide the groundwork upon which Louis the Pious would build, but demonstrate the vast difference between how the two kings utilized divine

⁶² Becher, *Eid*, 74-77 and McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 118-126.

⁶³ See my discussion of this in Chapter 2.

⁶⁴ *Chesne Fragment* a.786, 33; *AP* a. 786.

affirmation and revelation. While this period has been interpreted as the beginning of the decline of Carolingian rule in Francia, using the various crises Charles faced to support the “decomposition” of his authority, this same evidence suggests a heightened sensitivity to potential manifestations of the divine, and tenacious efforts to interpret and act on them.⁶⁵ In 805, faced with famine, disease, and warfare along the borders, Charlemagne commanded his bishops not to await his orders to begin to plead for God’s aid, and then underscored his command by releasing a circular letter interpreting the threats and clarifying precisely how they acted God’s judgement against the realm.⁶⁶ Rather than allowing these potential portents to be interpreted as God’s judgement against him or his rule, Charles orchestrated the three-day ceremonies and commanded that his circular letter be preached throughout his empire in translation.⁶⁷ Adapting his earlier forms of response, Charles by these ways sought to control

⁶⁵ The classic arguments that found this view, and still give it its shape, are illustrated in Ganshof, “L’échec,” 248-254; *idem*, *Carolingians*, 246-250. For an example of the more recent approach to the second half of Charlemagne’s reign, see Davis, *Practice*, 361; Nelson, “Voice,” 76-88.

⁶⁶ Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 245-246: *Necessitates vero quas supra nos dicturos esse promisimus, inter ceteras (quas tamen hac vice commemorare necessarium non duximus), haec sunt denique: conpertum habemus per fideles nostros, qui nobis de singulis regni nostri partibus haec nuntiaverunt, quod insolito more et ultra consuetum ubique terrae sterelitas esse et famis periculum imminere videtur, aëris etiam intemperies frugibus valde contraria, pestilentia quoque per loca, et paganorum gentium circa marcas nostras sedentia bella continua, multa praeterea quae et nunc enumerare longum est et nobis experimento possunt esse notissima, si recordare volumus, qualia incommoda singulis diebus propter merita nostra sentiamus. Certissimeque ab his exterioribus colligere possumus, nos per omnia Domino non placere interius, qui tanta mala compellimur tollere exterius. Quamobrem bonum nobis omnino videtur, ut unusquisque nostrum cor suum humiliare in veritate studeat et, in quocumque loco sive actu sive cogitatu se Deum offendisse deprehenderit, poenitendo tergat, flendo doleat et semetipsum in quantum ipse potest ab his malis in futurum cavendo custodiat... ut gratiam illius promereri possimus, haec ieiunia atque has orationes ab omnibus vobis generaliter fieri decrevimus.* On the 805 crises, see Jörg, “Besänftigung,” 38-51 and Verhulst, “Agrarpolitik,” 175-189.

⁶⁷ Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 246: *Et unusquisque vestrum per singulas ecclesias baptismales dirigite et bonos interpretes mittite qui omnia tradant, sicut superius diximus. Nam et per singula monasteria infra parochiam tuam ita facias.*

the narrative and assert publicly his leadership to regain divine support while emphasizing the communal responsibility all shared for the trials they faced.

In the final years of his reign, Charles lost two of his primary heirs, Pippin and Charles, as well as his daughter Hroutrud, all of which frustrated his careful preparation for succession.⁶⁸ In addition, these years witnessed royal deaths among his allies, solar and lunar eclipses, plague among his people and their livestock, military pressure on several borders, and trouble with some subjects refusing military service.⁶⁹ Elements of Charlemagne's responses to these crises continue to adapt earlier efforts, as shown by Charles' commands preserved in a capitulary and in another circular letter to his ecclesiastical elites, commands that are aimed to control both the interpretation of and the response to, the crises.⁷⁰ Above and beyond these efforts, however, Charlemagne and his advisors began to prepare for another massive reform movement reminiscent of 789.

In the preparation for what would become the 813 Reform Councils, Charlemagne's and his advisors' plans are preserved in two memoranda that offer a unique view into the

⁶⁸ *ARF* a.810, 131-132: Hruotrud filia imperatoris, quae natu maior erat, VII Idus Iun. diem obiit... et Pippinum filium eius, regem Italiae, VIII Idus Iulii de corpore migrasse. *ARF* a.811, 135: Interea Carlus filius domni imperatoris, qui maior natu erat, II. Nones Decembri diem obiit. *Annales Laureshamensis* (Fulda Codex) a.811, 121: Hiemps fuit durissima, perdurans usque ad finem Martii mensis, et duo filii imperatoris id est Pippinus moritur et Karolus moritur. *Annales Lobiensis* a. 812, MGH SS 13, 231: Karolus, primogenitus domni imperatoris, dolore capitis ab oculis affectus est. Deinde ipso anno cum luctu omnium defunctus est. On the *divisio regni*, see Collins, *Charlemagne*, 141-159.

⁶⁹ S. Patzold, *Episcopus*, 247-249.

⁷⁰ *Capitulare missorum Aquisgranense primum a. 810*, cc. 5-6 153: Ut sacerdotes admoneant populum ut aelemosinam dent et orationes faciant propter diversas plagas quas assidue pro peccatis patimur. Ut ipsi sacerdotes unusquisque secundum ordinem suum praedicare et docere studeat plebem sibi commissam. Rihcolf, *Epistola*, 249.

ideas inspiring these late-reign reforms.⁷¹ These memoranda reveal an interest in reforming Charlemagne's empire and his subjects at the most fundamental level, as well as the efforts to ascertain God's will for such reforms. In the second memorandum, it is recorded that Charlemagne and his elites performed another round of three-day fasts, litanies, and almsgiving as part of their preparation; these services were intended to ask God to reveal "how our actions ought to be corrected: that is what we now desire to do."⁷² Claiming direct revelation on behalf of their reform efforts, Charles and his advisors organized five reform councils throughout the empire, in their attempt to fulfill the revelation they had been given and do so publicly.

By Charles' death in 814, the interpretation of signs and portents and the seeking of revelations had been established as part of the Frankish political lexicon. Charles' approach to these crises drew together the frequent claims of divine support for his rule and the search for the means of knowing God's mind and will as he utilized the prophetic to dominate the dialogue and meaning of the crises. By portraying his leadership as confident in its efforts to assure divine assistance and by promoting the communal responsibility of every individual in the empire to appease God and do His will, Charles kept these threats to his reign from directly undercutting his own rule. His approach was, in short, a success. But, while Charlemagne's interpretation of portents and claim of revelation laid the groundwork for

⁷¹ For a study of both texts as witnesses to Charlemagne's own concerns, see Nelson, "Voice."

⁷² *Capitula de causis cum episcopis et abbatibus tractandis*, c. 1, 21: Prima commemorandum est quod anno preterite tria triduana ieiunia fecimus, Deum orando ut ille nobis dignaretur ostendere in quibus conuersatio nostra coram illo emendari debuisset: quod nunc facere desideramus.

Louis' own similar behavior, Louis' approach to the appropriation of divine affirmation and inspiration proved very different and ultimately subversive to his authority.

III. A History of the Carolingian Use of the Prophetic from 814-840

Writing after Louis' death in the winter of 840/841, Louis' otherwise anonymous adviser and biographer known as the Astronomer defended the emperor's life as a consistent search for divine guidance and protection. Throughout the biography, the Astronomer compares Louis to biblical prophets, discusses the emperor's consistent interest in signs and portents, and lauds his ability to discern the divine communication that they contained.⁷³ The Astronomer chose to emphasize these prophetic aspects of Louis' reign because by the emperor's death in 840, claiming to recognize and understand divine communication through signs, portents, and direct inspiration had become a critical feature of Carolingian political authority. As I will illustrate in this brief survey of Louis' reign, while Louis' anxiety to know and fulfill God's will remained relatively consistent throughout his reign, Carolingian political culture transformed around him as attempts to interpret God's will, invoking His support, came to dominate Carolingian discourses of political power.

Louis' reign from 814 to 840 can be divided broadly into three periods. The first phase, from 814 to 826/827 is best understood as an inward turn, focused on introspectively

⁷³ E.g. Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 27, 370-372; c. 58, 520-524. For a recent study and bibliography of the Astronomer's life of Louis, see Ganz, "Astronomer," 129-148.

correcting the empire and its institutions. The second period, from 829 to 834, is one of crisis and revolt, which Louis and those loyal to him struggled against rebellions led by his sons, leading nobles, and churchmen. The final period, from 834 until Louis' death in 840, consisted of a nearly constant struggle for Louis to regain and retain control over his empire.

813-826/827: The Inward Turn

The first phase of Louis' reign began before his father's death in 814, because Louis was crowned and elevated to the imperial throne by Charlemagne in Aachen in 813. Later sources, including Louis' biographer Thegan following Charlemagne's biographer Einhard, concluded that all the people in attendance accepted Charlemagne's coronation of his son "as if the event were the admonition of God."⁷⁴ Afterwards, according to Thegan, Louis swore that he would "gladly obey, and with God's help, keep all the orders that his father had entrusted to him," commands that included, "in the first place, to love and fear the All-Powerful God, to keep His commandments in all things, to govern the churches of God, and to defend them from corrupt men."⁷⁵ Although this account comes from a source written in the 830s, Thegan's portrayal of Louis' imperial coronation and its attendant commitments captures the tenor of the earliest phase of Louis reign perfectly. Developing many of the trends already evident in

⁷⁴ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c. 6, 180-182: Illi (the coronation's attendees) omnes exultando responderunt, Dei esse ammonitionem illius rei.

⁷⁵ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c. 6, 182: ammonens eum, inprimis omnipotentem Deum diligere ac timere, eius praeceptis servare in omnibus, ecclesias Dei gubernare et deffendere a pravis hominibus... at ille respondit, libenter obedire et cum Dei adiutorio omnia praecepta, que mandaverat ei pater, custodire.

Charlemagne's late reign, Louis proved committed to the spiritual priorities Thegan described in his depiction of Louis' coronation.

Louis' desire to please God, to do what was right, can be seen in 816 when he had himself crowned again, this time by the hand of Pope Stephen IV (r. 816-817).⁷⁶ This same year Louis called together a council in Aachen aimed at reforming the monastic life throughout the empire, under the leadership of Benedict of Aniane, with a second council following in the next year.⁷⁷ The statements issued by these councils acknowledge how Louis had been led by divine inspiration to call the councils and consult on "any agreeable and necessary issues concerning the improvement of the church of God."⁷⁸ The same year as the second reform council, after a nearly fatal accident that he interpreted as a sign from God, Louis set out his succession, making his eldest son Lothar his co-emperor, and justifying the entire action by claiming divine revelation in a document known as the *Ordinatio imperii*.⁷⁹ In keeping with his previous actions, Louis would later have Lothar crowned co-emperor again in Rome in 823 by Paschal I.⁸⁰

Louis' decision to set out his succession provoked an immediate response in the form of an abortive rebellion by his nephew, Bernard, king of Italy, one member of the family notably unmentioned in the *Ordinatio imperii*. Although Louis and his nobles successfully met

⁷⁶ Collins, *Medieval*, 319.

⁷⁷ Collins, *Medieval*, 323.

⁷⁸ *Concilium Aquisgranense* a. 816, *praefatio*, 312: coepisset secundum ardentissimam erga divinum cultum sibi caelitus inspiratam voluntatem multa congrua et necessaria de emendatione sanctae Dei ecclesiae

⁷⁹ For the unique nature and importance of the *Ordinatio imperii*, see Erkens, "*Divisio*," 423-485. For a critical perspective on Louis' revelatory claims, see Dohmen, "Vorsehung," 139-159.

⁸⁰ Collins, *Medieval*, 320.

and countered external military threats until 827, Bernard's revolt proved that internal discontent was never far off in the empire.⁸¹ Louis put down Bernard's revolt quickly, and although Louis only ordered his nephew to be blinded, Bernard died a short time later from the wounds. This revolt offers a striking example of the misalignment between how Louis (and the counsellors he heeded) understood his imperial rule, and how others viewed it. By April of 818, Louis had exiled the majority of the rebels and added to their number his half-brothers and other potential, political opponents.⁸² Among those political opponents stood Theodulf of Orléans, a prominent figure from Charlemagne's court who fell victim to Louis' political cull and spent the rest of his life in exile.⁸³ Theodulf and others who survived Louis' exile of the rebels turned to vision literature and poetry on political portents to comment on the dire state of the realm, and like the anonymous author of the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman*, to criticize Louis' behavior in handling the affair and express concern for the emperor's eternal soul in a style Louis' own proclivities were making more acceptable.⁸⁴

By 822, Louis had been convinced of his own mistakes in putting down Bernhard's revolt, and as a result decided to perform a public penance that closely mirrored the accusations leveled against him by the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman*. At the Synod of Attigny in 822, Louis performed public penance for his and his father's sins, an action that appears to have then set off several years of confident law-making and governance on Louis'

⁸¹ For studies of Bernhard's rule, realm, and revolt, see Depreux, "Königtum," 1-24; T.F.X. Noble, "Revolt," 315-326.

⁸² Schieffer, *Die Karolinger*, 118-119.

⁸³ Schaller, "Briefgedichte," 107-120; Ziolkowski, *Animals*, 59-60.

⁸⁴ On Theodulf and his portents, see Theodulf, *Carmen LXXII*, MGH Poet I, pp. 563-569; Godman, "Louis," 253. On the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman*, see Dutton, *Politics*, 72-73; de Jong, *Penitential*, 29, n.93, citing Tremp (ed.), *Thegan*, MGH SSRG 64, 213, n.275; Ganshof, "Am Vorabend," 42.

part.⁸⁵ The penance at Attigny had serious consequences, however, as Paul Dutton has explained, in that it, first, promoted and sanctioned public criticism of Charlemagne; second, it allowed criticism of Louis; and third, it suggested that Louis was open to advice to a degree unimagined under his father. As a result, many took the opportunity to offer more than advice.⁸⁶

Despite the long-term trouble the penance might have caused, Louis' short-term confidence resounded in the years following 822 as he and his advisors continued to elaborate on his theocratic role as emperor and the moral responsibilities that his role entailed.⁸⁷ Promulgating his and his advisors' articulation as the *Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines*, Louis' capitulary from the early 820s argued that Louis alone, "with God's help," must oversee the correction of his realm.⁸⁸ In addition to his *Admonitio*, Louis also exercised his spiritual authority in Rome as well, extracting an oath of loyalty to Louis and Lothar from Pope Paschal I in 824.⁸⁹ Finally, although the true pinnacle of Louis' inward turn to correct himself and his empire came in his calling of the 829 Reform Councils throughout his empire, by then events had begun to spiral out of Louis' control as internal and external pressures proved more than Louis and his loyal servants could manage.

⁸⁵ On the Synod of Attigny, see de Jong, *Penitential*, 122-131. For other critical perspectives, see Suchan, "Kirchenpolitik," 11, and Depreux, "Penance," 372-374.

⁸⁶ Dutton, *Politics*, 111.

⁸⁷ *Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines*, 303-307. Guillot, "Une *ordinatio*," 455-486. Compare Guillot's interpretation with Erkens, *Herrschersakralität*, 148 and Werner, "Gott, Herrscher," 106.

⁸⁸ *Admonitio ad omnes* (823/825), 305: quia omnia Deo auxiliante corrigere debemus. Cf. Suchan, "Kirchenpolitik," 12-13.

⁸⁹ *Constitutio Romana*, MGH Cap. I, no. 161, 322-324.

This first phase of Louis' reign saw increasing claims to receive and interpret divine inspiration by Louis and those with whom he surrounded himself. These claims, many in Louis' own official voice, appear in major imperial statements from large-scale gatherings, and they are reflected in the increasing reading and interpretation of signs and portents in political poetry, historiography, and vision literature. This final category takes on a new importance under Louis as Louis appeared receptive to those who used revelatory genres in order to criticize and correct him.

827-834: Crisis and Revolt

Unlike the first phase of Louis' reign, the years 827 to 834 exposed many of the latent political tensions in the Carolingian regime, and saw a series of rebellions in the empire. The catalysts for the trouble of this phase were a series of military defeats and failures against Islamic forces from al-Andalus, Bulgars from Pannonia, and Danes from the north, all of which proved deeply troubling throughout the empire.⁹⁰ As Louis struggled to calm those around him and take control of the situation, the empress Judith, her family, and her allies, sought to secure the position of Louis' youngest son Charles.⁹¹ Politically, Louis sought a swift response to the military failures by stripping authority and dignity from the commanders of the eastern and western marches, Baldric of Friuli, Hugh of Tours, and Matfrid of Orléans.⁹² As he had done in 817 with Bernhard's revolt, Louis appears to have sought to bring order to the chaotic situation while simultaneously advancing his own political agenda, because at least two of the

⁹⁰ Schieffer, *Die Karolinger*, 125.

⁹¹ For a survey of Charles' life, see Nelson, "Charles the Bald," 1-23.

⁹² Gansshof, "Am Vorabend," 41; de Jong, *Penitential*, 150.

nobles he stripped of power happened to be prominent supporters of Lothar as well.⁹³

Unfortunately, as with many decisions Louis made, his public humbling of Hugh and Matfrid would cause trouble for him in the years to come, since they would become central figures in the revolts against Louis' rule.⁹⁴

In addition to his political maneuvering, Louis had originally intended to convene an imperial council in 828 in order to address the crisis, only to be frustrated by an ultimately unfounded threat of another invasion. Instead, Louis gathered many of his top advisors informally in the winter of 828 and 829 to seek to address the root causes of the crises. Louis' earlier attempts to claim divine inspiration or interpret divine signs for the empire laid the groundwork for the results of the meeting. Among those in attendance, Walahfrid Strabo, Einhard, and Wala all produced works that either captured the spirit of the meeting or sought to influence the emperor directly, and their influence can be seen in the imperial proclamation released afterwards, known as the *Epistola generalis*.⁹⁵ The influence of this meeting and of the documents presented and prepared therein remain in the large councils gathered throughout the empire in 829, councils reminiscent of Charlemagne's Reform Councils of 812.⁹⁶ Written by Jonas, the Bishop of Orléans, the records of the Paris council

⁹³ Schieffer, *Die Karolinger*, 125-127.

⁹⁴ De Jong, *Penitential*, 39.

⁹⁵ On the winter meeting and the *Epistola generalis*, see Suchan, 13; De Jong, *Penitential*, 40; *eadem*, "Jeremiah," 192.

⁹⁶ On the 829 Paris Council, see Ganshof, "Am Vorabend," 50; Boshof, *Ludwig der Fromme*, 175. For a more detailed discussion of the episcopacy in the ninth century, see Hartmann, *Synoden*, 181-182 and Dubreucq, "Le pouvoir," 87-110.

survive and in their phrasing attest to the increasing importance of the prophetic in the highest levels of Carolingian society.⁹⁷

Louis' behavior in August of 829, however, subverted the immediate effects of the councils.⁹⁸ Despite the Paris council's impact on scholarship, the Royal Annals ignored the councils entirely in their final entry, focusing instead on the imperial assembly in Worms where Louis again tried to establish Charles the Bald in a position of power by dismissing Lothar, Louis' co-emperor, to Italy, and repudiating his own decisions promulgated in the *Ordinatio imperii* in 817.⁹⁹ Mere months after the general assembly at Worms, Louis sought to lead a campaign against the Bretons, only to find himself effectively abandoned by the nobility who brought Lothar and Pippin together in order to force Louis from his throne.¹⁰⁰ While this rebellion has been referred to as a "loyalen Palastrebellion" by Egon Boshof, because its participants claimed that the Empress Judith and the new chamberlain Bernhard of Septimania were its primary targets, this positive reading of the rebels' intentions has not found universal acceptance.¹⁰¹ In the midst of this rebellion, Agobard, the Archbishop of Lyons, wrote to Louis and reified the prophetic authority Louis had claimed earlier, reminding Louis of the revelation the emperor had claimed in 817 that led to the *Ordinatio imperii*. Using the same language of prophetic authority Louis had used, and as had been articulated in the

⁹⁷ For a view on political claims of the bishops in Paris 829, see Suchan, 26.

⁹⁸ While I follow Ganshof, "Am Vorabend," 50-52, note Hartmann's important reading of the manuscript tradition of the conciliar decisions in *Konziliengeschichte*, 186-187.

⁹⁹ *ARF* a.829, 176-178. Cf. Reimitz, "Nomen Francorum," 279-281.

¹⁰⁰ *Annales Bertiniani* a.830, MGH SSRG 5, 1-2.

¹⁰¹ Boshof, *Ludwig*, 182-191; see especially Patzold, "Palastrebellion." Cf. Dohmen, "Vorsehung," 143; Suchan, "Kirchenpolitik," 18-19; Booker, *Convictions*, 151;

829 Paris Council, Agobard called for Louis to hold to his earlier decisions and not anger God by rejecting His revealed guidance.

In 830 the rebels deposed Louis, captured the empress Judith, and after tonsuring her brothers and confining all three to monasteries.¹⁰² Unable to capture the chamberlain Bernhard, who fled back to the Spanish March, the rebels (supported by Wala of Corbie and Agobard of Lyons) satisfied themselves by blinding Bernhard's brother, Heribert.¹⁰³ By the end of Spring 830, Lothar came north and personally took command of the rebels, reinstated Matfrid, and issued charters, again jointly with his father. Lacking the critical support of Louis the German, however, Lothar and the other rebels relented and the rebels condemned to death at an assembly in Nijmegen, although all were pardoned quickly thereafter by Louis.¹⁰⁴

Although the first rebellion briefly forced Louis from power, the inability of the rebels to unite all of Louis' sons doomed the rebellion to failure.¹⁰⁵ A second revolt three years later was more successful, removing Louis from power, forcing his abdication and using the emperor's own prophetic authority against him to compel his public penance and strip him of his imperial authority. In the summer of 833, the brothers Lothar, Louis the German, and Pippin, together with many noble allies, gathered together and met Louis on the *Rotfeld*, now remembered as the "Field of Lies" (*Lügenfeld*) since Louis' army abandoned him there,

¹⁰² De Jong, *Penitential*, 42-43.

¹⁰³ Nelson, "Kingdoms," 117; Collins, *Medieval*, 326-327; de Jong, "For God," 102-103; Berschin, *Biographie*, 318; Weinrich, *Wala*.

¹⁰⁴ De Jong, *Penitential*, 43-44; Nelson, "Kingdoms," 117; Collins, *Medieval*, 327.

¹⁰⁵ Collins, 326.

purportedly walking across the field and joining his sons' forces.¹⁰⁶ After Louis' army left him, leading to his capture, Lothar claimed sole rule: he had also had his father and his half brother, Charles, imprisoned in different monasteries, an act supported by a gathering of bishops in Compiègne.¹⁰⁷

On the first of October, 833, Lothar came to his father at Soissons, where a body of ecclesiastical figures imposed upon Louis the need to perform a public penance. Much of modern scholarship has read this coerced penance as a fatal blow to Frankish imperial authority, and certainly this gathering of bishops sought to debar Louis from ever taking up his secular position again.¹⁰⁸ These bishops asserted their right to judge the emperor in this way by utilizing the language of the 829 Paris Council, claiming prophetic responsibilities as watchmen over the empire and over the emperor himself.¹⁰⁹ Although the episcopal deposition of Louis proved unsuccessful, as did its attendant rebellion, it does demonstrate just how powerful claims of prophetic authority had become in Frankish politics: the bishops used such authority not only to chastise the emperor, but to strip him of his imperial authority entirely.

Unfortunately for the rebels, Louis the German did not come to, or support, the assembly at Compiègne, and signs of the Lothar and his supporters' disquiet began to show as

¹⁰⁶ *AB* a.833, 6; Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c.42, 228: Qui usque hodie nominatur Campus-Mendacii. The best treatment of the betrayal at the Rotfeld and its memory is Booker, *Convictions*. Cf. Nelson, "Kingdoms," 117; Collins, *Medieval*, 328; Suchan, "Kirchenpolitik," 18-19; de Jong, *Penitential*, 47-48.

¹⁰⁷ De Jong, *Penitential*, 48.

¹⁰⁸ De Jong, *Penitential*, 49.

¹⁰⁹ For the bishops' text, see Anonymous, *Episcoporum de poenitentia, quam Hludowicus imperator professus est, relatio Compendiensis* (833), in Booker, "Public," 1-20.

they subsequently sought to pressure Louis and Charles into taking monastic vows, which would have barred them from future secular office with the finality they had failed to achieve at Compiègne.¹¹⁰ Lothar's plan fell apart when Louis the German and Pippin began publicly to plead for better treatment for their father, and by 834, Louis the Pious began the process of restoring himself to his former position and power.¹¹¹ While Louis punctiliously unraveled the ecclesiastical deposition forced upon him, Lothar's army continued to fight until they capitulated in the autumn of 834, having burnt Chalon-sur-Saône and drowned Bernard of Septimania's sister in a barrel, as a witch.¹¹² Lacking the support of his brothers, Lothar eventually capitulated to his father and was effectively exiled to Italy as the northern parts of his kingdom were given to his half-brother Charles. By the second of February, 835, Louis had his penance and deposition declared uncanonical, deposed those who had orchestrated the public penance, and regained enough power to keep his sons in line until his death in 840.

Although chaotic and punctuated by attacks from Northmen, this period of Louis' reign witnessed the most dramatic use of prophetic authority to date in Frankish history.¹¹³ While Louis' court historians in the *Annals of St. Bertin* claimed that God had restored Louis to his position at the head of the empire, we must not overlook the repeated claims of revelation and prophetic authority that not only recognized and reified Louis' own prophetic claims, but used them against him as well.

¹¹⁰ De Jong, *Penitential*, 49.

¹¹¹ De Jong, *Penitential*, 49-50.

¹¹² De Jong, *Penitential*, 50-51.

¹¹³ On the external attacks, see Collins, *Medieval*, 352.

834-840: *Struggle for Stability and Control*

Although some read the final years of Louis' reign as reflecting a strong, confident rule, he was never able to turn back the clock and spent most of his time struggling to keep his sons in line. As the events of this final phase narrated in the two major sources, the West-Frankish *Annals of St. Bertin* and the East-Frankish *Annals of Fulda* make clear, Louis managed to hold on to power despite the extensive internal and external pressures, although he did not enjoy the same freedom as he had in the first phase of his reign.¹¹⁴ Balancing his ambitious sons Louis the German and Pippin and the annual attacks of Northmen, pirates in the Mediterranean, defections and apostasies within his court, and the continual struggle to provide a place for Charles the Bald, Louis spent his final years with little time to issue the same sort of statements that expressed his previous prophetic claims. The narrative sources for the period, however, offer much evidence for how the acts of recognizing, interpreting, and responding to the revealed mind of God had permeated nearly every level of Frankish discourses of power.

In the narrative sources for the end of Louis' reign, signs and portents dominate the narratives when elites wrote letters to each other, and to Louis, debating the meaning of comets and the attacks of Northmen. The extent of Louis' penchant for knowing and interpreting the will of God can be seen as well in a vision text that was given to Louis by king Aethelwulf of Wessex, when he asked the Frankish emperor for permission to pass through

¹¹⁴ These sources have been most recently edited in F. Grat, J. Vielliard, and S. Clémencet (eds.), *Annales de Saint-Bertin* (Paris, 1964) and in F. Kurze (ed.), *Annales Fuldenses sive Annales regni Francorum orientalis*, MGH SSRG 7.

the empire on pilgrimage to Rome.¹¹⁵ This vision text, including the many signs and portents also recorded in the narrative sources, offered an interpretation of these events and claimed to speak to Louis' interests and personality. The use of similar signs and portents pervaded the sources up to and beyond Louis' death, and their interpretation became the occasional subject of an extensive biography of Louis written shortly after his death. The Astronomer, in his *Life of the Emperor Louis*, defended the emperor's legacy by emphasizing the emperor's prophetic qualities in order to counter those who appeared to blame Louis for the quick breakdown of the empire after Louis' death. By the year of that event, 840, claims to divine inspiration, including attempts to read and interpret the signs and portents of God's will, had become commonplace in the Frankish political discourse, and had come to define the legacy of Louis' reign.

¹¹⁵ The vision is preserved in the *Annals of St. Bertin*.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Towards the middle of his reign, Charlemagne promulgated a letter known as ‘On the Cultivation of Letters’ (*Epistola de litteris colendis*) that survives in the version sent to Abbot Baugulf of Fulda.¹ In this circular letter, most probably dated to the 780s, Charlemagne emphasized the importance of the education and thorough training of clerics and other elites in his realm. While Einhard, in his biography of Charlemagne written late in the 820s, claimed that Charles was driven by an insatiable urge to learn, modern scholars have broadly agreed that Charlemagne felt—or at least publicly depicted himself as feeling—responsible for the salvation of those he ruled and that this motivated his reforms.² As he continued in the letter, Charlemagne drew a connection between the deficiencies in writing that concerned him and the far more dangerous potential deficiencies in understanding Scripture; he noted that “we all know well that although there are dangerous errors of words, far more dangerous are errors

¹ *De litteris colendis*, 78-79.

² Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 25, 30: Erat eloquentia copiosus et exuberans poteratque quicquid vellet apertissime exprimere. Nec patrio tantum sermone contentus, etiam peregrinus linguis ediscendis operam impendit. In quibus Latinam ita didicit, ut aequae illa ac patria lingua orare sit solitus, Grecam vero melius intellegere quam pronuntiare poterat. Adeo quidem facundus erat, ut etiam dicaculus appareret. Artes liberales studiosissime coluit, earumque doctores plurimum veneratus magnis adficebat honoribus. For a comparable, contemporary depiction of Charlemagne’s predilections towards learning, see Theodulf, *de ordine baptismi ad magnum senonensem liber*, prologue, in S. Keefe (ed.), *Water and the Word*, vol. 2 (Notre Dame, 2002) p. 281: quippe cui hoc semper familiare est: ut exercent praesules ad sanctarum scripturarum indagationem et sanam sobriamque doctrinam, omne clerum ad disciplinam, philosophos ad rerum divinarum humanarumque cognitionem, monachos ad religionem, omnes generaliter ad sanctitatem; primates ad consilium, iudices ad iustitiam, milites ad armorum experientiam, praelatos ad humilitatem, subditos ad oboedientiam, omnes generaliter ad prudentiam, iustitiam, fortitudinem, temperantiam atque concordiam. His et his similibus rebus ille virorum optimorum deo sibi propitio sanctae ecclesiae fastigium accumulare non cessat et admirabili in rerum ecclesiasticarum sive civilium amministrazione strenuus, et sapientiae fonte redundat, et virtutis exhibitione triumphat. For various expressions of this idea, see Davis, *Practice*, 397; McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 309; Alberi, “Army,” 1-20; de Jong, “State,” 241-254.

of understanding.”³ Leaving no doubt about the dangers he had in mind, Charlemagne explained in the letter that such reforms were necessary “so that they who eagerly desire to please God by correct living will not fail to please Him by correct speaking.”⁴ Pleasing God, maintaining His favor, and avoiding His anger, more than anything else, formed the core motivation behind Charlemagne’s efforts to reform and correct his subjects.

If Charlemagne’s goal was to please God, how did he know what God wanted? Even in the ‘On the Cultivation of Letters’, Charlemagne placed great importance on correct understanding and the practice it informed. These two strands of thought—how to know God’s will and therefore how to please God—would be significant themes in the course of Charlemagne’s early reign and, as later chapters will demonstrate, were early signs of developments in the discourses of power in Frankish political culture during the reign of Louis the Pious.

In this chapter I will investigate key official documents, letters, legislation, and declarations from Charlemagne as well as the documents produced by his early teachers and advisors. In order to understand the two notions that form the foundation for later use of the prophetic—how to know God’s will and how to please God—I will explore the documents produced by Charlemagne’s counsellors, teachers, and advisors, especially the works of Cathwulf and the Lombards, Peter of Pisa and Paul the Deacon. Finally, I will turn to the late 780s and the revolutionary documents promulgated as a part of Charlemagne’s reforms: ‘On

³ *De litteris colendis*, 79: Et bene novimus omnes, quia, quamvis periculosi sint errores verborum, multo periculosiores sunt errores sensuum.

⁴ *De litteris colendis*, 79: ut Deo placere appetunt recte vivendo, ei etiam placere non negligent recte loquendo.

the Cultivation of Letters' and the *Admonitio generalis* of 789. These sources, as well as Charlemagne's correspondence with Pope Hadrian, reveal the shifts in how Charlemagne approached his rule, and the importance he placed on pleasing God and how this presupposed the need to discover God's will.

I. Divine Favor and Inspiration in Charlemagne's Early Reign

Cathwulf and the Signs of Divine Anger and Approval

Amongst the earliest letters of direction or advice Charlemagne received was a letter from Cathwulf. Little is known of Cathwulf, but his name betrays an Anglo-Saxon origin and his text suggests he wrote shortly after the Frankish conquest of the Lombard kingdom in Italy in 775.⁵ Analyzing the style and content of the letter scholars have suggested that the Anglo-Saxon knew Charlemagne and may have been a teacher or advisor of some sort, but this must remain speculative.⁶ Joanna Story has proposed that Cathwulf's use of familiar language and imperatives suggested a "personal proximity to the king."⁷ Cathwulf's intimate and bold style of direct address also echoes the language of the scriptural sources he frequently deployed to instruct the king. . Additionally, Cathwulf often layered his second-person singular imperatives with similar language from the Psalms, although where the Psalms instead often

⁵ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 501-504. For a careful overview of the text, see Anton, "Königsvorstellung," 298-301; cf. Garrison, "Letters," 305-328. On Cathwulf's letter as a *Fürstenspiegel*, see Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, 75-79.

⁶ For a thorough study of Cathwulf's letter and a potential context for its delivery, see Story, "Cathwulf," 1-21. Compare with Meens, "Politics," 354.

⁷ Story, "Cathwulf," 3.

took the form of second-person-plural imperatives.⁸ Mary Garrison has observed that the poetic and liturgical character of the letter suggests that the text may have been read out in a large gathering; further, Joanna Story has argued persuasively that Cathwulf's letter was most probably associated with the 775 foundation of the new basilica at the royal monastery of Saint-Denis, and that Cathwulf may have been a member of the community there. While Garrison identified the octosyllabic verse used in the salutation of the letter, a feature probably only noticeable by Charlemagne if the letter had been read aloud to the king, Story noted how the curious repetition of the number eight (i.e. in naming the eight signs of God's approval of Charlemagne's kingship, and the eight columns of good rule) would have symbolically resonated with the new basilica at Saint-Denis and especially with its carved columns.⁹

Covering just over four full pages in its modern MGH edition, Cathwulf's letter sought to affirm both Charlemagne's complete dependence upon God and the necessity for him to act according to God's will if he wanted any success as a ruler. To make his point, Cathwulf discussed signs that he interpreted as God's favor for Charlemagne, and later also warned the king of the signs of an unjust ruler, thereby offering him, and perhaps his advisors, a way of evaluating God's approval or anger. Cathwulf's understanding of how God's power manifested in the political world appeared prominently throughout the letter, expressing itself through a

⁸ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 302: domine mi rex, illum exalta in his omnibus predictis in laude, quod ipse te honorifice super omnes antecessores tuos gentis tuae exaltans, iuxta illud: "Exaltate dominum Deum nostrum" et reliqua; item: "Iubilare Deo omnis terra." On Cathwulf using scriptural language in his letter, see Garrison, "Letters," 325.

⁹ Garrison, "Letters," 305-328; Story, "Cathwulf," 20-21.

language of signs and portents that would be taken up by others surrounding, and seeking to influence, Charlemagne.¹⁰

Following his brief introduction Cathwulf greeted Charlemagne by stating, “my lord king, I hereby beseech you to always remember Him who, as I believe, created you from nothing and made from the very least the very greatest.”¹¹ Cathwulf confirmed this initial theme of his letter by introducing to Charlemagne the eight signs of God’s favor that set Charles apart from other men. These signs—events from Charles’ early reign—were used by Cathwulf simultaneously to prove that God had elevated Charlemagne to his position and that such success was impossible without God.

The first and second “sign[s] of blessedness” Cathwulf chose were Charlemagne’s royal birth and baptism, to which Cathwulf added three signs referring to Charles’ deceased brother Carloman.¹² Cathwulf interpreted Carloman’s death as God’s means of preserving Charles from his brother’s treachery and of elevating Charles to sole rule over the Franks “without the shedding of blood.”¹³ The final three signs of God’s favor to Charlemagne were the defeat of the

¹⁰ Story, “Cathwulf,” 8.

¹¹ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 502: Domine mi rex, igitur praeco te, ut illius semper recordaveris, sicut credo, qui de nihilo te creavit, etiam ex minimo fecit maximum.

¹² Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 502: beatitudinis signum.

¹³ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 502: Quinta: non minimum est beatitudinis signum, quod Deus transtulit illum de regno ad alterum et exaltavit te super omne hoc regnum sine sanguinis effusione. On the conflict between the brothers and Carloman’s death, see *ARF* a.771, 32: Et eodem anno Carlomanus rex defunctus est in villa, quae dicitur Salmontiacus. *RARF* a.771, 33: Cumque ibi aliquamdiu moraretur, Carlomanus frater ad II nonas Decembris decessit in villa Salmontiaci. Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.4, 6: Et Karlomannus quidem post administratum communiter biennio regnum morbo decessit; Karolus autem fratre defuncto consensu omnium Francorum rex constituitur; *Chronicon Moissiacense* a.771, 119: Et in sequenti anno Karlomannus mortuus est. Karolus autem, fratre defuncto, consensu omnium Franchorum, rex constituitur. On this early period, see Jarnut, “Bruderkampf,” 235-246, and M. Richter, “Karl der Große,” 587-594.

Lombard kingdom in Italy, the capture of Pavia, and Charlemagne's victorious entry into Rome, where he received the "kingdom of the Italians" from God.¹⁴ Confirming his message with Scripture, Cathwulf repeated a sequence of passages describing the same divine aid he suggested as active in Charles' own life, claiming that "'God fights for us,' and again, as the Blessed Paul said, 'if God is for us, who is against us?'"¹⁵ Cathwulf's interpretation of these eight events—and the scriptural passages with which he compared his interpretations—laid the foundation for the warnings and admonitions that formed the core of the letter.

Building upon his eight signs of divine favor, Cathwulf admonished Charlemagne that the only way to retain God's approval was to rule justly and act according to God's will. Shifting in tone, Cathwulf explained that "by the command of God, first I write to you a few things that demonstrate the rules and contain the law of all Christianity."¹⁶ Acting on God's command, as he claimed, Cathwulf proceeded to admonish Charlemagne to follow the "eight pillars pertaining to a just king," actions including patience, generosity, justice in correction and judgement, and light taxes.¹⁷ Cathwulf explained that if Charles ruled justly

then there will be balance in the air and weather, fertility on the land and sea and of all things growing in them. In addition, you will rule over many peoples happily and your enemies will fall before your face, and much more. On the other hand, as Saint Patrick said: 'because of the injustice of the king, there will be misfortune within his own family, dissent of wife as well as sons, famines among his peoples, pestilence, infertility of the land and also the sea.

¹⁴ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 502: Octava, quod auream et imperialem Romam intrasti, et Italiorum regna cum omnibus praeciosis a rege regnorum suaviter accepisti. On the Charles' Italian campaigns against the Lombards, see Gasparri, "Il passaggio," 25-43.

¹⁵ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 502: 'Deus pugnat pro nobis,'; item sanctus Paulus: 'Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos est?'

¹⁶ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 503: Primum pauca vobis scribo, sicut canones promunt et totius christianitatis legem continent per Dei mandatum.

¹⁷ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 503: Sunt autem octo columnae regis iusti propriae.

The fruit of the land will be struck by diverse storms, and [the unjust king] will be conquered by his enemies and driven from the kingdom.' Similarly, you have enough examples from your days and those of your father: Waifar, Desiderius and his son, and their kingdom and even more, just like Rehoboam, Achaz, Achab and the remaining kings of the Jews, [all] did evil in the presence of the Lord and did not walk in the commandments of God.¹⁸

Drawing a direct connection between Charlemagne, his rule and realm, and the wider consequences of a ruler not following God's will, Cathwulf made it clear how Charlemagne could retain God's favor and the cost of not doing so.¹⁹ Comparing the former duke of Aquitaine and the former king of the Lombards—both recently conquered by the Franks—to notable wicked kings from Scripture, Cathwulf affirmed his declaration of divine favor for Charlemagne and his warnings about how to maintain it. In addition, Cathwulf also described the signs of good and bad kings, the ways that one could recognize God's approval or anger with a ruler. As both warning and judgement, the signs Cathwulf held up for Charlemagne operated by the same logic that the eight signals of God's support for Charlemagne had, and he used Scripture and recent history to support his claims.

¹⁸ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 503: Et tunc erit aeris et tempestatum tranquillitas, terre maris cum omnibus in eis nascentibus fecunditas, et dominaberis etiam multis feliciter gentibus et inimici tui ante faciem tuam cadunt et reliqua. E contra, sicut dixit sanctus Patricius: Pro regis iniustitia sui ipsius infelicitas erit, uxoris filiorum quoque dissensio, populorum fames, pestilentia, infecunditas terre, maris quoque tempestatibus fructus terrarum diversis percussis, et ab inimicis suis superatus et expulsus de regno. Et sicut habes exempla sufficienter in his diebus et patrum tuorum, sicut de Waepere et de Desiderio filioque eius regnisque illorum et rel[iqua]; sicut Roboam, Achaz, Achab et reliqui reges Iudeorum, qui fecerunt malum in conspectu Domini et non ambulaverunt in mandatis Dei. Roboam, Achaz, and Achab, depicted as wicked kings, are mentioned in 3 Kings 12 and 16, 4 Kings 16. While some argue that Cathwulf appears to have derived the first half of this passage (*Pro regis... de regno*) from the canon-law collection known to modern scholars as the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, the ultimate source for both Cathwulf and the *Collectio* remain the Hiberno-Latin text falsely attributed to Cyprian, known as *de duodecim abusiis saeculi*. On the ascription of the Latin to *Patricius*, see Breen, "De XII Abusiis," 89-90. Cf. Anton, "Pseudo-Cyprian," 568-617.

¹⁹ On the perceived connection between royal actions and the fate of kingdoms in the early middle ages, see Blattman, "Unglück," 82; Anton, "Königsvorstellungen," pp. 270-330; cf. Erkens' introduction as well as Diesenberger's and Reimitz's articles in the same volume.

Cathwulf urged Charlemagne “therefore, to read all of this and think on it diligently so that you will not destroy your honor now or in the future.”²⁰ Cathwulf made the weight of his admonitions clear as he explained to Charles the full extent of his responsibilities as king. After emphasizing that Charles must praise God, Cathwulf wrote:

remember, my king, and be, therefore always with fear and love of God your king because you are in His place to rule over and protect all His members, and to give an accounting on the day of judgement, even for yourself. And a bishop is in the secondary place, as if in the place of Christ. Therefore, reflect together among yourselves diligently to establish the law of God over the people of God.²¹

Proclaiming that Charlemagne stood above the bishops as they worked together to impose the law of God on his people, Cathwulf tied together the layers of his thought by reminding Charles of his ultimate accountability to God. As he had already made clear, if Charles failed in acting justly or according to what God wanted, the resulting signs would be clear enough.

II. Conceptualizing God, King, and Cosmos

Charlemagne's Lombards: Peter of Pisa and Paul the Deacon

Cathwulf was not Charlemagne's only advisor in these early years. Many of the scholars whom Charlemagne gathered around himself are remembered as grammarians,

²⁰ Cathwulf, *Epistola* 504: Tu ergo, rex mi, hec omnia lege et diligenter considera, ne honorem tuum hic et in futuro perderis. Janet Nelson argued that among other things, “*honor* meant, first, high office,” in “Kingship,” 427.

²¹ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 503: Memor, esto ergo semper, rex mi, Dei regis tui cum timore et amore, quod tu es in vice illius super omnia membra eius custodire et regere, et rationem reddere in die iudicii, etiam per te. Et episcopus est in secundo loco, in vice Christi tantum est. Ergo considerate inter vos diligenter legem Dei constituere super populum Dei. For a closer look at how this passage has been used by scholars of medieval political thought, see Moore, “La monarchie,” 308-309; Ullmann, *Kingship*, 49-50.

poets, historians, and theologians, but this overlooks the fact that many also functioned as ambassadors, advisors to Charlemagne and others, scribes, and experts in many subjects critical to Charlemagne's court.²² Some of these individuals composed texts at Charlemagne's request or at the request of those close to him, some wrote texts in hopes of influencing Charles, and perhaps some spent time with the king.²³ In order to explore this early intellectual milieu within which Charlemagne and his advisors acted we will examine the surviving works of two of Charles' teachers and advisors, specifically the Lombards Peter of Pisa and Paul the Deacon. Because, as Donald Bullough observed, "there was as yet no real parallel [north of the Alps] to the cultivation of Latin letters at the Lombard royal court," Lombards such as Peter and Paul were pre-eminent among Charlemagne's early scholars.²⁴ These scholars belonged to what historians have come to call the first generation of scholars at the Frankish court and were responsible for laying the groundwork for what would be referred to as the Carolingian Renaissance.²⁵ In works ranging from a commentary on the biblical book of Daniel and histories of Rome and of the Lombards, how did these scholars explore how to know God's will and how to please God, often in efforts to educate and influence Charlemagne?

²² Mary Garrison argued that they "would have thought of themselves primarily not as poets, but as ambassadors, teachers of grammar, experts on time-reckoning and biblical exegesis, advisers to the king or theologians." Garrison, "Emergence," 112.

²³ Recently, Johannes Fried (*Karl*, 48) argued Charles simply believed what he was taught by his ecclesiastical advisers, a view that threatens to cast Charlemagne as a mere cypher of those around him. While it seems likely that Charlemagne was convinced by some of what he was taught, there is not enough evidence to prove Fried's simple assertion.

²⁴ Bullough, *Charlemagne*, 100.

²⁵ Contreni, "Bishops", 29. For broader surveys of the various generations of scholars connected to the Carolingian court, see Contreni, "Pursuit," 106-141 and *idem*, "Carolingian Renaissance," 709-757.

Peter of Pisa as the Teacher of Charlemagne

Before exploring the scriptural commentary he wrote for Charlemagne, we must first examine Peter's life and his connection to the king. Einhard recalled that "in the learning of grammar, [Charles] learned from the aged deacon, Peter of Pisa, and in all other subjects he learned from Alcuin, also named Albinus from Britain, also a deacon."²⁶ Despite apparently serving as Charlemagne's teacher throughout the 780s, little information has survived about Peter's role at court.²⁷ As Donald Bullough has reminded us, however, Einhard knew next to nothing about the "pre-Aachen court," the brevity of mention of Peter does not diminish the impact Peter had on Charles and the thinking of those around the king.²⁸

Peter's life can be briefly stated. We know nothing of his family, birth, or education; instead, the earliest detail in Peter's life we learn comes to us from a 799 letter from Alcuin to Charlemagne. Recalling his journey to Rome in the late 750s or early 760s, Alcuin explained that he learned that in the Lombard capital of Pavia, Peter had publicly debated a Jew named Iulius or Lullus. While the subject of the debate remains unknown, Alcuin recommended that if Charles had any other questions, he should ask a student of Peter's named Angilbert, one of

²⁶ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.24, 30: In discenda grammatica Petrum Pisanum diaconem senem audivit, in ceteris disciplinis Albinum cognomento Alcoinum, item diaconem, de Britannia.

²⁷ Most scholars agree that the Frankish court would only "become a center of learning in the sense of a focus of intellectual activity in the late 780s and early 790s," since the surviving evidence of intellectual activity becomes much more pronounced after 793. McKitterick, *Kingdoms*, 161. Compare McKitterick's appraisal with Bullough, "Aula Renovata," 131.

²⁸ Bullough, "Aula Renovata," pp. 124, 139-140. Another difficulty in establishing Peter's impact on Charlemagne is Alcuin's potential dislike for the Lombard scholar: Alcuin described him as Hercules, smashing about with his club. For Alcuin's poetic depiction of Peter, see Alcuin, *Carmina IV*, in E. Dümmler (ed.), *MGH Poet.* p. 222, lns. 45-46: Mormure dic tacito: 'Cathegita Petre valetio! | Herculeo sevus claro ferit ille, caveto!' For a commentary on this poem, see Brunhölzl, *Geschichte I*, 249. Manitius, *Geschichte*, 452-453.

Charlemagne's other scholars.²⁹ By the late 780s or early 790s Peter returned to Italy, and yet he remained in contact with Charles and continued as an advisor and teacher to the king.³⁰

Having established his reputation in Pavia, Peter probably became part of the court shortly after Charlemagne's conquest of Lombard Italy in 774. He taught the king, composed and compiled several grammatical texts, wrote a brief commentary on the book of Daniel, and composed poetry including several poetic letters to Paul the Deacon in the name of Charlemagne.³¹ Nevertheless, judging by the surviving poems and verse-epistles between Charlemagne and Peter, the aged Lombard appears to have served as a teacher and spiritual advisor for Charlemagne even after the teacher had returned to Italy in the late 780s or early 790s.³²

²⁹ Alcuin, Ep. 172, MGH Ep 4, p.285: dum ego adolescens Romam perrexi et aliquantos dies in Papia regali ciuitate demorarer, quidam Iudaeus, Lullus nomine, cum Petro magistro habuit disputationem; et scriptam esse eandem controuersiam in eadem ciuitati audiui. Idem Petrus fuit, qui in palatio uestro grammaticam docens claruit. Forsan Omerus uester aliquid exinde audiuit a magistro praedicto. For a careful study of Alcuin's letter, see Bullough, "Reminiscence," 174-201. cf. Villa, "Horazüberlieferung," 44.

³⁰ Peter's correspondence with Charles has been edited in Neff (ed.), *Gedichte*.

³¹ Peter's poetic works are edited alongside those of Paul the Deacon in Neff (ed.), *Gedichte*. Peter's grammatical works have been edited by Krotz and Gorman (eds.), *Peter of Pisa*.

³² In the poetry written in Charlemagne's name to Peter, 'the king' consistently addressed Peter as *magister*, teacher, which is unsurprisingly consistent with Angilbert's own address of his former teacher, as Angilbert may have written the poems in Charles' name. Neff (ed.), *carmina*. XXIV (from 'Charles'), XXXIX (from Angilbert), XL (from 'Charles'), XLI (from 'Charles'), pp. 140-142 163-169. *Carmen* XXXIX, lns. 1-4: Carmina mitto Petro, dulci doctoque magistro, | Angelbertus ego carmina mitto Petro. | Petre magister have, Christus te salvet ubique, | Saecula per longa, Petre magister have.; *Carmen* XL, 166-167, lns. 1-2, 20: Rex Carulus Petro, dulci doctoque magistro, | Cordis ab affectu carmina mitto libens. | Sis memor et nostri, Petre magister have.; *Carmen* XLI, 168, lns. 1-2: Rex Karolus gaudens <ad> te, <Petre, docte> magister, | Versibus his paucis aeternam inscribo salutem. While not speaking specifically to each of these particular poems, Peter Godman has argued that it was Alcuin, rather than Angilbert, who began to write much of the verse-epistles *in nomine regis*; Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford, 1987) p. 55-56. Michael Gorman has argued that Peter must have returned to Italy at the latest by 796, based on a charter subscribed by "*Petrus diaconus* and *Fiducia clericus*." About Fiducia, Gorman adds, "we know that Peter and Fiducia had returned to Pisa and were living there by that date. Whether Fiducia too was from Pisa or Pavia, or whether Peter met him at Charlemagne's court, we do not know." Gorman, "Peter of Pisa," 239 and Bullough, "*Aula Renovata*," 131

Dating Peter's Minor Questions on Daniel

Written as a teaching text with alternating questions and responses, Peter's 'Minor Questions on Daniel' (*Quaestiunculae in Danielelem*) fills the first seventeen folios following a full-page inscription in Brussels ms. II 2575 (eighteen pages in Krotze's and Gorman's edition) and offers no title or introduction beyond the inscription.³³ As the only exemplar of Peter's text, the Brussels manuscript boasts a beautiful inscription: "Here begins the book of various minor questions with their answers, which the Lord King Charles ordered to be copied from the *authenticus* of Peter the Archdeacon."³⁴ Suggesting that Charlemagne had ordered the text preserved from Peter's original, the inscription offers no other aid in dating the text beyond Charles' title that suggests it preceded his imperial coronation in 800. In order to narrow down the dates for the text's composition, a clue may be offered by the final question and response Peter included. Peter's final question and response addressed Daniel 11:6, a passage that describes the vision of the "king of the south" offering his daughter in a marriage alliance with the "king of the north."³⁵ In the response, Peter explained that the alliance failed and that the king of the north, Antiochus, and his new bride both wound up poisoned.³⁶

³³ Peter's *Minor Questions on Daniel* survives in the manuscript Brussels Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België ms. II 2575, 1v-17v. On this manuscript, see Gorman, "Peter of Pisa," 240-242.

³⁴ Brussels Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België ms. II 2575 (CLA X 1553): *INCIPIT LIBER DE DIUERSIS QUAESTIUNCULIS CUM RESPONSIONIBUS SUI. QUEM IUSSIT DOMNUS REX CAROLUS TRANSCRIBERE EX AUTHENTICO PETRI ARCHIDIACONI*. For the manuscript and the early printed versions of its contents, see Gorman, "Peter of Pisa," 238-260.

³⁵ *Quaestiunculae in Danielelem*, 221, 17r-17v: Quid est quod dicunt et post annos illius commiscuntur filiaque regis austri ueniet ad regem aquilonis facere amicitiam et non obtinebit fortitudine brachii nec stabit semen eius et tradetur ipsa et qui adduxerunt eam iubenens eius et qui confortabant eam in temporibus.

³⁶ *Quaestiunculae in Danielelem*, 221, 17r-17v: Hoc est quod nunc dicitur per multos annos ptolomeus philadelfus et anthiochus qui uocabatur theos id est Deus facient amicitias et filia regis austri hoc est ptholomei ueniet ad regem aquilonis id est antiochum ut inter patrem ac uirum iungat amicitias et non poterit inquit obtinere nec

While it is possible that this merely demonstrates the unfinished state of the *Quaestiunculae*, it is equally possible that Peter, a Lombard whose career began near the court of the Lombard King Desiderius and continued to the time of the Frankish conquest, might have selected the passage for its relevance to Carloman's disastrous marriage alliance with a southern king, Peter's own king Desiderius.³⁷ Since Peter was extremely selective in the material he discussed in his text, and because this extract is one of several close parallels with crucial issues that determined the course of Charlemagne's early reign, it is most probable that Peter created his text in the mid-to-late 770s, after Charlemagne's Lombard conquest, but before his brother's Lombard marriage and subsequent death, as well as the difficulties surrounding the co-rule with his brother, became politically irrelevant.³⁸ Read in this context, the *Quaestiunculae* illuminate many of the concerns and questions the king himself most probably held at this early stage of his reign, revealing as well how one of Charles' scholars utilized prophetic scripture as a guide to these concerns.

Peter of Pisa and the Use and Abuse of Jerome of Stridon

Written in an interrogative style used at Charlemagne's court in the eighth and early ninth centuries, Peter's *Minor Questions on Daniel* is the first text in the manuscript and, as a

semen illius stare in regno syriae sed et ipsa berenice et qui eam adduxerent interfici<?>entur. Rex quoque antiochus qui confortabat eam id est {17v} per quem poterat praeualere ueneno uxoris occisus est. Laudicen enim prior illius uxor eum per ministros ueneno interficit quia dicebat rex berenicem consortem regni et hanc concubinam.

³⁷ The marriage alliance was briefly discussed by Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 18, 22: Deinde cum matris hortatu filiam Desiderii regis Langobardorum duxisset uxorem, incertum qua de causa, post annum eam repudiavit et Hildigardam de gente Suaborum praecipuae nobilitatis feminam in matrimonium accepit. See Nelson, "Making a Difference," 171-190.

³⁸ A discussion of joint rule and a suggestion that by "law of nature" the elder should rule alone can be found in *Quaestiunculae in Danielelem*, 207, 4v.

study of its contents demonstrates, it was written with the education of a ruler in mind.³⁹

Presenting sixty-nine questions and answers adapted from Jerome's Commentary on Daniel, Peter's text focuses primarily on the visions of rulers and their realms, and on the power of God that determined their fates.⁴⁰ In their dismissal of the 'Minor Questions on Daniel', Michael Gorman described Peter's work as "largely a reworking of Jerome's commentary on Daniel," and James Palmer argued that Peter said "little that is new," both have overlooked the plain fact that Peter repurposed and drastically altered Jerome's Commentary on Daniel and created an original work. Peter's text demonstrated, as we shall see, a sustained interest in kingship, history and the decisive role God played therein.⁴¹

Jerome's Commentary on Daniel was an interesting choice for Peter, since Jerome had written his text to refute the arguments of Porphyry by claiming that Daniel had to be understood both prophetically and historically.⁴² Although Peter relied almost exclusively on

³⁹ Contreni argued that this early generation of scholars (c.780-c.800) "favored encyclopedic commentaries based on earlier florilegia of patristic and early medieval authors," naming specifically Wigbod's work on Genesis and Peter of Pisa's on Daniel, Contreni, "Bishops," 29. Discussing the entirety of Charlemagne's reign, not just the later period, Bullough argued that the consistent feature that unites the intellectual activity of Charles' reign—as it survives in written form—"is the presence of handbooks, manuals, in the several modern senses of that word: compilations, abbreviated 'standard' texts—with a not unexpected bias to *grammatica*—assemblages of extracts of variable length, both inherited...—and and newly created, on secular and theological topics, summary introductions to complex subjects." Bullough, "Library," 362.

⁴⁰ For an overview of the text's contents, see Bullough, "Reminiscence," 194.

⁴¹ Donald Bullough argued that Peter's text may have been created after his debate in Pavia with the Jewish scholar Iulius (Bullough, "Reminiscence and Reality," 199-200), and James Palmer explained that Peter created "a text on prophecy in Old Testament history rather than a treatise on Antichrist and the dangers of empire in the future," Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 137-138.

⁴² In four books, Jerome gave fairly balanced treatment to the entire Book of Daniel, with the first three historically interpreting the text, and the fourth—often known under the title *de antichristo* (on the Antichrist)—aimed squarely at Porphyry, Zier, "Daniel," 45-47. Peter's *Quaestiunculae* drew upon the first three books, stopping at Daniel 11:6, before Jerome's third book ends with verse 20. This may suggest that Peter never finished the work, that the scribe copying from Peter's original preserved only a part of the body of the text, or that the exemplar Peter utilized was itself incomplete.

the language of Jerome to pose and respond to the questions, his work remained highly selective and very willing to do significant damage to the original purpose of Jerome's text since he shared neither Jerome's audience or priorities.

To crystallize how selectively Peter excerpted Jerome's work: compared to the seventeen folios with an average of twenty-five lines per side of Peter's *Quaestiunculae*, one of the earliest complete manuscripts of Jerome's text boasts one hundred and eleven folios, with an average of twenty-six lines per side.⁴³ Beyond the very restricted amount of Jerome's material Peter preserved, an example will suffice to demonstrate just how much freedom Peter exercised with Jerome's work. Using the fifty-second question of the text as an example, a question asking about the meaning of the phrase "until it has been enlarged to the prince of strength" from Daniel 8:11, I will compare Jerome's original commentary with Peter's work, bolding what Peter took directly from Jerome.

Jerome, <i>Commentarium in Daniele</i> , bk. 2, pp. 853-855. ⁴⁴	Peter, <i>Quaestiunculae in Daniele</i> ⁴⁵
Cornu autem grande, ipse est rex primus Alexander, quo tricesimo secundo aetatis suae anno mortuo in Babylone: Surrexerunt pro eo quattuor duces eius, qui sibi imperiunt diuiserunt—Aegyptum enim Ptolomaeus Lagi filius tenuit; Macedonas Philippus, qui et Arideus frater Alexandri, syriam et Babylonem et omnia regna orientis, Seleucus Nicanor; Asiae regnauit Antigonus—, sed non, inquit, in fortitudine	

⁴³ Comparing Brussels ms. II 2575 with St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 120, both dated around the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

⁴⁴ Jerome, *Commentariorum in Daniele*, 853-855.

⁴⁵ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 213, 9r-9v: Quid est quod dicit et usque ad principem fortitudinis magnificatus est.

eius: nullus enim magnitudini Alexandri potuit coaequari. Et post multa tempora Syriae rex impudens facie et intellegens propositiones consurget, **Antiochus Epiphanes filius Seleuci, qui Philopator apellatus est.**

Cum obses fuisset Romae et nesciente senatu per dolum cepisset imperium, contra Ptolomaeum Philometorem dimicauit, hoc est contra meridiem et contra Aegyptios, rursumque ad orientem contra eos qui res nouas in Perside moliebantur, ad extremum contra Iudaeos dimicans, capta Iudaea, ingressus est Hierosolymam et in templo Dei simulacrum Iouis Olympii statuit. Et usque ad fortitudinem caeli—id est filios Israel, qui angelorum uallabantur auxilio—erexit magnificentiam suam, ita ut de sanctis plurimos idolatriae subiecerit et uelut stelas caeli conculcaret pedibus suis; atque ita factum est, ut et meridiem et orientalem, id est Aegyptum et

Persidem, su teneret imperio. Quodque ait: Et usque ad principem fortitudinis magnificatus est, hoc significat: quod **erectus sit contra Deum et sanctos illius persecutus, et tulerit 'ενδελεχισμόν** id est **iuge sacrificium** quod mane offerebatur et uespere, et polluerit atque deiecerit locum sanctificationis eius. Et hoc non sua uirtute sed propter peccata populi, atque ita factum est, ut ueritas prosterneretur in terra et, cultu idolorum florente, Dei religio conquiesceret.

Et audiui unum de sanctis loquentem et dixit unus sanctus alteri nescio, cui loquenti. Pro altero nescio quo, quod Symmachus interpretatus est τινί ποτε, quem et nos secuti sumus, Aquila et Theodotio, et Septuaginta 'phelmoni', ipsum uerbum hebraicum, posuerunt. Nomen ergo angeli

Hoc dictum est de **antioco epiphane filio seleuci qui et filopater appellatus est**

quia **erectus sit contra Deum et sanctos illius persecutus et tulerit iuge sacrificium**

tacens, generaliter unum quemlibet de angelis indicauit.

Usquequo uisio et iuge sacrificium et peccatum desolationis quae facta est, et sanctuarium et fortitudo conculcabitur?

Unus angelus interrogat alterum angelum: usque ad quod tempus Dei iudicio sub Antiocho rege syriae templum futurum sit desolatum et simulacrum iouis staturum in templo Dei.

et peccatum desolationis quae facta est et sanctuarium et fortitudo conculcabitur.

Unus angelus interrogat alterum angelum usque ad quod tempus Dei iudicio sub antioco rege syriae templum futurum sit desolatum et simulacrum iouis staturum in templo Dei, posuit enim antiocus statuam iouis in templo Dei.

Like a form of subtractive art, Peter reduced Jerome's language hugely, stripping back most of it in order to emphasize a few key points and give it new contours. Throughout the *Minor Questions on Daniel*, Peter simplified the text by removing the comparisons between translations of the Greek Old Testament as well as many of the contextual explanations and alternative interpretations, leaving only the information in which he, or his audience, was interested. Further, Peter often disregarded the order of Scripture or Jerome's ordering as he answered his series of questions, treating some later material before passages that come earlier in the Book of Daniel, as well as passing over entire chapters with a single question. As a result, Peter created a new text from the material he took from Jerome, and while the words are often Jerome's, Peter's exegetical ventriloquism give them new meaning and relevance to his royal audience. Peter focused his text on how God manifested in transitions of power—the rise and fall of great kings and their kingdoms and empires—most interested in precisely *why* they succeeded or failed.

Kingship, Divine Power, and History in Peter's Minor Questions on Daniel

In his first question-and-response pair, Peter affirmed the historical and political focus of his text by ignoring the ordering of Jerome's commentary or of the book of Daniel and asking:

What are those kingdoms that King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision?

The kingdom of the Babylonians is indicated in the head of the statue, and after that the kingdoms of the Medes and Persians, which have the appearance of silver, and the third kingdom signifies the kingdom of Macedonian Alexander and the successors of Alexander, which have the appearance of bronze. The fourth kingdom, clearly, pertains to the Romans, made of iron that shatters and conquers all things. But its feet and toes are a mix of iron and clay, something that by this time has been most clearly confirmed: just as in the beginning nothing was stronger and more resilient than the Roman Empire, even so in the end of earthly affairs, nothing will have been weaker.⁴⁶

While occasional questions arise addressing the odd grammatical or textual question from the Danielic text or from Jerome's commentary, most of the 'Minor Questions on Daniel' involve the visions contained in the Book of Daniel and their political or historical interpretations.

Ranging from Babylonian kings to Alexander the Great and his successors to the Roman Empire, Peter led his royal audience from one ruler to another, occasionally pausing to insert a few other notes of interest. As my analysis will demonstrate, however, Peter primarily focused his questions on how and why God assisted or resisted each ruler in turn.

⁴⁶ Peter of Pisa, *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 203, 1r: Quae sunt illa regna quae in uisione sua uidit Nabocodonosor rex, In capite statuae, regnum babylonium designatur, et post illud medorum atque persarum, quod argenti habet similitudinem, et regnum tertium alexandrum significat regnum macedonum successorumque alexandri, quod aeris habet similitudinem. Regnum quartum perspicue pertinet ad romanos; Ferreum est quod comminuit et domat omnia. Sed pedes eius et digiti ex parte ferrei, ex parte sunt fictiles quod hoc tempore manifestissime comprobatur. Sicut enim in principio nihil romano imperio fortius et durius fuit, ita in fine rerum nihil imbecillius. Cf. Jerome, *Commentarium in Daniele*, 793-795.

Following the first question with a series of questions involving the prophet Daniel himself, Peter's questions soon turn to the conquest, reign, visions, and trials of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, whose conquest of Israel forms the historical backdrop for the first four chapters of Daniel.⁴⁷ Offering roughly twenty-five questions on the first six chapters of the Book of Daniel, adding a few examining the mysterious writing on the wall and Cyrus' and Darius' conquest of Babylon, Peter then focused on Daniel's vision of the four beasts and Jerome's interpretations of it. Next, Peter turned to the vision of the ram and goat in Daniel 8 as a discussion of Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic kingdoms. Briefly touching on the prophet's prayer from Daniel 9, Peter included his longest responses as explanations of the "seventy weeks" mentioned in the Angel Gabriel's prophecy given to Daniel in answer to his prayer.⁴⁸ Finally, the last few questions focus on the interaction between Daniel and Darius, ending with the intriguing discussion of the marriage between the king of the north and the daughter of the king of the south. If these questions derived from conversations with Charlemagne, or at his request, his interest fixed squarely on the historico-political visions that paralleled the first vision cited, namely Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the four great kingdoms of the world.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ For a brief overview, see DiTommaso, *Daniel*, 39-45.

⁴⁸ Cf. Daniel 9:24 - Septuaginta hebdomades abbreviatae sunt super populum tuum et super urbem sanctam tuam, ut consummetur praevaricatio, et finem accipiat peccatum, et deleatur iniquitas, et adducatur justitia sempiterna, et impleatur visio et prophetia, et ungatur Sanctus sanctorum. For Jerome this section was meant to vindicate Daniel's prophecies chronologically by claiming that the seventy weeks prophesied the time until Christ's birth. For the section in the *Minor Questions on Daniel*, see *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 215-219, 11r-16v. For an overview of Jerome's sources and their use, prominently on display in this section, see Zier, "Daniel," 49-54.

⁴⁹ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 203, 1r.

In order to illustrate the lessons Peter sought to communicate to his royal audience, I will follow the outline Peter offered in his first response by focusing on Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the four kingdoms (often personified by their rulers) and explore how Peter used each to instruct his royal audience. Beginning with the example of king Nebuchadnezzar, Peter asked "Why did Nebuchadnezzar deserve to see a dream of such a great mystery? Can we believe that the most wicked of men had obtained this merit?"⁵⁰ Peter responded that Nebuchadnezzar "did not see the vision by his own merit" but was granted the vision in order that Daniel's interpretation of it would glorify God, comparing it to Pharaoh's visions that resulted in Joseph's elevation to political power (Genesis 41:39-46).⁵¹ Shifting from Nebuchadnezzar's vision to his rule, Peter next asked how the king managed to rule such a powerful kingdom despite his seven-year bout with madness.⁵² In response, Peter dismissed those who read the passage as an allegory:

For who does not know of madmen living like wild animals in the fields and forested places? Why is it remarkable if the judgement of God should have prepared this to demonstrate the power of God and to humble the pride of kings? For many things that are even more unbelievable have happened to men are recorded in the histories of the Greeks and Romans. For their tales tell of the Scylla and the chimera, the hydra, centaurs, and of men transformed into beasts and birds.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 204, 2r: Quid est quod nabochodonosor tanti mysterii meruerit cernere somnium, numquid credere possumus hominis pessimi hoc meritum obtinuisse?

⁵¹ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 204, 2r-2v: Non suo merito uidit sed ut interpretante sancto quod uiderat, Deus glorificaretur. Sic nec pharao uidere meruit, sed ut ioseph cunctis esset praepositus.

⁵² *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 205, 3r-3v: Quomodo homini sine mente per septem annos imperium reseruatum sit, regnumque potentissimum absque rege tanto tempore fuerit? aut si alius illi successit in regno cuius uecordiae aestimandum sit, ut cederet imperio quod tanto tempore possidebat; praesertim cum \hi/storiae caldeorum nihil tale contineant (conteneant ante corr.) nec potuisse fieri, ut qui de minoribus scripserunt, maiora reticuisent.

⁵³ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 205-206, 3r-3v: Quis enim nesciat amentes homines instar brutorum animantium in agris uiuere locisque siluestribus? Quid mirum si ad ostendendam Dei potentiam et humiliandam regum

Dismissing the allegorical reading of the passage, Peter argued that first, a king's seven years of bestial madness were hardly the strangest thing one could find in history, and second, God could do as He wished to "humble the pride of kings." By moving the question about humbling the pride of kings from the end of the thought to near its beginning, Peter reiterated and emphasized that when it came to rulers, God had always done and could do whatever He wished. To support this claim, Peter inserted two interpretations of the lioness of Daniel's dream (Daniel 7:4) and explained that the dream revealed either a Nebuchadnezzar who lost his earthly power but was restored because of his humility and repentance, or the Babylonian people who only learned humility after being conquered by the Persians.⁵⁴ Peter used these examples to extend his lesson from the king to the kingdom and affirm that these lessons in humility came from God.

As the only ruler discussed by Peter whose reign ended successfully, Nebuchadnezzar's restoration led to another question: "if Daniel prophesied the will of God that cannot be changed, why did he call [on Nebuchadnezzar] for alms and acts of mercy for

superbiam hoc Dei iudicium sit paratum? Nam et multo incredibilia et graecae et romanae historiae accidisse hominibus prodiderunt. Scyllam quoque et chimeram ydram adque centauros aues et feras facta ex homine narrent fabulae. The italics signal the portion of the extract from Jerome that Peter moved earlier in order to increase its emphasis. Compare with Jerome's original ordering in Jerome, *Commentarium in Daniele*, 810-811: Quis enim amentes homines non cernat instar brutorum animantium in agris uiuere locisque syluestribus? Et—ut cuncta praeteream—cum multa incredibilia, et graecae et romanae historiae accidisse hominibus prodiderint; Scyllam quoque et Chimeram, Hydram, atque Centauros, aues et feras, flores et arbores, stellas et lapides factos ex hominibus narrent fabulae: *quid mirum est si, ad ostendendam potentiam Dei et humiliandam regum superbiam, hoc Dei iudicio sit patratum?*

⁵⁴ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 208-209, 5v-6r: nabuchodonosor potest intelligi qui postquam perdidit regnum et gloria eius ablata est, rursum in pristino gradu restitutus sit, et non leaenam sed hominem se esse didicerit, et cor recipit, quod amiserat. Potest et aliter intelligi de regno caldeorum quod interfecto baldasar medis persisque in imperio succedentibus, babyllonii homines humilis fragilisque naturae se esse intellexerint.

the poor in order to alter the will of God?”⁵⁵ Stepping around the apparent contradiction, Peter responded by describing King Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:5), whose prayers delayed his own prophesied death by fifteen years, and the example of the Ninevites (Jonah 3:10) whose repentance convinced God to revoke their prophesied destruction.⁵⁶ The question, according to Peter, was “easily answered” by these examples because “according to the prayers of Hezekiah and the Ninevites the will of God was altered, not by the caprice of judgement but by their conversion.”⁵⁷ Asserting the malleability of God’s will, Peter’s responses provided historical and scriptural precedent for the efficacy and necessity of royally guided correction and emendation of a kingdom. If Charlemagne and his advisors followed Cathwulf’s logic and interpreted military and agricultural problems they faced in 779 as God’s judgement, Peter’s commentary could easily explain why Charlemagne and his advisors decided to respond with such an emphasis on fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

Leaving Nebuchadnezzar behind, Peter shifted his focus to Cyrus and Darius who, Daniel prophesied, would defeat and replace the final Babylonian king Belshazzar (Daniel 5). Peter used the two kings to address the issue of joint rule, offering a commentary on an issue

⁵⁵ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 206, 3v: Si praedixit daniel sententiam Dei quae non potest inmutari, quomodo ortatur ad elimosinas et misericordiam pauperum ut Dei sententia commutetur?

⁵⁶ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 206, 3v: Facile soluitur ezechiae regis exemplo quem esaias dixerat esse moriturum, et neniuitarum adhuc tres dies et neniue subuertetur. et tamen ad praeces ezechiae et neniuitarum Dei sententia commutata est non uanitate iudicii, sed eorum conuersione. These two examples would appear again together in Alcuin’s correspondence and used to make a similar point. Cf. Alcuin, Ep. 21, 59: Memento Ezechiam regem quantos hostes una prece prosternit. Alcuin, Ep. 22, 60: ut Deo illorum placeat conversio, sicut Ninivitarum ei placuit poenitentia, et peperit civitati per lacrimas confitentium peccata sua

⁵⁷ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 206, 3v: et tamen ad praeces ezechiae et neniuitarum Dei sententia commutata est non uanitate iudicii, sed eorum conuersione. These two examples would appear again together in Alcuin’s correspondence, where they were used to make a similar point. Cf. Alcuin, Ep. 21, 59: Memento Ezechiam regem quantos hostes una prece prosternit. Alcuin, Ep. 22, 60: ut Deo illorum placeat conversio, sicut Ninivitarum ei placuit poenitentia, et peperit civitati per lacrimas confitentium peccata sua.

that defined the early years of Charlemagne's reign. Approaching the same issue as Cathwulf, Peter used his scriptural examples to arrive at a similarly affirming conclusion. Regarding the transition of power from Belshazzar to Cyrus and Darius, Peter wrote

after Belshazzar had been killed and Babylon taken by the Medes and Persians, that is to say, by Darius and Cyrus, why did only Darius succeed to the kingship and not Cyrus with him, who moved together with Darius against the kingdom of Babylon?

It is the order of blood relation and the comparison of kingship, because Darius was sixty-two years old, and we read that the kingdom of the Medes was greater than that of the Persians, and so it was the older uncle who must be counted as the successor of the kingdom by the law of nature. *We must understand the words that the fingers wrote: mane, thecel, phares. *Mane, God will number your kingdom and finish it. Thecel, [your kingdom] has been weighed on the scales and has been found having less. Phares, your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and the Persians* (Daniel 5:26-28).⁵⁸

In order to answer why Darius and Cyrus did not rule together, Peter reordered Jerome's text by first declaring that "by the law of nature" Darius ruled because he was older and his kingdom was greater.⁵⁹ After acknowledging Darius' natural preeminence, Peter inserted Daniel's interpretation of a sign of God's judgement on Babylon, effectively stating that the guiding "law of nature" merely fulfilled God's will. Adding the prophecy strengthened the

⁵⁸ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 207, 4v: Interfecto baldasar obsessaque babilone a medis et persis dario uidelicet et cyro et cur darius solus successit in regnum et non cum eo cyrus qui pariter cum eo regnum coepit babilonium? Ordo aetatis et propinquitatis et regni est. Darius enim sexaginta duorum annorum erat, et maius regnum medorum quam persarum legimus, et auunculus qui prior erat iure naturae successor regni debuit numerari*. Sciendum est quae fuerit illa scriptura quam scripserunt articuli mane, thecel, phares. Mane, numerabit Deus regnum tuum et compleuit illud. thecel, appensum est in statera et inuentum est minus habens. phares, diuisum est regnum tuum, et datum est medis et persis. In their edition, Krotz and Gorman curiously divide the passage into two questions (marked here by an asterisk (*)), requiring them to postulate another missing question, without any indication from within the text or from the manuscript. In addition, their edition omits several words from the manuscript without explanation.

⁵⁹ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 207, 4v: Darius enim sexaginta duorum annorum erat, et maius regnum medorum quam persarum legimus, et auunculus qui prior erat iure naturae successor regni debuit numerari.

general theme that the success of a ruler always depended upon God's will. With issues of joint rule still in recent memory, Peter's response to the problem of joint-rule argued that the law of nature, confirmed by God's judgement, had favored the elder claimant to succeed to sole rule.⁶⁰

Peter's next example used to illuminate the reasons for the successes and failures of rulers was Alexander the Great, a figure who does not appear in the Book of Daniel but to whom Jerome's commentary and interpretations gave much attention. Interpreting the ruler as the third beast (a leopard with four wings and four heads) of the four Daniel saw rising from the sea (Daniel 7:6), Peter explained that Alexander conquered everything from "Illyricum and the Adriatic Sea to the Indian Ocean and the Ganges River" in only six years.⁶¹ Referring to the scriptural passage describing power given to the third beast, to Alexander, Peter explained that the phrase "*and power was given to it*" shows that [Alexander's power] was not because of Alexander's courage but because of the Lord."⁶² While Peter acknowledged Alexander's military prowess, he reminded his royal audience that while Alexander fought with courage, ultimately he only conquered according to God's design.

In the penultimate question and response of the 'Minor Questions on Daniel', Peter used Alexander as a contrast for Darius the Mede. Introducing the comparison, Peter wrote

⁶⁰ On the issue of Charlemagne's legitimacy in relation to Carloman, see McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 78 and Jarnut, "Ein Bruderkampf," 235-237.

⁶¹ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 209, 6v: Qui ab illirico et adriatico mari usque ad indicum oceanum et gangem fluuium non tam proeliis quam uictoriis percucurrit, et sex annis europa partem et omnem sibi asiam subiugauit.

⁶² *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 210, 6v: ostenditur non Alexandri fortitudinis, sed domini uoluntatis fuisse.

what does it mean that he said: From the first year of Darius the Mede I stood that he might be comforted and strengthened?

He said: I stood in the presence of God and asked for his clemency on behalf of him (Darius) who loved me, that he (Darius) might be comforted and that he or his kingdom might be strengthened, he (Darius) who sealed the pit of lions for the sake of my safety with his own ring so my enemies would not kill me. Alexander, however, founded Alexandria when he was thirty-two years old and in the twelfth year of his rule in Babylon he died of poison.⁶³

Instead of interpreting Jerome's lengthy discussion of how Alexander conquered Darius, Peter contrasted Alexander's meteoric rise and fall with the mutual protection demonstrated by Darius and the prophet Daniel. Making his argument by subverting the historical and scriptural content he discussed, Peter juxtaposed the prophet's intervention on behalf of the king as a reward for Darius' mercy to Daniel and Alexander's rapid successes and sudden death. By leaving out Jerome's discussion of Alexander's defeat of Darius, Peter's text instead suggests that while Darius fared well, having protected and favored a servant of God, Alexander lacked the same divine support and thus his successes were more ephemeral.

The final ruler discussed by Peter in his 'Minor Questions on Daniel' was, in fact, no ruler at all, but the Roman Empire. Interpreting the fourth beast from the vision in Daniel 7, a beast lacking any distinct animal form, Peter explained that Rome was compared to no particular beast because "whatever we thought of as more terrible among beasts, that is how

⁶³ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 221, 17r: Quid est quod dicit et ego ab anno primo darii maedi stabam ut confortaretur et roboraretur. Stabam inquit in conspectu Dei et rogabam eius clementiam pro eo qui me diligebat, ut confortaretur uel ipse uel regnum eius et roboraretur, qui ob custodiam meam etiam lacum leonum suo signans anulo, ne me aduersarii interficerent. Alexander autem condita alexandria cum triginta et duos aetatis haberet annos et duodecimum annum imperii in babylone, ueneno periit.

we should understand the Romans.”⁶⁴ Despite attributing to the Romans this fearful reputation, Peter had signaled his interpretation of the Roman Empire early on when he declared that “just as in the beginning nothing was stronger and more resilient than the Roman Empire, even so in the end of earthly affairs, nothing was weaker.”⁶⁵ Following the mention of Rome’s weakness at the end of things, Peter primarily discussed the Roman Empire as the backdrop for the future rise of the Antichrist. Peter explained that

at the end of the world, when the kingdom of the Romans must be destroyed, there will be ten future kings who will divide the world of the Romans among them and an eleventh young king will be raised up who will conquer three of the ten kings. That is, the kings of the Egyptians, of Africa, and of Ethiopia, when these have been killed, the other seven will bow their necks to the victor.⁶⁶

Peter focused further on the final drama that would play out within the former Roman world when he explained that

in the singular Roman Empire, because of the blaspheming of the Antichrist every kingdom will have been destroyed at the same time and by no means will there be an earthly empire, instead there will be the association of the saints and the coming of the triumphant Son of God.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 210, 6v-7r: Quid est quod superius tria regna bestiis comparauit id est leaenae, urso et pardo, romanorum regnum nulli bestiae comparauit. Quia ut formidolosam faceret bestiam uocabulum tacuit, ut quicquid formidolosius cogitaueremus in bestiis, hoc romanos intelligamus.

⁶⁵ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 203, fol. 1r. Sed pedes eius et digiti ex parte ferrei, ex parte sunt fictiles quod hoc tempore manifestissime comprobatur. Sicut enim in principio nihil romano imperio fortius et durius fuit, ita in fine rerum nihil imbecillius.

⁶⁶ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 210, 7r: In consummatione mundi quando regnum destruendum est romanorum, decem futuros reges qui orbem romanorum inter se diuidant, et undecimum surrecturum esse paruolum regem qui tres reges de decem regibus superaturus sit. Id est aegyptiorum regem, et africae et ethiopiae. Quibus interfectis etiam septem alii reges uictori colla submittent.

⁶⁷ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 211, 7v-8r: In uno romano imperio propter antichristum blasphemantem omnia simul regna deleta sunt et nequaquam terrenum impe[8r]rium erit, sed sanctorum conuersatio et aduentus filii Dei triumphantis.

Setting up the Roman Empire and its destruction as an example for the destruction caused by the Antichrist, Peter argued that Rome existed primarily to warn others and to be replaced by the preferable “association of the saints” after the Antichrist briefly held power.⁶⁸ As he had argued throughout the ‘Minor Questions on Daniel’, Peter demonstrated that even the Roman Empire—that critical fixture in the Frankish imagination under Charlemagne—was subject completely to God’s purposes. Peter’s relegation of Rome to the role of scenery for the apocalyptic drama has been reasonably interpreted by James Palmer as Peter’s call for Charlemagne to pursue the “strong *imperium Christianum* [rather] than the failing *imperium Romanorum* which preceded it.”⁶⁹

Peter’s Lessons for Charlemagne

Although Peter’s ‘Minor Questions on Daniel’ might have been made at the direct request of Charlemagne and that it was probably made with the king as its audience, scholars have paid little attention to the text because, as James Palmer succinctly stated, Peter says “little that is new.”⁷⁰ Yet while Peter may have broken little new ground in the world of early medieval political or theological thought, it is worth considering whether Peter’s audience and patron would have thought its contents novel. Many of the messages within Peter’s text had been voiced before and would be again before the end of Carolingian rule in Francia, but Charlemagne clearly thought enough of the text to order it copied and preserved from Peter’s

⁶⁸ *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 211, 8r. While the “association of the saints” held a greater import for Jerome, Peter’s use of it suggests that the period following the time of the Antichrist was not his primary interest. For the period following the persecution of the Antichrist in Jerome’s thinking and beyond, see Lerner, “Refreshment,” 101-107.

⁶⁹ Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 138.

⁷⁰ Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 138.

original. It offers a valuable glimpse into the thought-world of Charlemagne's teacher, his scholars, and possibly the interests of the king himself.

Peter used scriptural and historical precedent to demonstrate to Charles how God's power determined the fates of rulers and those they ruled. Offering insight on many of the issues that defined Charles' early reign including the sharing of power, royal righteousness and the correction of one's subjects, and the possibility of turning away God's judgement through acts of prayer and mercy, Peter illustrated for Charlemagne God's role in every aspect of kingship. By reminding Charlemagne that political power and success came only from God's approval, and that God could literally do anything to humble a ruler, Peter offered Charlemagne lessons on kingship that, as we shall see, were enacted in the king's own pronouncements.

*"Paul, a deacon, our dear little client."*⁷¹

In stark contrast to Peter of Pisa, Paul the Deacon is far more well-known to modern scholars and although he spent less time in Francia, he most probably exerted a similar influence on Charlemagne and his intellectual circles. With relationship with Charlemagne comparable to his Lombard colleague Peter's, Paul the Deacon was commissioned to write a *Book of the Bishops of Metz* by Angilram of Metz, the bishop of Metz and the head of Charlemagne's royal chapel.⁷² This text defied the genre of *gesta episcoporum* that it claimed to follow and offered instead a praise of the Carolingian royal family, and Charlemagne in

⁷¹ MGH Cap. I no. 30, 81: Paulo, diacono, familiari clientulo nostro.

⁷² On Angilram's life and work, and its place in scholarship, see Kempf, *Paul the Deacon*, 4-7.

particular.⁷³ While Paul's episcopal history has been rightly judged as a "pretext for a composition of court history," a history that "reflect[ed] the religious politics of the Carolingian court," its significant here is Paul's use of signs and prophecy to affirm divine support for Charlemagne and his family and, in consequence, his popularizing of the reading of signs and portents more broadly at Charlemagne's court.⁷⁴

Before investigating Paul's understanding of signs, portents, and prophecy in history, first we must establish his connection to Charlemagne and his intellectual circles. Born to a noble family in Lombard Italy, Paul was sent as a youth to the court of King Ratchis where he was educated and may have met Peter of Pisa.⁷⁵ While Paul's time at the Pavian court or his precise role there remains unknown, Paul succeeded in gaining a patron and student in the duchess Adalperga of Benevento, daughter of king Desiderius and wife of duke Arichis II (758-787).⁷⁶ As Adalperga's tutor, he followed her to the Beneventan court, most probably composing the *Roman History* for her around 770.⁷⁷ After Charlemagne's conquest of the Lombard kingdom, Paul's brother was captured by Frankish forces after participating in a rebellion, and while Paul travelled to Francia seeking his brother's release, he eventually

⁷³ Kempf has argued that the text also sought to demonstrate the strong connections between the Carolingians and the city of Metz in *Paul the Deacon*, 1.

⁷⁴ Paul's time in Charlemagne's intellectual circles coincided with the beginning of serious portents within Carolingian historical writing, and as Walter Pohl has suggested, his works may have been consulted by the court historians writing the *Royal Frankish Annals*. Pohl, "Paulus Diaconus," 400.

⁷⁵ On the details of Paul's life, see Wattenbach-Levison-Löwe II, 203-204, 211-214. For more modern appraisals, see Cornford, "Paul," 47-49; Bullough, "Ethnic History," 97-122; Goffart, *Narrators*, 329; McKitterick, *Memory*, 66-77; Sestan, "La Storiographia," 51-84.

⁷⁶ Cornford, "Paul," 48.

⁷⁷ For the dating of the *Historia Romana*, see Wattenbach, Levison, Löwe, II, 213-214, Cornford, "Paul," 47, and Pohl, "Resources," 23.

became part of Charlemagne's court, remaining there until 786.⁷⁸ Paul appears to have been well received at court, receiving commissions and impressing the king enough that Charles would maintain contact with Paul even after the latter's departure from Francia for Monte Cassino, where he wrote his final work, the *History of the Lombards*.⁷⁹

During his time in Francia, Paul appears to have enjoyed a good relationship with the king—who referred to him as "Paul, a deacon, our dear little client"⁸⁰—and with those in his court, as shown by Paul's commissions and his continued correspondence with them. In addition, in Paul's *Book of the Bishops of Metz* he claimed to have discussed Charlemagne's family history with the king, and learned what would become the centerpiece of the entire work from Charles himself.⁸¹ While it is impossible to know if his claim is true, or to extrapolate on what such a conversation would have included beyond what Paul claimed, if Charles did discuss such things—specifically, a sign from God to Arnulf of Metz, and the bishop's subsequent prophecy for his descendants, the Carolingian family—Paul would make an obvious choice for such a conversation, given his prolific use of signs and portents in his histories.⁸² Rather than a superficial praise of Charles and his ancestors, Paul's section

⁷⁸ Hartmann, "Vitam litteris," 75-83; Wattenbach, Levison, Löwe, II, 216-217.

⁷⁹ For Paul's continued connection to Charlemagne and his scholars, see his edited letters and poems in K. Neff (ed.), *Gedichte*. For an overview of the debates on when and where Paul wrote the *Historia Langobardorum*, see Costambeys, "Monastic Environment," 127-128; Goffart, *Narrators*, 334; Cornford, "Paul," 48-49.

⁸⁰ MGH Cap. I no. 30, 81: Paulo, diacono, familiari clientulo nostro.

⁸¹ *LEM*, 72: Hec ego non a qualibet mediocri persona didici, sed ipso totius veritatis assertore, precelso rege Karolo, referente cognovi; qui de eiusdem beati Arnulfi descendens prosapia, ei in generationis linea trinepos extabat.

⁸² For the first and only study to focus on Paul's use of portents, see Sestan, "Qualche aspetto," 50-76. Ernesto Sestan felt that the *Historia Romana* revealed certain elements of Paul the Deacon's personality, and among those personality traits of Paul's that Sestan explored, he found himself amazed that Paul was so interested in natural portents that Paul inserted frequently throughout the *Historia Romana*. Sestan, however, had little to say

dedicated to St Arnulf and his supposed Carolingian descendants wove Charles and his family into the ongoing dialogue between God and mankind that Paul traced throughout all of his works. We will attempt to explore, therefore, Paul's *Book of the Bishops of Metz* and what it reveals about Paul and his vision of history that most probably earned him the commission and the attention of Charlemagne in the first place.⁸³ After all, as Walter Pohl suggested, such historical writing and the understanding of history that informed it often influenced future decision-making.⁸⁴

In order to investigate Paul's vision of history and how that view influenced Charlemagne, his advisors and scholars, Paul's *Book of the Bishops of Metz* will be analyzed within the context of Paul's larger works of history. The *Roman History* and the *History of the Lombards* were written on either side of his time in Francia and they illustrate the change and transitions in Paul's historical thinking alongside the *Book of the Bishops of Metz*. Because each of these three works illuminates Paul's understanding and use of the miraculous and portentous in history, the *Roman History* and the *History of the Lombards* prove invaluable for understanding how Paul used signs and prophecy to affirm Carolingian rule in the *Book of the Bishops of Metz*, and what that affirmation meant.

The Sharing of Stories

about why Paul included them, "Qualche aspetto," 67-68. Walter Goffart generally agrees with and repeats Sestan's view, but adds nothing to the discussion. Goffart, *Narrators*, 352.

⁸³ As Walter Pohl suggested, to understand Paul one must understand his "metatext," Paul's own vision of the present that informed his work. Pohl, "Paulus Diaconus," 383-386.

⁸⁴ Pohl, "Resources," 32-33; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 76-77.

While Paul's 'Book of the Bishops of Metz' included none of the standard characteristics of the *gesta episcoporum* genre except that it traces the succession of bishops, it bears the marks of Paul's historical thinking throughout.⁸⁵ Narrating the history of the Metz bishopric from Clement to Angilram, Paul made his longest entries when he had a miracle to report, or a wondrous sign, vision, or prophecy, there sometimes only tangentially related to the bishop about whom he wrote. He described a miracle at the tombs of Bishops Rufus and Adelphus; a vision of the Huns' destruction of the city received by Bishop Servatius of Tongeren; an anonymous vision of St Stephan's oratory surviving the Hunnic attack; Bishop Auctor driving away the darkness plaguing the Huns in return for the captives they had taken from Metz, and finally the miracle at the time of St Arnulf of Metz; and the longest entry in his *Book*.⁸⁶

The miraculous event that Paul described in St Arnulf's life involved a ring that the bishop dropped into a river, saying he would only know he was free of his sins when he recovered the ring, and in several days the fish that had swallowed the ring was served to him for dinner.⁸⁷ Commenting on this miraculous sign, which he compared to Gideon's sign from God in Judges 6, Paul affirmed the divine origin of the sign.⁸⁸ To prove the veracity of the story Paul explained that

⁸⁵ Kempf, *Paul the Deacon*, 9. For the characteristics of the genre of *gesta episcoporum*, see Kaiser, "Gesta episcoporum," 459-480. For a study of the texts that defined the genre and its connections to broader medieval historiography, see R. McKitterick, "Liber Pontificalis," 23-35.

⁸⁶ *LEM*, 60-62 (Rufus and Adelphus), 62-64 (bishop Servatius' vision), 66 (anonymous vision), 66-70 (bishop Auctor's miracle).

⁸⁷ *LEM*, 70.

⁸⁸ *LEM*, 72: Nec dissimiliter pater hic venerabilis quam olim Gedeon ille signum a Domino poposcit.

I learned this story from no minor person, but I heard it from the very champion of all truth, the lofty King Charles, who has descended from the lineage of the same blessed Arnulf standing forth in the line of generation as a great-great-great-grandson.⁸⁹

Simultaneously asserting St Arnulf's holiness, Carolingian descent from him, and Paul's proximity to Charlemagne, Paul suggested this conversation, the only conversation he ever mentioned between himself and the ruler, involved Charlemagne's ancestor seeking and receiving a sign from God. Moreover, this story, and Paul's praise of the Carolingians was far from over. This story laid the foundation for Paul's affirmation of divine favor for the Carolingian dynasty, most probably the true reason for Angilram's commission.

Before becoming bishop Arnulf had had two sons, and in Isaac-like fashion, had blessed one of them and prophesied about his descendants. After Arnulf's son Ansegisel demonstrated his righteousness to his father, Paul explained that

the venerable father gave thanks to his son and prophesied that he would have more than he had given up, and in addition, Arnulf blessed him and his entire progeny that would be born thereafter. This has occurred. For Ansegisel acquired more wealth than he had given up, and it was established in him by the paternal blessing that from his progeny such vigorous and powerful men would be born that the kingdom of the Franks was justly passed to his progeny.⁹⁰

Claiming that Arnulf's blessing went to the younger son instead of the older, Paul suggested a biblical parallel to Isaac and Jacob, a parallel that fittingly hinted at the chosen people of Israel

⁸⁹ *LEM*, 72: Hec ego non a qualibet mediocri persona didici, sed ipso totius veritatis assertore, precelso rege Karolo, referente cognovi; qui de eiusdem beati Arnulfi descendens prosapia, ei in generationis linea trinepos extabat.

⁹⁰ *LEM*, 74: Agit venerandus pater gratias filio, et predicit ei pluriora eundem quam reliquerat habiturum; insuper benedicit eum eiusque cunctam progeniem nascituram in posteram. Factumque est. Nam et pluriores Anschiso quam reliquerat divitie accesserunt, et ita in eo paterna est constabilita beneficia, ut de eius progenie tam strenui fortesque viri nascerentur, ut non immerito ad eius prosapiam Francorum translatus sit regnum.

because Paul's story outlined the beginning of a great dynasty.⁹¹ Arnulf's prophetic words, Paul reminded his audience, all came true, since Ansegisel received more wealth than he had given to the poor and because his descendants became so great that they were given the kingdom of the Franks. The sign and prophecy established the expectation of divine favor for Charlemagne that Paul then proved when he described Charles' early conquests and rule, adding that it was "by God's will" that Charles' sons Pippin and Louis held the kingships of Italy and Aquitaine respectively.⁹² Using all of the features that marked out (as we shall see) his other historical works, Paul used every strategy at his disposal to invoke God's good will towards the Carolingian family. At its heart, this episode suggests the possibility that Charles and Paul may have spent time discussing signs and portents, or at the very least, the signs relevant to Charlemagne's family. Because understanding this episode and what it might suggest depends upon understanding Paul's vision of history, we will briefly turn to Paul's larger works of history.⁹³

Paul in his preface for his student and patron, the duchess Adalperga, explained that his *Roman History* would build upon Eutropius' ten-book history and Paul would include what Eutropius lacked, specifically "stories of God and our worship."⁹⁴ Drawing material from various sources (including, but not limited to, Eusebius/Jerome's Chronicle, Orosius, Jordanes'

⁹¹ Cf. Genesis 27. For the idea of the chosen people in Frankish history, see Garrison, "New Israel," 114-61.

⁹² *LEM*, 77: ex quibus iam Deo favente minor Pippinus regnum Italie, Ludowicus Aquitanie tenuit.

⁹³ Paul's *Roman History*, despite becoming one of the most popular works of Roman history in the middle ages, has received very limited attention from historians in comparison to Paul's later work, the *History of the Lombards*. For a discussion of various fundamental problems with the treatment of the *Historia Romana* by modern scholars, see Heath, *Structures*, 20. For a discussion of further criticism of Paul, specifically of the *Historia Langobardorum*, see Goffart, *Narrators*, 387-388.

⁹⁴ *HR*, preface, 3-4: quia utpote vir gentilis in nullo divinae historiae cultusque nostri fecerit mentionem.

Romana and *Getica*, the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, and Bede), Paul expanded Eutropius' focused political and military narrative in many ways, but as often as not, with signs and portents.⁹⁵ In Paul's mind, inserting these events would bring Eutropius' work into a state of harmony with "the most sacred history."⁹⁶ In contrast to the *Roman History*, Paul's *History of the Lombards* was an original creation, although its precise context and audience remain the subject of debate.⁹⁷ While many aspects of Paul's vision of history seem to have changed between the writing of the two works, Paul also made signs and portents central to the narrative of the *History of the Lombards* and showed even more confidence in interpreting them. Compared with other contemporary historical sources produced during the late-eighth and early-ninth centuries, Paul's *Historiae* appear ahead of their time, paying careful attention to potentially portentous events and utilizing them to add specific meaning to otherwise neutral events.⁹⁸ As will be made clear, Paul used signs, portents, and prophecy in his narratives as a form of divine authority he could interpret to

⁹⁵ Cornford, "Paul the Deacon's understanding of identity," 50; Kretschmer, *Rewriting Roman History*, 6; Goffart, *Narrators*, 347-353; Brunhölzl, *Geschichte* I, 260. For an early, but still valuable, *Quellenkritik* of the *Historia Romana*, see Bauch, *Historia Romana*.

⁹⁶ *HR*, preface, 3-4: *HR*, preface, 3-4: Ac primo Paulo superius ab eiusdem textu historiae narrationem capiens eamque pro loci merito extendens, quaedam etiam temporibus eius congruential ex divina lege interserens, eandem sacratissimae historiae consonam reddidi. On this passage, see Borri, "Arrivano," 231.

⁹⁷ For Pohl's *terminus ante quem*, see Pohl, "Paulus Diaconus," 376. For other positions in the debate, see Hartmann, "*Vitam litteris*," 87-91; Pohl, "Resources," 26-28; Goffart, *Narrators*, 331-334, 379-380; McKitterick, "Paul," 324-325.

⁹⁸ For example, Paul drew the notice of the famine in Rome following Gregory's death from the *Liber Pontificalis*' entry on Gregory's successor, Sabinianus, then interpreted it prophetically to confirm authoritatively the true meaning of an event. *Liber Pontificales* 67, Sabinianus, 163: [immediately following Gregory's death] Eodem tempore fuit famis in civitate Romana gravis. Tunc facta pace cum gente Langobardorum et iussit aperire horrea ecclesiae et venundari frumenta per solidum unum. Instead of introducing portentous events to transform a negative interpretation into a positive one, here Paul took independent events from his sources and by attributing to them a deeper, prophetic, meaning, he confirmed Gregory's status as so great that even the natural world could not but acknowledge his passing.

bolster his own historical judgement or to break the narrative and speak his mind directly to his audience.

Reading God into History

Ranging from apposition and subtle suggestion to direct interpretation, Paul often interpolated prophetic events into his narrative to give an authoritative verdict or meaning to the events he described. Following Eutropius' treatment of Hannibal conquering the city of Saguntum in the Second Punic War (c.218-202), Paul reminded the reader that the people of Saguntum had been warned of what would happen. Before the destruction of the city, Paul wrote, "a *prodigium* portended this sadly to [the Saguntines], for when a woman was about to give birth, the infant returned into the womb, which signified the destruction of the city."⁹⁹ This particular portent stands among the more striking of Paul's interpolations within the text: it captures Paul's propensity to describe how before particularly devastating events—whether military or natural catastrophes—those affected witnessed portents that warned them of the coming danger. While Hannibal struggled to bring his men and elephants across the Alps, so Paul related, "the Romans were frightened by dreadful *prodigiis*," combining celestial portents involving the sun, the moon, a tear in the sky, and other apparitions with shields sweating blood and the discovery of bloody grain.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *HR* 3.7, 42: quibus hoc ante portenderat triste prodigium; nam cum poene enixa mulier esset, infans in uterum regressus civitatis excidium significavit. This portent appears to have been drawn from Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 7.3, 528 in H. Rackham (ed.), *Pliny, Natural History*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA, 1942) p. 528: est inter exempla in uterum protinus reversus infans Sagunti quo anno deleta ab Hannibale est.

¹⁰⁰ *HR* 3.9, 44: Diris tunc etiam romani prodigiis territi sunt; nam et solis orbis inminui visus est et apud Arpos palmae in caelo visae, sol quoque cum luna pugnasse, apud Capenas duae lunae ortae sunt, in Sardinia sanguine duo scuta sudarunt, Faliscis caelum scindi visum est, apud Antium cruentae spicae in corbem cecidere. This

In the *Historia Langobardorum*, Paul employed portentous events in much the same way, using them to reveal the meaning of certain events with greater authority. These prophetic interpolations range from association through apposition to direct interpretation. For instance, throughout the *Historia Langobardorum*, Paul regularly included the appearance of comets, each time connected with either an important death or the coming of a pestilence. While the only portent included by Eutropius in his *Breviarium* was a comet predicting the death of Constantine, such comets in the *Historia Langobardorum* predict the deaths of John the Archbishop of Ravenna, Severus the Patriarch of Aquileia, and Bishop Candidianus of Grado, and warn of a coming plague.¹⁰¹ Further, Paul claimed that “battle lines of flame” and “a bloody sign” were in the sky, the former portending the Lombard invasion of Italy and the latter a Frankish civil war, continuing his earlier pattern of aligning signs and portents with devastating events.¹⁰² As in the *Historia Romana*, Paul often used such portentous events to

passage comes from Orosius, *History*, 4.15, 124: Diris tunc etiam Romani prodigiis territi sunt. nam et solis orbis minui uisus est et apud Arpos parmae in caelo uisae, sol quoque pugnassee cum luna, apud Capenas interdiu duas lunas ortas, in Sardinia sanguine duo scuta sudasse, Faliscis caelum scindi uelut magno hiato uisum, apud Antium metentibus cruentas spicas in corbem decidisse. In these early examples, Paul modified his sources—Orosius, for many of the portents—gearing them towards the coming event, even if that meant taking them entirely out of their original context. See *HR* 5.3, 73–74, drawn from Orosius, *History*, 5.23, 169.

¹⁰¹ Eutropius, *Breviarium*, 10.8, 176: denuntiata mors eius est etiam per crinitam stellam, quae inusitatae magnitudinis aliquamdiu fulsit, Graeci cometen vocant. *HL* 4.10, 149: Inter haec sequenti mense Ianuario paruuit stella cometis mane et uespere per totum mensem. Eo quoque mense defunctus est Iohannes archiepiscopus Ravennae; *HL* 4.32–33, 159–160: Tunc etiam mense Aprili et Maio apparuit in caelo stella quam cometem dicunt. Dehinc Agilulf rex iterum fecit pacem cum Romanis tribus annis. His diebus defuncto Severo patriarcha ordinatur in loco eius Iohannes abbas patriarcha in Aquileia vetere, cum consensu regis et Gisulfi ducis. In Gradus quoque ordinatus est Romanis Candidianus antistitis. Rursum mense Novembrio et Decembrio stella cometis apparuit. Candidiano quoque defuncto. *HL* 5.31, 197: Insequenti post tempore mense Augusto a parte orientis stella cometis apparuit nimis fulgentibus radiis, quae post semet ipsam reversa disparuit. Nec mora, gravis pestilentia ab eadem parte orientis secuta, Romanum populum devastavit.

¹⁰² *HL* 2.5, 88–89: Continuo apud Italiam terribilia noctu signa visa sunt, hoc est igneae acies in caelo apparuerunt, eum scilicet qui postea effusus est sanguinem coruscantes. *HL* 4.15, 151: Tunc etiam signum sanguineum in caelum apparuisse visum est et quasi hastae sanguineae et lux clarissima per totam noctem. Theudepertus rex Francorum eo tempore cum Clothario patruale suo bellum gerens, eius exercitum vehementer adflixit.

reveal the true meaning of a certain event, even when the meaning he identified ran contrary to the course of the events he related.

As Walter Pohl has discussed in his study of the *History of the Lombards*, but equally true of St Arnulf's entry in the *Book of the Bishops of Metz*, Paul often broke his historical narrative to address his readers directly.¹⁰³ Paul often used his signs and portents as opportunities to speak to his audience and provide commentary to provide or confirm the meaning of an event as established by divine authority, especially when discussing a ruler or his realm. Just as Paul did in his praise of Charles' family and their prophetic origins, so would he do for other rulers and their realms as well. Throughout Paul's *Historiae*, he frequently interpreted the success of rulers as a result of their willingness to seek out and adhere to prophetic advice, whether read and interpreted from signs and portents, or sought directly from the mouths of holy men infused with the spirit of prophecy. I will focus on four key examples: his discussions of the Roman Emperor Theodosius (d. 395), the Lombard king Aripert (d. 661), the Eastern Roman emperor Constans II (d. 668), and the Lombard king Liutprand (d. 744).

Turning to the Emperor Theodosius (d.395), the most celebrated leader in Paul's *Historia Romana*, Paul depicted the emperor's righteousness, and thus his favor from God, as the force behind his success. Depicting the Battle of the Frigidus in 394 between Theodosius and the usurper Eugenius, Paul described Theodosius fasting, praying, and then throwing

¹⁰³ Pohl, "Paulus Diaconus," 383.

himself into battle “as if he would be victor even if no one were to follow him.”¹⁰⁴ Explaining Theodosius’ confidence in the face of his enemies, Paul inserted a passage from Prosper of Aquitaine’s *Chronicle* that described how Theodosius consulted about the battle with a hermit named John “who promised [Theodosius] that he would conquer.”¹⁰⁵ Paul juxtaposed the assurance Theodosius had sought with the emperor’s belief that “he had been deserted by his own men” and that “he was surrounded by enemies” in order to emphasize Theodosius’ confidence in John’s prophecy.¹⁰⁶ Taking it even further, Paul then drew on Orosius to show how Theodosius’ divine support was confirmed by a strong whirlwind “from the direction of Theodosius into the face of the enemy,” blunting their projectiles.¹⁰⁷ Paul confirmed God’s support of Theodosius by including two lines of verse from Orosius—who in turn relied upon either Augustine or Claudian—that declared Theodosius was so “greatly beloved of God, that the sky fights for you and the winds come in alliance at the call of the trumpet.”¹⁰⁸ For Paul,

¹⁰⁴ *HR* 12.4, 164: Theodosius expers cibi ac somni orationi incumbens totam noctem pervigil exegit; cum tamen se esse a suis destitutum sciret, ab hostibus circumseptum nesciret, fiducialiter arma corripens signoque crucis signum proelio dedit ac se in bellum, etiam si nemo sequeretur, victor futurus inmisit. Cf. Orosius, *Historiae*, 7.35, 285: at uero Theodosius in summis Apibus constitutus expers cibi ac somni, sciens quod destitutus suis, nesciens quod clausus alienis, Dominum Christum solus solum, qui posset omnia, corpore humi fusus, mente caelo fixus orabat. Dehinc postquam insomnem noctem precum continuatione transegit et testes propemodum quas in pretium praesidii caelestis adpenderat lacrimarum lacunas reliquit, fiducialiter arma corripuit solus, sciens se esse non solum. Signo crucis signum proelio dedit ac se in bellum, etiamsi nemo sequeretur, victor futurus, inmisit.

¹⁰⁵ *HR* 12.4, 164: nam consultus Iohannes anachoreta eum victurum sponderat. *HR* 12.4, 164: cum tamen se esse a suis destitutum sciret, ab hostibus circumseptum nesciret.

¹⁰⁶ *HR* 12.4, 164: nam consultus Iohannes anachoreta eum victurum sponderat. *HR* 12.4, 164: cum tamen se esse a suis destitutum sciret, ab hostibus circumseptum nesciret.

¹⁰⁷ *HR* 12.4, 164: cumque ad congressionem ventum esset, vehemens turbo ventorum a parte Theodosii in ora hostium ruit, qui et ab eius parte spicula missa valenter hosti infigeret et hostili manu missa repelleret.

¹⁰⁸ *HR* 12.4, 164: O nimium dilecte Dei, tibi militat aether et coniurati veniunt ad classica venti. Cf. Orosius, *Historiae*, 7.35, 286. For further notes on the origin of the verses, see Weyman, *Beiträge*, 209.

Theodosius showed confidence in the prophetic promise he had sought, and had it confirmed by an act of nature soon thereafter.

In his depiction of the reign of Aripert, far less successful in war than Theodosius by contrast, Paul described how Aripert left his army in the wake of a battle and ultimately attempted to flee to Francia with much wealth, only to drown while trying to cross a river.¹⁰⁹ After relating Aripert's less-than-heroic demise, Paul offered a great deal of praise for the dead king, noting his just and righteous rule as well as his personal religiosity and peaceful character, all of which culminated in Paul claiming that "in his times there was exceeding fertility of the land, but the times were barbaric."¹¹⁰ Paul used the sign of the land's fertility, paralleled to Cathwulf's signs of a just king given to Charlemagne, to challenge a superficial understanding of Aripert's cowardly end, shielding the king from criticism by arguing that nature (and God who controls it, by extension) confirmed Aripert's quality, which left only the king's circumstances, in a barbaric age, to blame.

In contrast, Paul related in the *History of the Lombards* that Constans II consulted a hermit "said to have the spirit of prophecy" in Athens about his impending invasion of Lombard Italy.¹¹¹ After a night spent in prayer, the unnamed hermit explained to the emperor that

¹⁰⁹ *HL* 6.35, 227.

¹¹⁰ *HL* 6.35, 228: in cuius temporibus terrae ubertas nimia, sed tempora fuere barbarica.

¹¹¹ *HL* 5.6, 186: His diebus Constantinus augustus, qui et Constans appellatus, Italiam a Langobardorum manu eruere cupiens, Constantinopolim egressus, per litoralia iter habens, Athenas venit, indeque mare transgressus, Tarentum applicuit. Qui tamen prius ad solitarium quendam, qui prophetiae spiritum habere dicebatur, adiit, studiose ab eo sciscitans, utrum gentem Langobardorum, quae in Italia habitabat, superare et optinere possit.

at the moment, the people of the Lombards cannot be conquered by anyone, because a certain queen coming from another region built a basilica to St John the Baptist within Lombard borders, and that is why the blessed John constantly intercedes for the people of the Lombards. There will come a time, however, when this *oraculum* will be held in contempt, and then the people will be destroyed.¹¹²

Warned of the saint's protection of the Lombards and the impossibility of conquering them whilst under his aegis, the emperor disregarded the prophetic warning and invaded Italy. In the following five chapters, Paul depicted how Constans' invasion turned into a debacle, and forcing the emperor to recognize that "he could accomplish nothing himself against the Lombards," and thus turned his wrath "against his own, that is, the Romans."¹¹³ Nevertheless, closing the circle on the emperor's action within his history, Paul described how after ignoring the prophetic warning and failing to retake Italy, Constans "finally suffered the punishments for such great iniquities, and while he soaked in the bath, he was killed by one of his own people."¹¹⁴ Paul depicted both rulers as seeking prophetic advice, but in contrast to Theodosius, Constans ignored the prophetic warning and thus met with failure and death. Constans' fate typified what Paul saw happening if God's warnings were not followed.¹¹⁵

¹¹² *HL* 5.6, 186-187: A quo cum servus Dei spatium unius noctis expetisset, ut pro hoc ipso Dominum supplicaret, facto mane ita eidem augusto respondit: 'Gens Langobardorum superari modo ab aliquo non potest, quia regina quaedam ex alia provincia veniens basilicam beati Iohannis baptistae in Langobardorum finibus construxit, et propter hoc ipse beatus Iohannes pro Langobardorum gente continue intercedit. Veniet autem tempus, quando ipsud oraculum habebitur despectui, et tunc gens ipsa peribit.

¹¹³ *HL* 5.11, 190: At vero Constans augustus cum nihil se contra Langobardos gessisse conspiceret, omnes saevitiae suae minas contra suos, hoc est Romanos, retorsit.

¹¹⁴ *HL* 5.11, 191: sed tandem tantarum iniquitatem poenas luit, atque dum se in balneo lavaret, a suis extinctus est.

¹¹⁵ Compare with the story of the rulers of the Rugi and St Severinus: *HL* 1.19, 64-65: Hic saepius hunc de quo diximus Feletheum eiusque coniugem, cui vocabulum Gisa fuit, ut ab iniquitate quiescerent, verbis coelestibus monuit. Quibus pia verba spernentibus, hoc quod eis postmodum contigit longe antea futurum praedixit. Adunatis igitur Odoacar gentibus quae eius dicioni parebant, id est Turcilingis et Herolis rugorum que partem, quos iam dudum possidebat, necnon etiam Italiae populis, venit in Rugiland pugnavitque cum Rugis, ultimaque eos clade conficiens, Felethem insuper eorum regem extinctum.

Paul was not finished with Constans' death, however, and made it clear that the hermit's prophecy had been fulfilled by noting in his own voice, that

we have proven this has happened as follows: before the destruction of the Lombards, we witnessed that very same basilica of the Blessed John—built in a place called Modicia—administered by wicked individuals. So, that venerable place was granted to the unworthy and to adulterers not because of the worthiness of their lives but by the payment of bribes.¹¹⁶

Instead of leaving the hermit's prophecy as valid merely within the historical frame of Constans' failed campaign and death, Paul addressed the audience directly and suggested why God and St John had allowed the Carolingians to conquer the Lombard kingdom.¹¹⁷ Regardless of his specific views on the Franks and the Lombards, Paul saw Charlemagne's conquest as confirmation that all parts of the prophecy had been fulfilled. This suggests that Paul's view of the prophetic in history reached well beyond its role as a narrative device: it was part of his lived reality. While Paul placed the portentous events gleaned from his sources in strategic places in his histories, such manipulation reveals much about Paul's confidence in his authority as a historian and interpreter of how God manifested himself.

The final royal reign depicted in the *History of the Lombards* was Liutprand's. Paul described how Liutprand sought the aid of another hermit, a man named Baodolinus "who often prophesied the future, and also spoke of distant things as though he were present," for

¹¹⁶ *HL* 5.6, 187: Quod nos ita factum esse probavimus, qui ante Langobardorum perditionem eandem beati Iohannis basilicam, quae utique in loco qui Modicia dicitur est constituta, per viles personas ordinari conspeximus, ita ut indignis et adulteris non pro vitae merito, sed praemiorum datione, isdem locus venerabilis largiretur.

¹¹⁷ For Paul's thoughts on the end of the Lombard kingdom, see Pohl, "Gens," 70; Pohl, "Paulus Diaconus," 386; Goffart, *Narrators*, 410; Krüger, "Konzeption," 27; Maskarinec, "Romans," 334-335.

example, concerning Liutprand's fatally wounded nephew.¹¹⁸ Beyond humbly accepting the upsetting news that there was nothing that could be done from Baodolinus, Liutprand in Paul's narrative clearly acknowledged that "the man of God, Baodolinus, has the spirit of prophecy," and was wise enough to consult him.¹¹⁹ Liutprand's reign, and the ending point for the *History of the Lombards* as it has survived, ends on a positive note, for Paul described the good king's peaceful death at the end of a long reign, both rarities in his history. Liutprand was a good king precisely because he recognized and sought God's will through Baodolinus.

We can only speculate about the conversations between Charlemagne and Paul that led Charlemagne to relate the prophetic blessing of his ancestors. Nevertheless, Paul's view of history must have appealed to those near Charlemagne, especially Angilram of Metz who tasked Paul with writing the *Book of the Bishops of Metz*, or as Walter Goffart rightly characterized it, less a work of history than "the ecclesiastical symbol of the new Frankish regime."¹²⁰ Paul's depiction of history in all three works constituted a near-continuous dialogue between God and man through the interplay of natural events, human actions, and the inexplicable. For Paul, this dialogue ranged from presenting events and their meaning to

¹¹⁸ *HL*, 16.58, 240: Qui saepe futura praedixit, absentia quoque quasi praesentia nuntiavit.

¹¹⁹ *HL* 16.58, 240-241: Huius regis temporibus fuit in loco cui Forum nomen est, iuxta fluvium Tanarum, vir mirae sanctitatis Baodolinus nomine, qui multis miraculis, Christi gratia suffragante, refulsit. Qui saepe futura praedixit, absentia quoque quasi praesentia nuntiavit. Quod rex cernens valde enim eundem puerum amabat cum lacrimis eius incommodum lamentari coepit statimque unum e suis equitem misit, qui ad virum Dei Baodolinum curreret eumque peteret, ut pro vita eiusdem pueri Christum supplicaret. Qui cum ad servum Dei pergeret, puer defunctus est. Cui Christi famulus ad se pervenienti ita dixit: "Scio, quam ob causam veneris; sed illud quod postulare missus es iam fieri non potest, quia puer ille defunctus est". Quod cum is qui missus fuerat regi quod a servo Dei audierat renuntiasset, rex, licet doluerit, quod effectum supplicationis suae habere non potuit, tamen quia vir Domini Baodolinus prophetiae spiritum habuerit, aperte cognovit.

¹²⁰ Goffart, *Narrators*, 374.

narrating divine intervention, admonitions, and the reporting of prophecies for rulers and their subjects. Although we cannot know the full extent of Paul's influence on Charlemagne and those around him, we cannot overlook that in the limited documentary evidence for Paul's impact on the Frankish court Paul used the subject of a conversation with Charlemagne to weave the Carolingian family into the same historical dialogue between God and mankind he used in his other histories to affirm divine favor. In any effort to please God and know His will, acknowledgement of and participation in such a dialogue would prove very valuable.

III. Learning to Please God and Discerning His Will

A Capitulary for the Present Tribulation

In 788, after the death of Charlemagne's brother Carloman and the beginning of his own sole rule, one of Charlemagne's first legislative documents was promulgated in response to a serious crisis. In contrast to the positive reports of the *Royal Frankish Annals* for the years 777-779, Charles and his supporters were now under significant pressure: after invading al-Andalus Charlemagne learned of a serious Saxon revolt throwing his eastern frontier into chaos; and as he withdrew his troops to counter it, he suffered one of his worst defeats at Roncesvalles, all while—according to the *Moselle Annals*—“a famine caused great mortality in Francia.”¹²¹ Responding to these events in a royal assembly in 779 at Herstal, Charlemagne

¹²¹ For the Saxon revolts and the defeat at Roncesvalles, see *ARF*, a.778-779, 50-54. For the famine, see *Moselle Annals* a.778, 496-497: *Karlus rex iterum in Saxonia usque ad fluvium Wisaraha, et Saxones pacificati dextras et obsides dederunt. Fames vero magna mortalitas fuit in Francia; et domnus rex sedit in Wormacia. Cf. Lorsch Annals*, sa. 778, Katz (ed.), 32; *Chesne Fragment*, sa. 779, 31. For the debate between Hubert Mordek and Francois-

implemented a “social experiment,” in Janet Nelson’s words.¹²² This social experiment was outlined in the second capitulary of Herstal, named by its most recent editor the ‘Capitulary for the Present Tribulation’ (*Capitulare pro praesente tribulatione*), one of the first official statements Charlemagne promulgated as a ruler.¹²³

At the assembly in Herstal Charlemagne introduced a novel response to the military setbacks and famine conditions, and his response suggests how the crises were understood by Charlemagne so early in his reign. In the introduction to the general capitulary, the assembly is described as consisting of “a council of bishops, abbots, noblemen, and counts, [and] together with our most pious lord, according to the will of God, they have consented to this decree for reasonable plans.”¹²⁴ Although this heading is not utilized in the relatively brief second capitulary released at Herstal, given the contents of the second it seems that the claim to act according to God’s will suffused all of the products of the assembly.

After a brief introduction, the second capitulary states that “each bishop should perform three masses and three psalters, one for the Lord King, another for the army of the Franks, and a third for the present tribulation.”¹²⁵ After the main body of the text specifies how bishops, abbots, priests, and monks should fulfill these requirements, and how many alms

Louis Ganshof on the dating of these crises and Charlemagne’s response, see Mordek, “Kapitular,” 1-52; F.-L. Ganshof, “Une crise,” 133-145.

¹²² Nelson, “Religion,” 497.

¹²³ For an edition of the text, see Mordek, “Kapitular,” 50-52. See Mordek’s overview of and contribution to the debate regarding the dating of the capitulary from pp. 23-31.

¹²⁴ *Capitulare haristallense*, MGH Cap. I, no. 20, 47: congregatis in unum sinodale concilio episcopis, abbatibus, virisque inlustribus comitibus, una cum piissimo domno nostro secundum Dei voluntatem pro causis oportunis consenserunt decretum.

¹²⁵ *Capitulare prop praesente tribulatione*, c. 1. a, 50: Ut unusquisque episcopus III missas et trea psalteria cantent, I pro domno rege, alia pro exercitu Francorum, tertia pro presente tribulatione.

should be paid by counts to support the poor, the capitulary declares: “let all of these things be completed, if it should please the Lord, by the feast of St John (24 June) for the lord king, the army of the Franks, and the present tribulation.”¹²⁶ At the beginning and end of this short document, Charlemagne and his advisors declared the threefold purpose of the devotional actions the Charlemagne had required: for the king, the army of the Franks, and for “the present tribulation.” Although they included in the capitulary the language of pleasing God, recalling the general claim that the assembly had acted “according to the will of God,” the *Capitulary for the Present Tribulation* gave no explanation for why the decision had been made to institute masses, psalters, and almsgiving throughout the kingdom.

While Charlemagne appears to have found this response to the crises effective—he would utilize it repeatedly throughout his reign—his first use of this response raises several critical questions and offers little in the way of answer. Why did Charlemagne and his advisors feel the need to focus their efforts on obtaining divine help for the king and the army of the Franks, and to alleviate this particular tribulation? What does Charlemagne’s and his advisors’ response, especially the emphasis on pleasing God and acting according to His will, reveal about how they understood the crisis they faced? While these questions resist simple answers, to contextualize them and approach understanding them we must look to Charlemagne’s father, Pippin III, as well as other contemporary documents that illuminate Charlemagne’s crisis response in 779.

¹²⁶ *Capitulare pro praesente tribulatione*, c. 3. a., 50: Hec omnia, si domino placuerit, pro domno rege et exercitu Francorum et presente tribulatione missa sancti Iohannis.

Past Tribulation and Divine Inspiration

A comparable scenario that may have informed Charlemagne's response is described in a letter written by Pippin III, the only letter he wrote using the formula "king of the Franks by the grace of God."¹²⁷ Writing to archbishop Lull of Mainz following a particularly dire famine that interrupted a campaign against Tassilo of Bavaria, Pippin declared that

we know the evidence of your holiness, the great piety and mercy that God showed in this very land this year. God gave us a tribulation for our sins, however after the tribulation he gave us a great and even miraculous comfort, specifically an abundance of the fruits of the land that we recently received. From this letter and for our other reasons the work falls to us to offer Him thanks because He deigned to comfort his servants through His mercy. Thus, it seems to us that apart from the announced fast, let each bishop perform litanies in his district, not with the fast, unless it is only in praise of God who gave us such a great abundance. Let each man give his alms and feed the poor. You should see to and arrange matters thus according to our word that each man, whether he wants to or not, pays his tithe. Farewell in Christ.¹²⁸

Although Pippin only hints at the famine and harsh winter in his letter, he does offer a brief explanation of how he and his advisors understood the "tribulation" they had endured. First, Pippin acknowledged that God had caused both the terrible famine and the following miraculous relief, and second, the "tribulation" had been specifically a punishment or

¹²⁷ *Pippini ad Lullum epistola*, MGH Cap. I no. 17, 42. I am grateful to Herwig Wolfram for bringing this letter to my attention and for his insightful comments.

¹²⁸ *Pippini ad Lullum epistola*, 42: Cognitum scimus sanctitati vestrae, qualem pietatem et misericordiam Deus fecit presenti anno in terra ista. Dedit tribulationem pro delictis nostris, post tribulationem autem magnam atque mirabilem consolationem sive habundantiam fructus terrae, quae modo habemus. Et ab hoc atque pro alias causas nostras opus est nobis illi gratias agere, quia dignatus est servis suis consolare per eius misericordiam. Sic nobis videtur, ut absque ieiunio indicto unusquisque episcopus in sua parrochia letanias faciat, non cum ieiunio, nisi tantum in laude Dei, qui talem nobis habundantiam dedit; et faciat unusquisque homo sua elimosina et pauperes pascat. Et sic providere faciatis et ordinare de verbo nostro, ut unusquisque homo, aut vellet aut nollet, suam decimam donet. Valet in Christo. For more on the famine and harsh winter that prompted Pippin's gratitude, see McCormick, "Pippin III," 237–38, n. 74.

consequence of sin. Finally, Pippin explained that he felt compelled to see that God was properly thanked and that all the bishops offered extra litanies and that all men did their part in paying tithes and feeding the poor. Because the famine and harsh winter most probably forced Pippin to call off a campaign, this similar situation and Pippin's response may have informed Charlemagne's approach to the crises of 778 and 779. Believing that the crises had arisen as a result of sin or that God had aided the Franks in similar cases in the past might explain Charlemagne's similar approach to gaining divine assistance, but these must remain only possibilities since Charlemagne did not offer an explanation of his choices in his second capitulary at Herstal.

Approaching Charlemagne's and his advisors' hope of pleasing God and claim of acting according to His will, claims that presume a knowledge of what God wanted, it should be noted that such language is relatively rare in Charlemagne's early reign.¹²⁹ Such claims stands out amidst Charlemagne's capitularies because they would not reappear until after his coronation as emperor in 800.¹³⁰ Where similar language does appear, however, is in a certain formula used in several of Pippin's and Charlemagne's royal grants and diplomata, where the documents' authors assert that the royal giver acted by divine inspiration. For example, only

¹²⁹ cf. *Capitulare haristallense*, 47: congregatis in unum sinodale concilio episcopis, abbatibus, virisque inlustribus comitibus, una cum piissimo domno nostro secundum Dei voluntatem pro causis oportunis consenserunt decretum. *Capitulare pro praesente tribulatione*, c. 3. a., 50: Hec omnia, si domino placuerit, pro domno rege et exercitu Francorum et presente tribulatione missa sancti Iohannis.

¹³⁰ cf. *Capitulare missorum generale* (a. 802), 92: Et ut ipsi missi diligenter perquirere, ubicumque aliquis homo sibi iniustitiam factam ab aliquo reclamasset, sicut Dei omnipotentis gratiam sibi cupiant custodire et fidelitate sibi promissa conservare; ita ut omnino in omnibus ubicumque, sive in sanctis ecclesiis Dei vel etiam pauperibus, pupillis et viduis adque cuncto populo legem pleniter adque iustitia exhiberent secundum voluntatem et timorem Dei.

months after gaining the throne in 752, Pippin III re-founded the monastery at Prüm and claimed in the grant confirming his actions that “because we were inspired by heavenly grace, accordingly we built the monastery called Prüm anew.”¹³¹ Similarly, in a 776 grant of an estate to the monastery at Nonatola, the author of the diploma wrote in Charlemagne’s voice that “inspired by the Lord, we give [the estate] for the perpetual possession of the previously mentioned holy place.”¹³² In both examples, Charles and his father Pippin claimed divine inspiration as the reason for their actions, using language that is rare in such documents from the eighth and ninth centuries.

As the royal grants show, Charlemagne (possibly learned from his father) felt no qualms about claiming divine inspiration to justify an official action, on a small scale at least. While this language of divine inspiration was available to and used by Charlemagne early in his reign, he would not claim divine inspiration, or to know what God’s will for him, in major political actions until late in his reign. Nevertheless, whether claiming to act according to God’s will at Herstal or by divine inspiration in a minor grant, Charlemagne began early in his reign to experiment with invoking knowledge of God’s will in his political activity.

Learning God’s Will

¹³¹ DD Kar. 1, n. 3, 5: Et quoniam siquidem monasterium quod dicitur Prumia superna nobis inspirante gratia a novo construximus opere in honore videlicet sancti Salvatoris vel sanctae Mariae. On this particular donation, see Smith, “Pippin III,” 437-454. cf. DD Kar. 1, no. 13, pp. 22-23: Idcirco inspirante nobis superna gratia donamus pariter ego et coniux mea Bertrada ad ipsum sanctissimum locum, quem in honore sancti Salvatoris vel sanctae Mariae construximus.

¹³² DD Kar. I, n. 113, 159-160: ad praefatum sanctum locum tradimus domino inspirante ad possidendum perpetualiter.

By the second half of the 780s, with his Lombard scholars returning home, Charlemagne and those around him began to show signs of having most probably absorbed some of what the Lombards—and Cathwulf too, for that matter—had taught. For example, in a letter from Pope Hadrian I (d. 795), the pope described how Charlemagne had sent to him a certain John, a monk and priest who had claimed he had experienced certain revelations regarding the state of the church.¹³³ According to the letter, John travelled under the protection of his *missus* whom Charlemagne had sent to Hadrian so to address various legal matters, and John's revelations, so that "wicked men might be corrected and emended by propitiation to God through your [Charles'] arrangement, just as your royal power demanded of us."¹³⁴ While Hadrian did not explain all of the matters the *missus* Garamannus had been sent to deal with, he expanded on the issue of the monk John and his revelations. Hadrian described how the monk corrected the behavior of bishops and priests alike and cited his visions to justify his corrections. After relating John's primary complaints against the church—complaints Hadrian claimed Charlemagne had already heard from John himself—Hadrian described the visions:

Regarding the revelation of this same monk John, as reported in his words, it is best considered to be an apparition. For instance, he claimed that he saw first in a dream the heavens open and the right hand of God. Then he saw another dream afterwards: a great tower and angels descending from it, among whom he saw a kind of man, seemingly dead, who had the wings of an eagle, and another kind of man who had the wings of a living dove, and saying, that 'here

¹³³ The letter survives as Epistola 88, CC, MGH Ep. III, pp. 624-625.

¹³⁴ Hadrian to Charlemagne, Ep. 88, CC, p. 624: Ilud autem, quod nobis vestra innotuit regalis potentia per suum fidelissimum missum, scilicet Garamannum gloriosum ducem, pro Iohanne monacho atque presbitero – qui, sicuti in vestris referebatur regalis apicibus, de captivatione hominum et de aliis inlicitis causis, quae a pravis perpetrantur hominibus, vobis enuntiasset, ut Deo propitio per vestrum precelsum regalem dispositum corrigerentur vel emendarentur – quemadmodum nobis poposcit regalis potentia.

is the Christian faith.' Thus may it be absent from the hearts of the faithful that it be prophesied that the faith of Christians is dead. For the kind [of man] who had eagle's wings we interpret just as the holy fathers, we proclaim John the Evangelist, who prophesied to mankind heavenly secrets, "In the beginning was the word" and the rest: the Holy Spirit appeared as a kind of dove. For we have never read of a kind of man with the wings of a dove besides. Wherefore, praising your exceedingly laudable and most firm faith, we recognize in this matter that you have considered these visions apparitions. In this matter that which your royal power demanded of us on his behalf that he was in no way condemned, excommunicated, or beaten by us, we were bound to make no adversity for him.¹³⁵

Hadrian implied that John had claimed that his criticisms of ecclesiastical figures and practices were confirmed by his revelation. Hadrian dismissed the revelation ostensibly because one of the symbols was scripturally unattested. Nevertheless, John's revelation appears serious, for it claimed to reveal the Christian faith as a corpse utilizing several symbols commonly associated with John the Evangelist. The seriousness with which the revelation was taken is confirmed by Charlemagne's dispatch of John to Hadrian in the first place and by Hadrian's careful report back to Charles. That Charlemagne was especially interested in John's vision is suggested by Hadrian's implication that Charles listened to John tell of it and then went to the trouble of packing him off to Italy with his *missus*.

¹³⁵ Hadrian to Charlemagne, *Ep.* 88, CC, p. 625: Porro de revelatione eiusdem Iohannis monachi, sicut eius referebat locutio, vere fantasma esse existimatur. Dicebat enim, quia vidit primis in somnis caelos apertos et dexteram Dei; deinde vidit postmodum somnium aliud: turrem magnam et descendentes angelos; inter quibus vidit speciem hominis, alas habentes aquile, mortuumque essentem, et aliam speciem hominis, alas habentem columbe vivae et dicentem: 'Quia hic est fides christiana.' Absit enim a fidelium cordibus, ut fides christianorum mortua esse prædicetur. Nos enim speciem, aquile alas habentem, sicut a sanctis suscepimus patribus, Iohannem evangelistam testamur, qui secreta caelestia hominibus predicat: 'In principio erat verbum' et cetera; in specie vero columbe spiritus sanctus visus est; nam numquam legimus speciem hominis alas columbe in dutum. Quapropter nimis vestram laudantes firmissimam atque laudabilem fidem, in hoc cognovimus, quia vos fantassma ipsas reputastis visiones. In eo quod nobis pro eo vestra poposcit regalis potentia, ut nequaquam a nobis condemnatus, anathematizatus vel flagellatus fuisset, neque aliquam atversitatem ei facere debuissimus.

But what does Hadrian's letter reveal about how Charlemagne viewed the revelation or the monk who brought it to him? It says something of Charlemagne's interest in, or susceptibility to, the prophetic that Charles demanded from the pope that John was not to be harmed or punished in any way, a demand that Hadrian claimed to have met, only later mentioning that he "corrected and emended" John to keep his monastic rule more strictly.¹³⁶ Although Tom Noble has claimed that the letter demonstrated how Charlemagne "left to the pope the disciplining of clerics," this explanation overlooks the clear fact that Charlemagne had no interest in punishing John.¹³⁷ Even Hadrian's labored praises and polite statement that "we recognize in this matter that you have considered these visions apparitions" does not sound entirely convincing given the effort Charles made to bring John to Hadrian's attention and the king's instructions that John be protected from all punishment, ecclesiastical and physical. Instead, John, a monk and priest of little account, managed to deliver a dramatic account of a revelation claiming that "the faith of Christians is dead" to Charlemagne himself, potentially in person, and this moved Charlemagne enough that the king sent John to deliver his message to the pope.¹³⁸ From the hints the letter offers, Charlemagne seems to have felt the revelation was important because in sending John to Hadrian—and forbidding any punishment for the cleric—Charles seems to have either wanted Hadrian to learn of the

¹³⁶ Hadrian to Charlemagne, *Ep.* 88, CC, p. 625: a nobis correctus et emendatus, monachicam regulam illi demonstrare inreprehensibiliter habuissimus.

¹³⁷ Noble, *Republic*, 283-284.

¹³⁸ Hadrian to Charlemagne, *Ep.* 88, CC, p. 625: Absit enim a fidelium cordibus, ut fides christianorum mortua esse predicetur.

revelation or judge whether it was reliable. In either case, John's message seems to have resonated with the Frankish king, possibly more so than with the pope.

Pleasing God and Keeping His Protection

While Charlemagne's attention to John's revelation suggests the king's interest in the prophetic, one reason that John's ominous revelation caught Charlemagne's eye must have been the monk's efforts to correct the Church and its leaders. John's criticism of bishops and priests, dated to the second half of the 780s, resonated with Charlemagne's own increasing efforts to correct those he ruled and thereby retain God's favor. Early capitularies and other documents offered glimpses of Charles' efforts to gain divine assistance, to please God, and act "according to God's will."¹³⁹ By the end of the decade, however, Charlemagne and his advisors went far beyond such glimpses when they declared that their correction of the clergy, as well as of the laity, was necessary "so that He Who has granted such great honors upon our kingdom might deign to preserve us and our kingdom with His protection for eternity."¹⁴⁰

This focus in Charlemagne's and his advisors' thought responded to the threats against his rule experienced in the 780s, first from a revolt of nobles in the eastern parts of the Frankish kingdom and then by Charlemagne's cousin, the Bavarian Duke Tassilo. Starting in 785 and lasting into the next year, the revolt led by the magnate Hardrad seems to have

¹³⁹ *Capitulare haristallense*, MGH Cap. I n. 20, 47: congregatis in unum sinodale concilio episcopis, abbatibus, virisque inlustribus comitibus, una cum piissimo domno nostro secundum Dei voluntatem pro causis oportunis consenserunt decretum. *Capitulare pro praesente tribulatione*, c. 3.a., 50: Hec omnia, si domino placuerit, pro domno rege et exercitu Francorum et presente tribulatione missa sancti Iohannis.

¹⁴⁰ *AG*, praefatio, 53: quatenus qui nostro regno tantos contulit honores, sua protectione nos nostrumque regnum in aeternum conservare dignetur.

caused great trouble for Charlemagne's rule, as many surviving sources suggest.¹⁴¹ A letter from pope Hadrian to Charlemagne also described how in 785 Charles had asked the pope to perform a series of litanies and *laudes* because of a pestilence that had recently arisen in Francia.¹⁴² In the following year, while on a visit to Rome, Charlemagne received papal forgiveness for all of the death and destruction that would come from his planned attack on his cousin Tassilo, the duke of Bavaria and more a competitor for the Frankish throne than later Frankish sources admitted.¹⁴³ By 788, Charlemagne had subdued Tassilo without fighting and brought the Bavarian duke to trial for breaking oaths to the Carolingian kings, and in 789, Charlemagne promulgated instructions to his entire realm through his *missi* that everyone above the age of twelve must swear a new oath to him.¹⁴⁴ Charlemagne, however, did not stop with demanding new oaths of allegiance and punishing those who had threatened his rule; in 789 he and his advisors also promulgated a series of profound and wide-reaching reforms that touched nearly every aspect of Frankish religious life and society, included in which should be the *Admonitio generalis*.¹⁴⁵

As a sign that Charlemagne had internalized some of what his teachers and advisors had taught him, Charlemagne's decision to support his military and legal responses to serious threats to his rule with a substantial array of reforms suggests a developing understanding of

¹⁴¹ For critical perspectives on Hardrad's revolt and the historiographic reaction to it, see McKitterick, *Perceptions*, 68-71, and Nelson, *Opposition*, 13-26.

¹⁴² Hadrian to Charlemagne, *Ep.* 76, CC, 608.

¹⁴³ The papal involvement is recorded in *ARF sa.* 787. On Charlemagne's efforts to control Bavaria, see S. Airle, "Narratives," 93-119.

¹⁴⁴ *Capitulaire missorum* no. 25, MGH Cap. I, pp. 66-67. For the essential study of this oath, see Becher, *Eid*, 79-85.

¹⁴⁵ Helmut Reimitz alluded to the connection in *History*, 340.

the basis of his own power. After all, Cathwulf had suggested that among the signs of an unjust ruler, or more accurately, of God's displeasure with an unjust ruler, were dissent within his family, rebellions, and pestilence.¹⁴⁶ If Charlemagne and his advisors accepted that Charlemagne's successful rule depended on divine support, and that offending God could result in the humbling of the ruler of the Franks, it would explain the extensive reforms being pushed at a fairly precarious moment in Charlemagne's rule. If Charlemagne were becoming more sensitive to the continuous dialogue between God and mankind in the events occurring around them, *correctio* as a response to a rebellion and a close shave with civil war begins to make sense. Emblematic of Charlemagne's attempts to support his other responses to solidify his rule, the *Admonitio generalis* and the circular letter *On the Cultivation of Letters* articulate Charlemagne's developing understanding of his role as king as well as of his dependence on divine support. This royally guided *correctio* sought proper understanding of Scripture as much as ethical behavior and liturgical precision so that Charlemagne and his subjects would please God and maintain His favor.¹⁴⁷

As the grandest statement of his intention to correct his people and secure their salvation and continued divine protection, Charlemagne and his advisors promulgated the *Admonitio generalis*, and in the capitulary they outlined their motivation. Instead of merely stating his royal titles at the outset of the capitulary as he had done in the past, Charles is

¹⁴⁶ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 503: E contra, sicut dixit sanctus Patricius: Pro regis iniustitia sui ipsius infelicitas erit, uxoris filiorum quoque dissensio.

¹⁴⁷ For the debate regarding the level of ritualism and the emphasis on propitiation in Carolingian religious observance, see Mayr-Harting, "Religion," 113-122; Angenendt, "Libelli," 118-121, 126-135.

introduced at the outset as saying, “I Charles, king by the grace and mercy given by God and *rector* of the kingdom of the Franks and devoted defender and humble supporter of the sacred church.”¹⁴⁸ Asserting authority over the kingdom as much as the church as their king and *rector*, teacher or guide, Charlemagne and his advisors justified his claim to such authority in a parallel to biblical rulers, describing that

we have read in the books of the kings how the holy Josiah endeavored to recall the kingdom given to him by God to the worship of the true God by inspection, correction, and admonition. While I do not compare myself to his holiness, yet with respect to us the examples of the saints must be followed everywhere and always.¹⁴⁹

Comparing himself to the Old Testament king who recalled Israel from worshipping other gods and restored the Law, Charlemagne described his own *correctio* efforts in similar terms and with dramatic urgency.¹⁵⁰ The reforms enumerated in the *Admonitio generalis* aimed to assure more than his subjects’ salvation, but also to make them worthy for God to “deign to preserve us and our kingdom with His protection for eternity.”¹⁵¹ These efforts ranged widely and covered the clergy and the laity at nearly every level, and Charlemagne and his advisors made the stakes clear when they concluded the lengthy capitulary’s list of reforms and corrections with a mildly apocalyptic warning that

¹⁴⁸ AG, 53: Ego Karolus, gratia Dei eiusque misericordia donante rex et rector regni Francorum et devotus sanctae aeclesiae defensor humilisque adiutor.

¹⁴⁹ AG, 54: Nam legimus in regnorum libris, quomodo sanctus Iosias regnum sibi a Deo datum circumeundo, corrigendo, ammonendo ad cultum veri Dei studuit revocare: non ut me eius sanctitate aequiparabilem faciam, sed quod nobis sunt ubique sanctorum semper exempla sequenda. On the unprecedented nature of *Admonitio generalis* and Charlemagne’s use of scripture, see J. J. Contreni, “Biblical Culture,” 2-3.

¹⁵⁰ cf. 4 Kings 34. On the urgency expressed in the *Admonitio generalis*, see de Jong, “Ecclesia,” 120.

¹⁵¹ AG, praefatio, 53: quatenus qui nostro regno tantos contulit honores, sua protectione nos nostrumque regnum in aeternum conservare dignetur.

as the Lord prophesied in the Gospel and the Apostle Paul witnessed to Timothy, we know that in the last days false teachers will arise. Therefore, most beloved, let us prepare ourselves with our entire hearts in the knowledge of the truth to be able to oppose the adversaries of truth.¹⁵²

As the conclusion of the capitulary confirmed, one of the primary concerns of the *correctio*-efforts outlined in *Admonitio generalis* was the proper understanding of truth, a priority highlighted by Charlemagne's comparison with Josiah. At the root of every moral, pastoral, or liturgical action he sought to correct there had to lie exposed the correct knowledge that informed it: knowing what God wanted so that the actor could act according to God's will.

If the motivation behind *correctio* was to please God, then the emphasis on improving education and literacy laid the foundation for it by stressing the primary means by which one could learn God's will and act accordingly. In the circular letter mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, *On the Cultivation of Letters*, also dated to the late 780s, Charlemagne and his advisors argued that they must improve their means of education at every level. Revealing concerns far deeper than the simple eloquence of churchmen, Charlemagne's circular letter continued to explain that

as we have begun to fear that perhaps as skill in writing has become worse thus also the wisdom in understanding the Holy Scriptures has become much less than it ought to be. And we all know well that however much errors of words are dangerous, errors of understanding are more dangerous.¹⁵³

¹⁵² AG, 62: quia scimus temporibus novissimis pseudodoctores esse venturos, sicut ipse Dominus in euangelio praedixit, et apostolus Paulus ad Timotheum testatur. Ideo, dilectissimi, toto corde praeparemus nos in scientia veritatis, ut possimus contradicentibus veritati resistere.

¹⁵³ *De litteris colendis*, 233: Unde factum est, ut timere inciperemus, ne forte, sicut minor erat in scribendo prudentia, ita quoque et multo minor esset quam recte esse debuisset in sanctarum scripturarum ad intelligendum sapientia. Et bene novimus omnes, quia, quamvis periculosi sint errores verborum, multo periculosiores sunt errores sensuum.

One indication of what made “errors of understanding” so dangerous comes in their earlier claim that Charlemagne and his advisors must improve education “so that those who eagerly desire to please God by correct living will not fail to please Him by correct speaking.”¹⁵⁴ While his *Correctio* efforts affected many individuals in many stations throughout his kingdom, Charlemagne and his advisors remained motivated by the need to retain God’s favor, because their temporal success and eternal salvation depended on it.

Conclusion

Charlemagne’s interest in the monk John’s revelation and his criticisms of churchmen fits into the logic of the *Admonitio generalis* and the letter *On the Cultivation of Letters* in the king’s efforts to please God and thereby to maintain the divine assistance he had enjoyed. Throughout his early reign Charlemagne and those he kept around him demonstrate the perceived need and reliance on God’s aid in crisis and beyond, and by the end of the 780s, Charles considered it his responsibility as *rex et rector* of his kingdom to make certain that the ruler and realm maintained God’s favor and protection. Placing the emphasis on the necessity of correct knowledge when speaking and acting to gain God’s favor, Charlemagne and his advisors show the internalization of what his scholars had taught and discussed early in his reign. Acknowledging his reliance on God, and revealing a sensitivity to and interest in the dialogue between God and those who could understand His signs, portents, and prophecies,

¹⁵⁴ *De litteris colendis*, 79: ut Deo placere appetunt recte vivendo, ei etiam placere non negligant recte loquendo.

Charlemagne laid the foundation and set the conditions for his own and for his son's far more extensive use of the prophetic.

Chapter 2

Introduction

In the later 820s, Einhard wrote a biography of Charlemagne and, in the Suetonian style of imperial biography he adapted, included a chapter near the end of the biography dedicated to the signs and portents that heralded Charlemagne's death.¹ Einhard explained that

while Charles conducted his final campaign in Saxony against King Godofrid of the Danes, on a certain day, before sunrise, having left the camp he began to take his journey, Charles unexpectedly saw a flame falling from heaven with great light, crossing through the calm sky from right to left. While everyone wondered what this sign portended, suddenly the horse Charlemagne rode toppled, dropping its head and throwing him to the ground so violently, that the buckle of his cloak cracked and his sword belt was thrown. Disarmed, without a cloak, he was lifted up by those ministers present who hastened to him. Even his spear, which he had held strongly in his hand at the time, had similarly slipped away, so that it lay a space of twenty or more feet away from him.²

Einhard's biography, and this section in particular, contributed to the discussions of Louis' reign and will be examined later. For present purposes, Einhard's text highlights two critical themes for the understanding of the prophetic in the second half of Charlemagne's reign: Charlemagne's performative confidence in knowing what such signs meant, and the collective responsibility he and his advisors encouraged as a response. Just as the previous chapter

¹ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.32, 36-37. On the form of the biography, see Ganz, "Einhard's Charlemagne," 38-51.

² Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.32, 36-37: Ipse quoque, cum ultimam in Saxoniam expeditionem contra Godofridum regem Danorum ageret, quadam die, cum ante exortum solis castris egressus iter agere coepisset, vidit repente delapsam caelitus cum ingenti lumine facem a dextra in sinistram per serenum aera transcurrere. Cunctisque hoc signum, quid portenderet, ammirantibus, subito equus, quem sedebat, capite deorsum merso decedit eumque tam graviter ad terram elisit, ut, fibula sagi rupta balteoque gladii dissipato, a festinantibus qui aderant ministris exarmatus et sine amiculo levaretur. Iaculum etiam, quod tunc forte manu tenebat, ita elapsum est, ut viginti vel eo amplius pedum spatio longe iaceret.

illustrated the development of the perception that God had to be pleased and of an appreciation of the dialogue of signs and portents between God and mankind, this chapter will explore how these ideas were drawn together and utilized by Charlemagne and those around him to respond to crises facing the realm. The Carolingian scholars we have investigated so far identified the ruler as the active agent in any discussion of pleasing God and knowing His mind, and Charles grew into his role, adapting their ideas while shifting the focus from the king's personal connection to portents to the necessity of a collective responsibility. As we shall see, by controlling the interpretation of and response to crisis, Charles and his advisors managed to use even negative events to reinforce his rule and support his claims of divine support and guidance.

In this chapter I will explore the transformations that took place from the early 790s to Charlemagne's death in 814. I will explore Alcuin's understanding of portents and prophecy and their prominent place in his thinking, especially when it comes to the teaching and correcting of kings. In the 790s and first decade of the ninth century, our sources also document experiments in seeking divine approval or claiming divine support. I will then investigate how Charlemagne in conversation with other Carolingian elites within his realm began to explore the interpretation of God's will and its political currency. Finally, turning to the final decade of Charlemagne's reign, I will investigate a series of documents produced by Charlemagne's court in response to personal and widespread catastrophes, in order to illuminate how Charles and his advisors used the prophetic to capitalize on potential disasters and use them to reinforce his rule.

I. David's Teacher: Alcuin of York and the Interpretation of God's Signs

Alcuin of York

As Einhard recalled in his biography of Charlemagne, Alcuin of York (d. ca. 804) was Charles' teacher after Peter of Pisa and taught Charles in many disciplines as "a man most learned in every respect."³ Einhard also noted how Charles and Alcuin studied rhetoric and logic together, but especially emphasized that Charles "explored with perceptive concentration the course of stars and the art of *computus*."⁴ While the extent of Alcuin's influence on Charlemagne and Frankish politics has been much debated, in the use of the prophetic his influence was undoubtedly substantial.⁵ From 786 to his death around 804, Alcuin remained in contact with Charlemagne and enjoyed a degree of patronage and economic support from the Frankish king far beyond anything attested for earlier scholars, suggesting that Alcuin's voice carried significant weight.

Alcuin's continental career can be quickly sketched. In 786, as argued convincingly by Bullough, Alcuin became part of Charles' itinerant court, and with the exception of a three-and-a-half-

³ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 25, 30: In discenda grammatica Petrum Pisanum diaconem senem audivit, in ceteris disciplinis Albinum cognomento Alcoinum, item diaconem, de Britannia Saxonici generis hominem, virum undecumque doctissimum, praeceptorem habuit.

⁴ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 25, 30: apud quem et rethoricae et dialecticae, praecipue tamen astronomiae ediscendae plurimum et temporis et laboris impertivit. Discebat artem computandi et intentione sagaci siderum cursum curiosissime rimabatur.

⁵ For a thorough study of Alcuin and those who have studied Alcuin through the years, see Bullough, *Alcuin*. For examples of those scholars who tend to overestimate Alcuin's impact, see Tremp and Schmuki (eds.), *Alcuin*, Veyrard-Cosme, "Littérature," 192-207; Wallace-Hadrill, *Kingship*, 101; L. Wallach, *Alcuin and Charlemagne. Studies in Carolingian History and Literature* (New York, 1959); Wattenback, Levison, Löwe II, 225; Levison, *England and the Continent*, 153-155.

year return to Northumbria, Alcuin remained in Francia until his death *ca.* 804.⁶ As one of Charlemagne's most outspoken advisors, Alcuin's view of the prophetic, and its impact on Charlemagne, proved critical in the final years of the eighth and the first years of the ninth century. As a counsellor and teacher, Alcuin was influential during the critical years of transformation in Charlemagne's understanding of his role as ruler and how he understood his responsibilities to God and their consequences.

Beyond Alcuin's substantial surviving correspondence, the Northumbrian's influence can be seen in how he helped shape Carolingian *correctio*.⁷ To understand Alcuin's contribution to the understanding and use of the prophetic in the Frankish court, however, we must look to his letters to Charlemagne and to Anglo-Saxon rulers as well. As we shall see, Alcuin's letters reveal his interpretation of portents and his invocation of divine authority through his own prophecies, all in efforts to avoid what he often perceived as approaching disaster. Although Charlemagne's own use of the prophetic did not simply mirror Alcuin's, Alcuin's approach to interpreting divine communication, his use of prophecy, and his understanding of royal responsibilities to God all left an impression on the court.

⁶ See Bullough, *Alcuin*, 336-410. While outdated in a few points, Dümmler's essay remains one of the best surveys of his life, E. Dümmler, "Zur Lebensgeschichte Alcuins," *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde*, 18 (1893) pp. 51-70. See also Levison, *England and the Continent*, 153-155.

⁷ It has been argued that Alcuin may have been initially drawn to Charlemagne's court because the king prioritized the improvement of the religiosity of his people (Fried, *Karl der Grosse*, 311), he had an impact Frankish *correctio* in many ways. For a brief survey of Alcuin's influence, see Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge," 107. Compare this with the perspectives in Bullough, *Alcuin*, 312, 351. For fundamental scholarship on Alcuin's influence on the two documents mentioned in the last chapter, see F.-C. Scheibe, "Alcuin und die Admonitio generalis," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 14 (1958) pp. 221-229; L. Wallach, "Charlemagne's *De litteris colendis* and Alcuin: A Diplomatic-Historical Study," *Speculum* 26,2 (1951) pp. 288-305.

A comprehensive analysis of Alcuin's quotation of prophets in his letters goes beyond the limits of this study. In Alcuin's letters to kings and others in authority, however, the prophetic was never far from his mind. The first example from Alcuin's correspondence with Charles, written in 798, exemplified Alcuin's function as Charlemagne's teacher, and specifically resonated with Einhard's claim that Charlemagne had been interested that Alcuin teach him astronomy.⁸ In the summer of 798, as Charlemagne was on campaign in Saxony, he wrote a letter to Alcuin asking why the planet Mars had disappeared for a time from the sky. According to Alcuin's reply, Charles had asked his advisor "whether [Mars] acted in accordance with its natural course or as a powerful portent as it completed its circuit of two years in one?"⁹ While Alcuin replied that he believed Mars' disappearance to be natural and therefore not a portent, the letter nevertheless reveals Charlemagne and those around him as acutely aware of the possible messages in the world around them. Alcuin's letter did not give the impression that the king was in a panic, but rather that he and his advisors remained watchful of what transpired around them and to them. Further, the letter reveals that when such questions did arise, when he needed to understand a potential portent, Charlemagne reached out to Alcuin for answers.

The second example from Alcuin's correspondence with Charlemagne revealed Alcuin's role as advisor to the king and his efforts to influence Charlemagne's understanding

⁸ For the letter's dating, see Bullough, *Alcuin*, 10 n. 15.

⁹ Alcuin, Ep. 155, 252: et de Marte, qui anno praeterito in Cancrī sidere solis lumine humanis obtutibus interceptus est, quid sentias: an naturali sui cursus ratione an solis? Vi an prodigio actum sit, ut iter duorum annorum uno conficeret?

of his responsibilities as ruler. In a letter from 799, Alcuin wrote to his patron in an attempt to convince Charlemagne to make peace with the Saxons and ease off attempts to enforce the payment of tithes in newly converted regions.¹⁰ Addressing Charlemagne as the biblical prophet-king David, Alcuin reminded “sweetest David” that he often pondered and wanted to advise the king “concerning the success of your excellency, concerning the stability of the kingdom given to you by God, and concerning the progress of the Holy Church.”¹¹ Alcuin explained to Charlemagne that “on you alone rests the complete safety of the churches of Christ, even now in decline. You are the punisher of sinners, you are the corrector of those in error, you are the comforter of those in mourning, you are the pride of the good.”¹² In order to justify the dramatic terms he used to praise Charlemagne, Alcuin gave his letter an apocalyptic shade by claiming that “these times are dangerous as Truth Itself once prophesied, because the love of many has grown cold.”¹³ Alcuin echoed his apocalyptic warning with his interpretation of the situation in Saxony, warning Charlemagne that “Babylon, as is read in the

¹⁰ Alcuin, Ep. 174, 288-289.

¹¹ Alcuin, Ep. 174, 288: Quia calamus caritatis cordis mei archana instigare saepius solet de vestrae excellentiae prosperitate tractare; et de stabilitate regni vobis a Deo dati; et de profectu sanctae ecclesiae Christi. For a broader discussion of David as an ideal ruler, see Erkens' chapter “Davidkönigtum und karolingisches Kaisertum” in his *Herrschersakralität im Mittelalter*, 133-155. Compare Erkens with older, but still essential, works by Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, 75-76, 109, 129, and Werner, “Gott, Herrscher, und Historiograph,” 92-93. For a similar study, but focused on artistic depictions of David, see Steger, *David Rex et Propheta: König David als vorbildliche Verkörperung des Herrschers und Dichters im Mittelalter, nach Bilddarstellungen des achten bis zwölften Jahrhunderts* (Nürnberg, 1961). For an excellent investigation of nicknames in Alcuin's writing, see Garrison, “The Social World,” 59-79 and eadem, “*Praesagum nomen tibi*,” 107-127.

¹² Alcuin, Ep. 174, 288: Ecce in te solo tota salus ecclesiarum Christi inclinata recumbit. Tu vindex scelerum, tu rector errantium, tu consolator maerentium, tu exaltatio bonorum.

¹³ Alcuin, Ep. 174, 288: Tempora sunt periculosa olim ab ipsa veritate praedicta, quia refrigescit caritas multorum. For a focused discussion of apocalyptic thought in the years preceding 800, see Brandes, “Tempora periculosa sunt,” 49-79.

prophets, was condemned to be the habitation of demons because of the sins of its people.”¹⁴

Alcuin ended by praising Charlemagne’s God-granted knowledge of holy Scripture and history, claiming that

Nothing of these affairs is able to escape the notice of your wisdom, since we know you are learned to the highest degree in the holy Scriptures or secular histories. From all of these sources, understanding has been given to you by God that through you the holy Church of God might be directed, exalted, and preserved among the Christian people. Who can say how great the reward given by God for your outstanding devotion? Neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor risen in the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him.¹⁵

In the space of a single letter, Alcuin crystalized many of the themes that appear throughout his letters to his Frankish patron: Alcuin depicted Charlemagne as a biblical king and prophet, intimated Charlemagne’s responsibility for pleasing God for the sake of a stable reign, used scriptural prophecies to justify his arguments, and praised Charlemagne’s God-given wisdom in Scripture and history, a praise with a much greater meaning in light of Alcuin’s other correspondence. In order to understand these two letters, Alcuin’s correspondence with other rulers and powerful individuals in Anglo-Saxon England and Francia demand our attention,

¹⁴ Alcuin, Ep. 174, 289: Nam Babylon propter peccata populi daemoniorum deputata est habitatio, ut in prophetis legitur. Cf. Rev. 18, 2.

¹⁵ Alcuin, Ep. 174, 289: Nihil horum tuam latere poterit sapientiam: utpote in sanctis scripturis vel saecularibus historiis te adprime eruditum esse novimus. Ex his omnibus plena tibi scientia data est a Deo, ut per te sancta Dei ecclesia in populo christiano regatur, exaltetur, et conservetur. Quanta tuae optimae devotioni merces exhibeatur a Deo, quis dicere poterit? Quia nec oculus vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit quae praeparavit Deus diligentibus se.

not least because Alcuin suggested Anglo-Saxon affairs informed conversations between himself and Charlemagne.¹⁶

Holy Scripture, Ancient History, and Recent Events

Throughout the 790s, Alcuin learned of several disasters that destabilized his homeland, and interpreting them as punishments and portents from God, used his interpretations as an opportunity to admonish his correspondents. Alcuin's letters from 793 to 800 evince his increased confidence in interpreting God's will and his increasing certainty about the gloomy fate of Anglo-Saxon England as well as the blessed future of Charlemagne's realm.¹⁷ For example, in the wake of the 793 Viking attack on the monastery of Lindisfarne, Alcuin wrote a letter to King Aethelred I of Northumbria (d. 796) wherein he interpreted the attack as a warning for the monarch.¹⁸ Using a three-fold interpretive heuristic to extract the meaning of the attack, Alcuin then employed his interpretation as a warning—not a condemnation—to the ruler: “my devotion desires to present this warning for the salvation of

¹⁶ For Alcuin's suggestion that he discussed Anglo-Saxon events with Charles, see Alcuin, Ep. 101, 147; Alcuin, Ep. 20, 58. See Bullough's critical discussion of the limits of the possible in regards to Alcuin's personal interaction with the king, *Alcuin*, 432-437.

¹⁷ Mary Garrison has argued that Alcuin's interpretation and invocation of God's mind and will through these disasters changed dramatically between 793 and 796, but in her article she minimizes the changed circumstances and the nature of the events. By smoothing over the contrasting nature of the events Alcuin was interpreting, Garrison overemphasizes the contrast between the prophetic modes of “patient Job” and “lamenting Jeremiah,” creating a near binary in Alcuin's thought that is not evident in the sources. See Garrison, “Bible,” 68-84.

¹⁸ Alcuin, Ep. 16, 42-43. While the attack on Lindisfarne made an incredible impression on Alcuin, it was largely ignored at the time on the continent (Bullough, *Alcuin*, 410-11). Bullough argued that “no later event, not even the imperial coronation of 800 which has so often been claimed as the center of Alcuin's thinking in the late 790s, provoked or inspired in him a comparable literary outpouring” as did the attack on Lindisfarne (Bullough, *Alcuin*, 418).

my homeland. Do not imagine that I accuse you of crimes, instead understand that I wish to avoid punishments,” like the attack on Lindisfarne.¹⁹

In order to convince the king that his warning of future punishments was true, Alcuin proceeded to list many of the crimes, sins, and misdeeds of Aelfwald, the king during Aethelred's exile (*ca.* 778 or 779-788), and to set them into a direct causal relationship with the Viking attack.²⁰ Explaining the relationship between Aelfwald's evil actions and the attack, Alcuin declared that

he who reads holy Scriptures, reflects on ancient histories, and contemplates the way the world works will discover that kings, kingdoms, and homeland have been destroyed because of sins of this kind. And while powerful foreigners pillage unlawfully, our own people rightly perish.²¹

Alcuin argued that through comparing the Viking attack and the crimes of Northumbria's previous rulers with relevant Scripture, history, and present events, one arrived at a clear understanding that their sins had cost kings their rule, and might cost the people their kingdom. To underscore the point and apply his interpretive approach, Alcuin asked Aethelred

what did the blood rain signify that we saw fall menacingly from a clear sky on the highest, northern parts of the roof of the church of St Peter—the Prince of

¹⁹ Alcuin, Ep. 16, 42: quod mea offerre pro salute patrie studet devotio. nec culpas vobis invehere me arbitramini; sed poenas amovere velle intellegite.

²⁰ Alcuin, Ep. 16, 43: Non dico, quod fornicationis peccata prius non essent in populo. Sed a diebus Aelfwaldi regis fornicationes adulteria et incestus inundaverunt super terram, ita ut absque omni verecundia etiam et in ancillis Deo dicatis hec peccata perpetrabantur. Quid dicam de avaritia rapinis et violentis iudiciis? Dum luce clarius constat, quantum ubique hec crimina succreverunt et populus testatur spoliatus. On the end of Aethelwald Moll's reign, and Aethelred's own exile and return, see Bullough, *Alcuin*, 239-240; S. Keynes, Appendix 1, EASE, 525. Cf. Stenton, *England*, 92-93.

²¹ Alcuin, Ep. 16, 43: qui sanctas legit scripturas et veteres revolvit historias et seculi considerat eventum, inveniet pro huiusmodi peccatis reges regna et populos patriam perdidisse. Et dum aliena potentes iniuste rapuerunt, propria iuste perdiderunt.

Apostles—and the capital of the kingdom in York during Lent? Should it not be interpreted that punishments of blood from northern places come upon the people, because it can be seen to have begun in the actions that recently broke upon the house of God?²²

Alcuin gave the church within Northumbria's most prominent city the symbolic value of the kingdom and the Church in their entirety. He used the portent to link the judgement of God to the "head of the kingdom," and to remark that God's judgement on the kingdom was only just beginning. After declaring that God's "judgement shall begin at the house of God," Alcuin admonished the king and his nobles to be "*rectores* of the people, not robbers; pastors, not predators."²³ As Cathwulf and Peter of Pisa had instructed Charlemagne, so Alcuin elaborated on his advice to the ruler by encouraging Aethelred to follow the example of the scriptural ruler Hezekiah, whose prayers destroyed an entire enemy force through angelic intervention and postponed his prophesied death for fifteen years.²⁴ In another contemporary letter to the monastic communities of Wearmouth and Jarrow, Alcuin again invoked Hezekiah interpreting the Viking attack. Alcuin interpreted the attack as a direct fulfillment of biblical prophecy: "in us is fulfilled what once was prophesied through the prophet: 'From the north

²² Alcuin, Ep. 16, 43: Quid significat pluvia sanguinis, qui quadragessimali tempore Eboraca civitate, in ecclesia beati Petri principis apostolorum, que caput est totius regni, vidimus de borealibus domus sereno aere de summitate minaciter cadere tecti? Nonne potest putari a borealibus poenas sanguinis venire super populum? Quod in hoc facto nuper ingruente super domum Dei incepisse videri potest. Dümmler noted that Alcuin was still in Northumbria to see this himself during Lent. Dümmler, "Lebensgeschichte," 64. For modern approaches to the phenomenon Alcuin and others thought of as blood rain, see Dutton, "Observations," 167-180; Hjelmroos, "Biological Particles," 247-252; J. White (et al.), "Seasonality," 471-476; Burt, "Rain," 347-353.

²³ Alcuin, Ep. 16, 44: tempus est, ut iudicium incipiat a domo Dei (Cf. 1 Peter 4:17)... Estote rectores populi, non raptores; pastores, non predatores.

²⁴ Alcuin, Ep. 16, 44: Mementote, quod Ezechias rex iustus et pius una prece impetravit a Deo, ut hostium centum octoginta quinque milia una nocte perimerentur ab angelo. Similiter idem ipse mortem iminentem sibi lacrimis profusus avertit et quindecim annos vite suae hac prece superaddi promeruit a Deo (4 Kings 18-20). Cf. Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 502; *Quaestiunculae in Daniele*, 206, 3v. Alcuin, Ep. 21, 58.

evils erupt and from the Lord will come an terrible acknowledgement.”²⁵ In contrast, Alcuin counselled the monks to remember “how great an Assyrian army perished because of one prayer of a just and beloved king (i.e. Hezekiah) to God,” and how their “conversion [in the sense of repentance] will be pleasing to God, just like the penance of the Ninevites pleased him, and he forgave their sins on account of the tears of the city’s confession.”²⁶ Whether writing to the king or the monastic communities of Northumbria, Alcuin remained consistent in interpreting the attack as the fulfillment of prophecy, and as a sign of a continuing judgement of the kingdom, a judgement that demanded the penitent response of the people and the guidance of a righteous king.

In his letter to Aethelred, Alcuin had corrected the king of Northumbria by illuminating predecessors’ bad behavior, employing Scripture to demonstrate how the attack fulfilled prophecy, and interpreting a natural event as a warning from God of greater punishment unless Aethelred, like Hezekiah, got right with God and corrected his people. Alcuin placed the onus on the shoulders of the king to improve his behavior and do the same for his people when he suggested, “I do not believe the attack [on Lindisfarne] was caused only by the sins of they who lived in that place.”²⁷ In this way, Alcuin interpreted the blood

²⁵ Alcuin, Ep. 19, 55: In nobis impletum est, quod olim per prophetam praedictum est: ‘Ab aquilone inardescunt mala et a domino formidolosa laudatio veniet.’ The biblical language comes from Jeremiah 1:14 and Job 37:22.

²⁶ Alcuin, Ep. 19, 55: Quanta multitudo exercitus Assyriorum propter unam iusti regis et deo dilecti orationem perierat! Aliorum castigatio vestra sit ammonitio... Plangamus, quod fratres nostri perpassi sunt. Caveamus, ne nobis aliquid accidat tale. Praeveniamus faciem Domini in confessione et ploremus coram domino qui fecit nos. Cf. Ep. 21, 59: Memento Ezechiam regem quantos hostes una prece prosternerit. Ep. 22, 60: ut Deo illorum placeat conversio, sicut Ninivitarum ei placuit poenitentia, et perpercit civitati per lacrimas confitentium peccata sua

²⁷ Alcuin, Ep. 16, 44: non arbitror illorum hoc esse, qui in eo habitant loco, tantummodo peccatum.

rain as a divine warning for the king himself in the hope that Aethelred might correct those he ruled, placate God, and avoid an even greater punishment.

In each letter to the king, as well as his other letters to the bishops of his homeland, Alcuin interpreted the attack as a punishment and a portent, using the threat of divine judgement in each instance to call for *correctio* to placate God and avert a future, greater punishment. In his response to the attack, Alcuin used his interpretation of scripture, history, and what he perceived as natural processes as means of asserting prophetic authority to admonish those who, in Alcuin's view, were responsible for the defense of his *patria*.²⁸ Among the many historical and scriptural precedents Alcuin relied upon, he repeatedly recalled the prayers of King Hezekiah that saved himself, his people, and his kingdom, a lesson he wanted to drive home to Aethelred in a second letter from 793 by reminding the king that

we read that the entire goodness of the king is the prosperity of the people, the victory of the army, the balance of the weather, the abundance of the land, the blessing of children, the health of the people. It is great to rule an entire people. Indeed, *rex* comes from *regere*, and he who rules well the people subject to him receives a good reward from God... he must persevere with constant prayers and vigils to God by which he must entreat God not for himself alone, but for the prosperity of the entire people.²⁹

²⁸ Cf. Alcuin, 16, 44: Defendite patriam precibus assiduis ad Deum, iustitiae et misericordiae operibus ad homines... Nichil melius patriam defendit quam principum equitas et pietas et servorum Dei intercessiones.

²⁹ Alcuin, Ep. 18, 51: Legimus quoque, quod regis bonitas totius est gentis prosperitas. victoria exercitus, aeris temperies, terrae habundantia, filiorum benedictio, sanitas plebis. Magnum est totam regere gentem. A regendo vero rex dicitur; et qui bene regit, subiectum sibi populum, bonam habet a Deo retributionem... Orationibus vero et vigiliis eo instantius ad Deum insistere debet, quo non pro se solummodo, sed pro totius gentis prosperitate Deum deprecari debet. While Ildar Garipzanov described Alcuin as the crucial source of "insular political ideas" at Charles' court, ignoring Cathwulf and other attested insular figures, Alcuin is more likely the most well-attested insular figure in the surviving evidence of Charlemagne's intellectual circles. Garipzanov, *Symbolic*, 273. Cf. Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 503-504: Pro regis iniustitia sui ipsius infelicitas erit, uxoris filiorum quoque dissensio, populorum fames, pestilentia, infecunditas terre, maris quoque tempestatibus fructus terrarum diversis percussis, et ab inimicis suis superatus et expulsus de regno. For the dating of the letter, see Bullough, *Alcuin*, 398 no. 210.

In his efforts to respond to what he perceived as a serious warning to his homeland, Alcuin challenged Aethelred to lead his people as Hezekiah had led Israel and promised similar miraculous results. Offering a similar array of signs that would follow the righteous ruler, or that would signal an unrighteous ruler, Alcuin compared these positive signs with the failures that had preceded Aethelred's reign because of the crimes of his predecessors. As he concluded his message to Aethelred, Alcuin reiterated again to the king that God's judgement threatened the realm if the king did not listen to Alcuin's words, exhorting him to "fear the punishment that came upon the Church of St Cuthbert (at Lindisfarne)... he who does not fear this and correct himself and plead to God for the prosperity of his *patria*, has a heart of stone, not flesh."³⁰

In other letters, Alcuin interpreted the Lindisfarne attack unequivocally as a punishment and as a portent of future judgement, as he did to bishop Hygbald of Lindisfarne (d. 803) when Alcuin wrote that "either this is the beginning of a greater suffering or the sins of the inhabitants have caused this. In my opinion, the attack did not occur by accident, instead it is a sign of some great deserved punishment."³¹ Alcuin would repeat this interpretation in his letter to Archbishop Aethelheard of Canterbury (d. 805), when he explained that

our fathers, by the gift of God, although pagans first became pagan masters of this homeland by the warlike strength. How great a shame is it then that as Christians we lose what those pagans had obtained. I say this because of the

³⁰ Alcuin, Ep. 18, 52: Timete flagellum, quod venit super ecclesiam sancti Cuthberti... Qui hoc non timet se ipsum non corrigit et pro suae patriae prosperitate non plangit ad Deum, carneum non habet cor, sed lapideum.

³¹ Alcuin, Ep. 20, 57: aut hoc maioris initium est doloris aut peccata habitantium hoc exigerunt. Non equidem casu contigit, sed magni cuiuslibet meriti indicium est.

scourge that recently struck parts of our island that have been inhabited by our ancestors for nearly three hundred and fifty years. To be sure it can be read in the book of Gildas the wisest of the Britons, that also those Britons lost their homeland because of the robberies and greed of princes, the iniquity and injustice of judges, the laziness and indolence of the preaching of the bishops, the luxurious and wicked customs of the people. Let us beware these words lest these same vices grow in our times, since Divine blessing preserves the homeland for us in bounteous prosperity that [God] in his mercy has deigned to give to us.³²

Writing to one of the most powerful churchmen in Britain, Alcuin used the historical frame

not only to emphasize the novelty and evident severity of the attack, but also to remind the

archbishop that Northumbria's prosperity depended on God's approval and continued aid.

While he modified his interpretation to fit his audience, whether a king or churchman, the

core of his interpretation remained the same: continued vitality of the kingdom depended on

the righteousness of its people, which in turn depended on the guidance of its rulers.

*"Lest our God-given homeland be destroyed because of the sins of the people"*³³

³² Alcuin, Ep. 17, 47: Patres itaque nostri, Deo dispensante, licet pagani, hanc patriam bellica virtute primum pagani possederunt. Quam grande igitur obprobrium est, ut nos christiani perdamus, quod illi pagani adquisierunt. Hoc dico propter flagellum, quod nuper accidit partibus insulae nostrae, quae prope tricentis quinquaginta annis a parentibus inhabitata est nostris. Legitur vero in libro Gildi Brettonum sapientissimi, quod idem ipsi Brettones propter rapinas et avaritiam principum, propter iniquitatem et iniustitiam iudicium, propter desidiam et pigritiam praedicationis episcoporum, propter luxorum et malos mores populi patriam perdiderunt, Caveamus haec eadem nostris temporibus vitia inolescere; quatenus benedictio divina nobis patriam conservet in prosperitate bona, quam nobis in sua misericordia perdonare dignata est. Elsewhere, Alcuin would compare the Viking attack to the Gothic and Hunnic attacks of the fourth century, events he also attributed to the sins of those conquered. See Alcuin, Ep. 20, 57. Alcuin, *Vita Vedastisc.* 7, 421: Nam antiquis ferme temporibus sacrae in illis locis fidei floruisse reregionem agnovit, sed propter peccata habitatorum terrae illius occulto Dei iudicio, sed iustissimo tradita est cum ceteris Galliae vel Germaniae civitatis pagano et perfido Hunorum regi Attilo urbs quoque illa depraedanda... Non haec paganorum fecit fortitudo, sed populi christiani promuerunt peccata. Lapidge, "Gildas," *EASE*, 209-210; Bullough, *Alcuin*, 271-272; Heydemann, "Rhetoric," 24. For an argument that despite the citation, Alcuin derived all of his material from Gildas via Bede, see Carlson, "Wulfstan," 285-297.

³³ Alcuin, Ep. 101, 147: ne propter peccata populi destruat patria nobis a Deo data.

If the Viking attack on Lindisfarne inspired Alcuin to write extensively and admonish the rulers and communities of his homeland to improve themselves and their subjects, then the events of 796 drove him to even higher flights of corrective admonition. In that year, King Aethelred was killed; Osbald succeeded him only to be driven into exile after twenty-seven days, after which Eardwulf emerged as ruler of Northumbria; Offa the King of Mercia died, followed by his son and heir Ecgferth within the same year after a brief reign; and finally, Bishop Coelwulf of Lindsay and Archbishop Eanbald, who might have sought Alcuin to replace him, died as well.³⁴ If the Viking attack surprised and shocked Alcuin, the deaths of these kings and bishops fell into more secure scriptural and historical patterns that gave Alcuin a grim confidence in interpreting God's judgement on his homeland.

In a 796 letter to the Mercian King Offa, a letter that may not have even reached the king before his death, Alcuin declared that he would not be returning to Britain, feeling that he could not make much of a difference if he returned.³⁵ Alcuin explained that when Charlemagne learned of King Aethelred's death and the rebellion against him, the Frankish king became so angry that Alcuin had to intercede to prevent Charles from punishing the people he deemed "worse than pagans."³⁶ Alcuin lamented that "the most holy places had been devastated by pagans, altars defiled by perjuries, monasteries violated by adulteries, and

³⁴ Rollason, "Northern Annals," *EASE*, 339-340; Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum* a.796, 57-58.

³⁵ Alcuin, Ep. 101, 147: Ego vero paratus eram cum muneribus redire ad vos et patriam reverti, sed melius visum est mihi propter pacem gentis meae in peregrinatione permanere; nesciens, quid fecissem inter eos, inter quos nullus securus vel in aliquo salubri consilio proficere potest.

³⁶ Alcuin, Ep. 101, 147: Qui (Charles), retracta donorum largitate, in tantum iratus est contra gentem – ut ait 'illam perfidiam et perversam et homicidam dominorum suorum, peiorem eam paganis estimans – ut omnino, nisi ego intercessor essem pro ea, quicquid eis boni abstrahere potuisset et mali machinare, iam fecisset. Cf. Bullough, *Alcuin*, 466. It seems rather unlikely that Charles would have actually gone through on his supposed threat.

the land stained with the blood of lords and princes.”³⁷ Consequently, Alcuin claimed that there was nothing left for him to do than “to cry in anguish with the prophet: ‘Woe to the sinful people, to the people heavy with sin, to the wicked sons. They have abandoned the Lord and blasphemed the Holy Savior of the world in their wickedness.’”³⁸

Alcuin’s advice to Offa anticipated his later letters to Charlemagne. Addressing Offa as the “wisest ruler of the people of God,” Alcuin cautioned the king that he should “most dilligently correct your people from evil practices and instruct them in the teachings of God lest our God-given homeland be destroyed because of the sins of the people.”³⁹ Taking the same response and making it even stronger, Alcuin repeatedly argued that for a rulers’ continued rule, and the success of that rule, kings needed to correct their people. Where Alcuin’s earlier letters to Aethelred emphasized the personal righteousness of the king, along with his need to teach his people, in those to Offa, as well as to Offa’s daughter and Aethelred’s widow, Alcuin saw the *perfidia* and *infidelitas* of the people as primarily at fault.⁴⁰ This latter focus resonates much more with Charlemagne’s interpretations and responses to crises.

In his letter to King Eardwulf of Northumbria (d. *post* 808), Aethelred’s ultimate successor, Alcuin went further than he had with Offa and declared that Eardwulf should

³⁷ Alcuin, Ep. 101, 147: *Ecce loca sanctissima a paganis vastata, altaria periuriis foedata, monasteria adulteriis violata, terra sanguine dominorum et principum infecta.*

³⁸ Alcuin, Ep. 101, 147: *Quid aliud faciam, nisi cum propheta ingemescam: ‘Vae genti peccatrici, populo gravi iniquitate, filiis sceleratis; dereliquerunt Deum et blasphemaverunt sanctum salvatorum mundi in sceleribus suis.’ Cf. Isaiah 1:4.*

³⁹ Alcuin, Ep. 101, 147: *Tu vero, sapientissime populi Dei gubernator, diligentissime a perversis moribus corrige gentem tuam et in praeceptis Dei erudi illam, ne propter peccata populi destruaturs patria nobis a Deo data.*

⁴⁰ Alcuin, Ep. 101, 147: *ut ait ‘illam perfidiam et perversam et homicidam dominorum suorum, peiorem eam paganis estimans; Ep. 102, 149: Ecce me modo infidelitas patriae in tantum horret, ut reverti timeo.*

“consider most intently for the sins your predecessors lost their lives and kingdom.”⁴¹ After detailing the specific crimes of his predecessors that had so offended God, Alcuin admonished the Northumbrian king to

instruct yourself first in all goodness and sobriety, and then instruct the people who you seem to be set above in all modesty of life and dress, in all truth of faith and judgements, in keeping the commandments of God and in honorable practices. In this way, therefore, you will secure the kingdom for yourself, save the people, and free them from the wrath of God that has long threatened the kingdom as shown *by reliable signs*. Never before has so much blood of the nobility and of the *rectores* been shed on the land, nor the holy places devastated thus by the pagans, and so much injustice and arrogance prevailed among the people, except when the evident vengeance of God has threatened the inhabitants of the land. But you, I believe, have been preserved for better times and protected for the correction of the homeland by the assistance of God’s grace, for you to work out the salvation of your soul and the prosperity of the homeland and the people committed to you with all your concentration on the will of God. As far as you correct those who are subject to your authority, so will the present kingdom will be secured for you and your descendants, and the glory of the future kingdom will be granted to you and yours eternally.⁴²

Rather than displaying the high regard he seemed to hold for Offa, Alcuin painstakingly summarized as if for a child his view of Eardwulf’s responsibility and all that depended on it. Alcuin supported his prophetic posture by interpreting the significant deaths and the Viking attacks as “reliable signs” that the wrath of God was upon the kingdom and its ruler. The

⁴¹ Alcuin, Ep. 108, 155: Considera intentissime, pro quibus peccatis antecessores tui vitam perdidissent et regnum.

⁴² Alcuin, Ep. 108, 155: Erudi te ipsum primo in omni bonitate et sobrietate; postea gentem, cui praeesse videris, in omni modestia vitae et vestitus, in omni veritate fidei et iudiciorum, in observatione mandatorum Dei et honestate morum. Sic itaque et regnum tibi firmabis et gentem salvabis et ab ira Dei liberabis illam, quae certis signis et regnum diu imminebat illi. Numquam tantus nobilium et rectorum sanguis effunderetur in ea, nec sic loca sancta pagani devastarent, et tanta iniustitia et arrogantia valeret in populo, nisi perspicua Dei vindicta immineret habitatoribus terrae. Tu vero, ad meliora ut credo servatus tempora et ad correctionem custoditus patriae, Dei te auxiliante gratia, operare omni intentione in Dei voluntate salutem animae tuae et prosperitatem patriae et populi tibi commissi. quatenus ex correctione subiectorum dicioni tuae tibi tuisque nepotibus praesens feliciter firmetur regnum et futuri regni gloria aeternaliter concedatur.

“reliable signs” served as both punishment and portent for Alcuin, confirming God’s judgement on the kingdom but also urging Eardwulf to correct himself and his people to appease God. While Alcuin’s primary emphasis remained on the sins of the people bringing the vengeance of God upon them, as in his letter to Offa, in Eardwulf’s case Alcuin did remind the king that his own personal righteousness and its appearance to the people mattered as well. While the refrain of *correctio* appears in nearly every one of Alcuin’s letters to kings, his letter to Eardwulf emphasized how the royal responsibility to correct the people was in itself a means of placating divine anger and avoiding future punishments or disasters.

Despite Alcuin’s encouraging words to Eardwulf and his assurances that if the king would correct himself and his people, God’s judgement would spare them, he apparently entertained little hope. In a letter sent to Osberht, an otherwise unknown Mercian, about Offa’s death and that of Ecgrith, Offa’s son and heir, Alcuin reflected on Eardwulf and the future of the Anglo-Saxons in general.⁴³ Alcuin used the opportunity to prophesy about Eardwulf’s coming failure and fall from power. For much of the letter, Alcuin encouraged Osberht to become an “advisor on account of the wisdom given to you by God, because even now the greatest disasters have befallen our people because of the faithlessness of evil men.”⁴⁴ Offering a mirror image of how he viewed himself, Alcuin emphasized the divine origin of

⁴³ After Offa died, Ecgrith ruled for a mere one hundred and forty-one days. On Ecgrith’s succession and short reign, see Dumville, “Aetheling,” 20.

⁴⁴ Alcuin, Ep. 122, 178-179: *Multa tibi evenire audivi, quae quidem sine magno dolore animus tuus non patiebatur. Nec tibi solummodo specialis tribulatio mentis fuit, sed etiam totius regni tui, cui consilarius ex sapientia tibi a Deo data esse debes; ut etiam genti nostrae maxima pro malorum hominum infidelitate incommoda acciderunt.* For the use of the word *consilarius*, cf. AG, 53.

Osberht's wisdom and its connection to avoiding the "greatest disasters" that the people had suffered.

Alcuin utilized the rest of his encouragement to Osberht as a warning of avoiding future disasters, as he highlighted Offa's lack of good advisors by remarking that

in my opinion, that most noble youth [Offa's son Ecgrith] did not die on account of his own sins but actually the vengeance for the blood of the father overflowed even down to his son. For, as you know best of all, how much blood his father shed to consolidate the kingdom for his son. Nevertheless, this bloodshed was not the consolidation of the kingdom but its destruction.⁴⁵

While Alcuin dealt rather carefully with Offa during his life, after the king's death Alcuin felt confident in interpreting the failure of his son as the result of Offa's attempts to secure his son's accession.⁴⁶ Alcuin offered Osberht a warning from recent Northumbrian history, urging him to

admonish your king or even the nobles of your homeland diligently so that they might sustain divine piety among themselves, avoiding adulteries, nor should leading men despise their wives in favor of the adulteries with noble women, but either keep their own wives with the fear of God or even better, preserve themselves with consensual chastity. I fear that our king Eardwulf will soon lose the kingdom he holds because of the offense that he commits before God, as it is said that he dismissed his own wife and publicly associates with concubines. Let your most dear king be warned of this, so that divine kindness and protection will follow him and that God will grant the ancient prosperity to him and his people.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Alcuin, Ep. 122, 179: Non enim ill. (*sic*) nobilissimus iuvenis ex suis peccatis, ut reor, mortuus est; sed etiam paterni sanguinis ultio in filium usque redundavit. Nam, sicut scis optime, quam multum sanguinis ultio in filium usque redundavit. Nam, sicut scis optime, quam multum sanguinis effudit pater eius, ut filio regnum confirmaret. Sed hoc confirmatio non fuit regni, sed destructio.

⁴⁶ On Offa's efforts for his son to succeed him, see Yorke, *Kings*, 115; Nelson, *Politics*, 285; Keynes, "Jaenberht," and "Offa," *EASE*, 262-263, 347-348.

⁴⁷ Alcuin, Ep. 122, 179: Ideo diligentius admone regem vestrum vel etiam nostre patrie [potentiores] ut se apud divinam contineant pietatem, adulteria devitantes; nec despiciant uxores priores propter adulteria feminarum nobilium; sed sub timore Dei vel proprias habere vel etiam se cum consensu in castitate continentes. Timeo,

Alcuin framed his fearful prophesy about the dangers threatening Eardwulf within his call for Osberht to act as a royal advisor. Rather than only lamenting with Jeremiah and Isaiah, Alcuin saw himself (and those like Osberht) as the teachers of kings, the bulwarks against the type of royal behavior that threatened the divine favor that allowed for stable rule and a prosperous kingdom. Alcuin would similarly draw a parallel between himself and a prophet in a contemporary letter to Aethelburga, Offa's daughter and Aethelred's sister-in-law, when describing how

the recent infidelity of the homeland horrifies me so much that I feared to return, not knowing what I could manage to accomplish with regard to my homeland except to lament for our homeland about to die and frequently echo the tearful lamentations of Jeremiah who grieved for the ruin of Jerusalem in a four-part alphabetical series."⁴⁸

As these key instances show, Alcuin saw himself as decidedly prophetic when he interpreted Viking attacks, notable deaths, civil unrest, and admonished kings. Having interpreted the signs, confident in their meaning, Alcuin knew that disaster loomed for rulers who failed to please God, and failed to teach their people to do the same.

Rector Regum

Comparing Alcuin's letters to Anglo-Saxon elites with his letters to Charlemagne, a few features are immediately clear. Alcuin retained his high confidence in his own

quod Ardwulfus rex noster cito regnum perdere habeat propter contumeliam, quam in Deum gerit, propriam dimittens uxorem, publice se socios concubinae, ut fertur. Hoc sibi praecaveat carissimus rex vester, quatenus illum divina adsequatur clementia et protectio, et longevam prosperitatem sibi suaeque concedat genti.

⁴⁸ Alcuin, Ep. 102, 149: Ecce me modo infidelitas patriae in tantum horret, ut reveri timeo, nesciens, quid de illa proficere valeam nisi perituram plangere et lacrimantis Hieremiae lamentationes sepius revolvere, qui quadrivario alphabeti ordine ruituram luxit Hierusalem.

interpretation of God's will and in his need to advise Charlemagne, but it appears that the Frankish king gave Alcuin far fewer opportunities to reach for the same dramatic prophetic voice Alcuin used with the Anglo-Saxons. Compared to the political upheaval Britain endured at the end of the eighth century, Charlemagne's kingdom appeared stable and almost idyllic in many respects. In addition, Alcuin's proximity may have tempered his tone when writing to Charles, something he did not need to do with the distant Anglo-Saxon elites. Nevertheless, Alcuin used the prophetic when the opportunity arose and left an impression on those in Francia with whom he corresponded.

While it has been argued that Alcuin and other members of Charlemagne's intellectual circles borrowed the comparison between Charlemagne and the biblical king and prophet David from papal correspondence with the Frankish kings, Alcuin certainly gave the comparison his own meaning.⁴⁹ Alcuin frequently addressed Charles as David—as he had in 799—and just as often linked the nickname to discussions of Charlemagne's divine favor or his God-given wisdom. In another letter of that same year, Alcuin hoped that Charlemagne would soon be free of fighting the Saxons so he could devote himself to correcting his people. If Charlemagne devoted himself fully to the task, Alcuin promised that he would be rewarded,

just as it is said that through the sanctity of a single man of your same name, King David, the most beloved of God, the power of his royal throne was preserved for all of his descendants. For because of these improvements of worship and the like, completed by Christ God, to you has grown and increased the elevation of your sons, the good fortune of the kingdom, the health of the people, the abundance of the crops, and for you the enjoyment of

⁴⁹ For the papal use of Davidic comparisons with Frankish kings, see Erkens, *Herrschersakralität*, 134.

everything good, and the blessing of the heavenly kingdom grow and increase,
Christ God bringing this about, sweetest David, for eternal days.⁵⁰

Similar to the comparison with the biblical ruler Josiah in the *Admonitio generalis*, Alcuin's comparison of Charlemagne with David emphasized Charlemagne's function as the *rector* and *corrector* of his people, as well as what Charles stood to gain for pleasing God in his efforts. By comparing Charlemagne with David, Alcuin reinforced Charlemagne's royal responsibilities and the biblical frame in which Alcuin understood Charlemagne's actions and their consequences, notably the same frame that gave Alcuin confidence in his prophecy of Eardwulf's approaching demise, or in his interpretation of why Ecgrith died so soon after his father.

Alongside the responsibility for, and consequences of, *correctio* that Alcuin highlighted by greeting Charlemagne as David, Alcuin also gave the greeting a prophetic aspect. As H. H. Anton has argued, Alcuin compared Charlemagne with David as both king and prophet, and the latter comparison appears in the same letter, when Alcuin declared to Charlemagne that "from these matters, full understanding has been given to you by God that through you the holy Church of God might be directed, exalted, and preserved among the Christian people."⁵¹ In other letters, Alcuin reminded "David, the most beloved of God and most worthy of all honor" that "divine grace enriched you marvelously with these two gifts:

⁵⁰ Alcuin, Ep. 178, 293: sicut per solius omonymi tui David Deo dilectissimi regis sanctitatem legitur omnibus nepotibus suis regalis throni potestas conservata fuisse. In his enim et huius modi relegionis exercitationibus filiorum exaltatio et regni felicitas et populi sanitas et frugum ubertas et totius boni iocunditas, tibi que caelestis regni beatitudo, Christo deo perficiente, crescit et augetur, dulcissime David, diebus aeternis.

⁵¹ Alcuin, Ep. 174, 289: Ex his omnibus plena tibi scientia data est a Deo, ut per te sancta Dei ecclesia in populo christiano regatur, exaltetur, et conservetur.

imperium of earthly good fortune and an expanse of spiritual wisdom so that you may grow in both directions until you arrive at the good fortune of eternal blessedness.”⁵² As Alcuin presented it, Charlemagne’s God-given understanding was critical to his successful rule and God’s continued support. In Alcuin’s eyes, God granted Charlemagne insight. Alcuin also saw Charlemagne as his equal in ability to interpret God’s will through scripture, history, and recent events.⁵³

In later letters, Alcuin identified the role of inspiration within Charlemagne’s governance. Writing after 800 to “King David, most greatly missed and deserving of affection,” Alcuin declared that he had been “inspired by the Holy Spirit” to send a gift to Charlemagne.⁵⁴ This was a gospel book, Alcuin stated in his letter that

Therefore, it is clear without a doubt that in the most holy concern for your piety that the Holy Spirit works through you for the well-being of the entire church. Also, in how many prayers of all of the faithful it has been desired that your empire be extended in all its glory, that within it might be worthy to be

⁵² Alcuin, Ep. 178, 294: Domino dilectissimo atque omni honore dignissimo David regi Flaccus veteranus miles perpetuum in Christo Salutem... Ideo divina te gratia his duobus mirabiliter ditavit muneribus, id est terrenae felicitatis imperio et spiritalis sapientiae latitudine, ut in utroque proficias, donec ad aeternae beatitudinis pervenias felicitatem.

⁵³ Compare *Epistola 174* with Alcuin’s lengthy praise of Charlemagne’s wisdom in *Epistola 171*. Alcuin, Ep. 174, 289: Nihil horum tuam latere poterit sapientiam: utpote in sanctis scripturis vel saecularibus historiis te adprime eruditum esse novimus. Ex his omnibus plena tibi scientia data est a Deo, ut per te sancta Dei ecclesia in populo christiano regatur, exaltetur, et conservetur. Quanta tuae optima devotioni merces exhibeatur a Deo, quis dicere poterit? Quia nec oculus vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit quae praeparavit Deus diligentibus se. Ep. 171, 176: Domino piissimo et praestantissimo et omni honore dignissimo David regi; 177: Haec sunt, quae vestra nobilissima intentio non ignorat – quomodo per omnes sanctae scripturae paginas exhortamur ad sapientiam discendam: nil esse ad beatam vitam sublimius adipiscendam, nil ad exercitium iocundius, nil contra vitia fortius, nil in omni dignitate laudabilius... [Quoting Proverbs 8:15-16]: ‘Per illam reges regnant, et legum conditores iusta decernunt; per illam principes, et potentes decernunt iustitiam.’

⁵⁴ Alcuin, Ep. 261, 418: Domino desiderantissimo meritoque amabili David regi; 419: tandem Spiritu sancto inspirante inveni.

loved by all of the faithful to God, and without it might be terrifying to the enemies of His most holy name.⁵⁵

The consequence of the understanding God had given to Charlemagne, as far as Alcuin was concerned, had implications far beyond the king's own piety and salvation: it had an impact on the well-being of the church and the success of his realm. Alcuin's depiction of how the presence of the Holy Spirit and the efficacy of prayers of the faithful would be borrowed by Charlemagne and his advisors to interpret several crises as signs from God.

As Charles' teacher and advisor, one confident in his ability to interpret the signs and portents of God's will, Alcuin was an obvious recipient of Charlemagne's questions about potential portents. After Charlemagne asked him about Mars' disappearance while he was on campaign, Alcuin assured the king, "I do not think it portentous, because it did not appear to us at such a time, but according its natural order."⁵⁶ While Alcuin happily dismissed the disappearance of Mars as a natural phenomenon, and not a dangerous portent, this episode does not mean that Alcuin only saw ill omens in Anglo-Saxon affairs. For example, in a 799 letter to Archbishop Arn of Salzburg, Alcuin bemoaned the loss of "the bravest men... who preserved and even expanded the borders of the *christianum imperium*," a reference to the deaths of Duke Eric of Friuli and Count Gerold, both of whom had died earlier that year on the

⁵⁵ Alcuin, Ep. 261, 419: Ergo in vestrae pietatis sacratissima sollicitudine non dubie patet, quid per vos in totius ecclesiae salutem Spiritus sanctus operetur; et quantis universorum fidelium precibus sit optandum, ut in omnem gloriam vestram extendatur imperium; et ut intus sit omnibus Deo fidelibus amabile et foris sanctissimo nomini illius adversariis terribile.

⁵⁶ Alcuin, Ep. 155, 252: Nec enim prodigiosum reor, quod tanto tempore nobis non apparuit, sed naturali sui cursus ordine.

eastern border of Charlemagne's realm.⁵⁷ Alcuin explained to his friend that "we do not only lament this loss, but we fear [it as a] sign of a greater danger."⁵⁸

In another letter to Arn, Alcuin interpreted the recent attack on pope Leo III, explaining to Arn that it "must be feared not only as a crime of the most impious depravity, but even as a portent of a greater evil."⁵⁹ Supporting his interpretation of the papal attack, Alcuin utilized scriptural apocalyptic language to bemoan that "justice is in distress, and iniquity abounds, and charity becomes cold, and faithlessness encroaches like poison, and just like cancer it does not cease polluting the members of Christ."⁶⁰ Alcuin's intimation to Arn that what had occurred was a partial fulfilment of apocalyptic scripture, all invoked to support his interpretation of a portent, resonates with Alcuin's similar reference to apocalyptic scripture in a letter to Charlemagne when he reminded the king that his royal duties were critical because "these times are dangerous as Truth Itself once prophesied, because the love of many has grown cold."⁶¹ Writing to his Frankish correspondents in contrast to his Anglo-

⁵⁷ Alcuin, Ep. 185, 310: Plurimae sunt huius saeculi temptationes et multa pericula saeculum amantibus. Ecce quomodo recesserunt subito viri fortissimi, qui terminos custodierunt, etiam et dilataverunt, christiani imperii. *ARF* a.799, 108: Eodem anno [799] gens Avarum a fide, quam promiserat, defecit, et Ericus dux Foroiulensis post tot prospere gestas res iuxta Tharsaticam Liburniae civitatem insidiis oppidanorum oppressus est, et Geroldus comes, Baioariae praefectus, commisso contra Avars proelio cecidit. On the broader impact of their deaths, see Lošek, "Auswirkungen," 113.

⁵⁸ Alcuin, Ep. 185, 310: Non solum hoc damnum plangimus, sed maioris periculi signum timemus.

⁵⁹ Alcuin, Ep. 173, 286: Timendum est non solum hoc impiissimae pravitatis scelus, sed etiam maioris mali prodigium.

⁶⁰ Alcuin, Ep. 173, 286: Dum in capite talia aguntur, quid in corpore fieri possit formidandum est. Iustitia laborat, et iniquitas abundat, et caritas frigescit, et infidelitas serpit sicut venenum, et sicut cancer membra Christi maculare non desistit. Notably, among other things, Alcuin's language here borrows from the apocalyptic depictions of the end times in Matthew 24.

⁶¹ Alcuin, Ep. 174, 288: Tempora sunt periculosa olim ab ipsa veritate praedicta, quia refrigescit caritas multorum.

Saxon contacts, Alcuin proved more guarded, tending to emphasize the fulfilment of apocalyptic scripture rather than draw concrete conclusions from specific events.

While Alcuin remained open to the possibility that the events occurring around them could be interpreted to reveal God's will, he also used every opportunity to affirm to Charlemagne that the king must appease God by correcting his people, and that Charles' continued rule and success depended on it. Through comparisons to David, suggestions that the Holy Spirit worked through him, and extensive praise for his God-given understanding, Alcuin crystallized many early ideas suggested by Charlemagne's previous scholars in his advice about Charles' royal responsibilities. Although Charlemagne's later use of the prophetic did not conform to Alcuin's personal formulation perfectly, the Anglo-Saxon's influence will certainly be seen.

II. Experimentation and Improvisation

The Crises of Kingship of the 790s

We can set the contents of Alcuin's letters within the context of other historical sources, all demonstrating a series of novel and experimental efforts to attain divine assistance and claim they had enjoyed it all along. From an episcopal council before an invasion to minor historical texts to a personal letter from Charlemagne to his wife, the sources from this period reveal attempts to utilize the prophetic in various ways that reflect the influence of earlier Carolingian scholars, as well as a willingness to innovate by invoking

divine approval for direct political action and in the arguments of political legitimacy. While the first redaction of the *Royal Frankish Annals*—ending in 788 and composed *ca.* 790—gave an unproblematic grand narrative of Carolingian success, the reality was that Charlemagne faced more threats to his power than the *Annals* describe.⁶² While serious resistance to Charlemagne's rule came to a head in 785/786 with Hardrad's revolt, Charles continued to face resistance from his cousin, Duke Tassilo of Bavaria, whom Charles tried and deposed two years later in 788, and then resistance from his illegitimate son known as Pippin the Hunchback, who rebelled in 792.⁶³ These events represented, as Ildar Garipzanov has demonstrated, “[a] crisis caused by the discrepancy between Charlemagne's growing power that exceeded the limits of traditional kingship and earlier Frankish perceptions of royal authority as dependent on and limited to its *gens*.”⁶⁴

In response to this crisis, Charlemagne and his supporters became, among other things, increasingly interested in seeking and arguing for divine support. Responding to the same core problems that prompted the *Admonitio generalis*, Charlemagne demanded an oath from all of his subjects as the production of ideological texts increased creating Charlemagne's Davidic image. Further, many Frankish elites sought to gain divine support for the Carolingian cause, and to emphasize God's past and continuing support for Charlemagne.

⁶² On the dating of this first redaction of the *Royal Frankish Annals*, see Becher, *Eid*, 74-77, as well as Reimitz, *History*, 337-340. For two prevailing views on the composition of the *Royal Frankish Annals* and their relationship to other so-called ‘minor annals,’ see Reimitz, “Königtum,” 277-280 and McKitterick, *Perceptions*, 65-89.

⁶³ The indispensable study of opposition to Carolingian rule is Brunner, *Oppositionelle Gruppen*. For a modern response, see Jennifer Davis' survey of the resistance to Charlemagne's rule in *Practice*, 128-144. For the Bavarian context of Pippin the Hunchback's revolt, see Diesenberger, “Dissidente Stimmen,” 118-119.

⁶⁴ Garipzanov, *Symbolic*, 275.

Turning first to Charlemagne's efforts to assure divine support for his war against the Avars, the primary evidence is a letter from Charlemagne to his wife Fastrada, written from the campaign in 791.⁶⁵ In his letter to Fastrada, Charlmagne reported on how the campaign had progressed, the victory of his son Pippin's forces against the Avars, and the extensive litanies, fasts, and almsgiving Charlemagne's own forces performed in order to gain God's assistance for the remainder of the campaign.⁶⁶

In his letter to his wife Fastrada—written with the clear expectation that she would share its contents with Charles' children and supporters—Charlemagne described how Pippin of Italy had clashed with the Avars and how “the Almighty God gave [Pippin and his forces] the victory on account of His mercy, and they killed such a great multitude of those Avars, as they claimed, that there has not been a greater slaughter among those Avars for many days.”⁶⁷

Recalling his own efforts, Charlemagne explained that

with God helping, we performed litanies for three days beginning on the fifth of September—it was a Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday—pleading for the mercy of God that He might deign to grant us peace, health, victory, and a favorable campaign, and that in his mercy and loyalty He might be our helper,

⁶⁵ Charlemagne to Fastrada, Ep. 20 in MGH Ep. IV, pp. 528-529.

⁶⁶ While these efforts to gain divine aid occupy our attention here, it is worth noting that in the first decade of the ninth century Charlemagne's letter to Fastrada would be preserved in the “personal letter collection of the abbots” of St Denis, as the codicological parallel with Cathwulf's letter to Charlemagne. For her study of the manuscript (Paris, BNLat, 2777) and St Denis' reasons for preserving the letters, see Story, “Cathwulf,” 11-18. Joanna Story has noted that both Cathwulf's and Charlemagne's letters were preserved by Fardulf, the abbot of St.-Denis who helped expose Pippin the Hunchback's plot against Charlemagne, and that both letters used to headline the collection, Story, “Cathwulf,” 18-19. While both letters, and their use of the prophetic, must be understood in their own initial contexts, their reception in the early ninth century suggests the growing importance of such claims of divine support for Charlemagne and the varied means of making and reinforcing such claims.

⁶⁷ Charlemagne, Ep. 20, 528: Et inierunt pugnam cum eis. Et dedit eis Deus omnipotens pro sua misericordia victoriam, et multitudinem de ipsis Avaris interfecerunt; in tantum, ut dicunt, quod in multis diebus maior stragis de ipsis Avaris factum non fuit.

our counsellor, and our defender in all of our difficulties. Also our priests appointed that those who are not prohibited by illness, old age, or youth, abstain from wine and meat. The greater nobles who desired to buy themselves out so they might be allowed to drink wine for those three days, had to pay each a single *solidus*, and the lesser nobles had to pay according to their capacity, and he who could not pay more and wanted to drink wine, paid at least one *denarius*. But everyone gave alms according to their own wealth and good will, or according to their capacity. And each priest offered a special mass unless illness prevented him. Each cleric who knew the Psalms sang fifty and meanwhile they offered the litanies walking barefoot. Our priests determined this course, and we all agreed, and with the Lord helping we completed it, that is why we desire that you and [the names of two others are omitted in the manuscript] our other supporters must determine how these same litanies ought to be performed there.⁶⁸

Recalling the services prescribed in the *Capitulary for the Present Tribulation*, and those Charlemagne asked Hadrian to perform in 786, Charlemagne and his advisors went to great lengths to gain divine assistance against the Avars and wanted Fastrada to do the same in Regensburg.⁶⁹ Charlemagne's and his advisors' plea to Fastrada to coordinate with "our other supporters" to perform the same services to appease God probably served two purposes: first, to seek God's help, and second, to make clear to elites at home that efforts to gain divine

⁶⁸ Charlemagne to Fastrada, Ep. 20, 528-529: Nos autem, Domino adiuvante, tribus diebus letania fecimus, id est Nonis et Septembris quod fuit Lunis die incipientes, et Mertis et Mercoris; Dei misericordiam deprecantes, ut nobis pacem et sanitatem atque victoriam et prosperum iter tribuere dignetur, et ut in sua misericordia et pietate nobis adiutor et consiliator atque defensor in omnibus angustiis nostris exsistat. Et a vino et carne ordinarunt sacerdotes nostri, qui propter infirm[itatem au]t senectudinem aut iuventudinem abstinere potebant, qui abstinuisset: [et qui re]demere voluisset, quod vinum licentiam habuisset bibendi ipsis tribus diebus, [mai]ores et potentiores homines hunaquaque die solidum hunum dedissent, minus potentes iuxta possibilitatem ipsorum; et qui amplius dare non potebat et vinum bibere volebat, saltim vel unum din[a]rium donasset. Aelimosina vero unusquisque secundum propriam atque bonam voluntatem vel iuxta possibilitatem fecisset. Et sacerdos unusquisque missam specialem fecisset, nisi infirmitas inpedisset. Et clerici, qui psalmos sciebant, unusquisque quinquaginta cantasset; et interim quod ipsas letanias faciebant, discaltati am[bu]lassent. Sic consideraverunt sacerdotes nostri; et nos omnes ita artificavimus [et] Domino adiuvante complevimus. Unde volumus, ut tu cum ill. Et ill. Vel ceteris fi[de]libus nostris considerare debeas, qualiter ipsas letanias ibidem factas fiant.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Capitulare pro praesente tribulatione*, 50-52; Hadrian to Charlemagne, Ep. 76, CC, 608.

favor were central to Charlemagne's efforts. After all, beginning and ending "with God helping," these litanies and all that accompanied them were neither routine nor ordinary.

Turning to the purpose of, and publicity surrounding, the litanies, in the *Royal Frankish Annals* the court historians described how the services were performed "for the salvation of the army and for the help of Our Lord Jesus Christ and for victory and vengeance over the Avars," the word *vindicta* (vengeance) suggesting that the Avars had enjoyed previous success against the Franks.⁷⁰ This suggestion might explain why Charles and his advisors decided to orchestrate services that, according to Michael McCormick, marked the first time that such liturgical activities had an exclusively military purpose and were not primarily a response to famines, wide-spread disease, and other disruptions of the natural and political order.⁷¹ The claim in Charles' letter to Fastrada that God had already given Pippin victory reinforces the high stakes of the campaign and the Franks' need to gain divine assistance. Nevertheless, Charlemagne's and his advisors' decision might be explained by the report in a later redaction of the *Royal Frankish Annals* that claimed that the expedition suffered from "such a horse plague" that in little time "just a tenth part of the entire military horses was said to have remained."⁷² This plague would have complicated the campaign, and it would also

⁷⁰ *ARF* a.791, 88: Ad Anisam vero fluvium properantes ibi constituerunt laetantias faciendi per triduo missarumque sollemnia celebrandi; Dei solatium postulaverunt pro salute exercitus et adiutorio domini nostri Iesu Christi et pro victoria et vindicta super Avaros.

⁷¹ McCormick, 'Liturgy,' 8-9.

⁷² *RARF* a.791, 89-91: Facta est haec expeditio sine omni rerum incommodo, praeter quod in illo, quem rex ducebat, exercitu tanta equorum lues exorta est, ut vix decima pars de tot milibus equorum remansisse dicatur. For contemporary example of the effects of a similar epizootic plague, see *ARF* a.810, 131: Tanta fuit in ea expeditione (to Saxony) boum pestilentia, ut pene nullus tanto exercitui superesset, quin omnes usque ad unum perirent; et non solum ibi, sed etiam per omnes imeratori subiectas provincias illius generis animalium mortalitas inmanissime grassata est.

explain why Charlemagne would turn again to the “social experiment” from 778/9 to meet this crisis.⁷³

Regardless of precisely why Charlemagne and his advisors decided to orchestrate such services, their purpose—to plead for God’s help—is clear. Likely internalizing some of the thinking of Charlemagne’s scholars and advisors, Charles explained to his wife that the services were performed so that God would “be our helper, our counsellor, and our defender.” While “helper” and “defender” reflect the most straightforward ideas of dependence upon God for a king’s prosperity, the inclusion of “counsellor” introduced an element only alluded to in Alcuin’s praise of Charlemagne’s God-given wisdom, and the Holy Spirit working through him.⁷⁴ The next time Charlemagne would similarly seek to orchestrate such a liturgical response to a crisis, God would not only be sought as a counsellor, but Charles would claim direct divine inspiration. While we constantly face the reality of how much simply does not survive from this period, it is nevertheless likely that Charlemagne’s use of such three-day litanies to seek divine aid was a rare and significant move.

Debating the Divine in Carolingian Historiography

In the early 790s the language of Charlemagne’s letter resonated with the *Royal Frankish Annals*, which were as close to an “official history” as was produced under

⁷³ Nelson, “Religion,” 497.

⁷⁴ cf. Alcuin, Ep. 178, 294: Domino dilectissimo atque omni honore dignissimo David regi Flaccus veteranus miles perpetuum in Christo Salutem... Ideo divina te gratia his duobus mirabiliter ditavit muneribus, id est terrenae felicitatis imperio et spiritalis sapientiae latitudine, ut in utroque proficias, donec ad aeternae beatitudinis pervenias felicitatem; *idem*, Ep. 261, 419: Ergo in vestrae pietatis sacratissima sollicitudine non dubie patet, quid per vos in totius ecclesiae salutem Spiritus sanctus operetur; et quantis universorum fidelium precibus sit optandum, ut in omnem gloriam vestram extendatur imperium; et ut intus sit omnibus Deo fidelibus amabile et foris sanctissimo nomini illius adversariis terribile.

Charlemagne.⁷⁵ Whether the conventional view, that the *Royal Frankish Annals* are the culmination of many smaller annalistic efforts is accurate, or whether Rosamond McKitterick is right to argue that the *Royal Frankish Annals* were the impetus for other contemporary annals, it is clear that the court historians' work was a component of a broader enterprise of debating the past.⁷⁶

The authors of the *Royal Frankish Annals* made repeated and strident declarations of God's support for Charlemagne. The court historians' sustained assertions of divine support formed a large part of what Helmut Reimitz has called the "Carolingian appropriation of providence," or the privileging of divine support for Carolingian rule in earlier eighth-century historiography.⁷⁷ Using phrases like *Domino adiuvante* and *auxilliante Domino*, language also used in Charlemagne's letter to Fastrada, the court historians argued that God had assisted Charlemagne's rise at nearly every step.⁷⁸ Using ablative absolutes similar to those discussed by Helmut Reimitz when they appeared in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* and the continuations to Fredegar's *Chronicae*, the court historians signaled divine aid in nearly every campaign, and every political and military victory, from Charlemagne's first campaigns in

⁷⁵ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 31.

⁷⁶ For the traditional approach and its inversion, see Reimitz, "Königtum," 277-280, and McKitterick, *Perceptions*, 65-89. For the context of the first redaction, see Becher, *Eid*, 74-77 and McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 118-126.

⁷⁷ Reimitz, *History*, 320.

⁷⁸ ARF a. 783, 64-66: et Domino adiuvante Franci victores extiterunt... et auxiliante Domino Franci victores extiterunt. Cf. Charlemagne, Ep. 20, 528-529: Nos autem, Domino adiuvante, tribus diebus letania fecimus, id est Nonis et Septembris quod fuit Lunis die incipientes, et Mertis et Mercoris... Sic consideraverunt sacerdotes nostri; et nos omnes ita artificavimus [et] Domino adiuvante complevimus. It was Robert Evans' observation that the earlier *Royal Frankish Annals* did not use such language, and avoided invoking God almost completely, before the court historians narrated Charlemagne's reign itself.

Aquitaine in 769 to his victories against the Avars in 791.⁷⁹ For a comprehensive view of how the court historians wrote God's support and assistance into Charlemagne's rise to power, I am including a comprehensive list from the first redaction of the *Royal Frankish Annals*:

ARF a. 755, 12	Et inierunt bellum, et <i>Domino auxiliante beatoque Petro apostolo intercedente</i> Pippinus rex cum Francis victor extitit.
ARF a. 769, 28	Domnus Carolus gloriosus rex iter peragens partibus Aquitaniae... et cum paucis Francis <i>auxiliante Domino</i> dissipata iniqua consilia supradicti Hunaldi.
ARF a. 773, 36	Hoc sentiens Desiderius clusas reliquens, supradictus domnus Carolus rex una cum Francis <i>auxiliante Domino et intercedente beato Petro apostolo</i> sine lesione vel aliquo conturbio clusas apertas Italiam introivit ipse et omnes fideles sui.
ARF a. 774, 40	Et dum pervenisset in loco, qui dicitur Ingilinhaim, mittens quatuor scaras in Saxoniam: tres pugnam cum Saxonibus inierunt et <i>auxiliante Domino</i> victores extiterunt.
ARF a. 775, 40-42	<i>Auxiliante Domino</i> et Francis decertantibus fugati sunt Saxones; Franci ambas ripas obtinuerunt, et multi Saxones ibi occisi sunt... Franci <i>Deo volente</i> victoriam habuerunt, et plures ex ipsis Saxones occiderunt... domnus Carolus rex ad propria reversus est <i>auxiliante Domino</i> in Franciam.
ARF a. 776, 44	Inde pergentes voluerunt de Sigiburgi similiter facere, <i>auxiliante Domino</i> Francis eis viriliter repugnantibus nihil praevaluerunt... et <i>Deo volente</i> petrarias, quas praeparaverunt, plus illis damnum fecerunt quam illis qui infra castrum residebant... Sed Dei virtus, sicut iustum est, superavit illorum virtutem.
ARF a. 778, 52	Ibi pugna incepta et valde bene finita, <i>auxiliante Domino</i> Franci victores extiterunt.
ARF a. 779, 54	<i>auxiliante Domino</i> non praevaluerunt, sed abinde fugientes reliquerunt omnes firmitates eorum.
ARF a. 783, 64-66	et <i>Domino adiuvante</i> Franci victores extiterunt... et <i>auxiliante Domino</i> Franci victores extiterunt.

⁷⁹ For Reimitz' discussion of the "appropriation of providence" in the early Carolingian historiography, see Reimitz, *History*, 320-326.

ARF a. 784, 68	<i>Auxiliante Domino</i> domnus Carolus, filius magni regis Caroli, victor extitit una cum Francis, multis Saxonibus interfectis; <i>volente Deo</i> inlesus remeavit ad genitorem suum in Wormatiam civitatem.
ARF a. 786, 72	Et sic supra diximus, in multis firmitatibus Brittonum praevaluerunt Franci et cum victoria <i>Domino volente</i> reversi sunt... Tunc Domnus rex Carolus praescipiens, se ex omni parte <i>Deo largiente</i> pacem habere.
ARF a. 788, 82-84	Et <i>auxiliante Domino</i> victoria est facta a Francis seu supranominatis Langobardis... <i>opitulante Domino</i> victoriam obtinuerunt Franci et Avari cum contumelia reversi sunt, fuga lapsi sine victoria... <i>Domino auxiliante</i> victoria fuit Francorum seu Baioariorum. Et ista omnia supradictus dux Tassilo seu malivola uxor eius, Liutberga <i>Deo odibilis</i> , per fraudem consiliaverunt... Ibi similiter fuerunt missi domni regis Caroli, et <i>Domino protegente</i> victoria christianorum aderat... quomodo salvas <i>Domino protegente</i> contra iamdictos Avaros esse potuissent.
ARF a. 789, 84-86	Inde iter permotum partibus Slavaniaem quorum vocabulum est Wilze, <i>Domino adiuvente</i> ... Exinde promotus in ante, <i>Domino largiente</i> supradicto Sclavos sub suo dominio conlocavit... Ibique obsides receptos, sacramenta conplurima, <i>Domino perducente</i> Franciam pervenit.
ARF a. 791, 88	Cum <i>Dei adiutorio</i> partibus iamdictis Avarorum perrexerunt... Ad Anisam vero fluvium properantes ibi constituerunt laetantias faciendi per triduo missarumque sollemnia celebrandi; Dei solatium postulaverunt pro salute exercitus et adiutorio domini nostri Iesu Christi et pro victoria et vindicta super Avaros... Avari enim cum vidissent utrasque ripas exercitum continentes et naviga per medium fluvium venientes, a Domino eis terror pervenit... <i>Christo perducente</i> suo populo utrosque exercitus sine laesione introduxit... et exinde uterque exercitus de ambobus ripis ad propria reversi sunt, magnificantes Deum de tanta victoria.

While the court historians did use the ablative absolute formula to illustrate Pippin's victory in 755, this single mention pales in comparison to the repeated references to divine involvement in Charlemagne's victories. The court historians barely mention a single expedition, victory, or triumphal return without affirming God's aid to Charlemagne and the Franks. This strategy of affirming Charlemagne's legitimacy through invoking divine support is

most evident in the entry for 788. Describing how Charles tried his cousin Tassilo for supposedly breaking his oaths, the court historians claimed God aided Charlemagne and his Franks on five separate occasions(!) and added that Tassilo's wife was "hateful to God" for good measure.⁸⁰ Abandoning all subtlety, the court historians piled affirmation on affirmation that God had assisted Charlemagne as he deposed the Bavarian duke. As the culminating moment of the first redaction of the *Royal Frankish Annals*, the description of the deposition of Tassilo and the highly repetitive invocations of divinely enabled Carolingian victories make a powerful argument to support Charlemagne.

What the court historians saw in past events, Charlemagne sought in the present during his Avar campaign. After describing how "with the help of God" the Frankish forces entered Avar territory, the court historians described how Charles and his forces "determined to perform litanies and celebrate solemn three-day masses for the salvation of the army and for the help of Our Lord Jesus Christ and for victory and vengeance over the Avars."⁸¹ The court historians claimed that as a result of the Frankish propitiation, "terror from the Lord reached the Avars" causing them to flee and "with Christ guiding his people, He lead both armies

⁸⁰ ARF a. 788, 82-84: Et auxiliante Domino victoria est facta a Francis seu supranominatis Langobardis... opitulante Domino victoriam obtinuerunt Franci et Avari cum contumelia reversi sunt, fuga lapsi sine victoria... Domino auxiliante victoria fuit Francorum seu Baioariorum. Et ista omnia supradictus dux Tassilo seu malivola uxor eius, Liutberga Deo odibilis, per fraudem consiliaverunt... Ibi similiter fuerunt missi domni regis Caroli, et Domino protegente victoria christianorum aderat... quomodo salvas Domino protegente contra iamdictos Avaros esse potuissent.

⁸¹ ARF a. 791, 88: Ad Anisam vero fluvium properantes ibi constituerunt laetantias faciendi per triduo missarumque sollemnia celebrandi; Dei solatium postulaverunt pro salute exercitus et adiutorio domini nostri Iesu Christi et pro victoria et vindicta super Avaros.

without any harm.”⁸² Finally closing the circle, the court historians described how once both armies returned across the river, they “praised God because of the victory.”⁸³

While the slight changes in style can be explained by the specific events reported in the *Royal Frankish Annals* as well as the changed context of the next redaction, the framework used in the 791 entry resonates with the efforts in Charlemagne’s letter to obtain divine aid and be seen doing so. While style changed, the intent remained the same. The 791 entry reveals that the claim of divine support remained critical, for the court historians continued to depict God’s consistent guidance and aid to Charlemagne and, here, his recognition of and gratitude for the assistance.

Prophetic Counterpoints

The first redaction of the *Royal Frankish Annals* was a direct assertion of the divine approval and assistance Charlemagne enjoyed, and this claim was part of a much larger debate conducted in a range of annals produced in a number of centers throughout the Frankish world. While none of the contemporary texts from the 790s or early 800s directly condemned Charlemagne and his family, their authors’ individual accounts of signs and portents gave them considerable room to problematize the triumphal Carolingian narrative and counter aspects of it.

⁸² ARF a. 791, 88: Avari enim cum vidissent utrasque ripas exercitum continentes et naviga per medium fluvium venientes, a Domino eis terror pervenit... *Christo perducente* suo populo utrosque exercitus sine laesione introduxit.

⁸³ ARF a. 791, 88: et exinde uterque exercitus de ambobus ripis ad propria reversi sunt, magnificantes Deum de tanta victoria.

The various annalistic reports for 785 and 786 paint a vivid picture in contrast with the bland triumphs described by the court historians. In the 785 entry from the *Royal Frankish Annals*, for example, the court historians described how Charles campaigned successfully in Saxony, held a royal assembly in Paderborn, and baptized two of his notable Saxon foes.⁸⁴ For 786, they described how Charles' seneschal Audulf marched against the Bretons and returned victorious "with the Lord willing it," and afterwards Charles decided to travel to Rome, "thoroughly aware that he had by the generosity of God peace on every side."⁸⁵ Omitting Hardrad's revolt or any pressure on Charles' power, the court historians use the formulae for divine aid to depict the year as just another step towards Carolingian preeminence.

In contrast with the *Royal Frankish Annals*, other annalists took a different view. The author of the *Annals of Lorsch*, close to the court but not as suborned to the grand narrative, described how "certain counts endeavored to rebel... and rise up against the Lord King," and then recalled

In that year, in the month of December, there appeared such terrible battle-lines in the sky, such as have never before appeared in our times. The sign of the cross also appeared in peoples' clothing and several people claimed to have seen it rain blood, whereupon a panic followed, fear came among the people, and even a great mortality followed afterwards. Also, Archbishop Lull died.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ ARF, a.785-786, 68-72.

⁸⁵ ARF, a.785-786, 72: Et sic supra diximus, in multis firmitatibus Brittonum praevaluerunt Franci et cum victoria Domino volente reversi sunt... Tunc Domnus rex Carolus praespiciens, se ex omni parte Deo largiente pacem habere, sumpsit consilium orationis causae ad limina beatorum apostolorum iter peragendi et causas Italicas disponendi, et cum missis imperatoris placitum habendi de convenientiis eorum, quod ita factum est.

⁸⁶ *Lorsch Annals*, a.786, 34-35: Rebellare conati sunt quidam comites, nonnulli etiam nobilium in partibus Austriae ac coniurantes inuicem coegerunt, quos poterant, [ut] contra domnum regem insurgerent... Eo anno mense December apparuerunt acies terribili in caelo tales, quales numquam antea apparuerunt nostris temporibus, nec non et signa crucis apparuerunt in uestimentis hominum, et nonnulli sanguinem dixerunt se

Compiled ca. 803 and connected to Ricbod, the abbot of Lorsch and a student of Alcuin's, the *Lorsch Annals* offered a powerfully pro-Carolingian, if different from the *Royal Frankish Annals*, message in the wake of Charlemagne's imperial coronation in 800.⁸⁷ The 786 entry from the *Lorsch Annals* included celestial signs, blood-rain, the death of a social elite, and some deaths among the people. The truly unique feature of the entry is the comment on the popular fear of the signs.⁸⁸

An alternative perspective from that of Lorsch is offered by the *Chesne Fragment*, an adapted version of the *Lorsch Annals* within a late-eighth-century historical compendium beginning with creation, and seen by Max Diesenberger as a Bavarian challenge to the Carolingian narrative.⁸⁹ Among the unique features of this manuscript is that the entries for 786 to 791 differ from the *Lorsch Annals* and offer a narrative that subtly problematizes the triumphant narrative of the *Lorsch* and *Royal Frankish Annals*. Maximilian Diesenberger has argued that the source for the *Fragment* was composed in a Bavarian context in the early 790s, not long after Charlemagne's takeover of Bavaria and his deposition of Tassilo.⁹⁰

Amidst the various differences from the *Lorsch Annals*, the author of the *Chesne Fragment* included an extended account of the 786 portents that it related after

uidere pluerē: unde pauor secuta est et metus in populo inruit, ac mortalitas magna postea secuta est. Et Lullus archiepiscopus obiit.

⁸⁷ For a brief introduction, see Reimitz, *History*, 351-353. For greater detail on its authorship, composition, and purpose, see R. Pokorný, "Annales Laureshamenses," 1-43, and Collins, "Coronation," 52-70.

⁸⁸ On the ordering of events in the 786 entry in the *Lorsch Annals*, see Mordek, "Kapitular," 28-29. The author ignored the date of Lull's death in order to add it to the portent list, perhaps suggesting what the portents revealed, or to save the greatest for last.

⁸⁹ Diesenberger, "Dissidente Stimmen," 105-121. The manuscript is Rome, BAV, Reg. Lat. 213.

⁹⁰ Diesenberger, "Dissidente Stimmen," 113-117.

Charlemagne's journey to Italy. In contrast to Charlemagne's pronouncements and public efforts to correct and teach his people that dominated the late 780s and early 790s, the author of the *Fragment* set down the longest discussion of portents in any extant annals from the Carolingian period to that point, and added simply that the people knew the signs and corrected themselves. After describing Hardrad's revolt, the author of the *Fragment* described how

Departing thence, Charles proceeded to Italy. Furthermore, many signs were said to have appeared in that year: for instance, the sign of the cross appeared on the clothing of men and women, and blood flowed from heaven and earth, and also many signs appeared that beneficially brought an immense panic and fear upon the people, so that as a result many corrected themselves. Also, six days before the birth of the Lord immeasurable thunder and lightning struck and damaged churches in *Widli*, and it was heard throughout nearly all of Francia, and many people were killed. Even the birds of the sky were killed by this same thunder. And a rainbow (*arcus coeli*) appeared through the night in the clouds. Afterwards there was a great mortality, and Archbishop Lullus departed from this life. Charles proceeded to Rome and from there towards Benevento, and there accepted the son of Arichis II as a hostage, and from there, he returned to Rome.⁹¹

Recalling Alcuin's portents and Cathwulf's signs of an unjust king, the author of the *Chesne Fragment* framed the signs and portents within Charles' journey to Italy. While the mere apposition of the terrifying portents with Charles suggested a connection, as a potential

⁹¹ *Chesne Fragment*, a. 786, 33: Inde proficiscens Carlus rex perrexit in Italiam. Multa etiam referuntur signa apparuisse eodem anno; signum enim crucis in vestimentis hominum apparuit ac sanguinem de terra ac de coelo profluere; nec non et alia multa signa apparuerunt, unde pavor ingens ac timor in populo salubriter inruit, ita ut se multi corrigerent. Et sex dies ante natale Domini tonitrua et fulgura immensa apparuerunt, ita ut ecclesias concussit in *Widli*, et pene per totam Franciam auditum fuit, et multi homines interfecti fuerunt; etiam aves coeli ab ipso tonitruo occisi sunt. Et arcus coeli in nubibus apparuit per noctem. Et postea vero mortalitas magna fuit, et Lullus archiepiscopus migravit de hac luce. Carolus perrexit ad Romam et inde usque Beneventum, et filio Aregiso inde ospitatum recepit; et inde reversus est ad Romam.

response to the triumphal narrative of the *Royal Frankish Annals* this entry challenged Charlemagne's divine affirmation through a different means of invoking God's judgement.

Not only did the author of the *Fragment* subvert the Carolingian message, but he minimized Charlemagne's role by remarking that after seeing many of the signs, and being rightly terrified, "as a result many corrected themselves." For a point of comparison, in the *Petau Annals*—compiled in the first decade of the ninth century—the author described the same events along lines similar to the *Lorsch Annals*: "in that year a sign was sent from heaven to the earth by God, and there was great terror."⁹² Contrary to the 'official line' from the *royal Frankish Annals*, the author of the *Fragment* framed the unsettling events of the year as a divine judgement on Charlemagne and declared Charlemagne's reforms unnecessary, countering one of Charlemagne's central claims to legitimacy as a Christian ruler.

Defending Carolingian Conquest

While the author of the *Chesne Fragment* treated 786 with an extensive discussion of signs and portents, the author of the contemporary *Petau Annals* quickly disposed of the year's events in favor of directly invoking God's support for Charlemagne. The author of the *Petau Annals* pushed historiographical experimentation with the prophetic in the late eighth century to a new height in the defense of Charlemagne's rule.⁹³ The *Petau Annals* consist of yearly entries covering 708 to 799, with the first section up to 777 compiled from other annals and an independent continuation covering Charlemagne's reign. In the continuation from 777

⁹² *AP* a. 786: Et illo anno fuit missum signum de coelo a Deo in terra, terrorque magnus.

⁹³ The *Petau Annals* survive in three manuscripts, Vatican, BAV reg. lat. 520, Paris lat. 4995, and Genf, lat. 50, the latter of which has been dated to 825, Bischoff, *Katalog*, 284, n° 1351.

to 799, the unknown author adapted the approach used in the *Royal Frankish Annals* to explain Charlemagne's rise to power and to affirm the king's legitimacy. Upon closer analysis, however, the author of the *Petau Annals* invoked God's continual aid to Charlemagne not just as an affirmation of Charles' rule but, to combine divine authorization with a legal argument for his right to rule his empire.

The author of the *Petau Annals* invoked divine support for Charlemagne on two levels: first, emphasizing how God guided Charlemagne by comparing the Frankish king with biblical prophets, and second by stamping the divine approval for each of Charlemagne's conquests using a unique and legalistic formula. The first level can be first seen in the entry for 777:

In the same year, the glorious King Charles went to Saxony, a place known as Paderborn, and there he held a great assembly where Saxons gathered for catholic baptism, and many thousands of pagan people were baptized. There they also built a church of the Franks. For that reason, afterwards, King Charles deservedly rejoiced with John the Baptist, who as he baptized, was preaching baptism for the remission of all sins.⁹⁴

The emphasis on baptism, and specifically on Charlemagne's role as John the Baptist "preaching baptism" to the Saxons recalled another text celebrating Charles' victories of 777, namely the poem *De conversione saxonum*.⁹⁵ Possibly written by one of Charles' scholars and advisors, Angilbert of St. Riquier, the poetic praise of Charles' evangelizing wars against the Saxons described how Charles "anointed with chrisms those Saxons washed by holy baptism...

⁹⁴ *AP* a. 777: Eodem anno gloriosus rex Karolus venit in Saxoniam, loco cognominante Patresbrunna; habuitque ibi magnum placitum: et ibi convenerunt Saxones ad baptismum catholicum, et baptizata multa milia populorum gentilium: et aedificaverunt ibi ecclesiam Franci. Unde in postmodum Karolus rex merito gaudet cum Iohanne baptista, qui et baptizavit praedicans baptismum in remissionem omnium peccatorum.

⁹⁵ The most recent edition of *De conversione saxonum* can be found in Rabe, *Faith*.

and lead the new progeny of Christ into the great hall.”⁹⁶ The author of the *Petau Annals* did not use the same liturgical language for the 777 entry, choosing instead to depict Charles in a more prophetic light.

The author of the *Petau Annals* again depicted Charlemagne as a scriptural prophet in his entry for 788, using this prophetic characterization to emphasize Charles’ defeat of his cousin Tassilo. Summarizing the events of 788, the author explained that

In that same year, of course there was an assembly in Angoulême, and in the same year Almighty God fought for the lord king Charles, just like He did for Moses and the Children of Israel, when Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea. Just so, God, as a warrior, without battle or any conflict surrendered the kingdom of the Bavarians into the hand of the king Charlemagne. Duke Tassilo was tonsured and was driven to the monastery of Jumièges.⁹⁷

Mary Garrison has argued that the author of the *Petau Annals* used the comparison with the Children of Israel to affirm the divine election of the Franks, and to use that divine election to “write other Christians out of history.”⁹⁸ While her argument is entirely valid, it ignores the parallel between Charlemagne and Moses, a key feature for understanding the rest of the final continuation to the *Annals*. Rather than following the *Royal Frankish Annals* by repeatedly citing God’s help, the author instead gave one episode a scriptural parallel and portrayed

⁹⁶ Rabe, *Faith*, 65: Postque salutiferi perfusos rore lavacri, sub patris et gentili, sancti sub flaminis almi nomine, que nostrae constat spes unica vitae, Christicolasque rudes ad caeli sidera misit, Chrismatibus sacro iunxit baptismate lotos, quo iam fumiferas valeant transcendere flammas, progeniemque novam Christi perduxit in aulam.

⁹⁷ *AP* a. 788: Eodem quippe anno fuit placitum Angulisamo, et idem anno pugnavit omnipotens Deus pro domno rege Karolo, sicut fecit pro Moyse et filios Israel, quando demersus fuit Farao rubro mari: sic Deus praeliator sine bello et absque ulla altercatione tradidit regnum Bawarium in manu Karoli magni regis; et Taxilo dux tonsus est, retrususque Gemitico monasterio.

⁹⁸ Garrison, “New Israel,” 152-153.

Charlemagne as the prophet who witnessed God saving Charlemagne's realm and defeating his greatest foe.

To illuminate why the author characterized Charlemagne as a prophet, we must turn to the deeper level of invoking divine affirmation for Charlemagne's conquests in the *Petau Annals*. On the surface, this second level of writing God into Charlemagne's conquests appears similar to the strategy used by the *Royal Frankish Annals*, as the author, for the first time in the entry for 780, claimed that Charlemagne first "acquired an entire land (in Saxony) under the strength of his own arm," and added that after building churches and baptizing many Saxons, "acquired each one with the help of God."⁹⁹ Again, in the entry for 785, the author optimistically described how Charlemagne again invaded Saxony and "acquired the Saxons with the help of God."¹⁰⁰ Continuing the same strategy the annalist noted in the next entry, for 786, that Charlemagne "acquired the land of Benevento through the help of God," to which the annalist added as an exclamation point that the same year witnessed "a sign sent from heaven to the earth by God, and there was great terror."¹⁰¹ As noted earlier, in the entry for 788 the author repeated a version of the same claim by describing how "God, as a warrior, without battle or any conflict surrendered the kingdom(?) of the Bavarians into the hands of the great

⁹⁹ *AP* a. 780: Eodem anno iterum pulcherrimus rex Karolus cum Francorum exercitu venit in Saxoniam usque fluvium Alvea, adquisivit universam terram illam sub forti brachio. Ipso quoque anno Saxones derelinquentes idola, Deum verum adoraverunt, et eius crediderunt opera, eodem quoque tempore aedificaveruntque ecclesias et venerunt ad domnum regem multa milia gentilium Winethorum hominum; ipse autem adquisivit una cum Dei auxilio.

¹⁰⁰ *AP* a. 785: Tunc domnus rex Karolus commoto exercitu de ipsis tentoriis, venitque Dersia, et igne combussit ea loca, venit ultra flumen Visera, et eodem anno destruxit Saxonorum cratibus sive eorum firmitatibus: et tunc adquisivit Saxones cum Dei auxilio.

¹⁰¹ *AP* a. 786: Hic annus fuit sine hoste, nisi tantum invernus temporis perrexit domnus rex Karolus in Italiam cum suo exercitu, et venit Romam; deinde adquisivit terram Beneventanam per Dei auxilium. Et illo anno fuit missum signum de coelo a Deo in terra, terrorque magnus.

King Charlemagne.”¹⁰² It must be noted, however, that the final instance of the author’s writing God into Charlemagne’s history deviates from the pattern and in the entry for 791, the annalist described how Charles returned from his campaign against the Avars “with great booty, protected by God.”¹⁰³

The feature that defined this deeper level of divine affirmation is signaled by the author’s use of the verb *adquirere*, to acquire or obtain. While the annalist denoted each of Charlemagne’s contested conquests (of Saxony *and* the Saxons, Benevento, and Bavaria) as achieved *per Dei auxilium* or *cum Dei auxilio*, in each instance save one the divine assistance is coupled with the verb *adquirere*. In the instance when *adquirere* was not used, the annalist used instead the verb *tradere* to depict God giving Bavaria to Charles. When these instances of God’s involvement in Charlemagne’s conquests are analyzed together, the annalist’s approach becomes clear. This formula would be applied to the Saxons, against whom Charlemagne struggled for thirty years, and the Beneventans whose subjugation completed Charlemagne’s occupation of Italy, and Tassilo’s Bavaria, the greatest ideological threat to Charlemagne’s claims. In each instance, the divine confirmation of Charlemagne’s acquisition of a people or place served as a sort of final statement on the matter.

Discussing the most difficult or precarious of Charlemagne’s conquests, the author of the final continuation to the *Petau Annals* argued that Charlemagne “acquired” them with

¹⁰² *AP* a. 788: sic Deus praeliator sine bello et absque ulla altercatione tradidit regnum Bawarium in manu Karoli magni regis.

¹⁰³ *AP* a. 791: Hoc anno domnus rex Karolus commoto magno exercitu perrexit in Hunia, ibique habuit conflictum magnum cum Hunis, et vastavit Hunia plaga magna usque flumen Rafa; cum praeda magna, Deo protegente, victor revertit in Franciam.

God confirming each acquisition. Experimenting with the prophetic in a form well ahead of its time, the author of the *Petau Annals* modified the triumphal narrative of the *Royal Frankish Annals* and, countering any claims to the contrary, argued that God had assisted and approved each of Charlemagne's conquests. Most significant, the annalist compared Charlemagne explicitly with biblical prophets, a comparison that took on new meaning in the first decade of the 800s. In its use of the prophetic the *Petau Annals* stand outside the mainstream, similar practices would, however, become very common in ninth century historical writing.

III. Seeking Revelation and Controlling Meaning

Interpreting Divine Displeasure

In the final decade of Charlemagne's life, we see increased use of the prophetic in Charlemagne's responses to a series of crises that threatened him and his rule. Charlemagne and his advisors interpreted many of the threats they faced as clear signs of divine judgement and focused their efforts on appeasing the God they had offended. Prevailing scholarship has interpreted these documents as a change, as part of the rapid increase in capitulary production that followed and was caused by Charlemagne's imperial coronation, and as a sign of new ambitions Charlemagne would fail to achieve, but recently scholars have begun to deemphasize the imperial coronation and recognize the continuities from 789 to 814.¹⁰⁴

Among other things, Fichtenau's and Ganshof's famous depictions of this period as the

¹⁰⁴ The classic arguments are made by Ganshof, "L'échec," 248-254; *idem*, *Carolingians*, 246-250. Compare with more modern approaches in Davis, *Practice*, 361 and Nelson, "Voice," 76-88.

beginnings of failure, frustration, and fragmentation relied on many of the sources that demonstrated Charlemagne's claims to know God's will and sought to perform it, sources that must be understood in their broader context of his whole reign.¹⁰⁵ Above all, however, we can see in Charlemagne's late reign a focused endeavor instead to control the narrative of current events through public efforts to know, claim, and invoke God's will. Read in this way, we step outside the question of the relative successes or failures of Charles' late reign and encounter a contemporary interpretation of the destabilizing events that brought about novel and unprecedented challenges for Charles.

In 805, responding to a famine that would become the first in the series of crises, Charlemagne promulgated a set of capitularies from the assembly at Thionville; the second capitulary addressed the famine.¹⁰⁶ The fourth heading in the capitulary addressed the famine directly by declaring that

About this matter, in the event of famines, disasters, pestilence, an imbalance in the air, or any similar form of trouble, do not wait upon our proclamation but immediately beg for the mercy of God. Also because of the famine in the current year, aid your people and everyone as you are able, let none sell their crops for excessive prices, and let none sell any of their food outside of our empire.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Fichtenau, *Imperium*, 177-179; Ganshof, "Note," 1-25. For a response to the traditional approach, see Nelson, "Religion," 490-506. Compare with Davis' moderating approach in *Practice*, 347-350.

¹⁰⁶ The capitulary is edited as *Capitulare missorum in Theodonis villa datum secundum, generale*, MGH Cap. I, no. 44, pp. 122-126. For studies of the response to the famine, see Jörg, "Besänftigung," 38-51 and Verhulst, "Agrarpolitik," 175-189.

¹⁰⁷ *Capitulare missorum* (805), c. 4, 122-123: De hoc, si evenerit fames, clades, pestilentia, inaequalitas aeris vel alia qualiscumque tribulatio, ut non expectetur edictum nostrum, sed statim depraecetur Dei misericordia. Et in praesenti anno de famis inopia, ut suos quisque adiuvet prout potest et suam annonam non nimis care vendat; et ne foris imperium nostrum vendatur aliquid alimoniae.

In contrast to earlier efforts on Charlemagne's part to gain divine support, however, the command not to wait for an imperial proclamation could now presume that the audience believed the response would be coordinated centrally by Charlemagne and his advisers. The capitulary strongly suggests that Charlemagne's efforts throughout his reign to please God had by this point become broadly known, thus requiring the emperor to empower his bishops to begin to propitiate God on their own initiative. Although the response to the 805 famine recalls the crisis response from Herstal in 779, suggesting to some a standardized Carolingian *Notstandpolitik*, the similarities go only so far.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, at their core both capitularies were intended to invoke God's aid in response to a significant crisis, and neither explained how they understood the threats facing them, only that they needed God's mercy.

Despite the apparent agnosticism each document exhibited about precisely *why* the realm had been beset by a famine and other problems, modern scholars have concluded that because the response appeared penitential, it must be the case that the crisis was perceived as a punishment for sin.¹⁰⁹ The prevailing scholarly position has been to conflate and understand these crises in 779 and 805 through Charlemagne's 805 circular letter that addressed the crises and outlined the responses to them.¹¹⁰ Although the liturgical and practical responses outlined in the 805 circular letter are very similar to those called for in the *Capitulary for the*

¹⁰⁸ For a comparison between the capitularies from 779 and 805, see Mordek, "Kapitular." Further, Mordek argued that while not continuously implemented, the 779 capitulary from Herstal represented a "staatlichen Notstandspolitik" (governmental emergency policy) and was exemplary as such (pp. 22, n.93.) Cf. Curschmann, *Hungersnöte*, 70-73.

¹⁰⁹ For scholars who conflated the understanding of the crisis in both 779 and 805, see Nelson, "Religion," 497; Mordek, "Kapitular," 7; de Jong, *Penitential*, 154.

¹¹⁰ Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 245-246. For the dating of this circular letter to 805, rather than the 807 date proposed by Alfred Boretius, see Jörg, "Besänftigung," 42.

Present Tribulation, the explanation of the crises in the circular letter signals how much has changed over the course of Charles' reign.

In the circular letter from 805, surviving in a copy to Bishop Ghaerbald of Liège, Charles and his advisers explained to the bishop

that after counselling with our loyal spiritual servants as much as our loyal secular servants, with the agreement and advice of both, we have found it necessary because of certain pressing needs that we will indicate below that three three-day fasts be celebrated in general by all of us and that we must seek help from Him, in Whom we live, act, and are; from Whom whatever one prays for justly and reasonably with our faith, certain hope, or complete charity, one will receive at an agreeable time without doubt. As the Lord said: *Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.*¹¹¹

While emphasizing the united counsel from all of Charlemagne's advisors that informed his actions, the introduction to the circular letter harmonizes with the earlier 779 capitulary by orchestrating three-day fasts to gain God's assistance. The text went on to answer its own questions and highlighted two key claims for the rest of the circular letter: first, God's willingness to give the Franks the relief and assistance they need, and second, His willingness to reveal answers to Charles. After setting out the specific times and conditions for the three-day fasts, activities that also include litanies and almsgiving, Charles began to explain the "pressing needs" that demanded such a response:

these are the emergencies that we promised previously to discuss, among others that we still do not deem necessary to discuss at present. We have

¹¹¹ Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 245: Notum sit dilectioni vestrae, quia nos, cum fidelibus nostris tam spiritualibus quam saecularibus tractantes, cum consensu et pari consilio invenimus necessarium esse propter instantes quasdam necessitates quas subter significaturi sumus, tria triduana ieiunia ab omnibus nobis generaliter esse celebranda atque ab eo, in quo vivimus, movemur et sumus, auxilium esse quaerendum. a quo, quicquid iuste ac rationabiliter fides nostra, spes certa seu caritas perfecta postulat, sine dubio tempore congruo inpetrat, ipso Domino dicente: 'Petite et dabitur vobis, quaerite et invenietis, pulsate et aperietur vobis.'

learned these things through our loyal servants who reported from each part of our kingdom: that everywhere, abnormally and extraordinarily, the earth is barren and the danger of famine appears to threaten; that likewise there is an imbalance in the air highly dangerous to crops; pestilence in various places; the continuous wars of the pagan peoples living around our frontiers; and we have received information of more besides that would take a long time to list here, if we desire to call to mind what sort of adversities we know that we suffer each day because of our desserts. We can conclude with greatest certainty from *these external signs* that we who do not please the Lord in all things internally are forced to bear such evils externally. That is why it seems absolutely right that each of us should strive to humble his heart in truth and, for whatever place or action or thought he will discover that he offended God, he should cleanse himself with penance, lament with weeping, and in the future should guard and protect himself to the best of his ability against these ills... and so that we might be able to gain His grace, we have decreed to you that these fasts, together with prayers, should be performed in general by everyone.¹¹²

This adds to the brief list in the Thionville capitulary, where Charlemagne encouraged his bishops not to await his command but to immediately seek divine assistance: he and his advisors declared that famine, bad weather, disease, war, and more besides threatened everyone because of their actions. In this text, Charlemagne, and his advisors, presented themselves as confident in their interpretations of the “external signs” as a clear indication that they were failing to please God, failing to live up to one of the most enduring goals of

¹¹² Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 245-246: *Necessitates vero quas supra nos dicturos esse promisimus, inter ceteras quas tamen hac vice commemorare necessarium non duximus, haec sunt denique: conpertum habemus per fideles nostros, qui nobis de singulis regni nostri partibus haec nuntiaverunt, quod insolito more et ultra consuetum ubique terrae sterilitas esse et famis periculum imminere videtur, aeris etiam intemperies frugibus valde contraria, pestilentia quoque per loca, et paganorum gentium circa marcas nostras sedentia bella continua, multa praeterea quae et nunc enumerare longum est et nobis experimento possunt esse notissima, si recordare volumus, qualia incommoda singulis diebus propter merita nostra sentiamus. Certissimeque ab his exterioribus colligere possumus, nos per omnia Domino non placere interius, qui tanta mala compellimur tollerare exterius. Quamobrem bonum nobis omnino videtur, ut unusquisque nostrum cor suum humiliare in veritate studeat et, in quocumque loco sive actu sive cogitatu se Deum offendisse deprehenderit, poenitendo tergat, flendo doleat et semetipsum in quantum ipse potest ab his malis in futurum cavendo custodiat... ut gratiam illius promereri possimus, haec ieiunia atque has orationes ab omnibus vobis generaliter fieri decrevimus.*

Charlemagne's reign. Superficially, the circular letter recapitulated signs of an unjust king invoked powerfully by Cathwulf in his admonitory letter to Charlemagne as well as Paul the Deacon's historical portents, all potentially suggesting that Charles was failing in the primary responsibility he had claimed for years.¹¹³

In the context of Charles' entire reign and his repeated attempts to please God and correct his people to that end, however, the circular letter illustrates how Charlemagne interpreted the portents and controlled their meaning. Rather than echoing the sources that understood such signs as punishments inflicted on unjust or negligent rulers, as Charlemagne's son would later do, Charlemagne interpreted the external signs as evidence of internal shortcomings, and focused his audience on the need for everyone to correct themselves. Charles' interpretation of the signs also echoes Alcuin's earlier letter to the king describing how the "Holy Spirit works through [Charles]" and that the prayers of the faithful sustained the empire so that "internally it might be worthy to be loved by all those faithful to God, and externally, it might be terrifying to the enemies of His most holy name."¹¹⁴ Further, in

¹¹³ Cathwulf, *Epistola*, 503-504: Pro regis iniustitia sui ipsius infelicitas erit, uxoris filiorum quoque dissensio, populorum fames, pestilentia, infecunditas terre, maris quoque tempestatibus fructus terrarum diversis percussis, et ab inimicis suis superatus et expulsus de regno. Paul the Deacon, *HL* 6.35, 228: in cuius temporibus terrae ubertas nimia, sed tempora fuere barbarica. Alcuin, Ep. 18, 51: Legimus quoque, quod regis bonitas totius est gentis prosperitas, victoria exercitus, aeris temperies, terrae habundantia, filiorum benedictio, sanitas plebis. Magnum est totam regere gentem. A regendo vero rex dicitur; et qui bene regit, subiectum sibi populum, bonam habet a Deo retributionem... Orationibus vero et vigiliis eo instantius ad Deum insistere debet, quo non pro se solummodo, sed pro totius gentis prosperitate Deum deprecari debet. In addition, compare these with Odilbert to Charlemagne, MGH Cap. I, no. 126 247: ut vitam vestram atque incolomitatem per multorum annorum curricula ad profectum omnium aeccliarum Dei sive et fidelium populorum vobis a Deo commissorum conservare dignetur, quia in vestra tranquillitate salutem nostrorum omnium adesse cognoscimus atque tenemus.

¹¹⁴ Alcuin, Ep. 261, 419: Ergo in vestrae pietatis sacratissima sollicitudine non dubie patet, quid per vos in totius ecclesiae salutem Spiritus sanctus operetur; et quantis universorum fidelium precibus sit optandum, ut in omnem gloriam vestram extendatur imperium; et ut intus sit omnibus Deo fidelibus amabile et foris sanctissimo nomini illius adversariis terribile.

order to control the interpretation of the signs and orchestrate the response, Charlemagne ordered that the contents of the letter were to be preached and promulgated in a manner intelligible to all his subjects throughout the empire in every monastery and baptismal church.¹¹⁵ Demonstrating the importance of these measures, Charlemagne used a similar process he had used previously in 802 when he ordered that the new oath he commanded all of his subjects to swear to him be explained publicly to all.¹¹⁶ Rather than interpreting the instruction to have the contents read out and repeated in the languages of his subjects as evidence of the impotence of Charlemagne's capitularies, this requirement demonstrates Charles' recognition of the importance of dominating the interpretation of the signs and orchestrating the response, thereby controlling their meaning and impact on all his subjects.

Interpreting the Signs

The events of 805 proved far from the only events that were perceived as signs of divine displeasure. Contemporaneous sources describe how in 810, Charles' son, Pippin of Italy, and his daughter Hruotrud both died, and then in 811, Charlemagne's eldest son and heir, Charles the Younger, died after what the *Lorsch Annals* described as a "most cruel winter,

¹¹⁵ Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 246: Et unusquisque vestrum per singulas ecclesias baptismales dirigite et bonos interpretes mittite qui omnia tradant, sicut superius diximus. Nam et per singula monasteria infra parochiam tuam ita facias.

¹¹⁶ *Capitulaire missorum generale* 802, MGH Cap. I, c. 2, pp. 92: de fidelitate promittenda domno imperatori. Precepitque, ut omni homo in toto regno suo, sive ecclesiasticus sive laicus, unusquisque secundum votum et propositum suum, qui antea fidelitate sibi regis nomine promisissent, nunc ipsum promissum nominis cesaris faciat; et hii qui adhuc ipsum promissum non perfecerunt omnes usque ad duodecimo aetatis annum similiter facerent. Et ut omnes traderetur publice, qualiter unusquisque intellegere posset, quam magne in isto sacramento et quam multa comprehensa sunt, non, ut multi usque nunc extimaverunt, tantum fidelitate domno imperatori usque in vita ipsius, et ne aliquem inimicum in suum regnum causa inimicitiae inducat, et ne alicui infidelitate illius consentiant aut retaciat, sed ut sciant omnes istam in se rationem hoc sacramentum habere.

lasting until the end of the month of March.”¹¹⁷ While Charles the Younger’s death may not have caused the great mourning claimed by later sources, it completely dashed the plan for succession Charlemagne had announced in 806.¹¹⁸ In addition to these personal losses, the sources report the death of the Danish King Godfrid, a series of lunar and solar eclipses, a spreading plague among the livestock, Arab attacks in Sardinia and Corsica, Viking attacks in Frisia, bad weather, military pressure on many fronts, and an apparently rising problem with subjects resisting military service.¹¹⁹ Although this catalogue of events might record a genuine rise in crises and trouble for the empire, it is equally possible that we are instead witnessing a growing sensitivity among contemporary historians to events with portentous potential. In response to these events, several responses have survived and illuminate how Charlemagne and those around him sought to understand and address these events.

A capitulary and a fragmentary letter from 810 suggest that, in response to many of these signs, Charlemagne continued to utilize the approach outlined in the circular letter. In a brief capitulary to imperial *missi* promulgated from Aachen, Charlemagne commanded his priests to

admonish the people to give alms and offer prayers because of the varied misfortunes that we suffer incessantly for our sins. And let these priests, each

¹¹⁷ *ARF* a.810, 131-132: Hruotrud filia imperatoris, quae natus maior erat, VII Idus Iun. diem obiit... et Pippinum filium eius, regem Italiae, VIII Idus Iulii de corpore migrasse. *ARF* a.811, 135: Interea Carlus filius domni imperatoris, qui maior natus erat, II. Nones Decembri diem obiit. *Lorsch Annals* (Fulda Codex) a.811, 121: Hiemps fuit durissima, perdurans usque ad finem Martii mensis, et duo filii imperatoris id est Pippinus moritur et Karlus moritur.

¹¹⁸ *Annales Lobiensis* a. 812, 231: Karolus, primogenitus domni imperatoris, dolore capitis ab oculis affectus est. Deinde ipso anno cum luctu omnium defunctus est. On the *divisio regni*, see Collins, *Charlemagne*, 141-159.

¹¹⁹ S. Patzold, *Episcopus*, 247-249.

according to his order, strive to preach and teach the people committed to him.¹²⁰

Continuing this same approach, Charlemagne's instructions to his *missi* become even clearer through the fragmentary letter from Archbishop Riculf of Mainz to Bishop Egino of Constance.¹²¹ Riculf explained to Egino that "Our Lord Emperor has admonished us just as [he did?] often in the gathering of the council" that "we ought to beg humbly for the mercy of God Almighty at every moment... whenever compelled by emergencies."¹²² Not only does Riculf's letter echo the language of *necessitas* from Charles' circular letter, it further called for three-day fasts and "that they [Riculf, Egino, and those committed to Egino] implore God Almighty that He might give His grace to all His faithful Christians," and most important, "that He might [save?] them from all the tribulations that incessantly multiply on account of our sins."¹²³ Riculf took up the language of the 805 circular letter and the 811 capitulary to the *missi*, reinforcing the conclusion that Charlemagne's efforts throughout his empire to dominate the interpretation, form the response, and control the meaning of potential portents had successfully landed in fertile soil.

Seeking Revelation

¹²⁰ *Capitulare missorum Aquisgranense primum a. 810*, cc. 5-6 153: Ut sacerdotes admoneant populum ut aelemosinam dent et orationes faciant propter diversas plagas quas assidue pro peccatis patimur. Ut ipsi sacerdotes unusquisque secundum ordinem suum praedicare et docere studeat plebem sibi commissam.

¹²¹ The fragmentary letter survives in St. Gallen manuscript Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 1394. For the dating of the manuscript, see Nelson, "Voice," 82, n. 34, and for insightful comments on it, see Patzold, "*Pater Noster*," 200-201.

¹²² Riculf, *Epistola*, MGH Cap. I, no. 127, 249 (corrected with reference to St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 1394, fol. 141r with elipses representing likely breaks in the text because of the fragmentary nature of the letter): quia domnus imperator nos admonuit, sicut sepius in conventu concili... ut omni tempore Dei omnipotentis misericordiam humiliter depraecare debeamus pro co... quandocumque necessitas conpellit. Boretius suggested the reading debeamus pro com[muni salute], but given what survives on the edge of the fragment's third line, rather than a "co" we ought to read a "c" followed by an open "a" with a horizontal ligature above it.

¹²³ Riculf, *Epistola*, Cod. Sang. 1394, fol. 141r: rogassent Deum omnipotentem, ut omnibus suis fidelibus christianis dedisset suam gratiam... et animae, et ut ab omnibus tribulationibus quae pro peccatis nostris assidue crescunt.

In conjunction with these efforts to interpret divine communication that was taking place through the events transpiring around them and respond accordingly, the final decade of Charlemagne's reign witnessed a rising interest in the natural world. In the *Royal Frankish Annals*, it is notable that beginning in the entry for 807, the court historians begin to take a keen interest in recording solar and lunar eclipses, as well as other natural phenomena, something largely absent in earlier recensions of the text.¹²⁴ This sudden shift in the text can be explained as part of a larger effort at understanding the workings and meanings of the natural world.

Giving further credence to Einhard's claim about Charlemagne's interest in astronomy, and that Charles' question to Alcuin about the disappearance of Mars did not merely indicate a fleeting interest in the significance of heavenly events, in 809 a synod gathered under Charles' cousin Adalhard of Corbie to address the state of Frankish *computus* and its astronomical underpinnings.¹²⁵ As a product of this synod, one of the books produced even made a list of the recent solar and lunar eclipses that had been visible in Francia.¹²⁶ Charles' interest in eclipses is further illuminated by a letter from 811 to Charlemagne from an insular scholar Dungal who had learned that Charlemagne had asked the abbot of St.-Denis about eclipses, and decided to respond.¹²⁷ Although Charlemagne's interest in the heavens cannot be reduced entirely to their portentous potential, the dramatic rise in his inquiries

¹²⁴ On the compilation of the *ARF* between 806-809, see Collins, "Reviser," 195-197.

¹²⁵ On the synod of 809 and the Frankish study of Astronomy, see E. Ramirez-Weaver, *A Saving Science*.

¹²⁶ *Libri Computi* V. 10, 1276-1279.

¹²⁷ Eastwood, "Astronomy," 117-13.

during the late years of his reign, nevertheless, suggests an growing desire to understand the world he sought to interpret.

The growing interest in understanding the world and interpreting the signs and portents within it found its next expression in a pair of memoranda likely presenting the preparations for a series of councils that would be held in 813. Dated to 811, the memoranda present a response to the deaths of two of Charlemagne's heirs and the other troubles the empire faced. Interpretations of these memoranda have varied between Ganshof and Fichtenau arguing that they represent to the modern historian an alarm siren for the deterioration of Charles' empire, and Janet Nelson explaining that the memoranda reveal Charlemagne simply becoming "extremely concerned about religion" in his old age.¹²⁸ While these scholars differ, they all agree that the memoranda reveal that Charlemagne felt something was terribly wrong. For a ruler who frequently predicated his legitimacy on the divine support he enjoyed and his efforts to maintain God's favor, the memoranda illuminate an inward and speculative turn unprecedented in our evidence for Charles' reign.

Preserving a series of questions and discussion points in preparation for a larger council, these memoranda of Charlemagne commanded his bishops, abbots, counts, and other notables "that we must consider in ourselves whether we are true Christians. This can be simply examined through investigation of our lives or customs, if we desire to explore our

¹²⁸ Ganshof, *Carolingians*, 248; Fichtenau, *Imperium*, 179-181; Nelson, "Parents," 98. For her updated view of the memoranda, see Nelson, "Voice," 77-88.

actions diligently in public.”¹²⁹ As part of a much broader inquiry into the lives of bishops, abbots, other churchmen, and laymen, as well as an intensive plan to investigate and reform the practice of baptism throughout the empire, the first memorandum reveals how deeply Charles’ concerns ran. The second, very probably produced that same year, began by expressing, in the aging emperor’s voice, that it was “a summary of headings that we desire to address with our faithful bishops and abbots and to warn about all of our collective utility.”¹³⁰ Demonstrating the same shift in focus as the 805 circular letter from the ruler to the ruled and their collective responsibility, the memorandum then reminded its audience that

first, it must be remembered that in the past year we performed three three-day fasts, praying to God that He might deign to show us, in His presence, in what matters our actions ought to be corrected: that is what we now desire to do.¹³¹

At first glance, the second memorandum indicates Charlemagne’s disquiet as he returned to the familiar formula of three-day fasts and other services to plead for God’s aid. Unlike previous examples of this pattern, however, this time the three-day services were performed to seek revelation from God regarding how the Franks needed to correct themselves and appease Him. Alongside his earlier claims to interpret the “external signs” to reveal God’s displeasure with the empire and the indications of an increased interest in signs and potential

¹²⁹ *Capitula tractanda cum comitibus episcopis et abbatibus*, 161: Quod nobis despiciendum est, utrum vere christiani sumus. Quod in consideratione vitae vel morum nostrorum facillime cognosci potest, si diligenter conversationem coram discutere voluerimus. For a study of both texts as witnesses to Charlemagne’s own concerns, see Nelson, “Voice,” 77-88.

¹³⁰ *Capitula de causis cum episcopis et abbatibus tractandis*, 21: item brevis capitulorum quibus fideles nostros episcopos et abbates alloqui uolumus et commonere de communi omnium nostrorum utilitate.

¹³¹ *Capitula de causis cum episcopis et abbatibus tractandis*, c. 1, 21: Prima commemorandum est quod anno preterite tria triduana ieiunia fecimus, Deum orando ut ille nobis dignaretur ostendere in quibus conuersatio nostra coram illo emendari debuisset: quod nunc facere desideramus.

portents, Charlemagne's efforts to receive revelation are at once in step with the behavior of the previous years and surprisingly novel. Reaching again to a by-now familiar formula, Charles and his advisors claim to have sought and received revelation and in the second memorandum they set out the reforms that they claimed had been revealed to them.

The reforms mentioned in the second memorandum were elements of an empire-wide reform effort more ambitious than anything Charlemagne had previously attempted. Seeking to please God by acting on the revelation they had been given, Charles and his advisors set about an attempt to reform the empire and its inhabitants at their most fundamental level. First, Charlemagne circulated a letter to his bishops asking "how you and your suffragans teach and instruct the sacrament of baptism" to the priests and the laity "entrusted to you."¹³² In response, bishops throughout Charlemagne's realm composed baptismal expositions clarifying Charlemagne's interest in recalling every member of his realm to the oaths made through baptism.¹³³ The second product of the revelation claimed in the second memorandum were the 813 Reform Councils that gathered in five locations throughout the empire (Mainz, Rheims, Tours, Chalons, and Arles), to discuss and implement the prepared reforms.¹³⁴ At an assembly in Aachen in September of 813, all of the results of the

¹³² Charlemagne, Text 14, Keefe, (ed.), *Water*, 261-263; nosse itaque per tua scripta aut per te ipsum volumus qualiter tu et suffraganei tui docetis et instruatis sacerdotes dei et plebem vobis commissam de baptismi sacramento.

¹³³ The baptismal expositions are collected in Keefe (ed.), *Water*.

¹³⁴ ARF, a. 813, p. 138; Concilia quoque iussu eius super statu ecclesiarum corrigendo per totam Falliam ab episcopis celebrata sunt, quorum unum Mogontiaci, alterum Remis, tertium Turonis, quartum Cabillione, quintum Arleti congregatum est. cf. *Chronicon moissiacense* a. 813, 310: Hoc anno sedit Karolus imperator apud Aquis palatium, et habuit ibi concilium magnum cum Francis, episcopis et abbatibus ac sacerdotibus; et decrevit quatuor synodos fieri, id est ad Maguntiam civitatem unam, alteram in Remis, tertiam Turonis, quartam Arelato civitate; mandavitque ut quidquid in unamquamque synodum definissent, ad placitum constituti imperatori renunciassent: quod ita factum est. Et in ipso anno mense Septembri iam dictus imperator Karolus fecit

councils were brought before Charlemagne and approved by him. As the culmination of the reform efforts throughout his reign, Charlemagne's Reform Councils showcased the emperor's powerful commitment to fulfilling the responsibility so often discussed and enjoined upon him by his advisors, and that he so often accepted. Having sought revelation and then used it to justify his *correctio*, Charlemagne's use of the prophetic had finally drawn together the concurrent lines of thought about the royal need to please God and the problem of knowing God's will.

Conclusion

These final years were when Charles decided to elevate Louis as his sole heir and teach him whatever he felt he should know. It cannot be overlooked that the interaction of father and son occurred at this late stage in the development of Charles' use of the prophetic. As we shall see, Louis would use the prophetic far more extensively than Charles ever did, and the foundation for Louis' understanding of his responsibility to please God, his attempts to interpret the signs of God's will, and his insistence on seeking and obtaining divine inspiration and revelation all have roots in Charlemagne's reign.

Louis received the imperial crown from an emperor who confidently interpreted the signs of God's anger and orchestrated the response; an emperor who gathered his spiritual elites to fast, pray, and seek revelation to know how to avert God's anger. Charlemagne's use of the prophetic developed throughout his reign and showed the influence of those scholars

conventum magnum populi apud Aquis palatium. De omni regno et imperio suo convenerunt episcopi, abbates, comites, presbyteri, diacones, et senatus Francorum ad imperatorem in Aquis; et ibidem constituerunt capitula [numero] quadraginta sex de causis quae necessariae erant ecclesia Dei et populo christiano.

and advisors with whom he surrounded himself, and the same would be true of Louis as well. In contrast to his son's public anxiety, however, Charlemagne managed towards the end of his reign to dominate the dialogue of signs and portents and control their meaning, thereby using even potentially negative events to reinforce the claims of divine support he had made throughout his reign. As Einhard recalled in his biography, Charlemagne publicly "either thought little of all of the previous portents or *feigned to*, in such a way as if none of them had anything to do with him."¹³⁵ Charlemagne took the initiative, using the prophetic to turn crises and disasters into opportunities to demonstrate his relationship with the divine and to assure divine support. In contrast, Louis would prove unable to monopolize the prophetic or to use it to strengthen his own rule. Instead of focusing the interpretation and response on the common utility of the empire, as Charles' consistently did, Louis demonstrated a stronger emphasis on his personal responsibility as ruler, echoing Charlemagne's advisors, to disastrous effect.

¹³⁵ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.32, 36-37: Adpropinquantis finis conplura fuere prodigia, ut non solum alii, sed etiam ipse hoc minitari sentiret... Sed superioria omnia sic aut dissimulavit aut sprexit, acsi nihil horum ad res suas quolibet modo pertineret.

Chapter 3

Introduction

Although Louis the Pious has often been deemed the little son of the great emperor, “des großen Kaisers kleiner Sohn,” when it came to his use of the prophetic Louis overshadowed his father in every respect.¹ In 817, dividing his empire amongst his sons, Louis the Pious stressed repeatedly that the decisions he had made had been “revealed by divine dispensation.”² More than a decade later, when surrounded by military and political crises, Louis again sought to reassure his followers by reminding them that he and his advisers had fasted, prayed, and taken all the necessary steps so “that He might reveal to us in what ways we have done Him the greatest offense, and that He might consider granting us a time of peace for our necessary correction.”³ These instances are but two examples among many, and I invoke them at the outset of this chapter to signal a key difference in the function of the prophetic under Louis than under his father. While both showed a belief in their responsibility to God as rulers, Louis’ sense of responsibility reinforced his desire for divine

¹ Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 2, 180. This quotation has been used and discussed by both Staubach and Boshof when they addressed the varied, while largely negative, depictions of Louis’ reign. Cf. Staubach, “Kleiner Sohn,” 701-722; Boshof, *Ludwig*, 255-270.

² *Ordinatio imperii*, 270-271: Idcirco necessarium duximus, ut ieiuniis et orationibus et elemosinarum largitionibus apud illum obtineremus quod nostra infirmitas non praesumebat. Quibus rite per triduum celebratis, nutu omnipotentis Dei, ut credimus, actum est, ut et nostra et totius populi nostri in dilecti primogeniti nostri Hlutharii electione vota concurrerent. Itaque taliter divina dispensatione manifestatum placuit et nobis et omni populo nostro, more solemni imperiali diademate coronatum nobis et consortem et successorem imperii, si Dominus ita voluerit, communi voto constitui. [*emphasis added*].

³ *Epistola generalis*, 4: Recordari vos credimus, qualiter hoc anno consilio sacerdotum et aliorum fidelium nostrorum generale ieiunium per totum regnum nostrum celebrare iussimus Deumque tota devotione deprecari, ut nobis propitiari et, in quibus illum maxime offensum haberemus, nobis manifestare et ut ad correctionem nostram necessariam tranquillum tempus nobis tribuere dignaretur.

guidance: he appears to have felt reliant on such guidance and inspiration to fulfil his responsibility, whereas his Charlemagne used claims of such guidance in a more self-assuring and circumspect manner.

In contrast to Charlemagne's openness to the possibility of divine communication and direction, Louis appears to have consistently sought and claimed such guidance and inspiration as he anxiously sought to fulfill his responsibilities as emperor. Building on the foundation of experimentation and exploration with the prophetic in Charlemagne's reign, Louis' anxieties and the resulting public dependence upon the prophetic gave a political currency to anyone willing to use the prophetic, a license unimaginable in his father's reign. This increasingly widespread use of the prophetic came in two forms: first, claims of sudden, divine inspiration or revelation, and, second, claims to possess the ability to read the signs and portents of the world in a rational fashion. Common to both was the claim to insight into God's will to comment on, or intervene directly in, Frankish politics.

In this chapter I will focus on how the growth and expansion of the vatic and the rational responses to the culture of anxiety that permeated Louis' reign, and their place in the political discourse of the 820s. After exploring the developing language of divine inspiration Louis and those around him employed in the earliest councils and capitularies from Louis' reign, I will discuss the *Ordinatio imperii*, the division of his empire that Louis declared as revealed to him by God. I will then demonstrate the ways that Louis' understanding of his responsibilities as emperor—and its reliance on his claims of divine inspiration—encouraged others throughout the empire to use the prophetic to influence Louis or the broader politics of

the realm through claiming visions or reading signs and portents. Finally, I will demonstrate how both of these approaches to the prophetic were used by Louis' advisors and the emperor himself as they confronted the chaos of 827-829. The next chapter then will explore how, despite Louis' apparent failure to quell the rising dissatisfaction within his empire, his insistence upon the use of the prophetic successfully altered Frankish political discourse, for the same approaches to knowing the mind of God were used by all sides in the rebellions and unrest that consumed the Frankish empire from 829 to 840.

I. 817, 822, and the Political Language of Inspiration

Early Language of Inspiration

Throughout the earliest documents produced in Louis' reign, Louis' anxiety about the rightness of his actions and his drive to interpret God's will correctly appear prominently. Glimpses of the importance Louis publicly placed on recognizing and acting on the will of God appear in the records of an 816 council in Aachen. In the preface of the conciliar statement, Louis is described as having "convened a general and holy assembly in the palace in Aachen, and he initiated his eager desire for the worship of God *following the divine inspiration given to him* on many agreeable and necessary issues concerning the improvement of the church."⁴ The Aachen council then reiterated Louis' inspiration in other words:

⁴ *Concilium Aquisgranense, Praefatio*, 312: In nomine Dei summi incipit prologus. Cum in nomine sanctae et individuae trinitatis christianissimus ac gloriosissimus Hludowicus superno munere victor augustus anno incarnationis domini nostri Iesu Christi DCCCXVI., indictione X., anno siquidem imperii sui tertio, Aquisgrani

so that the council might act according to God's command, [Louis] exhorted [the council] as a whole beforehand to beg the Lord humbly, so that, moved by the prayers of His servants, [God's] admonition will be deigned to be instituted according to God's will, and that God's grace will precede and follow it.⁵

The same sentiment would be echoed again in another document produced by the council known as the *Institutio Sanctimonialium Aquisgranensis*. In the *Institutio*, Louis' inspired leadership was again affirmed as follows:

In the year of Our Lord's incarnation, 816, in the tenth Indiction, accordingly in the third year of the most glorious emperor Louis at the palace in Aachen, we were admonished by the same prince [Louis], *inspired by divine grace*, and this holy councils assembled this decree on account of the canonical care for the salvation of the souls of the religious from the works of the holy fathers, as if gathering certain flowers from spring meadows.⁶

These texts offer little explanation of precisely how Louis' divine inspiration influenced the council's actions, but their attribution of divine inspiration to Louis is prominently placed and is nevertheless important. Even if the authors of these texts merely sought to please Louis in the prefaces, they believed that the emperor would be flattered to be described as having been guided by God in his actions. Given the remaining evidence that we will discuss shortly,

palatio generalem sanctumque convocasset conventum et coepisset secundum ardentissimam erga divinum cultum sibi caelitus inspiratam voluntatem multa congrua et necessaria de emendatione sanctae Dei ecclesiae

⁵ *Concilium Aquisgranense, Praefatio*, 312: Sed ut id nutu divino fieret, Dominum in commune humiliter exorandum praemonuit, ut servorum suorum exorabilibus pulsatus praecibus eius admonitionem secundum suam voluntatem fieri suaque gratia eam praecedere et subsequi dignaretur.

⁶ *Institutio Sanctimonialium Aquisgranensis*, 422: Hanc constitutionem sacer conventus anno incarnationis Domini DCCCXVI, indictione X, anno siquidem gloriosissimi Hludowici imperatoris tertio, in Aquisgrani palatio eodem monente principe ob animarum sanctimonialium canonice degentium salutem divina inspirante gratia ex sanctorum patrum auctoritatibus velut ex pratis vernantibus quosdam flosculos collegit. [*emphasis added*]. Cf. *Episcoporum ad imperatorem de rebus ecclesiasticis relatio*, MGH Cap I, no. 179, p. 368. cf. Hill, "Carolingian Perspectives," 234.

however, it is likely that these early mentions suggest a profound desire for divine inspiration that others recognized and invoked in their depictions of the emperor.

The next witness to Louis' public image as one guided by God comes in the form of the *Proemium generale*, a preface written for Louis' reform capitularies from the Aachen councils of 818 and 819.⁷ The author of the *Proemium* presented the text as the culmination of generations of reforms, arguing that all of these reforms derived from God's inspiration. Even in the titles used to describe Louis, the author of the *Proemium* declared that Louis was "ordained august Emperor by divine *providentia*."⁸ Shortly thereafter, Louis' own voice elaborated on his divine ordination by proclaiming

Henceforth, let it be known to all of our faithful subjects in the Holy *Ecclesia* of God and to our divinely bestowed successors: that divine kindness carried us, with no evident merits, unto the apex of this empire, after our father was freed from mortal cares. And [let it be known] how and in what way we have cultivated the desire of the *cultus divinus* unto its proper end supported by God, which [*cultus*] we had understood from childhood, *with our mind inspired by Christ*.⁹

After claiming to be "inspired by Christ," still in Louis' voice, the author affirmed that Louis had been "inspired by Christ from [his] childhood," and that Louis had instituted ecclesiastical

⁷ Semmler, "*Renovatio*," 133-135.

⁸ *Hludowici proemium generale*, MGH Cap I, no. 137, p. 273: In nomine domini Dei et salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi Hludowicus, divina ordinante providentia imperator augustus.

⁹ *Hludowici proemium generale*, 274: Proinde notum sit omnibus fidelibus nostris sanctae Dei ecclesie nostrisque Deo dispensante successoribus, quia, cum nos nullis existentibus meritis divina pietas, genitore nostro rebus humanis exempte, ad huius imperii culmen provexisset, et quomodo aut qualiter desiderium divini cultus, quod ab ineunte aetate Christo inspirante mente conceperamus, ad effectum Domino suffragante perduceremus. [*my emphasis*]. For a discussion of the nuanced meaning of *cultus divinus* for Carolingian rulers, see Staubach, "*Cultus divinus*," 553-554.

and political reforms “as much as God allowed to be reformed by our zeal.”¹⁰ God’s aid, guidance, and continual support appear repeatedly throughout the remainder of the *Proemium* in Louis’ voice, and were echoed in a document presented to Louis by the bishops from the council, wherein the bishops acknowledged Louis’ claims of divine inspiration, explaining that “that which [Louis] decreed, inspired by God, and ordered to be seen by all.”¹¹ Similarly, in response to Louis’ claims of divine inspiration, at the 822 Synod of Attigny the attendant bishops utilized the same rhetoric when they claimed to have “been admonished by the *inspiration of the Almighty God* and by [Louis’] most pious zeal, challenged even now by [Louis’] most salvific example.”¹²

817 and the *Ordinatio imperii*

To understand the early phase of this development of Louis’ rhetoric, we must look closer at the *Ordinatio imperii*. Although various claims of divine inspiration and guidance in Louis’ official voice and eventually that of other elites as well permeated the political language of the period from 814 to 825, the key piece of evidence for Louis’ attitude and its effect on Carolingian politics is the 817 promulgation of the *Ordinatio imperii*. An imperial proclamation, the *Ordinatio imperii* also described how at a summer council Louis divided the

¹⁰ *Hludowici proemium generale*, 274: Quod ab ineunte aetate Christo inspirante mente conceperamus... sed etiam imitare pro viribus nobis Deo concessis optaremus, scilicet ut, si quid in ecclesiasticis negotiis sive in statu reipublice emendatione dignum perspexissemus, quantum Dominus posse dabat nostro studio emendarentur.

¹¹ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*, c. 5, p. 367: Ut erga ecclesias piissima misericordia vestra id quod iam dudum Deo inspirante statuit observari ab omnibus iubeat; quoniam plerique post sacram iussionem vestram non solum census quos exigere de ecclesia solebant acceperunt, insuper etiam et graviora addiderunt. [*emphasis added*].

¹² *Capitula ab episcopis attiniaci data*, 357: Dei igitur omnipotentis inspiratione vestroque piissimo studio admoniti, vestroque etiam saluberrimo exemplo provocati, confitemur, nos in pluribus locis quam modo aut ratio aut possibilitas enumerare permittat tam in vita quamque doctrina et ministerio negligentes extitisse.

empire among his sons and made his eldest son, Lothar, his co-emperor.¹³ According to Agobard of Lyons, a witness to the 817 meeting in Aachen, Louis decided to divide his empire “because of the fragility of life, in which death is uncertain.”¹⁴ Agobard’s comment likely refers to Louis’ interpretation of an accident he suffered during Lent in 817, a potentially near-death experience that led Louis to call a council only three months afterwards. As he was leaving Church on the Thursday before Easter, a wooden arcade collapsed on the emperor and his party as they walked underneath, nearly killing them with falling roofbeams.¹⁵ The court historians recorded in the *Royal Frankish Annals* that Louis’ experience was preceded by a comet heralding the death of Pope Stephen IV, a juxtaposition that seemed to offer a parallel and suggested how Louis interpreted the event that then lead to his decision to gather a council and declare the plans for his succession so early in his reign.¹⁶

In keeping with the claims of inspiration and revelation Louis had been making, and his elites had recognized and praised, the *Ordinatio imperii* described how

according to our custom, we gathered in a sacred and general assembly of our people at the palace in Aachen in July to discuss the ecclesiastical affairs and

¹³ McKeon, “Un année désastreuse,” 5-12.

¹⁴ Agobard, *de diuisione imperii*, c.4, 248: et dixistis vos velle propter fragilitatem vite, cui incerta est mors. Cf. Boshof, *Ludwig*, 130 n. 228; McKeon, “Un année désastreuse,” 8; Nelson, “Kingdoms,” 112. Cf. *ARF* a.817, 146: Feria quinta, qua cena Domini celebratur, cum imperator ab ecclesia peracto sacro officio remearet, lignea porticus, per quam incedebat, cum et fragili materia esset aedificata et tunc iam marcida et putrefacta, quae contignationem et tabulatum sustinebant, transtra pondus aliquod ferre non possent, incedentem desuper imperatorem subita ruina cum viginti et eo amplius hominibus, qui una ibant, ad terram usque deposuit.

¹⁵ Nelson, “Kingdoms,” 112.

¹⁶ *ARF* a.817, 145-146: Luna Non. Febr. hora noctis secunda defecit, et cometes in signo Agitatoris apparuit. Interea Stephenus papa tertio, postquam Romam venerat, mense, sed nondum exacto, circiter VIII. Kal Febr. Diem obiit... Feria quinta, qua cena Domini celebratur, cum imperator ab ecclesia peracto sacro officio remearet, lignea porticus, per quam incedebat, cum et fragili materia esset aedificata et tunc iam marcida et putrefacta, quae contignationem et tabulatum sustinebant, transtra pondus aliquod ferre non possent, incedentem desuper imperatorem subita ruina cum viginti et eo amplius hominibus, qui una ibant, ad terram usque deposuit.

necessities for our entire empire. Urged by *sudden divine inspiration*, we were eager that our faithful followers might advise us in these things and that we might discuss the state of the entire realm and the affairs of our sons, according to the custom of our fathers, so long as peace and safety remained surrounding us granted by God. Therefore, in any event this particular *warning* came to be, faithfully and zealously, both to us and to these individuals who understand such things. By no means did it seem reasonable that the unity of our divinely preserved empire be torn apart through mortal division on account of love or favor to our sons, so that by such an action a *scandalum* should perhaps arise in the sacred *Ecclesia*, and in case we might incur His offense, on Whose power the bonds of all kingdoms depend.¹⁷

The proclamation first declared in Louis' voice that "sudden divine inspiration"—his interpretation of the accident—had led Louis to seek advice, and then elaborated that this "warning" appeared to him and "to these individuals who understand what can be clearly seen," the latter phrase drawing upon language from the 816 council in Aachen.¹⁸ The inspiration and warnings came, the document continued to explain, in order to avoid offending God, or as it is termed in the *Ordinatio imperii*, to avoid a *scandalum* throughout the empire.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ordinatio imperii*, 270: mense Iulio, Aquisgrani palatio nostro more solito sacrum conventum et generalitatem populi nostri propter ecclesiasticas vel totius imperii nostri utilitates pertractandas congregassemus et in his studeremus, subito divina inspiratione actum est, ut nos fideles nostri ammonerent, quatenus manente nostra incolomitate et pace undique a Deo concessa de statu totius regni et de filiorum nostrorum causa more parentum nostrorum tractaremus. Sed quamvis haec admonitio devote ac fideliter fieret, nequaquam nobis nec his qui sanum sapiunt visum fuit, ut amore filiorum aut gratia unitas imperii a Deo nobis conservati divisione humana scinderetur, ne forte hac occasione scandalum in sancta ecclesia oriretur et offensam illius in cuius potestate omnium iura regnorum consistunt incurreremus.

¹⁸ *Concilium Aquisgranense a. 816, Praefatio*, 312: Cum igitur huius institutionis formam coram memorato glorioso principe prolatam sacer conventus laudibus extulisset et ecclesiastica auctoritate fulcitam laudeque dignam ac sancte aeclesie utilimam atque proficuum consona voce praedicaret nihilque in ea reprehensionis ab his, qui sanum sapiunt, repperiri posse profiteretur, ab eodem victoriosissimo principe et ab omnibus, qui aderant, 'Deo gratias' adclamatum est.

¹⁹ De Jong argues that *scandalum* referred to a grievous sin that disturbed the divine and social order, and as such necessitated public penance. De Jong, "Ecclesia," 130-131.

Next, the proclamation outlined everything Louis, his advisors, and the assembled elites had done in order to receive God's will, explaining that

we considered it necessary that we might obtain, by fasts, prayers, and the generousities of alms before Him, that which our weakness could not achieve. For three days we performed these services solemnly, *having been commanded, we believe, by the Almighty God*, and as a result our wish and that of our entire people agreed on the selection of our beloved first-born son Lothar. So, *revealed by divine dispensation*, it was decided by us and by our entire people, therefore, that by sacred custom he be crowned with the imperial crown and become by common decision a companion and successor to us in the empire, if the Lord should will it thus.²⁰

Publicly demonstrating their thorough efforts to seek God's guidance through three days of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, Louis and his advisors claimed that the decision to divide the empire, raise Lothar to co-emperor, and lay out the succession had been revealed by God. The three-day formula of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving recalled a very similar procedure used by Charlemagne and his advisers to seek divine aid on behalf of the empire.²¹ In order to bolster the veracity of Louis' revelatory claim, the emperor proclaimed in the *Ordinatio* that the decisions, "revealed by divine dispensation," were additionally "pleasing to us and to our entire people," verifying the truth of the revelation through its acceptance by the Frankish nobility. A similar justification would be employed by the bishops at Attigny, when they justified their imitation of and obedience to Louis by explaining how the emperor had been

²⁰ *Ordinatio imperii*, 270-271: Idcirco necessarium duximus, ut ieiuniis et orationibus et elemosinarum largitionibus apud illum obtineremus quod nostra infirmitas non praesumebat. Quibus rite per triduum celebratis, nutu omnipotentis Dei, ut credimus, actum est, ut et nostra et totius populi nostri in dilecti primogeniti nostri Hlutharii electione vota concurrerent. Itaque taliter divina dispensatione manifestatum placuit et nobis et omni populo nostro, more solemniori imperiali diademate coronatum nobis et consortem et successorem imperii, si Dominus ita voluerit, communi voto constitui. [*emphasis added*].

²¹ Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 245-246.

“that which he decreed, inspired by God, and ordered to be seen by all.”²² Ultimately, the *Ordinatio* concluded by reminding its audience again that Lothar’s elevation came “by divine command,” and that in the entire process they had sought “to fulfill not a human will, but the will of God.”²³

The novelty of Louis’ claims in, and his instrumentalization of general validation of, an imperial proclamation becomes even more apparent when Louis’ 817 *Ordinatio imperii* is analyzed alongside Charlemagne’s comparable 806 *Divisio regnorum*. While the authors of both texts engage the divine in various ways, the authors of the *Ordinatio* based its decisions squarely on claims of divine revelation, while the *Divisio regnorum* only acknowledged God’s blessings towards Charlemagne and his sons, and asked for God’s blessing on the empire following Charlemagne’s death.²⁴ The revelatory claims at the heart of the *Ordinatio* and the repeated justifications of those claims diverge strikingly from the independent if supplicatory tone of the *Divisio*, a text reliant on no other authority save Charlemagne’s own.

The Synod of Attigny and the Order of Inspiration

²² *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*, c. 5, 367: Ut erga ecclesias piissima misericordia vestra id quod iam dudum *Deo inspirante* statuit observari ab omnibus iubeat; quoniam plerique post sacram iussionem vestram non solum census quos exigere de ecclesia solebant acceperunt, insuper etiam et graviora addiderunt. [*emphasis added*].

²³ *Ordinatio imperii*, 273: si is filius noster qui nobis divino nutu successerit... quatenus in eo constituendo non humana sed Dei quaeratur voluntas adimplenda.

²⁴ *Divisio regnorum* a. 806, 126-127: Sicut omnibus vobis notum esse et neminem vestrum latere credimus, quomodo nos divina clementia, cuius nutu ad occasum tendentia secula per successiones generationum reparantur, tres nobis dando filios magno miserationis ac benedictionis suae ditavit munere... quod eosdem per Dei gratiam filios nostros regni a Deo nobis concessi donec in corpore sumus consortes habere... Et post nostrum ex hac mortalitate discessum a Deo conservati et servandi imperii vel regni nostri heredes relinquere, si ita divina maiestas adnuerit, optamus.

Shortly after Attigny, one attendee, Agobard, Archbishop of Lyons, set down a contemporary depiction of the synod.

In those days, when our holy and devout Lord Emperor convened the assembly at Attigny, foreseeing vigorously every needful thing for the people committed to him, and proceeded to the seeking of *most necessary and heavenly counsel*. [Louis] desired, of course, to discover how he could most accurately direct the deepening of teaching, and the removal of negligence from the priesthood and all his public officers. What Louis admirably sought, *with the inspiring grace of God*, he discovered with good judgement and proclaimed faithfully by his own voice [*emphasis added*].²⁵

According to Agobard, the synod was an outgrowth of Louis' search for "heavenly counsel," and Louis proclaimed whatever God had inspired him to seek and find. For most contemporaries and scholars thereafter, Attigny's overwhelming significance resided in Louis' public penance for the death of his nephew Barnard of Italy, as well as for his mistreatment of other family members.²⁶ Louis' public penance suggests the lengths to which Louis was willing to go in order to correct himself when he believed he had failed to do what God wanted, and in addition he set a powerful precedent. While no statement survives in Louis' voice on par with the *Ordinatio imperii* or the *Proemium* of the Aachen councils, Agobard's contemporary recollection of Louis' divine inspiration and search for further divine guidance suggests that

²⁵ Agobard, *De dispensatione ecclesiasticarum rerum*, c. 1, 121: In illis diebus, quando sacer et religiosus dominus noster imperator euocato conuentu Attiniaco agebat, strenue prouidens de omnibus utilitatibus commissorum sibi populorum, peruenit ad sublimiorum inquisitionem pernecessarii consilii, cupiens scilicet inuenire, qualiter congruentissime profectum doctrine et abolitionem neglegentiarum sacerdotibus et cunctis honoratis suis commendare potuisset; quod utique laudabiliter inspirante Dei gratia quesuit, eleganter inuenit, fideliter ore suo annuntiauit.

²⁶ ARF, a.822, 158: Domnus imperator consilio cum episcopis et optimatibus suis habito fratribus suis, quos invitos tondere iussit, reconciliatus est et tam de hoc facto quam et de his, quae erga Bernhardum filium fratris sui Pippini necnon et his, quae circa Adalhardum abbatem et fratrem eius Walahum gesta sunt, publicam confessionem fecit et paenitentiam egit. Quod tamen in eo conuentu, quem eodem anno mense Augusto Attiniaci habuit, in praesentia totius populi sui peregit; in quo, quicquid similium rerum vel a se vel a patre suo factum invenire potuit, summa devotione emendare curavit.

Louis confirmed the correctness of his public penance in a similar prophetic way as he had in 817.

This moment in 817 signaled a change in Frankish political discourse; Louis was forcing the need to know and perform God's will to the forefront of Frankish politics, and the bishops present at the gathering eagerly accepted Louis' decisions. In place of an imperial decree that does not survive, we have a statement written in response to Louis by the bishops attending the synod, wherein they invoked divine inspiration in the first line of their public confession. The bishops explained how they confessed to their many failings "having been admonished by the inspiration of the almighty God and by [Louis'] most pious zeal, therefore, even now challenged by [Louis'] most salvific example."²⁷ Using the same language of divine inspiration they had ascribed to Louis in previous conciliar gatherings, language that Louis likely used at Attigny, the bishops crystallized how Louis' ideal empire should operate: led by leaders inspired by God and mutually corrected by each other.

Shortly after Attigny, Louis elaborated his political ideal of inspired leadership in a document known to modern scholars as an 'Admonition to all orders of the realm' (*Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines*). In this programmatic statement of how the empire should function, Louis' "responsibility for [God's] Holy Church and for this kingdom" came by "divine *providentia*," and had already resulted in "many subjects having been improved and

²⁷ *Capitula ab episcopis attiniaci data*, 357: Dei igitur omnipotentis inspiratione vestroque piissimo studio admoniti, vestroque etiam saluberrimo exemplo provocati, confitemur, nos in pluribus locis quam modo aut ratio aut possibilitas enumerare permittat tam in vita quamque doctrina et ministerio neglegentes extitisse.

corrected.²⁸ While the author of the *Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines* expressed Louis' responsibility as shared between the emperor and the bishops, the *Admonitio*, in Louis' voice, explained to the bishops that "I must be admonisher to you all, and all of you must be our supporters."²⁹ Taking the Synod of Attigny and the *Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines* together, it appears that Louis and his advisors meant to establish a system of reciprocal correction between Louis and his bishops, with Louis retaining the highest moral authority.³⁰ While such an idealized vision of the Frankish political system never came into being as such, these expressions of Louis' ideal inform the emperor's anxiety about pleasing God and the importance to him of discovering God's will, issues given a prominent place in Carolingian political discourse.

The Application of Elite Discourse?

Although much of the evidence for the political uses of the prophetic under Louis belongs to the highest levels of Frankish politics, some of the evidence that survives hints that

²⁸ *Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines*, 303: Omnibus vobis aut visu aut notum esse non dubitamus, quia genitor noster et progenitores, postquam a Deo ad hoc electi sunt, in hoc praecipue studuerunt, ut honor sanctae Dei ecclesiae et status regni decens maneret. *Nos etiam iuxta modum nostrum eorum sequentes exemplum saepe vestram devotionem de his admonere curavimus et Deo miserante multa iam emendata et correcta videmus, unde et Deo iustas laudes persolvere et vestrae bonae intentioni multimodas debemus gratias referre. Sed quoniam complacuit divinae providentiae nostram mediocritatem ad hoc constituere, ut sanctae suae ecclesiae et regni huius curam geremus, ad hoc certare et nos et filios ac socios nostros diebus vitae nostrae optamus, ut tria specialiter capitula et a nobis et a vobis, Deo opem ferente, in huius regni administratione specialiter conserventur: id est ut defensio et exaltatio vel honor sanctae Dei ecclesiae et servorum illius congruus maneat et pax et iustitio in omni generalitate populi nostri conservetur. In his quippe maxime studere et de his in omnibus placitis, quae vobiscum Deo auxiliante habituri sumus, vos admonere optamus, sicut debitores sumus.* The final phrase alludes to Romans 8:12.

²⁹ *Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines*, 303-304: quod ego omnium vestrum admonitor esse debeo, et omnes vos nostri adiutores esse debetis.

³⁰ *Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines*, 303-304: Sed quamquam summa huius ministerii in nostra persona consistere videatur, tamen et divina auctoritate et humana ordinatione ita per partes divisum esse cognoscitur, ut unusquisque vestrum in suo loco et ordine partem nostri ministerii habere cognoscatur.

the prophetic reached beyond the court and the great councils of the empire. Certain texts written under Charlemagne whose authors experimented with the prophetic continued to have relevance under Louis. It is, for example, possible to recover how imperial *missi* sought to utilize the same authority claims as they enforced Louis' rule by combining the legalistic and scripturally prophetic *Petau Annals* that resonated with Louis' understanding of his rule and capitulary texts they used in their work. Although the *Petau Annals* likely found the form in which they have been transmitted in the final years of Charlemagne's reign, the three manuscript exemplars suggest that the *Annals* were deployed (or at least available) in a legal context in the early 820s.³¹ As testaments to an effort to communicate the same authority that so fascinated Louis in the practice of ruling, the Paris and Vatican manuscripts have been identified as books created to support the work of imperial *missi*, books intended, in Jennifer Davis' words, "to convey royal ideas in the localities."³²

Recalling our discussion of the *Petau Annals* from the previous chapter, we must remember the two levels on which the text would have spoken to the increasing value of the prophetic under Louis. The anonymous annalist spoke to the prophetic on the first level when he or she described Charlemagne's victorious year of fighting against the Saxons in 777 by claiming that Charles "deservedly rejoiced with John the Baptist, as he baptized, preaching baptism for the remission of all sins."³³ The annalist reached again for such language for the

³¹ The legal material contained within the same codicological units as the annals in the Paris and Vatican manuscripts dates to no later than the 820s. These manuscripts include Vatican, BAV reg. lat. 520, Paris BN lat. 4995, and Genf, lat. 50, the latter of which has been dated to 825, Bischoff, *Katalog*, 284, n° 1351.

³² Davis, "Inventing," 38; citing McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 263-266.

³³ AP 777: Unde in postmodum Karolus rex merito gaudet cum Iohanne baptista, qui et baptizavit praedicans baptismum in remissionem omnium peccatorum.

788 entry, describing how God gave the kingdom of Bavaria into Charlemagne's hands by fighting "for the Lord King Charles, just like He did for Moses and the Children of Israel, when He drowned Pharaoh in the Red Sea."³⁴ The annalist engaged the second level, already hinted at by the first, as he or she essentially stamped each of Charlemagne's conquests with divine approval by associating Charlemagne's acquisition (using *adquirere*) with divine approval (e.g. *cum Dei auxilio*). For example, the annalist noted how in 780, Charlemagne had conquered a large group of Saxons, and after many were baptized the king "acquired each one with the help of God;" in 785 Charlemagne "acquired the Saxons with the help of God;" in 786 Charlemagne "acquired the land of Benevento through the help of God."³⁵ In the entries for 788 and 791 the annalist continued the same argument with slight alteration, describing how God "without battle" delivered the "kingdom of Bavaria into the hands of Charles the Great King," and how Charles returned from his campaign against the Avars "with great booty, protected by God."³⁶ The *Petau Annals* and their legalistic use of the prophetic to affirm territorial acquisitions resonated well with the increasing use of the prophetic under Louis.

³⁴ AP 788: Eodem quippe anno fuit placitum Angulisamo, et idem anno pugnavit omnipotens Deus pro domno rege Karolo, sicut fecit pro Moyse et filios Israel, quando demersus fuit Farao rubro mari; sic Deus potens praeliator sine bello et absque ulla altercatione tradidit regnum Bawarium in manu Karoli magni regis; et Taxilo dux tonsus est, reclususque Gemitico monasterio.

³⁵ AP 780, 16: Eodem anno iterum pulcherrimus rex Karolus cum Francorum exercitu venit in Saxoniam usque fluvium Alvea, adquisivit universam terram illam sub forti brachio. Ipso quoque anno Saxones derelinquentes idola, Deum verum adoraverunt, et eius crediderunt opera, eodem quoque tempore aedificaveruntque ecclesias et venerunt ad domnum regem multa milia gentium Winethorum hominum; ipse autem adquisivit una cum Dei auxilio; AP 785, 17: Tunc domnus rex Karolus commoto exercitu de ipsis tentoriis, venitque Dersia, et igne combussit ea loca, venit ultra flumen Visera, et eodem anno destruxit Saxonorum cratibus sive eorum firmitatibus: et tunc adquisivit Saxones cum Dei auxilio; AP 786, 17: et venit Romam; deinde adquisivit terram Beneventanam per Dei auxilium.

³⁶ AP 788, 17: sic Deus praeliator sine bello et absque ulla altercatione tradidit regnum Bawarium in manu Karoli magni regis; AP 791, 17: cum praeda magna, Deo protegente, victor revertit in Franciam.

While we remain somewhat uncertain about how such compilations were used on a day-to-day level to communicate “royal ideas in the localities,” perhaps the compilers of the Paris and Vatican manuscripts sought to justify those royal ideas as well, extending the justification increasingly used by Louis himself. This historiographic experiment, perhaps one of many, sought to capitalize on the political currency the prophetic had gained under Louis in extending the authority of Louis through his *missi*. While no other Frankish annals accompany capitulary material in their manuscripts, it is no accident that the only annals to do so also contain the most explicit and legalistic use of the prophetic. These codicological units within the Vatican and Paris manuscripts containing this historiographic experiment suggest one way the high-level discourse favored by Louis could filter through those serving him, possibly explaining the rapid increase and lasting impact of the prophetic during the first half of Louis’ reign as well as how such interest could extend far beyond the court itself.

II. Sources of Divine Revelation: Visions and Portents

Direct and Subtle Revelation

The political claims of revelation proclaimed and justified in the *Ordinatio imperii* form part of a broader pattern of conciliar statements asserting and acknowledging Louis’ desire for divine direction, and his receipt of it, as well as his general anxiety about doing the right thing. Whether such claims were presented in Louis’ own voice, or affirmed by his bishops or nobles, Louis’ claims of divine inspiration appear throughout the documentary

evidence of his major undertakings. These imperial proclamations and conciliar statements strongly suggest how central Louis' claims of divine inspiration were to his understanding of his own rule and how his understanding was accepted and reified by leading figures throughout the empire. Moreover, these documents attest to the fact that from the earliest years of Louis' reign, he worked to be seen by his subjects as guided and inspired by God. Unsurprisingly, Louis' anxious self-promotion as inspired by God and his concern about doing what God wanted provoked a variety of responses throughout his reign. With a high premium placed by Louis' behavior on the prophetic, elites within the Carolingian empire began to discuss how to recognize and interpret the mind of God, and to experiment with the political application of such knowledge.

The discourse of 'knowing the mind of God' that arose in response to Louis' behavior proceeded along two general lines, with the first focused on sudden, direct revelation and the second focused on a politically safer, rationally construed reading of signs and portents. While claims of direct revelation and inspiration would prove influential in Frankish politics, the discussion of signs and portents as means of interpreting God's mind was more common because it could be much subtler. Both forms of the prophetic, encouraged by Louis' own public desire for divine guidance, came to play powerful roles in Carolingian political discourse for the remainder of the ninth century.

Direct Revelation and Sudden Inspiration

Recognizing Louis' interests in revelation and his desire for inspired correction of himself and his subjects, many figures wrote themselves into the highest levels of political discourse through vision literature aimed at the emperor, his family, and those closest to him. One such text, known as the '*Vision of a Certain Poor Woman*' (*Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*), offers no indication of its author, although Heito, the Abbot of Reichenau and Bishop of Basil until 823, has been suggested.³⁷ The unknown author notwithstanding, the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman* describes a vision given to the titular poor woman as she was guided through the afterlife, shown the current fates of several recently deceased Frankish notables (including Charlemagne, Louis' wife Irmengard, and Count Bego of Paris). Most important, the guide of the visionary revealed the punishment awaiting Louis for the murder of his nephew Bernard, which the visionary declares a murder.³⁸ Notably, these accusations correspond with those misdeeds for which Louis performed his public penance at Attigny.

Offering wary criticism of Louis and his family, the anonymous author reported that the poor woman described a "man in monastic habit" who showed her where the saints rested and the sinners were punished.³⁹ During her tour of the afterlife, the poor woman claimed to witness the punishment of a "prince of Italy" (*princeps Italiae*), i.e. Charlemagne, punished alongside other recently deceased notables, and when she asked whether the former emperor would be freed from his punishment, her guide responded by explaining, "if the Emperor

³⁷ Dutton, *Politics*, 65, 70-72, 74; Houben, 38-39.

³⁸ The *Visio* is edited in H. Houben, "Visio," 41-42.

³⁹ *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*, 41: Ducebat autem illam, ut ipsa referebat, quidam homo in monachio habitu constitutus, ubi requiem sanctorum et penam iniquorum cernebat.

Louis, his son,” offers a series of services for Charlemagne, “he will have been released.”⁴⁰ After describing the punishment of Count Bego, Louis’ son-in-law and friend,⁴¹ the visionary was shown the fate of Empress Irmengard, “who had three rough rocks like millstones upon her; one upon her head, another upon her chest, a third on her back, which pulled her steadily into an abyss.”⁴² Unlike Charlemagne, for whom the visionary still held out hope of release, no mention of relief was mentioned for the erstwhile empress. Finally, the poor woman was shown a wall on which she read the names of Louis and Bernhard. While Bernhard’s name shone in bright letters, Louis’ name was barely legible, leading her guide to explain that

‘before he had carried out the murder of Bernhard, there was no name there brighter [than Louis’]. The killing of Bernhard was the obliteration [of Louis’ name]. Go and diligently beware, lest you keep the king in ignorance of these things.’ But the woman, not brave, did not communicate the message.⁴³

Assuming Louis’ ability to correct himself and perform sufficient satisfaction for himself and his father, the woman was then charged with delivering a message to Louis. After depicting the post-mortem punishments of his father, his son-in-law, and his wife, the vision offered Louis a fairly bleak picture of his own status in God’s eyes. The author of the text spoke to the

⁴⁰ *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*, 41: “bi etiam videbat quendam principem Italię in tormentis, multosque alios notos quosdam in poena, quosdam in gloria. Interrogavit illa eundem ductorem illius si ille ad ęternam ultra vitam redire debuisset. At ille: Utique debet. Nam si Hlodovuicus, inquit, imperator, natus eius, septem agapes pro illo pleniter dispensat, resolutus est.

⁴¹ On Bego’s relationship with Louis, see Agobard, *Epistola*, MGH Ep. 3, no. 10, 261, cited by Semmler, “*Renovatio*,” 142-143. Further comments on their relationship can be found in Dutton, *Politics*, 71; Kasten, *Adalhard*, 86-88; Levison, “Politik,” 238; de Jong, *Penitential*, 203.

⁴² *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*, 41: Irmengartam namque reginam aequae in tormentis, quae super se habebat cautes tres quasi molares, unum super caput, alterum super pectus, tertium super dorsum, qui semper eam in profundum mergebant.

⁴³ *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*, 42: Antequam, ait, in Bernhartum homicidium perpetrasset, nullius ibi nomen clarius erat. Illius interfectio istius oblitteratio fuit. Vade et cave diligenter, ne horum quid regem celaveris. Illa vero non ausa conticuit.

insecurities already evident in Louis' early reign, and since the text likely predated 822 and the Synod of Attigny, the carefully crafted vision text may have succeeded not only in exploiting Louis' penchant for revelation, but in pushing him to act.

After the visionary failed to deliver the message to Louis having been asked three times, the messenger asked:

'Why have you not acted to obey the word of God?' She responded, 'Lord, I am a worthless person, and I do not dare bring forward such things in public.' As a result of this, the interlocutor said, 'you will not enjoy your eyesight until you set forth these things before the king.' Immediately, the light of her pupils were covered. After many days she went into the presence of the king, she related everything, and she received eyesight.⁴⁴

In this section the author of the text underscored the prophetic nature of both visionary and her message. First, the vision and the command to report it to the emperor are described as the "word of God," which the woman was expected to obey.⁴⁵ Second, in her response to her guide, the visionary echoes the biblical models of Moses (Exodus 3:11; 4:10; 6:12; 6:30) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:6), the first of whom complained that he was neither eloquent, nor of high enough standing to address the Egyptian Pharaoh, and the latter, who complained that he was too young to speak well.⁴⁶ Adding another scriptural layer to her prophetic calling, in

⁴⁴ *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*, 42: Quid est, quod non gestis obsecundare verbo dei? Quae respondit: Domine, vilis sum persona, et ista non audeo in medium proferre. Ex hoc ait illi: Luminum tuorum non gaudebis, donec ea coram rege exponis. Cuius ilico pupilla caligne obducta est. Post dies multos venit in praesentiam regis, cuncta tradidit, lumenque recepit.

⁴⁵ *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*, 42: Quid est, quod non gestis obsecundare verbo dei? [*emphasis added*].

⁴⁶ *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*, 42: Domine, vilis sum persona, et ista non audeo in medium proferre. Cf. Exodus 3:11 - Dixitque Moyses ad Deum : Quis sum ego ut vadam ad Pharaonem, et educam filios Israel de Aegypto?; 4:10 - Ait Moyses : Obsecro, Domine, non sum eloquens ab heri et nudiustertius : et ex quo locutus es ad servum tuum, impeditioris et tardioris linguae sum; 6:12 - Respondit Moyses coram Domino : Ecce filii Israel non audiunt me : et quomodo audiet Pharaon, praesertim cum incircumciscus sim labiis; 6:30 - Et ait Moyses coram Domino : En incircumciscus labiis sum, quomodo audiet me Pharaon; Jeremiah 1:6 - Et dixi : A, a, a, Domine Deus, ecce nescio loqui, quia puer ego sum.

response to her reticence she suffered the loss of her eyesight, suggestive of another biblical figure, Zachariah, whose unwillingness to communicate the words of the Lord as given to him by an angel resulted in his loss of speech until the birth of his son, John the Baptist.⁴⁷ Just as the biblical model Zachariah regained the ability to speak upon fulfilling his divine mission, the text explains that once the visionary had presented her message to Louis, she miraculously regained her sight.

The author of the vision text used scriptural analogues in order to affirm the prophetic nature of the visionary's experience and thus demonstrated a keen awareness of the growing mode of political discourse. That Louis soon after performed public penance for all of the accusations levelled against him in the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman* does not necessarily mean that, as the text claimed, Louis did receive the message from the visionary. Nevertheless, by all outward evidence of Louis' openness towards, and interest, in divine guidance and inspiration, the claim ought to be considered as highly plausible.

Another text similarly attests to the outward perception that Louis was willing to receive correction in the form of vision texts, and this text, the poetic version of the '*Vision of Wetti*' (*Visio wettini*), would help its author write himself into Louis' court, eventually becoming the teacher of Louis' youngest son, Charles.⁴⁸ Born in 808 and given as a child to the monastery at Reichenau, while studying at Fulda Walahfrid Strabo wrote the poetic version of

⁴⁷ Cf. Luke 1:20, 63-64 – (20) Et ecce eris tacens, et non poteris loqui usque in diem quo haec fiant, pro eo quod non credidisti verbis meis, quae implebuntur in tempore suo; (63-64) Et postulans pugillarem scripsit, dicens: Joannes est nomen ejus. Et mirati sunt universi. Apertum est autem illico os ejus, et lingua ejus, et loquebatur benedicens Deum.

⁴⁸ On Walahfrid's biography, see Fees, "Walahfrid," 393-394, n. 270.

the *Vision of Wetti* (in 945 lines) in an effort to bring himself to Louis' attention, something he accomplished.⁴⁹ From Fulda, Walahfrid converted the prose text of the vision—originally redacted by Heito of Reichenau—into verse and then sent it to Grimald, one of the chaplains at Louis' court and Walahfrid's former teacher at Reichenau, thereby ensuring it would reach its intended royal audience.⁵⁰

Suggesting the growing acknowledgement of Louis' confidence in criticism provided by prophetic means, Walahfrid's *Vision of Wetti* followed the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman* in form by depicting the post-mortem suffering of Charlemagne. The prose text did not name the prince whose punishment it depicted, aside from describing the ruler as "a certain prince who once ruled Italy and the Roman people with a scepter."⁵¹ Walahfrid similarly described the same prince who "who once ruled Ausoniae and the noble Roman people," but using the first letter of each line of this section of the *Vision*, Walahfrid spelled out "CAROLUSIMPERATOR," leaving no doubt about the identity of the figure.⁵² According to Wetti, Charlemagne was "assailed by a beast as he stood, rending his manhood. The fortunate parts of the rest of his body were free from this torture."⁵³

⁴⁹ Booker, "Prologue," 83-84.

⁵⁰ Godman, *Poets*, 130-132; Dutton, *Politics*, 66, 76.

⁵¹ Haito of Reichenau (?), *Visio Wettini*, 271, lns. 9-10: Illic etiam quendam principem qui Italiae et populi Romani sceptrum quondam rexerat uidisse.

⁵² For the Latin, see the next line. On the subject of Charlemagne's sins and his posthumous reputation, see Ganz, "Charlemagne in Hell," 175-190; de Gaiffier, "La Légende," 490-503.

⁵³ Walahfrid Strabo, *Visio Wettini*, 66, lns. 446-450: Contemplatur item quendam lustrata per arva, | Ausoniae quondam qui regna tenebat et altae | Romanae gentis, fixo consistere gressu | oppositumque animal lacere virilia stantis; | Laetaque per reliquum corpus lue membra carebant. Cf. Pollard, "Reputation," 1-2.

After Wetti begged his guide to explain Charlemagne's punishment, his guide declared that the emperor

remains in these punishments on account of this fact: because he polluted his good deeds with shameful lust, having believed the temptations to be consumed by a mass of good deeds, and he preferred to end his life in familiar squalor. Still, he will reach eternal life and, rejoicing, he will enter the honor appointed to him by the Lord.⁵⁴

This was an explanation as much for Louis as any other member of the audience: Walahfrid's angel effectively warned Louis of what a lapse in righteousness could cost him in the hereafter. Still, just as with the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman*, Walahfrid conveyed clear hope that Charlemagne would be released from his punishment, offering by extension a similar hope to Louis as well, should he err like his father.⁵⁵ In his own voice, Walahfrid expanded on the meaning of Charlemagne's punishment, explaining that Charlemagne's example "admonishes (any) man who desires to preserve these hours with worthy behavior, so that he will not destroy them all with a certain offense and condemn every good deed to wasted failure."⁵⁶ If anything should be learned from Charlemagne's sorry fate, Walahfrid explained, it is that a single failing can erase many good deeds and condemn an individual.

Later in the text, Walahfrid would ascribe just such a failing to Louis, accusing the emperor of improperly placing nunneries and their holy virgins under the control of widows. Walahfrid accused Louis directly: "O prince, you who thought to bring about such a great evil,

⁵⁴ Walahfrid, *Visio Wettini*, 66, lns. 460-465: 'Oro refer!' Tum ductor: 'In his cruciatibus,' inquit, | 'restat ob hoc, quoniam bona facta libidine turpi | fedavit, ratus inlecebras sub mole bonorum | absumi, et vitam voluit finire suetis | sordibus. Ipse tamen vitam captabit opimam, | dispositum a domino gaudens invadet honorem.'

⁵⁵ Dutton, *Politics*, 64.

⁵⁶ Walahfrid, *Visio Wettini*, 66, lns. 466-468: ammonet hic hominem, qui dignis moribus horas | has servare cupit, ne quodam crimine cuncta | perdat et omne probum fundat vastante ruina.

give the chaste to the chaste, let the widow have something else.”⁵⁷ Walahfrid appears to have been sensitive enough to the culture developing in, and emanating from, Louis’ court, when he successfully wrote himself into Louis’ good graces using this vision text—even with its bold accusations against Louis and his father. Presenting a text far more polished than the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman*, Walahfrid safely criticized Louis by presenting his message as a form of revelation, folding together the vision given to Wetti and his own interpretations and interpolations. Often characterized as vision literature, this work of Walahfrid belongs to the broader culture of the prophetic, claiming insight into God’s will and using such insight as political commentary. Walahfrid’s work expertly exploited Louis’ proclivity for the prophetic and successfully brought the young scholar, soon to become a teacher to Louis’ son, to Louis’ attention.

Reading the World through Signs and Portents

In contrast to those who exploited the growing political currency of divine inspiration by writing dramatic visions, others sought a less dramatic means of employing the same authority: reading God’s will from the signs and portents in nature. If not without precedent in this activity, Louis’ reign witnessed the beginning of a open discussion of signs and portents and their potential meanings among the elites of Louis’ empire. Turning again to the Synod of Attigny, we can find an example of this use of signs and portents in the form of a sermon delivered by Adalhard of Corbie to the assembled elites. Adalhard, a cousin and senior advisor

⁵⁷ Walahfrid, *Visio Wettini*, 80, lns. 762-763 – O princeps, qui tale malum iunxisse videris, | da castis castas, aliud viduata receptet.

of Charlemagne, memorably led a series of discussions, in the winter of 808 and 809, of computistical questions as well as issues of observing and interpreting the natural world.⁵⁸

Recently recalled from exile to act as one of Louis' primary advisors, Adalhard enjoined the gathered bishops and nobles to do all they could to "defend against sin and (thus) avoid danger," and his words were recorded soon thereafter by the attendant bishop Agobard of Lyons. Adalhard explained:

Because, as holy Scripture teaches, sins provoke misfortunes, disturbances, disasters, and barrenness among the people, (Louis) who seeks with all concern that he might obtain these simple things, and that he might, God willing, succeed in governing by enacting good things while tearing down evil things, that the kingdom entrusted to him should flourish even when opposed by distant calamities.⁵⁹

Adalhard called on the gathered elites to assist Louis in the things that the emperor would propose at the council, underscoring the importance of their efforts by explaining how sins manifested in natural catastrophes with destructive results. Within the context of an assembly concerned with addressing and correcting the emperor's and his elites' failure to fulfil their responsibilities, Adalhard offered a means of interpreting God's disposition towards an individual, a region, a kingdom, or an entire people. These cosmological signs of sin introduced to the assembly the concept of a divine commentary on human affairs along with

⁵⁸ Ramirez-Weaver, *Saving Science*; Borst, "Alkuin," 53-78. cf. MGH, Ep IV, II, 565-7, nr. 42; Contreni, "John Scottus," 104;

⁵⁹ Agobard, *De dispensatione ecclesiasticarum rerum*, c.2, 121-122: Qui, quoniam, ut Scripturae sacrae docent, peccata contrahunt infelicitates, perturbationes, clades et sterilitates im populos, tota sollicitudine curat, ut, bona quidem statuendo, mala uero destruendo, optineat una uobiscum apud Dominum, ut, remotis aduersis casibus, regnum sibi commissum prospere, Deo fauente, ualeat gubernare.

the means to read it, specifically that these were signs of divine anger when someone had failed to fulfill his or her *ministerium*.⁶⁰

Adalhard's introduction of the language of signs and portents as a means of urging the elites at the Synod of Attigny to support the emperor belonged to the same discourse we observe in the near-contemporary *Royal Frankish Annals*. Written and promulgated by Louis' court historians, the final years of the *Royal Frankish Annals*—from 807 to 829—demonstrates a significant increase in the observation of natural phenomena and the reading of such events as “portents” (*prodigia*).⁶¹ By juxtaposing such portents with other events within the narrative, the court historians were presenting a divine commentary on the troubled state of the empire during a period of relative peace and calm.

Portents as Political Commentary

In these crucial early years leading up to the Synod of Attigny, the *Royal Frankish Annals* become increasingly interested in natural catastrophes, eclipses, plagues, and other difficult to explain phenomena. For example, in 818, after describing the death of Empress Irmingard in October the court historians broke their chronological order to insert the description of a solar eclipse that occurred on 8 July, only to return immediately to the rest of

⁶⁰ For Adalhard's biography, see Kasten, *Adalhard*. Note the similarities between Adalhard's hopeful outcome with the elites assisting the emperor and the language of the *Admonitio ad omnes regni ordines*, 303-304: quod ego omnium vestrum admonitor esse debeo, et omnes vos nostri adiutores esse debetis.

⁶¹ On the promulgation of the *Royal Frankish Annals*, see Reimitz, *History*, 337, 409. *ARF* a. 823, 163-164: Hoc anno prodigia quaedam extitisse narrantur.

the narrative of the end of the year.⁶² As the immediate buildup to Louis' public penance at Attigny, the final passages in the 821 entry and the first in 822 describe a series of unusual and inexplicable natural phenomena including a harsh winter that froze major riverways and did a lot of damage upon thawing to the villages along the Rhine, and how, in Thuringia, "a block of earth... was cut out, mysteriously lifted, and shifted twenty-five feet from its original location. Likewise, in eastern Saxony... the ground was raised into a dam."⁶³ The drama of Louis' penance at Attigny was introduced in the *Royal Frankish Annals* by strange, destructive, and unexpected events, mirroring the seemingly unprecedented character of the penance itself.

Against this backdrop of devastating and inexplicable natural events, the court historians then related how Louis publicly confessed his sins and performed penance for his crimes against Bernhard and other family members, and for other sins committed by his father. While we can only guess at the meaning such juxtaposition might hold, it does not appear to be overtly negative regarding Louis' penance, and may underscore something of the miraculous and inexplicable in Louis' behavior.

⁶² ARF a.818, 148-149: Irmingardis regina, coniux eius, quam proficiscens ibi aegrotantem dimiserat, duobus diebus postquam ipse ad eam venit, morbo invalescente V. Non. Octobr. Decessit. Eclipsis solis contigit VIII Id. Iul.

⁶³ ARF a.821, 157: Autumnalis satio iugitate pluviarum in quibusdam locis impedita est. Cui hiems in tantum prolixa successit et aspera, ut non solum minores rivi ac mediocres fluvii, verum ipsi maximi ac famosissimi amnes, Rhenus videlicet ac Danubius Albisque ac Sequana caeteraque per Galliam atque Germaniam oceanum petentia flumina, adeo solida glacie stringerentur, ut tricenis vel eo amplius diebus plaustra huc atque illuc commeantia velut pontibus iuncta sustinerent; cuius resolutio non modicum villis iuxta Rheni fluentia constitutis damnum intulit. ARF a.822, 157: In regione Thuringorum quodam in loco iuxta fluvium cespis longitudine pedum quinquagenum, latitudine quattuordenum, altitudine sesquipedali de terra sine manibus et praecisus et sublatus est et ab eo loco, in quo sumptus est, viginti quinque pedum spatio distans inventus est. Item in parte orientali Saxoniae, quae Sorabo*rum finibus contigua est, in quodam deserto loco iuxta lacum, qui dicitur Arnseo, in modum aggeris terra intumuit et limitem unius leugae longitudine porrectum sub unius noctis spatio absque humani operis molimine ad instar valli subrexit.

In the following entry for 823, the court historians left no doubt that they viewed the natural and seemingly supernatural events they recorded as filled with meaning. Using a strategy identified by Paul Dutton—in later ninth-century annals—as the “ordering of disorder,” the court historians described a particularly lengthy series of ominous portents.⁶⁴ While Dutton has observed such strategies as a feature primarily of historical writing, I argue that the *Royal Frankish Annals* and its use of the prophetic belong to a much larger discourse, that included historical writing, and that the court historians used portents to comment on imperial politics. Using the term “portent” (*prodigium*) for the first time in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, it is explained that

in this year, certain portents were said to have occurred: among them there were outstanding: an earthquake near the Aachen palace; in the territory of Toul near the village of Commercy, a certain twelve-year-old girl abstained from food for ten months; and in Saxony, in a village called Fritzlar, twenty-three villages were consumed by fire from heaven, and lightning bolts fell from a peaceful sky in the daytime.

In the village of Gravedona in the western part of Como, in the church of St John the Baptist, there was an image of the Holy Mary holding the boy Jesus in her lap that also depicted the Magi offering gifts in the apse of the same church. Even though the image was also almost destroyed on account of its extreme old age, the [image] shone with such great clarity for the space of two days, so that in the beauty of its old age, [the image] appeared to surpass the magnificence of a new painting completely, when examined in detail. Nevertheless, that clarity illuminated (only) minimally the images of the Magi, despite the gifts that they offered.

Further, in many regions, the ravaging of hail had destroyed crops and in certain places, at the same time actual true stones of massive weight fell with such hail. Also, homes were said to be struck from the sky, and men, and animals everywhere, were said to be dead from a strike of lightning, contrary to its custom. This was followed by a massive pestilence and mortality of people that brutally ran riot through all of Francia altogether, and with most

⁶⁴ Dutton, *Politics*, 109.

oppressive rage consumed an innumerable multitude of people of both sexes and various ages.⁶⁵

This lengthy entry demonstrates the breadth of what could be read as a portent and

underscores the potential the listing of such portents had as subtle political commentary.

While Tom Noble has argued that this passage, especially the middle portion dealing with the painting, and its ecphrasis may comment on the ongoing iconoclasm debate, the structure of

the passage suggests that the court historians were, instead, commenting on the birth in 823 of

Charles the Bald, Louis' youngest son and the first with his new wife Judith.⁶⁶ Reading the

passage as a complete unit, the ecphrasis of the miraculously-restored image in Gravedona is

the centerpiece of the passage, framed on each side by both miraculous and disastrous

portents. Within the ecphrasis itself, the critical detail is that "that clarity illuminated (only)

minimally the images of the Magi, despite the gifts that they offered" to the Christ child, in

contrast to the other miraculously restored images. While the fullest extent of the fallout of

Charles' birth could not have been known, the stress on obscurity of the Magi despite their

gifts to the newborn child offer a cautious, *ex post facto* commentary on Louis' future gifts to

⁶⁵ *ARF* a. 823, 163-164: Hoc anno prodigia quaedam extitisse narrantur, in quibus praecipua fuerunt in Aquense palatio terrae motus et in territorio Tullense iuxta villam Commercium puella quaedam annorum fere XII ab omni cibo per decem menses abstinens. Et in Saxonia in pago, qui vocatur Firihhazi, viginti tres villae igne caelesti concrematae, et fulgora sereno atque interdiu de caelo cadentia. Et in territorio Cumetensi Italiae civitatis in vico Grabadona in ecclesia sancti Iohannis baptistae imago sanctae Mariae puerum Iesum gremio continentis ac magorum munera offerentium in absida eiusdem ecclesiae depicta et ob nimiam vetustatem obscurata et pene abolita tanta claritate per duorum dierum spatia effulsit, ut omnem splendorem novae picturae suae vetustatis pulchritudine cernentibus penitus vincere videretur. Magorum tamen imagines praeter munera, quae offerebant, minime claritas illa inradiavit. Et in multis regionibus fruges grandinis vastatione deletae atque in quibusdam locis simul cum ipsa grandine veri lapides atque ingentis ponderis decidere visi; domus quoque de caelo tactae hominesque ac caetera animalia passim fulminum ictu praeter solitum crebro exanimata dicuntur. Secuta est ingens pestilentia atque hominum mortalitas, quae per totam Franciam inmaniter usquequaque grassata est et innumeram hominum multitudinem diversi sexus et aetatis gravissime seviendo consumpsit.

⁶⁶ Noble, "Images," 41-42. For an overview of the documentation of Charles the Bald's birth, see RI I.1, 306-307.

his youngest son: the divine *claritas* that illuminated the image of the miraculous birth shone the least on those giving gifts given to the child, and the court historians made this feature their central focus.

The Prophetic in Exile: Theodulf's Poetic Portents

The culture of reading (and discussing) portents as political commentary and intervention extended well beyond the centers of power and found a ready participant in Theodulf, the exiled bishop of Orléans. Theodulf had been deprived of his bishopric and exiled for alleged involvement in Bernhard's revolt against Louis in 817, but despite his removal from power, he remained in contact with other bishops.⁶⁷ Eagerly seeking to influence imperial politics from the outside, Theodulf sent a poetic epistle in 820 describing three portents to another bishop, Modoin of Autun, portents Theodulf interpreted as warnings of a violent catastrophe within the empire.⁶⁸ The poetic epistle consisted of two parts: the first established Theodulf's concern for Modoin and the empire at large, and the second presented three portents that promised trouble for its future.⁶⁹ As a bridge between the culture of Charlemagne's reign and that of his son, Theodulf approached the prophetic as Alcuin had, interpreting scripture, history, and current events to reveal God's will. While certain subtleties and meanings elude modern readers because of our lack of precise context, it is clear that

⁶⁷ For the best treatment of Theodulf's fall from Louis' favor, see Schaller, "Briefgedichte," and *idem*, "Theodulf's Exil," 91-101.

⁶⁸ Theodulf's portents formed the second portion of his poetic epistle to Modoin, known to modern scholars as *Carmen LXXII* in Schaller (ed.), "Philologische Untersuchungen," 43-51. On the dating of the poem, see Godman, "Louis," 248.

⁶⁹ Schaller, "Tierdichtung," 95; cf. Dahlhaus-Berg, *Nova Antiquitas*, 34, n.92.

Theodulf used the political implication of portents to warn and advise a figure who could still meaningfully influence Frankish politics.

In each of the portents, Theodulf demonstrates something he explored in an earlier poem from the end of Charlemagne's reign, namely the ways in which the world "signals its destruction, and sings its eclipse with its own silent (*tacente*) voice. For it speaks by signs (*rebus*) even when we are silent on doctrines of the Divine Law. They [the signs] shout what will be."⁷⁰ It has been argued that Theodulf probably drew the keyword, "silent" of "without words" (Latin *tacente*), from Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (d.258), who wrote a combative treatise to argue that the destructive signs and portents of his age (ca. 249-252) were not caused by Christian non-participation in Roman religious rites, but instead by the "*senectus mundi*," the aging world.⁷¹ Where Cyprian's work emphasized the veracity of the signs' message about the end of the world, focusing on the irrelevance of human knowledge or announcement, Theodulf shifted the focus to the signs themselves, and how they commented on the political situation of the early 820s.⁷²

In the first part of the poetic epistle, Theodulf warned Modoin that his exile was a warning to others, that the same "evil" that caused Theodulf's exile "is common, so a common

⁷⁰ Theodulf, *Carmen XIV*, 468, lns. 1-2: Cernere inest, ut eat mundus signetque ruinam, | Defectumque sui voce tacente canat. | Nam loquitur rebus, taceamus dogmata quamvis | divinae legis, quae id fore cuncta boant. Cf. Andersson and Ommundsen (trans.), *Theodulf*, 47. For the dating of this poem, see Fichtenau, *Imperium*, 183.

⁷¹ For a discussion of the medieval literary tropes of the aging world and the confused natural order, see Curtius, *Literatur*, 102-106.

⁷² E. Dümmler notes the borrowing in his edition of Theodulf's *Carmen XIV*, in MGH Poet. I, p. 468 n. 2. On Cyprian's text *Ad Demetrianum*, see Brent, *Cyprian*, 99-100, citing Spanneut, *Le Stoïcisme*, 413-414. Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad Demetrianum*, CCSL 3a. 2, c.3: Hoc etiam nobis tacentibus et nulla de scripturis sanctis praedicationibus que diuinis documenta promentibus mundus ipse iam loquitur et occasum sui rerum labentium probatione testatur.

cure must be sought.”⁷³ Not implausibly, Peter Godman has argued that the evil Theodulf mentioned was the greed and political maneuvering at Louis’ court.⁷⁴ While Theodulf assumed that his audience would recognize the evil he mentioned, he reinforced the serious nature of his warning to Modoin by reciting three portents, each warning of the troubles that would soon come upon the empire. Interpreting the portents through allusions to ancient history, scripture, and current events, Theodulf demonstrated his awareness that the political language, from the reign of Charlemagne to that of Louis, was changing.

Theodulf dated the first portent to 820 and described it as a miraculous drying of the Sarthe River, allowing locals to cross it on foot.⁷⁵ Theodulf suggested that God used this “not insignificant portent” to recall “when He divided the river and destroyed Jericho.”⁷⁶ In the context of the two remaining portents, the critical detail here is the mention of the destruction of Jericho, an event not directly linked in the biblical narrative to the miraculous crossing of the Jordan itself. Although Theodulf suggested that God had used the portent to recall the destruction of Jericho, he remained unwilling to explain further.⁷⁷ Theodulf explained that he had investigated the portent “with great zeal, because those who reported it

⁷³ Theodulf, *Carmen LXXII*, 44, lns.37-40: Unus ego quamvis sim, non est unius haec res: | quod factum est mihimet, esse potest alii. | Est commune malum, communis cura petenda est: | quod nostrum est hodie, cras erit alterius. | Haec non quis frater timeat contagia demens, | ne illi, quae nobis, inrepat ista lues?

⁷⁴ Godman, “Louis,” 248-249.

⁷⁵ Theodulf, *Carmen LXXII*, 46-47: Septimus hic agitur decurrens lubricus annus, | quod, Hludovice, tibi regna paterna manent | exilii quartus, meritis non denique nostris, | volvitur infaustus, aeger et ecce mei.

⁷⁶ Theodulf, *Carmen LXXII*, 45, lns. 75-76: Quo cives transire solent prope lintribus illum, | illic portentum non leve fecit eis; p. 46, lns. 105-106: Quis neget antiqui dominum meminisse trophaei, | quo fluvium scindit et hiericonda quatit?

⁷⁷ For other instances of Theodulf utilizing the imagery of the crossing of the Jordan, see Freeman, Meyvaert, “Meaning,” 127, 131.

desired to know the future through me.”⁷⁸ After describing his investigation, the exiled bishop carefully explained that

that which my voice does not proclaim openly will not always be hidden, for such things wait to be proclaimed at the right time. We manage to know certain things well by events and examples (*res et exempla*). *Although I do not prophesy, I know what this event (res) would suggest.* While many wonders may have been seen at the same time, that which was seen, I plan to relate.⁷⁹

This transition into the other two portents provides critical details that illuminate the thinking of Theodulf and others who sought to understand and re-deploy the divine messages coded into the world. Theodulf admitted the limitations of his knowledge, and acknowledged the prophetic character of such portents while disavowing any outright prophecy. Instead, he emphasized the rationality of his process, noting that he learned much by interpreting comparable *res et exempla*, Theodulf emphasized his own ability to interpret divine communication through his denial of explicitly prophesying when he confidently countered that “I know what this event would suggest.” Instead of directly stating the meaning of the event, Theodulf then presented two further *res et exempla* that further elaborated on the warning presented by the first and offered his audience a better indication of the meaning of the first.

For the two following portents, described as two massive battles between armies of birds, Theodulf named the individuals from whom he learned of the portents, and used

⁷⁸ Theodulf, *Carmen LXXII*, 47, lns.127-134: Nam grandi studio perquirimus ista, quod illi | qui narrant per me nosse futura volunt.

⁷⁹ Theodulf, *Carmen LXXII*, 47, lns.129-134: Non id aperta canit, nec erit vox semper operta, | tempore namque manent ista canenda suo. | Rebus et exemplis quaedam bene nosse valemus, | cum non divinem, haec scio res quid agat. Miraque sint per idem cum tempus plurima visa, | hoc etiam visum est, quod recitare paro. [*emphasis added*]. cf. Schaller, “Tierdichtung,” 103-104.

comparisons with Roman history to interpret the portents. Emphasizing the disaster promised by the portents, Theodulf embellished the second portent with Lucan's depiction of the Roman civil war between Caesar and Pompey, describing how

the people of Rome fought thus on the fields of Emathia, when they waged savage wars, here a father-in-law, there a son-in-law, when brother kills brother or friend kills friend, when they bear matching standards [lit. eagles] and matching arms. Certainly, the two great birds, who did not fight, are said to have fled, other crowds lie (there). No matter which side won, victory delighted neither, leaving the earth covered with the dead from both sides. As the rage of Hannibal made of Cannae a funeral, just so these fields stand filled by the funeral of birds. Let anyone recount each detail, what, by whom, why, when, and whence! Things repeatedly revealed throughout time turn out to be revealed signs.⁸⁰

Theodulf wove his interpretation into the description of the battles, conflating the memory of the Battle of Pharsalus (48 BC) in the Roman civil war and the devastating defeat the Romans suffered at the hands of the Carthaginian Hannibal at Cannae (216 BC). Theodulf reminded his audience that these events were portents in their every detail because their meaning are repeatedly revealed throughout history. This claim resonates with his earlier statement that many things were revealed through “events and examples (*res et exempla*)” and suggests the meaning behind Theodulf's assertion that “I know what this event (*res*) would suggest.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Theodulf, *Carmen LXXII*, (Schaller ed.) 50, lns. 213-224: Egit id Emathiis populus Romanus in arvis, | cum fera bella gerunt, hinc socer, inde gener. | Cum fratrem frater perimit, vel amicus amicum, | quando pares aquilas et paria arma vehunt. | Nempe duae volucres magnae evasisse feruntur, quae non pugnarunt; cetera turba iacet. | Utraque pars vincit, mulcet victoria neutram, | utrimque oppletam strage reliquit humum. | Ut furor Annibalis complevit funere Cannas, | Funere sic avium haec rura repleta manent. | Singula quis referat, quae, quo, cur, quando, vel unde, | monstrata haec crebro tempora signa patent. Cf. Schaller, “Tierdichtung,” 112-113. For Lucan's text, see Lucan, *De bello civili*, in Duff (ed.), *Lucan: The Civil War* (Harvard, 1962), bk. 1, lns. 1-7.

⁸¹ Theodulf, *Carmen LXXII*, 47, lns. 129-134: Rebus et exemplis quaedam bene nosse valemus, | cum non divinem, haec scio res quid agat.

By stressing the understanding of these events, and all their details, as signs, Theodulf drew greater attention to the political commentary he folded into his narrative of the portents, an interpretation that predicted destructive internal strife. Framing the portents and his interpretation with a plea to Modoin for assistance in addressing a threat to the peace of the realm, Theodulf detailed three portents that recalled God's destruction of Jericho, the disastrous Roman defeat at Cannae, and the Battle of Pharsalus during the Roman civil war. Like Alcuin, when he approached the interpretation of portentous events, Theodulf read events before him as warnings of future internal strife and external invasion, and on the basis of this reading urged Modoin to intervene in the political affairs of the empire. Writing from exile, Theodulf cast his use of the prophetic as a rational interpretation rather than as a vatic prophecy, claiming to read the will of God from portents others reported to him by comparing them with historical and scriptural events.

Agobard the Professional Interpreter

Theodulf was not the only figure to seek to capitalize on the growing discourse of portents, Archbishop Agobard of Lyons equally saw the value and persuasive power of being able to interpret God's mind and will from signs and portents. Unlike Theodulf, however, Agobard hijacked discussions of other issues and circulated his own solutions to them in order to promote his own interpretive expertise. Indeed, Agobard of Lyons wrote several tracts in an attempt to distinguish himself as an expert at interpreting such divine communication.

Agobard's works reveal an individual who really "wanted his voice to be heard"⁸² as he strove to establish his place in the world of Carolingian politics.

In a letter written by Agobard and his priests Hildigisus and Florus to another bishop, Bartholomew of Narbonne, Agobard responded to Bartholomew's concerns over certain inexplicable "punishments" that had occurred at the shrine of St. Firmin in Uzès, including epileptic fits, mysterious burns, and "those things that the common folk believe or call demonic possessions."⁸³ In short, the shrine was not acting as it should. While Agobard's text, often referred to as '*On the deceit of certain signs*' (*De quorundam inlusione signorum*), addressed Bartholomew's concerns and condemned those local clerics apparently exploiting the common folk who could not understand the signs, Agobard chiefly seized this opportunity to demonstrate his expertise in correctly interpreting divine manifestations. Agobard argued that these signs could not truly be signs of God's anger because they offered no *spes propitiationis*, no hope of propitiation, and as such they did not communicate anything corrective, as true signs must. Further enlightening our understanding of those who, during the 820s, began to read the world as a means of interpret and act upon the will of God, Agobard's explanation of how signs must be interpreted conflated events that were variously termed signs, portents, miracles, and natural events in the same way the court historians and

⁸² Kramer, "Agobard," 11. Cf. Airlie, "I, Agobard," 175-184. Riché, "Les réfugiés," 177-183. For both of the relevant texts from Agobard, see Agobard, *De quorundam inlusione signorum (ad Bartholomeum)*, 237-243; Agobard, *liber contra insulam vulgi opinionem de grandine et tonitruis*, 1-15. Cf. Boshof, *Agobard*, 176-178. Ferrari, "Aura," 163-177.

⁸³ Agobard, *De Quorundam inlusione signorum (ad Bartholomeum)*, 237-243. On the dating of the text, likely to 828-829, see CCCM 52, xliiii and 237-238: *Cognovimus sollicitam esse prudentiam vestram, quonam modo accipi debeat illud, quod in quodam loco ceperunt fieri quedam percussiones, ita ut caderent quidam modo epilepticorum vel eorum quod vulgus demoniacos putat vel nominat*. For the historical context of the letter, see Boshof, *Agobard*, 176-178; Zuckerman, "Theology," 29.

Theodulf had done. Agobard's conflation suggests the fluidity of these categories while demonstrating their uniting feature: divine communication.

Agobard's argument has often been seen as an example of his rationalism and opposition to superstition, but this position completely overlooks Agobard's self-promotion that formed the purpose of his commentary on the nature of divine manifestations as both punishment and portent. Explicating how divine communication manifests through signs and portents, Agobard and his co-authors asked

who is enough of a fool who does not know that the all-powerful God *visibly and invisibly scourges people for their education and conversion*, not only at the hands of other people, but even through beasts, and through each and every smallest and most worthless living thing? Not only through fiery serpents, but through frogs, flies, stinging insects, and locusts? Not only through the animate, but even through the inanimate, such as hail, lightening, rivers, rains, and droughts. By all means, your good sense knew from whence we have spoken: the authoritative Holy Scriptures. But if we had spoken of lions, hornets, locusts, cankerworms, rust, a devouring, that is, a curse, since many things can be understood using the same name, *it will still be by the same creator*. But if we were to have added bears, wolves, boar, and forest deer, although it could not be easily shown from Scripture, still examples would not be wanting.⁸⁴

Privileging the interpretation over the means of the divine communication, Agobard reduced signs and portents to their ultimate purpose, namely, instruction and correction. Rather than

⁸⁴ Agobard, *De quorundam inlusione signorum*, 237-238: Quisnam ita stultus est qui nesciat, et visibiliter et invisibiliter omnipotentem Deum flagellare homines ad eruditionem et conversionem; non solum per homines, sed etiam per bestias, et per minutissima et vilissima quaeque animantia? nec tantum per ignitos serpentes, sed et per ranas et muscas, et sciniphas, et locustas: nec tantum per animantia, sed per et inanimata, sicut per grandinem, per flumina, per pluvias, per siccitates. Novit utique prudentia vestra unde loquamur, auctore sancta Scriptura. Sed et si dixerimus leones, crabrones, brucum, erucam, aeruginem, devorationem, id est, maledictionem, quo uno nomine multa intelligi possunt, eadem auctore erit. Si autem et addiderimus ursos, lupos, sues et cervos silvestres, licet facile de Scripturis monstrari non possit, exempla tamen non deerunt. [*emphasis added*].

closely analyzing the specific signs appearing in St. Firmin, Agobard used the opportunity to demonstrate his expertise in the correct interpretation of signs and portents in general.

Although Agobard signalled that he was willing to go beyond the limits of Scripture in enumerating the various natural signs and portents, he nevertheless displayed his erudition by also discussing a series of scriptural examples of divine communication through such punishments and portents, focused primarily on God physically punishing or simply killing individuals or groups of people. This list included fevers sent to the Egyptians (Ex. 9:10), the Philistines' hemorrhoids (1 Kings 5:6-9), Job's boils (Job 2:7; 1:21), Saul's possession (1 Kings 19:9), Zachariah's inability to speak (Luke 1:20), Daniel's brief, physical weakness (Daniel 10:16), Jacob's struggle with an angel that left him weakened (Gen 32:24; 32:31), Miriam and King Ozias' affliction with leprosy (Numbers 12:10; 2 Chron 26:19), the fire God used to kill Nadab and Abiu (Lev. 10:2), the sudden death of Oza (1 Chron.13:10-11), the deaths of the Bethsamites (1 Kings 6:19), the heavenly fire that consumed two Samarian captains and their men (4 Kings 1:12), the heavenly fire that killed Job's livestock (Job 1:16), and still more. In each case, Agobard explained how each divine manifestation should be interpreted and understood as divine communication. Although some of these examples appeared to be caused by God directly while others were attributed to angels, demons, holy men, and even sinners, for Agobard they were all true signs caused by God that communicated a message to those who, if they had reason, could bear the punishment once they understood the portent.

Agobard's second text addressing signs and portents, known as the '*Book Against the Strange Opinion of the Common Folk Concerning Hail and Thunder*' (*Liber contra insulam vulgi*

opinionem de grandine et tonitruui), took as its target a belief in *tempestarii*, weather-makers who were believed to be able to call down hail storms, if they were not paid off by local farmers.⁸⁵ While the belief in, and implications of, these *tempestarii* have been studied more deeply by Paul Dutton and Michele Ferrari, here I wish to concentrate upon how Agobard used them to demonstrate his knowledge and expertise in interpreting divine manifestations.

Agobard argued that the very possibility of a mortal calling down a hailstorm completely contradicted how the world worked, since the notion defied God's communicative purpose inherent in such events.⁸⁶ Relying on another series of scriptural examples demonstrating God's omnipotence and His command of the weather, Agobard argued that while God used humans, the environment, angels, and demons to communicate His will, such hailstorms occurred by the will of "the omnipotent God *alone*."⁸⁷ Agobard made it clear that even when the meaning of a particular event was uncertain, the event nevertheless communicated something. He cited the example of Elijah the prophet, who "uttered a prayer, that it would not rain, and it did not rain for three years, and six months."⁸⁸ Explaining the ability to control the weather that Agobard felt was (in his own time) reserved for the saints, Agobard stated that Elijah commanded the weather

for the sake of rebuking and correcting his people; that is, in order that first they would be rebuked for the distraction of their minds by which they

⁸⁵ For the various attempts at dating this tract, see CCCM 52, xxxix-xlvii; Zuckerman, "Theology," 29. For an overview of the text, see Dutton, "Thunder," 112.

⁸⁶ Cf. Ferrari, "*Aura levititia*," 171-173; Dutton, "Thunder," 112.

⁸⁷ Agobard, *De grandine*, c.5, p. 6: Quamquam premissae sententiae neque istos neque illos eius demonstrant auctores, sed solum omnipotentem Deum.

⁸⁸ Agobard, *De grandine*, c.10, p. 10: Helias itaque orationem orauit, ut non plueret, et non pluit annos tres, et menses sex.

abandoned the worship of omnipotent God and went afterwards after to the filth of idols. And after having been beaten and overcome, they were corrected by the expectation of rain, and they returned to the Lord God, whom they had abandoned.⁸⁹

Just as Agobard had argued that signs served the "education and correction" of those who experienced them, here the archbishop argued that Elijah's command of the weather, unlike the claims made about the so-called *tempestarii*, was intended to rebuke and correct the people it affected. For Agobard the primary flaw in the claims of the *tempestarii*, and those who believed them, was that they did not fit into the purpose and patterns of divine communication through such natural events, namely punishment and warning. As these selective examples show, Agobard used both of these instances as opportunities to advertise his expertise in the interpretation of such divine communication. That he wished to do so underscores the growing value of the prophetic as a means of negative commentary and condemnation. Agobard's concern for the correct interpretation of these occurrences suggests the significance of such signs towards the end of the 820s, not least because such signs were interpreted in various, contradictory, and competitive ways.

Einhard's Response to the Reading of Signs and Portents

Within this context of anxiety about interpreting God's will and doing so correctly, we can situate Einhard's discussion of portents in his biography of Charlemagne. In line with the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman* and the *Vision of Wetti*, Einhard wrote his *Vita Karoli* in the

⁸⁹ Agobard, *De grandine*, c.10, 10: Fecit autem hoc propter correptionem et correctionem gentis suae, id est ut prius corripentur de auersione mentis, eo quod dereliquissent cultum Dei omnipotentis, et post sordes idolorum abirent, et postea flagellati et fatigati, expectatione pluuiarum corrigerentur, et redirent ad Dominum Deum, quem dereliquerant.

late 820s and in his biography used the memory of Charlemagne as a touchstone to comment on the rough early years of Louis' reign, and the king's anxiety about knowing God's will.⁹⁰ Einhard crafted the thirty-second chapter of his *Vita Karoli* as a commentary on the culture of reading portents, and specifically to respond to Louis' public anxiety about doing the right thing, and the attempts Louis and others made to discern God's will to that end.⁹¹ Using the example of Charlemagne, Einhard offered Louis a counter-example of a monarch who, while recognizing the profound meanings of the signs and portents occurring around him, maintained outward calm despite the troubling portents he observed.⁹²

Portents played a significant role in Einhard's model, the Roman biographer Suetonius, but in Einhard's *Vita* they are given a new relevance and are a part of an intensifying conversation about portents. Just as Suetonius included a lengthy section devoted to the omens preceding Augustus' death, Einhard described the various signs and portents that haunted the final years of Charlemagne's life in his thirty-second chapter.⁹³ As he surveyed the roughly three years preceding Charlemagne's death, Einhard described how several lunar and solar eclipses appeared, a bridge over the Rhine burned down and an archway within the Aachen palace complex collapsed, frequent earthquakes damaged various

⁹⁰ Dutton, "Karolus Magnus," 32-33.

⁹¹ For a discussion of Einhard as a response to the depictions of Charlemagne in the *Visio Wettini*, see Dutton, *Politics*, 78.

⁹² While certain scholars have dated the *Vita Karoli* as early as 817 and others as late as the mid-830s, following the research of Helmut Reimitz and Matthias Tischler, Einhard's biography of Charlemagne was probably in circulation by 829. Reimitz, *History*, 421; Tischler, *Vita Karoli*, 158-162, 228-229, 238; For other discussions on the dating of the text, see Dutton, *Courtier*, xix; Innes and McKitterick, "History," 204; Patzold, *Episcopus*, 136; Ganz, "Preface," 299-310; Staubach, "Cultus divinus," 563; Löwe, "Entstehungszeit," 85-103.

⁹³ Ganz, "Einhard's Charlemagne," 45-48. Cf. Harrison, *Dreams*, 100.

buildings, and finally, the portent potentially influenced by Einhard's Suetonian model: lightning struck the cathedral in Aachen causing Charles' name to fade from an inscription within the same church. Concerning all of these omens of Charles' impending death, Einhard explained "that not only others, but even [Charles] himself" understood their meaning.⁹⁴

While some historians misunderstood Einhard's list as misrepresenting and misdating natural events from Charlemagne's final years, if we focus on the specific signs he chose to include a better interpretation becomes apparent. Rather than a neutral account of the portents of Charlemagne's death, Einhard appears to have chosen specific events that would parallel similar events from Louis' early reign. First, the *Royal Frankish Annals* record eclipses both solar and lunar in 817, one corresponding to the death of Louis' wife Irmengard.⁹⁵ The

⁹⁴ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.32, 36-37: Adpropinquantis finis conplura fuere prodigia, ut non solum alii, sed etiam ipse hoc minitari sentiret. Per tres continuos vitaeque termino proximos annos et solis et lunae creberrima defectio et in sole macula quaedam atri coloris septem dierum spatio visa. Porticus, quam inter basilicam et regiam operosa mole construxerat, die ascensionis Domini subita ruina usque ad fundamenta conlapsa. Item pons Rheni apud Mogontiacum, quem ipse per decem annos ingenti labore et opere mirabili de ligno ita construxit, ut perenniter durare posse videretur, ita tribus horis fortuito incendio conflagravit, ut, praeter quod aqua tegebatur, ne una quidem astula ex eo remaneret. Ipse quoque, cum ultimam in Saxoniam expeditionem contra Godofridum regem Danorum ageret, quadam die, cum ante exortum solis castris egressus iter agere coepisset, vidit repente delapsam caelitus cum ingenti lumine facem a dextra in sinistram per serenum aera transcurrere. Cunctisque hoc signum, quid portenderet, ammirantibus, subito equus, quem sedebat, capite deorsum merso decidit eumque tam graviter ad terram elisit, ut, fibula sagi rupta balteoque gladii dissipato, a festinantibus qui aderant ministris exarmatus et sine amiculo levaretur. Iaculum etiam, quod tunc forte manu tenebat, ita elapsum est, ut viginti vel eo amplius pedum spatio longe iaceret. Accessit ad hoc creber Aquensis palatii tremor et in domibus, ubi conversabatur, assiduus laqueariorum crepitus. Tacta etiam de caelo, in qua postea sepultus est, basilica, malumque aureum, quo tecti culmen erat ornatum, ictu fulminis dissipatum et supra domum pontificis, quae basilicae contigua erat, proiectum est. Erat in eadem basilica in margine coronae, quae inter superiores et inferiores arcus interiorem aedis partem ambiebat, epigramma sinopide scriptum, continens, quis auctor esset eiusdem templi, cuius in extremo versu legebatur: KAROLUS PRINCEPS. Notatum est a quibusdam eodem, quo decessit, anno paucis ante mortem mensibus eas, quae PRINCEPS exprimebant, litteras ita esse deletas, ut penitus non apparerent. Sed superiora omnia sic aut dissimulavit aut sprexit, acsi nihil horum ad res suas quolibet modo pertineret.

⁹⁵ *ARF* a.817, 145: Luna Non. Febr. Hora noctis secunda defecit, et cometes in signo Agitatoris apparuit. Interea Stephenus papa tertio, postquam Romam venerat, mense, sed nondum exacto, circiter VIII Kal. Febr. Diem obiit; *ARF* a.818, 148-149: Irmengardis regina, coniux eius, quam proficiscens ibi aegrotantem dimiserat, duobus diebus postquam ipse ad eam venit, morbo invalescente V. Non. Octobr. Decessit. Eclipsis solis contigit VIII Id. Iul.

Annals also described how an archway in Aachen collapsed in 817, a public and traumatic event that prompted him to settle the issue of succession with the *Ordinatio imperii*. Further, the *Royal Frankish Annals* recalled severe lightning and earthquakes in Aachen in 823, as well as a village destroyed by fire from heaven.⁹⁶ Finally, as we have seen, the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman* claimed to have been reported to Louis personally, and the vision described the erasure of text from a symbolic building, indicating Louis' guilt.⁹⁷ Instead of collecting portents for their own sake, Einhard selected and invented portents from Charlemagne's reign analogous to those that seem to have troubled Louis, making the reigns of father and son appear even more comparable, and used these to frame the central message of his chapter for Louis: a brief narrative account of how Charlemagne confronted a dire portent.

From within the frame of relevant portents, Einhard described how,

while Charles conducted his final campaign in Saxony against King Godofrid of the Danes, on a certain day, before sunrise, having left the camp he began to take his journey, Charles unexpectedly saw a flame falling from heaven with great light, crossing through the calm sky from right to left. While everyone wondered what this sign portended, suddenly the horse Charlemagne rode toppled, dropping its head and throwing him to the ground so violently, that the buckle of his cloak cracked and his sword belt was thrown. Disarmed,

⁹⁶ *ARF* a.817, 146: Feria quinta, qua cena Domini celebratur, cum imperator ab ecclesia peracto sacro officio remearet, lignea porticus, per quam incedebat, cum et fragili materia esset aedificata et tunc iam marcida et putrefacta, quae contignationem et tabulatum sustinebant, transtra pondus aliquod ferre non possent, incedentem desuper imperatorem subita ruina cum viginti et eo amplius hominibus, qui una ibant, ad terram usque deposuit. *ARF* a.823, 163-164: Hoc anno prodigia quaedam extitisse narrantur, in quibus praecipua fuerunt in Aquense palatio terrae motus... Et in multis regionibus fruges *grandinis vastatione deletae atque in quibusdam locis simul cum ipsa grandine veri lapides atque ingentis ponderis decidere visi; domus quoque de caelo tactae hominesque ac caetera animalia passim fulminum ictu praeter solitum crebro exanimata dicuntur. Secuta est ingens pestilentia atque hominum mortalitas, quae per totam Franciam inmaniter usquequaque grassata est et innumeram hominum multitudinem diversi sexus et aetatis gravissime seviendo consumpsit.

⁹⁷ *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*, 42: Antequam, ait, in Bernhartum homicidium perpetrasset, nullius ibi nomen clarius erat. Illius interfectio istius obliteratio fuit. Vade et cave diligenter, ne horum quid regem celaveris.

without a cloak, he was lifted up by those ministers present who hastened to him. Even his spear, which he had held strongly in his hand at the time, had similarly slipped away, so that it lay a space of twenty or more feet away from him.⁹⁸

Einhard carefully selected the list of portents to resonate with recent events, and then offered a particularly powerful narrative of an accident suffered by the great king. This was meant to bring to mind Louis' accident in 817 and offer an example of how to respond to such a portent. Moreover, Charlemagne's accident had an additional symbolic resonance as Charlemagne's fall from his horse tore away his sword belt—a symbol of his masculinity and authority—and disarmed him, a further detail that spoke to the *Royal Frankish Annals* report of Louis' 817 accident, where the annalist noted that Louis had been wounded by his own sword.⁹⁹

This story was meant to be exemplary. In the sentences he used to begin and end the chapter, Einhard discussed Charlemagne's approach to reading signs and portents, explaining how Charlemagne understood the meaning of the signs and portents, but that he “either thought little of all of the previous portents or *feigned to*, in such a way as if none of them had anything to do with him.”¹⁰⁰ As a contrast to Louis' public anxiety about seeking, receiving, and enacting God's will, Einhard advised that Louis remain outwardly calm, act like his father, and

⁹⁸ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.32, 36-37: Ipse quoque, cum ultimam in Saxoniam expeditionem contra Godofridum regem Danorum ageret, quadam die, cum ante exortum solis castris egressus iter agere coepisset, vidit repente delapsam caelitus cum ingenti lumine facem a dextra in sinistram per serenum aera transcurrere. Cunctisque hoc signum, quid portenderet, ammirantibus, subito equus, quem sedebat, capite deorsum merso decidit eumque tam graviter ad terram elisit, ut, fibula sagi rupta balteoque gladii dissipato, a festinantibus qui aderant ministris exarmatus et sine amiculo levaretur. Iaculum etiam, quod tunc forte manu tenebat, ita elapsum est, ut viginti vel eo amplius pedum spatio longe iaceret.

⁹⁹ McKeon, “Un année désastreuse,” 5-12. Cf. Goldberg, “Louis,” 625 n. 76; R. le Jan, “Giving,” 281-309.

¹⁰⁰ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 32, 36-37: Adpropinquantis finis conplura fuere prodigia, ut non solum alii, sed etiam ipse hoc minitari sentiret... Sed superioria omnia sic aut dissimulavit aut sprexit, acsi nihil nihil horum ad res suas quolibet modo pertineret.

appear confident. Einhard acknowledged the place of the prophetic in Louis' reign and the power, importance, and meanings the portents could contain, but challenged the emperor to act like his father, and mask his anxiety and hunger for divine guidance. Einhard showed Charlemagne navigating calmly through a world of portents, thereby offering Louis a clear example to follow.

In the *Vita Karoli*, Einhard recognized the power of the prophetic in Carolingian political culture and used it to comment on its growth in Louis' reign. Einhard's apparent concern about Louis' eager search for God's will and the influence it had on Frankish politics suggests just how quickly such discussions of visions, signs, and portents had spread among Frankish elites. Ranging from the early language of councils and imperial decrees, all of which reflected Louis' desire to be seen as inspired by God, to more opportunistic texts seeking to influence the emperor and those around him, the myriad languages of divine inspiration and revelation were, by the mid-to-late 820s, established within the Frankish political lexicon. The relative calm of the early 820s allowed Louis' anxiety about his divine inspiration and his ability to know and do God's will to remain uncontested and unproblematic, but the crises of the late 820s would lead Louis to again assert prophetic authority in his imperial capacity again. Unfortunately for Louis, although his behavior encouraged prophetic interpretation, or its use, he exercised no monopoly over the language of divine inspiration and guidance and when he sought to assert his prophetic authority, his opponents effectively used the same language and authority to advise and oppose Louis. In short, Louis' anxious desire for divine

inspiration appears to have encouraged others to challenge him along the same lines, by claiming divine inspiration and prophetic authority.

III. Responding to Crisis: The Winter Meeting of 828-829 and the *Epistola Generalis*

Framing the Crisis

In the entry for 827 in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, dire threats facing the empire were emphasized by explaining how the defeats in the Spanish and Pannonian marches had been predicted. Specifically, the court historians claimed that “reliable portents of this disaster were seen many times as battle lines in the sky and as a scattering of flashing lights in the night sky.”¹⁰¹ In a way we have seen before, the court historians juxtaposed these dire portents with two assemblies Louis called to deal with the various crises throughout the empire.¹⁰² A similar approach would be taken in the nearly contemporary depiction of Louis’ continued attempts to confront the growing instability of his rule and the challenges surrounding him in the year 829.

After winter had ended, a few days before sacred Easter, an earthquake shook Aachen at night during Lent and a storm arose so violently that the storm stripped not only humble homes but even the very Basilica of the Mother of

¹⁰¹ *ARF* a. 827, 173: Huius cladis praesagia credita sunt visae multoties in caelo acies et ille terribilis nocturnae coruscationis in aere discursus. Cf. Eastwood, *Ordering*, 151.

¹⁰² *ARF* a. 827, 173: Imperator autem duobus conventibus habitis, uno apud Niumagam propter falsas Hohrici filii Godefridi regis Danorum pollicitationes... Altero apud Compendium, in quo et annualia dona suscepit et his, qui ad marcam Hispanicam mittendi erant, quid vel qualiter agere deberent, imperavit.

God—a church they call the Chapel built with lead roof tiles—of a large part of them.¹⁰³

Louis would surely have been present when these things happened for he had remained in Aachen from Fall 828 to July 829, occupied with addressing the ‘present troubles’ and their portents.¹⁰⁴ The court historians privileged the destructive forces of nature, Louis’ anxious reaction to the rumors of an invasion, and the nature of those rumors, overshadowing the winter meetings and Worms assembly in their narrative. Privileging the signs and suggestions of growing political instability, the court historians set the tone for the entry using the earthquake and the windstorm, suggesting concern for the outcome of the actions of the gatherings they would then describe.

Common to all recensions of the *Royal Frankish Annals* is an account of two lunar eclipses that occurred in 828 (on 1 July and 25 December); recension (C), however, noted in Gascony “crops raining from heaven resembling grain, but somewhat smaller and rounder.”¹⁰⁵ This may seem superficially trivial, but according to the annalist, some of the grain “was carried to the Lord Emperor at the palace in Aachen.”¹⁰⁶ If the miraculous grain was brought to Louis at his palace in Aachen, as the report suggests, it would have reached Louis in February, when he convened an assembly addressing the situation in the Spanish March, or after 11

¹⁰³ ARF a. 829, 176-177: Post exactam hiemem in ipso sancto quadragesimali ieiunio paucis ante sanctum pascha diebus Aquisgrani terrae motus noctu factus ventusque tam vehemens coortus, ut non solum humiliores domos, verum etiam ipsam sanctae Dei genitricis basilicam, quam capellam vocant, tegulis plumbeis tectam non modica denudaret parte.

¹⁰⁴ ARF a. 829, 177.

¹⁰⁵ ARF, a. 829 (C), 176: Ferunt in regione Wasconia trans Garonnam fluvium in pago Aginnense annonam de caelo pluire similem frumento, sed paululum breviora ac rotundiora grana habere de qua domno imperatori adlatum est ad Aquis palatium. For a brief introduction to the various recensions of the *Royal Frankish Annals* and their differences, see McKitterick, “Ideology,” 170-172.

¹⁰⁶ ARF a. 828, 176.

November, when Louis convened his winter meeting to address the crises spread throughout his empire.¹⁰⁷ Although the *Royal Frankish Annals* do not elaborate on the event, it resonates with the other evidence from the winter meeting of 828-829, when Louis appears to have sought to learn God's plan for him and his empire, and when Louis' advisors offered Louis what he wanted through claims of divine inspiration and by reading the signs and portents that had recently appeared.

Walahfrid Strabo among the Kings, Emperors, and Prophets

Among those present and counselling Louis during the winter of 828 to 829, Walahfrid Strabo and Einhard both played critical roles in suggesting Louis' next steps. Walahfrid's offering came in a poem, known as '*On the Statue of Theoderic*' (*de imagine tetrici*): a dialogue with the muse of Inspiration that took as its focus a statue of Theoderic that Charlemagne had brought to Aachen years before.¹⁰⁸ Herren suggests that this highly allusive poem depicted a single day in the life of the poet, beginning with a discussion with his muse in the courtyard about a statue of Theoderic the Ostrogoth, then observing the entrance of Louis and his entourage, then moving on to several moments inside the palace when the poet should praise the emperor, but instead offers "salutary wishes mingled with admonition," after which he withdraws to the courtyard and the statue of Theoderic, where he began.¹⁰⁹ Although the

¹⁰⁷ *ARF* a. 828, 174-176.

¹⁰⁸ Herren, "Walahfrid," 118-139; Smolak, "Panegyrik," 89-110; Deliyannis, *Agnellus*, 78-79.

¹⁰⁹ Herren, "Interpretation," 32-33. Compare with the division made by Smolak, "Panegyrik," 91. The poem survives in a single manuscript, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 869, and bears the very specific title of "Versus in Aquisgrani Palatio Editi Anno Hludowici Imperatoris XVI. De Imagine Tetrici" (Verses Composed in the Palace of Aachen in the Sixteenth Year of the Emperor Louis on the Statue of Theoderic). See also Godman, *Poets*, 137 n.157.

springtime setting of the poem was used by the poet as a contrast to the dire circumstances threatening the empire, it may also indicate when the poem was offered to Louis, that is in the spring of 829, nearing the end of the winter meeting of that year. The poem provided Walahfrid with an opportunity to praise and advise Louis in various ways, and he evidently thought Louis would be receptive to it.

At the poem's outset, Walahfrid noted the bad political situation ("the latest crisis") and presented the fate of Theoderic the Ostrogoth, suffering in hell for his sins as an example for Louis, should the king not heed his warnings.¹¹⁰ Walahfrid depicted Theoderic in ways highly reminiscent of how Charlemagne had been described in the vision literature of the earlier 820s, namely as "once ruler in Italian shores, | being miserly kept much of his great wealth for himself. | But the wretched man now walks only with himself along the pitch-black Avernus."¹¹¹ Theoderic's punishment, *Scintilla* then explained, came as a result of the "plague" of greed and slaughter Theoderic had caused, and his opposition to "illustrious palaces and Christian congregations," symbols for, according to Herren, "legitimate political authority" and "legitimate ecclesiastical authority."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Herren, "Interpretation," 27-29. Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 122-123, lns.20-26: Et uix ipsa luto subducit pupula sese | Stercoribusque nouissima, pro pudor, omnis inhorret. The legend of Theoderic's infernal punishment appears to derive from Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, specifically *Dialogue* 4, c. 31. Cf. Herren, "Interpretation," 28, n. 13.

¹¹¹ Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 123, lns.30-33: Tetricus, Italicis quondam regnator in oris, | multis ex opibus tantum sibi seruat auarus, | at secum infelix piceo spatatur Auerno. Herren (trans), 132.

¹¹² Herren, "Interpretation," 27-29. For a survey of the various, scholarly interpretations of the poem see Thürlemann, "Bedeutung," 26-30.

In contrast to the bleak image of the Ostrogoth, Walahfrid characterized Louis and his family in terms he seems to have felt would please Louis. About the emperor himself, Walahfrid asked, “Whom should I call you save Moses, great among his people, | you who lead your people into the light, once darkness has been removed?”¹¹³ Herren argues accurately that comparing a ruler with Moses was extremely rare in Carolingian panegyric, for poets and others tended to favor comparisons with David or Solomon.¹¹⁴ Further, after describing Lothar as “Joshua, heir of the prophetic name,” Walahfrid praised the Empress Judith by claiming that she could just as easily “contend in verses or announce the future” with the ancient female poet Sappho or the biblical prophetess Holda.¹¹⁵ Walahfrid’s comparisons were not entirely positive, however, since he also described Charles the Bald and his mother, Judith, as Benjamin and Rachel, compared Charles’ birth to a massive flood.¹¹⁶ Outside the political context of the poem, this image might suggest baptismal and cleansing imagery. In the context of 829, however, the comparison between Charles’ birth and a dangerous flood operated on two levels, the first suggesting the poet’s awareness of the political trouble

¹¹³ Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 125, ln.100: Quem te namque uocem, nisi magnum in plebe Moysen, | qui populos tenebris per lumen ducis ademptis. Adapted from Herren (trans.), 134.

¹¹⁴ Herren, “Interpretation,” 29. Notably, however, in historiography Charlemagne was also compared with Moses once indirectly in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, and again directly in the *Petau Annals*. ARF a. 782, 62 and 64; AP 788, 17.

¹¹⁵ Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 126 and 128, lns. 127-129 and 169-170: De Hlothario Imperatore | at latere e dextro sancti spes optima regni | procedit Iosue praesagi nominis heres... O si Sappho loquax uel nos inuiseret Holda, | Ludere iam pedibus uel ferre futura ualeres. Herren (trans.), 135-136. Holda is briefly mentioned in 4 Kings 22: 14-20

¹¹⁶ Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 127, lns.144-146 – Occurrit trepidae pelagi vastissima prorae | inluuies, uia quam suadet modo coepta secandam, | sed moles absterret aquae atque uolubilis obex. | Vidi equidem, cum pulchra Rachel solamen aurum | Benjamin dextro produceret ordine. Herren (trans.), 136.

Charles' birth had already caused and the second alluding to the fact that the birth of Benjamin had led to Rachel's death.¹¹⁷

Later in the poem, as Louis' entourage passes through the courtyard in which the statue of Theoderic stood, Walahfrid imagined another procession marching through the courtyard with Theoderic at its head. Viewing this imagined parallel procession, Walahfrid remarked that according to the actions and desires of the emperor "whatever the wretched world stirs up will migrate to the Frankish citadel."¹¹⁸ With Theoderic's legacy acting as a counterpoint to and lesson for Louis' rule, Walahfrid reminded Louis that he, as emperor, stood as the moral center of the empire, and upon his shoulders rested the responsibility for the purity and righteousness of the empire. Walahfrid never, throughout the outlined poem, abandoned his tone of admonition.

Describing his personal encounter with the emperor, when Walahfrid saw Louis dressed in "gems and gold" he questioned whether he beheld "brilliant Moses" whom the crowd followed, or "good Solomon or great David."¹¹⁹ After this moment of reflection, Walahfrid explained that rather than David or Solomon, he preferred to compare Louis with Moses, brightened in the moment of revelation, or as he described it: "the horned countenance of the holy father [i.e. Moses] flashing in glory; the fellowship of the divine word

¹¹⁷ Cf. Genesis 35:18.

¹¹⁸ Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 129, lns. 215-220 – Cedant magna tui, super est, figmenta colossi, | Roma: uelit Caesar magnus, migrabit ad arces | Francorum, quodcumque miser conflauerit orbis. | En quis praecipue iactabat Graecia sese, | organa rex magnus non iter maxima ponit. Herren (trans.), 137-138.

¹¹⁹ Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 130, lns. 228-232: Interea magnis crepitant tabulata cateris, | quae clarum sequitur pulcherrima turba Moysen. | Obstupui, fateor, gemmis auroque decorum | et uidi et mecum uoluens tum singula, uolui, | an Solomona pium an magnum Dauida uiderem. Herren (trans.), 138.

had conferred a brilliance on him who is the gentlest of mortals.¹²⁰ By comparing the emperor to the glowing countenance of Moses—a reference to Moses’ radiance after speaking with God in Exodus 34:34-35—Walahfrid praised Louis in a way they directly responded to Louis’ anxiety about knowing and performing God’s will. For once Walahfrid had overcome the awe that assailed him, it was the prophetic character of the emperor that the poet immediately recognized and praised, rather than a similarity to David or Solomon.

Never losing sight of the dangerous political parallel with the empire with which the poem began, Walahfrid concluded his praise of Louis by reminding him that “only then does a prosperous republic rise, | when kings are sufficiently wise and wise men are kings.”¹²¹ Earlier, when the poet first described Louis as Moses, Walahfrid claimed that despite Charlemagne’s great accomplishments “to his [Charlemagne’s] genius I do not apply the teaching of Plato,” largely because Louis’ prophetic character trumped the greatness of Charlemagne.¹²² Encouraging the emphasis Louis placed on recognizing the will of God and fulfilling it, Walahfrid used his pièce d’occasion for the winter meeting of 828-829 to admonish the emperor while further reifying the prophetic qualities Louis clearly valued.

Of an Angel and a Loquacious Demon

¹²⁰ Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 130, lns. 235-238: Percepi tandem, postquam rigor ossa reliquit, | ora sacri cornuta patris splendore corusco; | hunc cui fulgorem diui consortia verbi | ediderant, qui in terrigenis mitissimus extat. Herren (trans.), 138.

¹²¹ Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 139, lns. 256-257 – Nunc tandem creuit felix res publica, cum sat | et reges sapiunt simul et regnant sapientes. Herren (trans.), 139. Following Herren’s citation, see Prudentius, *Contra Symmachus*, 1.30-32 – Esset | Publica res, inquit, tunc fortunata satis, si | vel reges saperent, uel regnarent sapientes. Cf. Boethius, *Consolatio*, 1.4.

¹²² Walahfrid, *De imagine tetrici*, 126, lns. 111: Cuius ad ingenium non confero dogma Platonis. Herren (trans.), 135

Seeking to satisfy Louis' anxiety to know God's plan for him and his empire, Einhard, another participant in the meeting, presented to Louis a rational reading of signs and portents and thereby revealed to the emperor what he desired. Einhard came to the meeting with two revelatory texts that had come through the power of the relics he had recently acquired.¹²³ The first text consisted of twelve *capitula* revealed by the angel Gabriel to a blind man, intended to be presented to Louis the Pious.¹²⁴ The second text, accompanying the first, consisted of "the words and reasoning of a certain demon who called himself Wiggo" whose utterances were recorded during an exorcism "in the presence of many witnesses, before the altar next to which the sacred ashes of the martyrs were contained."¹²⁵

In his account of the translation and impact of the relics of the saints Marcellinus and Peter, Einhard described how he presented the revelatory texts to Louis and that the king failed to act on them, or as Einhard said: "Of those things that he [Louis] was commanded or admonished to do through this booklet, he cared to fulfil but a few."¹²⁶ Although Einhard was reticent to reveal the specific contents of Gabriel's twelve *capitula*, his letter to Louis in 830 suggested their contents by claiming that the revolt against Louis (and all that came with it) had been predicted by the "revelations of the martyrs of Christ," suggesting that either the

¹²³ On the use of the cult of the saints in Carolingian politics, see Smith, "Oral and Written," 309-343; Fouracre, "Origins," 143-166. On Einhard more specifically, see Heydemann, "Relics," 200-202.

¹²⁴ Einhard, *Translatio*, c.13, 252: Suscepi ab eo libellum atque perlegi, emendatumque ac noviter scriptum imperatori, ut iussus erat, obtuli.

¹²⁵ Einhard, *Translatio*, c.14, 253: Sub idem fere tempus, cum Ratleicus a nobis ad basilicam martyrum regressus est, adlatus est nobis inde alter libellus, continens verba et ratiocinationem cuiusdam daemonis, qui se Wiggonem nominavit; quae facta est ab eo coram multis testibus ante altare iuxta quod sacri martyrum cineres repositi sunt.

¹²⁶ Einhard, *Translatio*, c.13, 252: Et ille quidem suscepit atque perlegit. Sed de his quae per hunc libellum facere iussus vel admonitus fuerat perpauca adimplere curavit.

capitula included predictions, or warnings of what might happen should the emperor not fulfill what had been revealed.¹²⁷

Unlike the revelation from Gabriel, the second revelatory text (from the surprisingly loquacious demon Wiggo) offered much more in the way of specific details. “At nearly the same time” as the first revelation, Einhard recorded the “words and reasoning of a certain demon, who called himself Wiggo.”¹²⁸ Einhard explained that the demon spoke fluent Latin from the mouth of a possessed, illiterate sixteen-year-old girl from the area of Höchst, near Frankfurt am Main.¹²⁹ The demon, quoted at length by Einhard, explained that

‘I am an attendant and disciple of Satan and although I have long been the gatekeeper in the infernal regions, for several years with my eleven allies I have ravaged the kingdom of the Franks. We destroyed and sent plague upon grain, wine, and all crops born of the earth for the use of mankind, just as we were commanded. We killed herds with disease, we sent plague and pestilence among the people themselves, as well as all adversities and every evil altogether that they then suffered according to their merits.’¹³⁰

Recalling crop failures and diseases, plagues among humans and animals, and other unnamed adversities, Wiggo explained that he and his demonic companions had been answering the sins of the Frankish people with comparable signs and punishments. Such signs were

¹²⁷ Einhard, Ep. 14, 117: Omnia, que nunc in hoc regno geruntur, revelantibus Christi martyribus ante biennium futura predicta sunt.

¹²⁸ Einhard, *Translatio*, c.14, 253: Sub idem fere tempus, cum Ratleicus a nobis ad basilicam martyrum regressus est, adlats est nobis inde alter libellus, continens verba et ratiocinationem cuiusdam daemonis, qui se Wiggonem nominavit; quae facta est ab eo coram multis testibus ante altare iuxta quod sacri martyrum cineres repositi sunt.

¹²⁹ Einhard, *Translatio*, c.14, 253: ac deinde daemonem, qualiter et quando in eam fuisset ingressus, percontari coepisset, non barbara lingua, quam solam puella noverat, sed Romana locutione presbitero respondit.

¹³⁰ Einhard, *Translatio*, c.14, 253: Ego, ait, sum satelles atque discipulus Satanae et multo iam tempore apud inferos ianitor fui, sed modo per annos aliquot cum sociis meis undecim regnum Francorum vastavi; frumentum et vinum et omnes alias fruges, quae ad usum hominum de terra nascuntur, iuxta quod iussi eramus, enecando delevimus, pecora morbis interfecimus, luem ac pestilentiam in ipsos homines inmisimus; omnes quoque adversitates et cuncta mala, quae iam diu pro meritis suis patiuntur. Cf. Dutton's translation in *Courtier*, 104.

becoming increasingly familiar throughout the 820s to those who sought to read the natural world as a means of understanding God's will. Wiggo explained that he and his companions had been sent in response to

the wickedness of this people and the many sins of those who have been established over them; those who love bribes, not justice; who fear man more than God; who oppress the poor, and refuse to hear widows and orphans crying out to them, who provide justice to none except to the one buying. Furthermore, there are many other, nearly innumerable sins besides that are committed daily as much by the people as by its rulers, including: perjury, drunkenness, adulteries, murders, thefts, rapes, all of which no one prevents from being performed, and when they have been performed, there is none who would avenge them. [Wiggo described at length the sins among the Franks, including the greed of the powerful, their abuse of power, hatred, few still paid tithes and gave alms, dishonesty, and no respect for the Sabbath.] Because the people here have been proven disobedient through defiance to God's commandments, He allowed [us], or more correctly, we were ordered into human affairs to do these things that have been listed above, in order that the punishments compensate the faithlessness. For they are a faithless and deceitful people that does not care to preserve what they promised in baptism.¹³¹

The sins of the Franks and their rulers had become so numerous that Wiggo and his pack of demons had been commanded by God to punish and warn them. Einhard ensured that his readers understood the message's warning as he lamented that the times had become so terrible that "the teachers are not good men but evil demons, and the instigators of vices and

¹³¹ Einhard, *Translatio*, III, c.14, 253: Hic cum presbiter ab eo quaereret, quam de causa eis fuisset huiusmodi concessa potestas: 'Propter malitiam', inquit, 'populi huius et multimodas iniquitates eorum qui super eum constituti sunt, qui munera et non iustitiam diligunt; qui plus hominem quam deum metuunt; qui pauperes opprimunt, viduas et pupillos ad se vociferantes exaudire nolunt, nulli iustitiam nisi mercanti faciunt. Praeter haec sunt et alia multa ac pene innumerabilia, quae tam ab ipso populo quam a rectoribus eius cotidie committuntur, ut sunt periuria, ebrietates, adulteria, homicidia, furta, rapinae; quae nemo fieri prohibet, et cum facta fuerint, non est qui vindicet. Propter haec et alia multa, quae Deus aut praecepit hominibus ut facerent aut prohibuit ne facerent, quia populus hic per contumaciam mandatis eius inobediens effectus est, permissi, immo iussi sumus ea facere in rebus humanis quae superius enumeravi, ut perfidiae suae poenas luant. Sunt enim perfidi atque mendaces, cum hoc servare non curant quod in baptismo promiserunt. Cf. Dutton's translation, *Courtier*, 104-105.

the proponents of sins now warn us about our *correctio*.¹³² As he presented demons as their voice of warning, Einhard offered to those gathered at the winter meeting a rational reading of God's will from the signs and portents they had been experiencing, conveyed as the sudden revelation of an angel and a speech by a demon acting by God's command. Einhard admitted to re-writing and correcting the booklets he had received containing the Gabriel's and Wiggo's words. In his presentation of them we can observe one of Louis' advisors responding to Louis' anxiety about knowing God's will for himself and his realm and using techniques that can be observed more widely throughout the 820s.

Epistola generalis: Interpretation, Admission, and Admonition

Louis' response to the criticisms came the following year. Written in his voice (and also that of Lothar, Louis' son and co-emperor), the *Epistola generalis* echoed some of the language of Louis' *Ordinatio imperii*, reaffirming that Louis was doing all he could to ascertain God's will for the empire and to remedy its current ills.¹³³ In its introduction, the *Epistola generalis* declared that Louis and Lothar, "ordained august emperors by divine *providentia*,"¹³⁴ had followed the counsel of their advisors and ordered that

¹³² Einhard, *Translatio*, III, c.14, 254: Heu pro dolor! Ad quantas miserias tempora nostra sunt devoluta, in quibus non boni homines, sed mali daemones doctores sunt, et incentores vitiorum ac persuasores criminum de nostra nos correctione commonent.

¹³³ Two recensions of the *Epistola generalis* survive and are referred to as A (the shorter) and B (the longer). The shorter survives in a single manuscript (Barcelona, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Ripoll 40), while the longer survives in four manuscript witnesses (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Lat. 5516; Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chigi C. VIII. 239; Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. 1041; Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 3827). Although scholars have long argued that the longer recension was a forgery, recent scholarship has accepted it as authentic. Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte*, vol. 4, 51-53; Dutton, *Politics*, 98, who follows Bondonio, *La translation*, 94-97. See also Patzold, "Pater noster," 218 n. 95; de Jong, *Penitential*, 172-176.

¹³⁴ *Epistola generalis*, 4: In nomine domini Dei et salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi Hludowicus et Hlotharius divina ordinante providentia imperatores augusti omnibus fidelibus sanctae Dei ecclesiae et nostris.

a fast be celebrated by all throughout our entire kingdom to request with complete devotion that God might be propitiated towards us, *that He might reveal to us* in what ways we have done Him the greatest offense, and that He might deign to grant us a time of peace for our necessary correction.¹³⁵

Before anything else, Louis made it clear that he had sought revelation from God to know how He had been offended, in order that this offence might be corrected. In its call for a three-day fast, this letter invoked Charlemagne's innovations in response to crises in 807 as well as Louis' response to his near-death experience that resulted in his promulgation of the *Ordinatio imperii* in 817.¹³⁶ While Charlemagne's fasting appeared primarily propitiatory, however, Louis' three-day fast sought both revelation and then the time to perform what would be revealed, as was also requested by the fasting that preceded the division of the empire in 817.¹³⁷ Immediately thereafter, Louis and Lothar declared that they had decided during the winter meeting to convene a series of councils throughout the empire, again utilizing but expanding Charlemagne's response to crisis, and specifically his Reform Councils in 813.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ *Epistola generalis*, 4: Recordari vos credimus, qualiter hoc anno consilio sacerdotum et aliorum fidelium nostrorum generale ieiunium per totum regnum nostrum celebrare iussimus Deumque tota devotione deprecari, ut nobis propitiari et, in quibus illum maxime offensum haberemus, nobis manifestare et ut ad correctionem nostram necessariam tranquillum tempus nobis tribuere dignaretur.

¹³⁶ Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 245-246: Notum sit dilectioni vestrae, quia nos, cum fidelibus nostris tam spiritalibus quam saecularibus tractantes, cum consensu et pari consilio invenimus necessarium esse propter instantes quasdam necessitates quas subter significaturi sumus, tria triduana ieiunia ab omnibus generaliter esse celebranda atque ab eo, in quo vivimus, movemur et sumus, auxilium esse quaerendum.

¹³⁷ *Ordinatio imperii*, 270-271: Idcirco necessarium duximus, ut ieiuniis et orationibus et elemosinarum largitionibus apud illum obtineremus quod nostra infirmitas non praesumebat. Quibus rite per triduum celebratis, nutu omnipotentis Dei, ut credimus, actum est, ut et nostra et totius populi nostri in dilecti primogeniti nostri Hlutharii electione vota concurrerent. Itaque taliter divina dispensatione manifestatum placuit et nobis et omni populo nostro, more solemni imperiali diademate coronatum nobis et consortem et successorem imperii, si Dominus ita voluerit, communi voto constitui.

¹³⁸ *Epistola generalis*, 4: Quapropter nosse volumus solertiam vestram, quod in isto praesenti placito cum fidelibus nostris consideravimus ut primo omnium archiepiscopi cum suis suffraganeis in locis congruis tempore opportuno convenirent et ibi tam de sua quam de omnium nostrum correctione et emendatione secundum

Louis and Lothar justified their reading of the situation, and their response, by interpreting the various signs and portents that had been presented to them, and that they had discussed during the winter meeting:

Who does not think that God is offended and provoked to wrath by our most corrupt actions when one sees his wrath rage for so many years through manifold scourges in the kingdom committed to us by Him? That is, when we see the people of this realm have been wretchedly harassed and afflicted through lasting famine, in the mortality of animals, in the plagues of men, in the sterility of almost all crops, and, as I have thus said, by the most diverse diseases and disasters and widespread poverty as well as the abundance of things has recently been exhausted.¹³⁹

Louis and Lothar use terms strikingly parallel to the punishments and portents Einhard's demon claimed to have caused among the Franks on God's order. But they both also went further in their interpretation of the signs of God's anger, explaining how they did not

doubt that this [crisis] has come about according to His just judgement, because scandals frequently arise through tyrants in this kingdom who strive to break the peace of the Christian people and the unity of the empire by their corruption. This very crisis should be regarded as occurring by our sins as well because of the devastations of the enemies of the name of Christ who have invaded this kingdom in the past year: they burned churches, enslaved Christians, and murdered servants of God, fearless, boldly cruel, and with impunity. Accordingly, because we fall short in all things, the just judgement of God causes that we are scourged *internally at the same time externally*. Obviously we are ungrateful for the blessings of God since we are discovered using them not according to God's will, but according to our carnal pleasure. And as a result, the creations of God, divinely permitted, appropriately fight

divinam auctoritatem quaerendo invenirent et nobis atque fidelibus nostris secundum ministerium sibi commissum adnuntiarent.

¹³⁹ *Epistola generalis*, 4: Quis enim non sentiat Deum nostris pravissimis actibus esse offensum et ad iracundiam provocatum, cum videat tot annis multifariis flagellis iram illius in regno nobis ab eo commisso desaevire, videlicet in fame continua, in mortalitate animalium, in pestilentia hominum, in sterilitate pene omnium frugum, et, ut ita dixerim, diversissimis morborum cladibus atque ingentibus penuriis populum istius regni miserabiliter vexatum et afflictum atque omni abundantia rerum quodam modo exinanitum? For an interesting take on the various disasters referenced, see Esders and Patzold, "Justinian," 403-406.

for God against us ingrates just as the saying goes, “the earth will fight for Him against the foolish.”¹⁴⁰

Developing actions first used under Charlemagne—when he claimed that from the many observed signs and portents “we can conclude with greatest certainty from these external signs that we who do not please the Lord in all things internally are forced to bear such evils externally”—Louis and Lothar declared all of the events they mentioned signs and portents communicating God’s anger.¹⁴¹ Confirming the message of divine anger communicated by the crisis, the co-emperors claimed that “in us the prophecy is fulfilled that states: *Tribulation alone will help you understand what you hear* (Isaiah 28:19).”¹⁴² In contrast to Charlemagne, however, Louis and Lothar took direct personal responsibility for having invoked the divine anger against the empire, and that

¹⁴⁰ *Epistola generalis*, 4-5: Nec illud etiam, dubitamus ex iusta vindicta illius evenire, quod saepe scandala per tyrannos in hoc regno exsurgunt, qui pacem populi christiani et unitatem imperii sua pravitate nituntur scindere nam et illud nihilominus peccatis nostris deputandum est, quod inimici Christi nominis praeterito anno in hoc regnum ingressi depraedationes, incendia ecclesiarum et captivationes christianorum et interfectiones servorum Dei audenter et impune, immo crudeliter, fecerunt. Agitur siquidem iusto iudicio Dei, ut, quia in cunctis delinquimus, *interius simul et exterius flagellemur*. Beneficiis quippe Dei evidenter existimus ingrati, quoniam his non ad voluntatem Dei, sed ad libitum nostrum carnalem uti invenimur. Et idcirco merito creaturae Dei nobis divinitus concessae pro Deo contra nos ingratos pugnant, iuxta illud: ‘Pugnabit pro eo orbis terrarum contra insensatos.’ (*emphasis added*).

¹⁴¹ Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 245-246: Necessitates vero quas supra nos dicturos esse promisimus, inter ceteras (quas tamen hac vice commemorare necessarium non duximus), haec sunt denique: conpertum habemus per fideles nostros, qui nobis de singulis regni nostri partibus haec nuntiaverunt, quod insolito more et ultra consuetum ubique terrae sterelitas esse et famis periculum imminere videtur, aëris etiam intemperies frugibus valde contraria pestilentia quoque per loca, et paganorum gentium circa marcas nostras sedentia bella continua, multa praeterea quae et nunc enumerare est et nobis experimento possunt esse notissima, si recordare volumus, qualia incommoda singulis diebus propter merita nostra sentiamus. Certissimeque ab his exterioribus colligere possumus, nos per omnia Domino non placere interius, qui tanta mala compellimur tollerare exterius. Quamobrem bonum nobis omnino videtur, ut unusquisque nostrum cor suum humiliare in veritate studeat et, in quocumque loco sive actu sive cogitatu se Deum offendisse deprehenderit, poenitendo tergat, flendo doleat et semetipsum in quantum ipse potest ab his malis in futurum cavendo custodiat... ut gratiam illius promereri possimus, haec ieiunia atque has orationes ab omnibus vobis generaliter fieri decrevimus.

¹⁴² *Epistola generalis*, 5: Verum, quia tot modis vexamur atque percutimur, ad eum, a quo percutimur, toto corde dignum necessariumque est ut revertamur, quatenus illud propheticum in nobis impleatur, quo dicitur: ‘Sola vexatio intellectum dabit auditui.’

He who made us to feel scourges by the most just execution made it possible for us to *recognize* our sins for which we are justly scourged by Him and *unmistakably understand* in what we have especially offended Him and provoked His wrath so that, after forsaking and correcting the corrupt, and pursuing the good and striving after it with total devotion as well, we will (with His pity) succeed to offer the sacrifice we owe to God through the spirit of humility and a contrite soul and to escape the wrath of His indignation, and that we, although unworthy, might deserve the grace of His propitiation, through worthy, harmonious correction and the exhibition of good works.¹⁴³

In his circular letter, Charlemagne explained that all the threats to his realm had occurred “according to what we have earned,” sharing the responsibility for the situation broadly and quickly taking the lead in encouraging his followers to humble themselves so that whenever one of them might “discover that he has offended God,” that all might perform appropriate penance.¹⁴⁴ This goes much further, Louis and Lothar declared that God had specifically “caused us to understand the scourges had come about by most just implementation,” and that “we recognize we have sinned to a greater degree in this, we who ought to be the example of salvation *to all*, to bear the responsibility *for all*, and to correct the actions of the corrupt through imperial authority, lest they grow even greater.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ *Epistola generalis*, 5: Sed quia pius et clemens Dominus sic ipsum flagellum moderatur, ut non ad interitum, sed potius ad correctionem nostram inferre videatur, debemus in conspectu eius veraciter humiliari et faciem illius in confessione praevenire eiusque pietatem pronis mentibus exorare, ut, *qui fecit nos iustissima dispensatione flagella sentire, faciat nobis peccata nostra, pro quibus iuste ab eo flagellamur, cognoscere* et, in quibus maxime illum offendimus et iram illius provocavimus, manifestius intelligere, ut post, eo miserante, prava deserendo et corrigendo, bona etiam sectando et tota cum devotione exsequendo, valeamus per spiritum humilitatis et animam contritam sacrificium Deo debitum offerre iramque illius indignationis evadere et per dignam congruamque correctionem et bonorum operum exhibitionem gratiam eius propitiationis, licet indigni, promereri. (*emphasis added*).

¹⁴⁴ Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 245-246: si recordare volumus, qualia incommoda singulis diebus propter merita nostra sentiamus... Quamobrem bonum nobis omnino videtur, ut unusquisque nostrum cor suum humiliare in veritate studeat et, in quocumque loco sive actu sive cogitatu se Deum offendisse deprehenderit, poenitendo tergat, flendo doleat et semetipsum in quantum ipse potest ab his malis in futurum cavendo custodiat.

¹⁴⁵ *Epistola generalis*, 5: At, quia nos magis in hoc peccasse cognoscimus, qui forma salutis *omnibus* esse debuimus et *omnium* curam gerere et per auctoritatem imperialem pravorum acta, ne tantum ad crescerent, corrigere. (*emphasis added*).

Louis and Lothar declared their own responsibility for what had befallen the empire, and their obligation for the correction and salvation of the same, authorizing their actions by acting on the knowledge revealed to them by God. Claiming a revelation regarding the meaning of the signs and portents occurring throughout the empire, Louis and Lothar sought to combine the two prevalent means of knowing the mind of God in order to legitimize their response to the crises surrounding them. Ultimately the *Epistola generalis* and the revelation it claimed arrived at an all-too-familiar solution: just as Charlemagne had done in 813, Louis and Lothar would convene councils to meet throughout the empire, only these councils would be specifically tasked with discovering how to placate an angry God.

Conclusion

Attempting to address the growing uncertainty and trouble in the empire, Louis and Lothar used the *Epistola generalis* to interpret God's judgement upon the empire for all to see and then to begin the process of correction based on God's authority. Louis and Lothar combined both approaches to the prophetic in the *Epistola generalis*, claiming direct divine revelation as well as reading God's will from the signs and portents appearing throughout the empire. As the culmination of Louis' consistent desire for divine direction and his use of such to authorize critical actions throughout his reign, this letter assured the public recognition of his prophetic authority as well as the guilt and correction it authorized. Although the *Epistola generalis* stands out as Louis' most extreme use of the prophetic to date, it was a clear and decisive step that extended the trends we have observed in his own official actions and the culture he cultivated.

Despite Louis' efforts, the *Epistola generalis* and the councils that it summoned ultimately failed to solve the profound crises of the empire, as demonstrated by the years of revolt that followed. Nevertheless, coming at the end of the 820s, the *Epistola generalis* signals the establishment of the prophetic as a powerful means of discourse within Frankish politics as even those who would reject Louis' rule as emperor utilized prophetic authority against him. Building on a foundation of theocratic rule, the co-emperors publicly declared that God had revealed to them the meaning of the portents afflicting the empire as well as the path forward, and did so in terms far bolder than any Frankish king or emperor had used before. Although Louis' political authority fared far worse following the crises of 829, the authority claims he made would now become a staple within the Frankish lexicon of power, to be used and abused by all sides in the conflicts to come.

Chapter 4

Introduction

According to the Astronomer, during Easter 837, a comet passing across the sky for several days had captured the emperor's attention. The Astronomer described how Louis had invited him personally to the balcony to view the comet's transit and to discuss its meaning. The Astronomer reported his inability to interpret the portent satisfactorily, but that Louis could. The emperor gently instructed his future biographer, explaining that the "ever dire and sorrowful portent" they were discussing "revealed a change in the kingdom and even the death of a prince."¹ The didactic formula into which the Astronomer cast their conversation then saw the Astronomer seek to comfort the emperor through Scripture, quoting the phrase from the prophet Jeremiah "do not fear the signs of heaven that frighten the heathens."² The emperor corrected his advisor, explaining that

we must not fear anything except Him, the Creator of us and of that star. But we cannot praise and wonder at His mercy enough, Who deigns to warn our ignorance with such signs, since we are sinners and unrepentant. Because, therefore, this portent indicates both me and all people generally, let us hasten all things according to what we can and what we know to improve, lest perhaps we are found unworthy of the mercy, for which we have already asked, prevented by our unrepentant state.³

¹ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 58, 518: dirum semper ac triste portentum, id est comete sidus. c.58, 522: unum est inquit quod adhuc silentio premis: mutationem enim regni mortemque principis hoc monstrari portento dicitur.

² Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 58, 522: A signis caeli ne timueritis, que pavent gentes.

³ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 58, 522: Non alium, inquit, timere debemus praeter illum, qui nostri et huius creator est syderis. Sed eius clementiam non satis mirari et laudare possumus, qui nostram inhertiam, cum simus peccatores et inpenitentes, talibus ammonere dignatur inditiis (*lege* indiciis). Quia ergo et me et omnes communiter hoc tangit ostentum, omnes pro posse et sapere ad meliora festinemus, ne forte misericordiam illo praerogante et nostra inpenitudine inpediente, nos illa inveniamur indigni.

Crystallizing the key features that the Astronomer felt defined Louis reign, this speech shows Louis' desire and ability to interpret the will of God through inspiration and manifest signs, values that formed a central part of the emperor's legacy. The Astronomer emphasized Louis' use of the prophetic as a counterpoint to many of the negative events in Louis' later reign, highlighting Louis' ability to transform what could have been pessimism about the outcome of events into a more hopeful message about the future.

By 837, Louis' pessimism would have been well founded. From the summer of 829 to the summer of 840, Louis endured several rebellions of his sons, abandonment by his troops on the battlefield, forced public penance at the hands of a group of bishops, and after regaining power, an ongoing struggle that irrevocably diminished Louis' authority and arguably the position of emperor, damage inflicted as much by Louis' supporters as by his opponents. Throughout the first half of his reign, Louis had normalized and popularized the use of the prophetic in imperial politics as he encouraged a culture of reciprocal correction between himself and his elites, and made himself a target of anyone claiming to speak God's mind. In this chapter, I will explore how in the second half of Louis' reign, the prophetic authority he claimed began to be used to check and subvert his authority. As the debates about the emperor's political authority were taken up on the page as well as the battlefield, Louis' opponents and defenders all used the prophetic in order to justify their various causes. While Carolingian imperial authority declined in the second half of Louis' reign, the use of the prophetic he had helped cultivate inversely increased and both dominated Frankish political discourse and defined Louis' immediate legacy as a ruler.

I. The Paris Council of 829⁴ - Reframing Prophetic Authority

The Council of Paris

The *Epistola generalis* stipulated that the bishops should draw up their findings and present them to an imperial assembly at the end of the summer of 829. Later that same year, bishops from all over the Carolingian empire gathered in Mainz, Lyon, Toulouse, and Paris to discover how to “appease the wrath of the Lord against us and our subjects.”⁵ The acts of the Paris Council survive in two extensive books, with an attached *relatio episcoporum*, a document intended for presentation to Louis at the imperial assembly in Worms.⁶ These

⁴ With its great length and wide-reaching interests, the Reform Council of Paris has been widely cited and interpreted by modern scholarship. For scholars of medieval political thought, the Paris Council of 829 has great meaning for various reasons. More than anything, it is renowned for its use of a quotation from Pope Gelasius, which established a division of power between the spiritual and the secular, the *auctoritas sacrata pontificum* and the *regalis potestas*. A preliminary bibliography must begin with Anton, “Konzept,” 55-58; cf. Canning, *History*, 50; de Jong, “Ecclesia,” 129-131; Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, 204-205; Schieffer, “Die Krise,” 11; Morrison, *Kingdoms*, 42-47. Some scholars have interpreted this division as the imposition of episcopal supremacy on the Carolingian polity, an effort to moralize political power, to curtail the power of Louis the Pious, or to create a *Staattheologie*, with many of these scholars claiming that the primary authority for these efforts remained the quotation from Gelasius. For example, see Hartmann, *Synoden*, 182; Schieffer, “Die Krise,” 11. Hans Hubert Anton has argued, to be echoed more recently by Mayke de Jong, that rather than some simple division of church and state, or of spiritual and secular power, the Council (and its use of Gelasius) revealed an exceptionally encompassing understanding of *ecclesia*, the prophetic authority claims made in Paris saw little distinction between the ecclesiastical and royal spheres of authority. Anton, “Konzept,” 60-61; de Jong, “Ecclesia,” 129-131. Further Anton noted how this understanding of *ecclesia* echoed the same use of *ecclesia* from the winter meeting in 828-829. For Anton’s view and Patzold’s elaboration of it, see Anton, “Konzept,” 60-61. Cf. Patzold, *Episcopus*, 150-151. Working from this all-encompassing understanding of the *ecclesia*, it is no longer tenable to argue that the bishops in Paris claimed episcopal supremacy in a grand gesture; instead they sought to respond to the crises in the empire, to identify how they had offended God, and to strive to correct the lives of the entire realm. Steffen Patzold has recently argued that the bishops in Paris defined themselves as those responsible for the salvation of the people within the *ecclesia*, a role they claimed that as proceeding from their apostolic power to bind and loose (Mt. 18:18), although Patzold does not explore here extent to which this claim relates to Louis’ own authority claims. On this, see Patzold, *Episcopus*, 152-153 and de Jong, *Penitential*, 177.

⁵ *Epistola generalis*, 5: Quapropter statuimus atque decrevimus cum consultu sacerdotum caeterorumque fidelium nostrorum huius rei gratia ob placandum scilicet contra nos nobisque subiectos Domini furorem conventus eorundem episcoporum in quatuor imperii nostri locis congruentissime fieri. Cf. Patzold, “Argument,” 285; Hartmann, *Synoden*, 179-181.

⁶ Patzold, *Episcopus*, 152.

documents were compiled, redacted, and written largely by the Bishop Jonas of Orléans, who also wrote a *Fürstenspiegel* for Louis' son Pippin that had much in common with the proceedings of the Paris Council.⁷ The acts of the Council of Paris survive in a form far larger than those of many other Carolingian councils because Jonas inserted quotations without abbreviation to “fortify” the conciliar text with the “prophetic statements of divine speech and the sayings of the holy fathers.”⁸ Such fortification with authority responded directly to Louis' claim to interpret the signs of God's displeasure with the Frankish empire, its leaders and people, and his call for the bishops to find solutions. The bishops, as the acts of the 829 Paris council demonstrate, articulated and affirmed the prophetic authority inherent in their episcopal authority in order to empower their proposed solutions, all while circumscribing Louis' own authority, royal and prophetic.

Divided into an introduction and two books, these conciliar acts were not simplistic reactions to immediate crises, nor were they mere political jockeying. Jonas explained that the first book would focus on correcting the priesthood, while the second would address and correct the person of the king.⁹ One theme that persists throughout the conciliar acts and bishops' *relatio* to Louis is the issue of authority, both secular and spiritual. In the introduction, Jonas set out the bishops' approach to the problems throughout the empire and the authority by which they sought to address the problems, and both books reinforce this

⁷ Jonas of Orléans, *De institutione regia*. For the relation of this text to the 829 Council of Paris, see de Jong, *Penitential*, 176; Hartmann, *Synoden*, 182; Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, 204.

⁸ CP, 609: Idcirco enim prolixitas eorum tanta est, quoniam, ne ex nostro corde ficta esse viderentur, divinorum eloquiorum oraculis et sanctorum patrum dictis ea munire non ab re iudicavimus. Cf. Hartmann, *Synoden*, 181.

⁹ CP 829, c.3, 611. Cf. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, 204-207.

approach. In a powerful witness to the changed nature of Frankish political discourse, the bishops articulated their authority as uniquely prophetic, reinforced their authority by re-interpreting the signs that had prompted Louis's decision to call the council, and then used their authority to correct the empire, and Louis at its head. This combination of nearly every form of the prophetic we have previously explored appears in consolidated form in the *Relatio* prepared for Louis in the summer of 829. While Louis may never have seen the *Relatio*, the prophetic authority used to authorize its solutions became one of the most dominant features of the debates throughout the rebellions of the 830s.

Framing Problems, Finding Solutions

Throughout the conciliar acts, Jonas portrayed the bishops' position on a cosmic stage, contextualizing the present crises within the *ecclesia*, and asserting their prophetic authority as heirs of the apostles in the continuing struggle between the virtues and vices, between Christ and the devil; with the greatest threat posed by those who "either do not understand or surely refuse to understand."¹⁰ Declaring "what specifically pertained to the Christian religion" to be part of the struggle between good and evil was not merely dramatic, Jonas sought instead to expose how the present crises reached far beyond military embarrassments and the *honor* of the empire.¹¹ Turning their searching gaze on every aspect of the *ecclesia*, from the emperors to the lowest of the laity, the bishops in Paris sought to recover divine favor by

¹⁰ CP 829, c.1, 610: Quae ideo periculosiora, immo mortifera diximus, quoniam sectatores illorum ea aut non intellegunt aut certe intellegere dedignantur et, quia ea parvipendentes pro his ad confessionem non veniunt, idcirco nec correctionem merentur.

¹¹ CP 829, 609: Quid proprie ad religionem Christianam pertineat; Paschasius, *Epitaphium Arsenii* II, c.2, 62: episcopus vero et ministri ecclesiarum, specialius quae Dei sunt, agant.

correcting the empire at a fundamental level. In order to understand how the bishops declared their prophetic authority and established its political necessity, using the same language of authority Louis and his advisors had utilized throughout the first half of Louis' reign.

In the introduction to the conciliar acts, Jonas of Orleans expressed the bishops' response to the severity of the situation quickly and clearly, establishing their own prophetic authority in the process. After a brief comment on the weaknesses and frailty of humanity, the bishops explained that because they found themselves "in tribulation and manifold adversities and calamities of the world, divine assistance must be sought humbly and truthfully, not deceitfully."¹² After declaring the seriousness of their situation, the bishops used three scriptural analogies to frame the situation of the *populus christianus*, their two emperors Louis and Lothar, and the church, suggesting the high stakes and just how each should respond to such times of tribulation. The bishops explained that

we have read how the Ninevites, worthy of divine vengeance, cried humbly in (their) tribulation for divine help from God [Jonas 3]. For Ahab and Manases, idolater kings, avoided divine vengeance by the payment of penance [3 Kings 21:29]. Again, the prostitute in the Gospel, named Mary, deserved by the shedding of many tears to be freed from the immensity of many sins [Luke 7:47-50]. By these and things like them in the Holy Scriptures it is given to be understood, that while enjoining all things good and prohibiting all things evil, God has been very frequently offended by the sins of human frailty and provoked to wrath. Nevertheless, through the worthy payment of penance He suspends the appropriate judgement of severity from erring mankind.¹³

¹² CP 829, 606-607: In tribulatione ergo multifariisque adversitatibus et calamitatibus mundi non dissimulanter, sed humiliter veraciterque sunt expetenda suffragia divina.

¹³ CP 829, 607: Legimus quippe Ninnivitis divina ultione dignis humiliter in tribulatione ad Deum clamantibus divinitus subventum. Nam et Ahab et Manases, reges idolatrae, paenitentiae satisfactione divinae obviavere

In the introduction to the Paris Council's statements, Jonas established scriptural analogies for the entire *ecclesia*, and claimed responsibility for the salvation of its constituent members. Jonas depicted the general *populus christianus* as the penitent Ninevites, Louis and Lothar as the repentant idolater-kings, Ahab and Manasses, and the church as Mary, the repentant prostitute. Jonas used these analogies to frame their situation and to authorize the claims the bishops would make in order to enforce their solution: namely, propitiate God through penance in the hope that He will treat us as he treated those in Scripture.¹⁴ Invoking the fates of the scriptural figures described, the bishops thereby promised a way to avoid all of the threats the empire faced: a loss of temporal power and position, invasion and destruction of the empire, and eternal punishment. Articulating the authority their provision of a scriptural frame assumed, the bishops explained that because God desired the conversion rather than the destruction of the Franks, the bishops had been "instructed abundantly, filled by prophetic sayings" to correct the empire.¹⁵ In order to illustrate how the bishops sought to perform the task they set themselves, we must explore three features of the documents produced by the 829 Council of Paris: first, how the bishops articulated their prophetic authority; second, how they used this authority to interpret the troubles they had witnessed

ultioni. Meretrix porro illa evangelica, Maria nomine, profusione lacrimarum carere meruit enormitate multorum peccaminum. His et his similibus salutiferis documentis datur intelligi, quod Deus, bona cuncta iubens malaque omnia vetans, saepissime humane fragilitatis peccatis offensus et ad iracundiam provocatus, per paenitentiae (*lege poenitentia*) tamen dignam satisfactionem ab humanis erratibus suae severitatis debitam suspenderit, vindictam, adeo ut quem moles peccaminum provocaverat ad ultionem actuum pravorum correctio flexerit ad misericordissimam propitiationem. Cf. Adalhard's promise to the bishops in 822 about how Louis would take care of the realm, in Agobard, *De dispensatione ecclesiasticarum rerum*, c.2, 121-122: tota sollicitudine curat, ut, bona quidem statuendo, mala uero destruendo, optineat una uobiscum apud Dominum.

¹⁴ Cf. de Jong, *Penitential*, 176, 178.

¹⁵ CP 829, 607: Quod autem Deus nolit mortem peccatoris, sed potius ut convertatur et vivat, propheticis satis abundeque instruimur oraculis.

throughout the empire; and third, how they used their authority to admonish their rulers and the people of the empire.

Claiming Prophetic Authority

Highlighting the uncertainty regarding who could claim divine inspiration, revelation, or some other way of knowing the mind of God, in the prologue Jonas recalled how “many *principes*, when filled with the heavenly inspiration from God” discovered that only by leading their peoples to convert could they avoid the judgement of God: these scriptural parallels included the king of the Ninevites (cf. Jonah 3:8-9), the prophet Joel (Joel 2:12-13), the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 55:6-7), the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 13:16), and Christ Himself (Matthew 25:13).¹⁶ While the use of the word *principes* seems intentionally vague, and not clarified by examples of biblical kings, prophets, and God Himself, Jonas then elaborated on who could and should be inspired by God and informed of His will and left little doubt that the task fell primarily on episcopal shoulders.

In the first book of the conciliar acts, Jonas specifically discussed the authority and function of the priesthood. The first chapter declared that the Christian religion, and its

¹⁶ CP 829, 607: dem Deo pleni principes caelitus inspirati consulto ad Deum congruam dignamque conversionem iudicaverunt esse faciendam iuxta illud regis Ninnivitae, quo legitur: Convertatur vir a via sua mala et ab iniquitate, quae est in manibus eorum. Quis scit, si convertatur, et ignoscat Deus: et revertatur a furore ire suae, et non peribimus? Per Iohel quoque prophetam Dominus ait: Convertimini ad me in toto corde uestro, in ieiunio et fletu et planctu et scindite corda uestra et non uestimenta uestra; item per Isaïam: Querite Dominum, dum inueniri potest; inuocate eum, dum prope est. Derelinquat impius uiam suam et uir iniquus cogitationes suas et reuertatur ad Dominum, et miserebitur eius, et ad Deum nostrum, quoniam multus est ad ignoscendum; item per Hieremiam: Date domino Deo uestro gloriam, antequam contenebrescat et antequam offendant pedes uestri ad montes caliginosos; et Dominus in euangelio: Ambulate, inquit, dum lucem habetis, ne tenebrae uos comprehendant; item: Uigilate, nequia nescitis diem neque horam; et apostolus: Ecce, inquit, nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.

leading bishops “ought to be esteemed among the Christian people as the successors of the apostles, and to be thought of as the salvation of their subjects.”¹⁷ Jonas illustrated what apostolic succession meant in this context with a quotation from Julius Pomerius (a quotation mistakenly attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine) explaining that the priesthood manfully bore the “weight of the people” for whose sins, as if they were their own, the bishops were “tirelessly to pray to God, offering just as a certain Aaron the burnt offering of a contrite heart and a humble spirit.”¹⁸ Specifically articulating the offering’s intercessory nature, the quotation from Pomerius added that such an offering served to “placate God, averting wrath of future punishment from the people.”¹⁹ Beyond merely responding to present, portentous punishments the empire had suffered, this selection from Pomerius looked to the future as well, claiming that as apostolic heirs, the bishops could placate God in the present *and* avert future punishment. Firmly establishing the prophetic nature of their responsibility, Jonas then cited the rest of Pomerius’ quotation, which stated that “Scripture named such [bishops] as watchmen, who watch the acts of all.”²⁰ With this quotation, Jonas crystallized the episcopal self-image that permeated the acts of the council: they claimed to stand as “watchmen” over the entire *populus christianus*, including themselves and their rulers.

In this way, Jonas modeled episcopal authority and responsibility on the prophet Ezechiel, called and placed as a “watchman” when the Lord threatened to bring “the sword

¹⁷ CP 829, c.4, 611: Quod in successoribus apostolorum religio Christiana vigere et salvatio subiectorum debeat consistere.

¹⁸ CP 829, c.4, 611: Qui pondus populi sibi commissi viriliter sustinentes pro peccatis omnium velut pro suis infatigabiliter supplicant Deo ac velut quidam Aaron incensum contriti cordis et humiliati spiritus offerentes.

¹⁹ CP 829, c.4, 611: quo placatur Deus, avertunt iram futurae animadversionis a populo.

²⁰ CP 829, c.4, 612: Tales scriptura divina speculatores appellat, qui speculantur actus omnium.

above the land.”²¹ Tasked with warning the people when “he sees the sword come over the land,” if the watchman were to fail in this responsibility, according to Ezechiel, God would “require the blood of the people at the hand of the watchman.”²² Extending their prophetic function beyond the immediate crisis, the bishops emphasized the “blood” demanded at their hands by citing another passage from Ezekiel, directed to the bishops in God's voice: “I placed you as a watchman for the House of Israel and you will hear the word from my mouth and proclaim it to them for my sake,”²³ and failure to do so would, as before, result in God holding the watchman accountable.²⁴ The bishops left no doubt that this referred to themselves, “this intensely frightening and terrible wisdom is for bishops,” as they elaborated on the prophetic burden that came with their responsibility to recognize, understand, and proclaim God's will, while watching for, and warning of, divine anger.²⁵ The responsibility as Jonas articulated it brought together incredible aspirations and possibilities as well as danger and potential condemnation.

Although in the second book of the conciliar acts Jonas and the bishops would circumscribe Louis' claims to divine inspiration, they focused the first book on the unique and necessary functions only the bishops could perform in Carolingian politics.²⁶ While Jonas

²¹ CP 829, c.5, 613: Quod Dominus per Ezechielem prophetam loquitur: Terra, cum induxero super eam gladium, et tulerit populus terre virum unum de novissimis suis et constituerit eum super se speculatorem. Cf. Ezechiel 33:2.

²² CP 829, c.5, 613: sanguinem autem eius de manu speculatoris requiram. Cf. Ezechiel 33:6.

²³ CP 829, c.5, 613: Fili hominis, speculatorem dedi te domui Israhel et audies de ore meo verbum et adnuntiabis eis ex me. Cf. Ezechiel 3:17-18.

²⁴ CP 829, c.5, 613: sanguinem autem eius de manu tua requiram. Cf. Ezechiel 33:6.

²⁵ CP 829, c.5, 613: Formidolosa valde et tremenda haec sententia sacerdotibus est.

²⁶ While Steffen Patzold has demonstrated that in the ninth century bishops and rulers were viewed as sharing similar roles and responsibilities, and that the Paris Council sought to establish a complementary but distinct

explained initially that reconciliation between God and the empire could only occur “with the advice of the priests and other faithful nobles,” he further elaborated this necessity by giving to the bishops the unique ability to announce God’s will. Citing Malachi 2:7 and Jerome’s commentary on the passage, Jonas explained that

as the Lord said through the prophet Malachi, *the lips of the priest preserve the knowledge and seek the law out of His mouth, because he is the angel of the Lord of hosts*, which blessed Jerome set as forth as follows: an angel is a messenger, he said, most precisely referring to a priest of God, because he is the intermediary between man and God, and he announces His will unto the peoples.²⁷

Beyond affirming the episcopal position as the intercessors between the people and God,

Jonas asserted confidently that the assembled bishops were authorized to announce the will

of God, indirectly contradicting (or at least competing with) Louis’ invocation of prophetic

division of power, we must remember that Jonas did not simply argue that only bishops could claim to learn and transform their interpretation of God’s will into action with precision. Patzold, “Argument,” 295; cf. Suchan, “Kirchenpolitik,” 22. Jonas argued instead in this first chapter was that “divine authority” lay at the center of everything pertaining to the Christian religion and secular government, the same authority the bishops would claim as their unique burden in the fourth chapter. *CP* 829, 609: *Licet itaque ita, ut auctoritas divina docet, eadem percipiatur fides, a plerisque tamen, quia operibus non adimpletur, eidem auctoritati divinae, immo apostolicis documentis superbiendo renititur, quorum exempla in promptu satis abundeque habentur.* This claim was not to place bishops in a position above the emperor, but to disentangle their authority, as a quote from Fulgentius clarified, explaining that “in the *ecclesia* none was found more effective than the bishop, and in the Christian world, none higher than the emperor.” *CP* 829, c.3, 610-611: *Quantum pertinet, inquit, ad huius temporis vitam, in ecclesia nemo pontifice potior et in seculo Christiano imperatore nemo celsior invenitur.* Fulgentius, *de veritate praedestinationis et gratiae* in CCL 91A, 458-548. Monika Suchan has argued that such dualism reflected an effort on the bishops’ part to restore the church to a sort of Gelasian-ideal, but this argument presupposes a Gelasian division as a sort of ‘natural state’ for the church that the sources do not support. Suchan, “Kirchenpolitik,” 12-13, 15. For a useful discussion of the Gelasian question, see Patzold, “Argument,” 297-298; Boshof, *Ludwig*, 176-177; Staubach, “Cultus divinus,” 561. In this case, by focusing on the use of pope Gelasius, scholars miss the ultimate purpose of the quotation and the rest of the introduction, namely that the bishops sought to claim a unique authority to interpret and proclaim the will of God.

²⁷ *CP* 829, 608: *quod per Malachiam prophetam Dominus ait: Labia sacerdotis custodiunt scientiam et legem requirunt ex ore eius, quia angelus Domini exercituum est, quod beatus Hieronimus ita exponit: Angelus autem, inquit, id est nuntius, sacerdos Dei verissime dicitur, quia Dei et hominum sequester est eius ad populos nuntiat voluntatem.* Although Jerome may have had a broader definition in mind, for Jonas and the bishops at the Paris Council of 829, when Scripture mentioned priests, *sacerdotes*, it referred to bishops.

authority to impose God's will upon certain political decisions throughout his reign.²⁸ The bishops understood their function in imparting knowledge as effectively prophetic, as demonstrated by the citation of another scriptural passage along with commentary from Jerome, this time from the prophet Haggai, who "said ask the priests for the law."²⁹ Using Jerome's commentary, Jonas specified that in order to be a true priest, one must understand the "law of the Lord," and the ability to respond to questions concerning the law were essential for one to act as a bishop.³⁰

Jonas' articulation of episcopal authority sought to trump Louis' own claims as an emperor who sought prophetic inspiration, revelation, and authority in implementing his political agenda. Although the universality with which the bishops claimed such prophetic authority left little room for Louis' own claims to prophetic authority, the bishops were not arguing for outright ecclesiastical supremacy.³¹ Instead of denying Louis or his claims of divine inspiration, the bishops—as Jonas wrote later in the acts—focused their claims on their authority to correct and judge, and to articulate God's will when it mattered. Jonas explained that in gathering in four councils, the bishops had been "inspired by the Lord," taught by "divine authority," and that they "discovered issues that arose within both orders [i.e. episcopal and royal] that had deviated from the proper path," and to such they "declared the

²⁸ Cf. Patzold, "Argument," 289-293.

²⁹ *CP* 829, 608: Nec inmerito, quippe quia noverant Dominum praecepisse per Aggeum prophetam, ut sacerdotes de lege Domini interrogarentur. Ait namque: Interroga sacerdotes legem. Cf. Haggai 2:12.

³⁰ *CP* 829, 608: Simul, inquit, considera sacerdotum officii esse de lege interrogatos respondere. Si sacerdos est, sciat legem Domini; si ignorat legem, ipse se arguit non esse Domini sacerdotem. Cf. de Jong, *Penitential*, 179-180.

³¹ For example, see Arquillière, *L'Augustinisme politique*, 170-171; Morisson, *Kingdoms*, 5-7; Ullmann, *Principles*, 32.

grace of correction openly according to the *ministerium* imposed upon them.”³² Describing episcopal authority another way, Jonas explained how the episcopal *ministerium* was divinely authorized and divinely inspired, and that bishops were essentially required to correct everyone: royal and ecclesiastical figures alike.

Reading the World

In the second book of the conciliar acts, Jonas included an entire chapter from the text ‘*On the Twelve Abuses of the World*’ (*De duodecim abusivis saeculi*), specifically the chapter most notable for its depiction of the stereotypical *rex iniquus*, or wicked king.³³ The use of *On the Twelve Abuses of the World* suggests that the bishops did not reject Louis’ understanding and use of prophetic authority, but sought to circumscribe his use of it within bounds which would not endanger the empire or his own soul. Generally attributed to the early church father Cyprian, the text the bishops included described the effects of good and bad rulers on the lands and subjects they ruled. Many of the precepts of good kingship listed in the ninth abuse can be found elsewhere in the second book of the conciliar acts, including caring for the poor, ruling justly, wisely, and righteously. Rather than citing the text for its repetition of

³² CP 829, 608: Quapropter statuerunt in quattuor congruentissimis imperii sui locis conventus episcoporum uno eodemque tempore fieri debere, in quibus conventibus Domino inspirante diligenter studerent querere et investigare de causis ad religionem Christianam eorumque curam pertinentibus, quid a principibus et reliquo populo vel ita, ut divina auctoritas docet, aut aliter teneretur vel quid inde ex parte aut ex toto dimissum sit, ut non teneretur; deinde quid in ipsorum, qui pastores populi constituti sunt, conversatione et actibus inveniri posset, quod divinae regulae atque auctoritati non concordaret, simulque invenirent, quae occasiones in utroque ordine id effecerint, ut a recto tramite deviassent; et quicquid de his causis inventum fuisset, correctionis gratia iuxta ministerium sibi iniunctum patenter denuntiarent.

³³ CP 829, c.55, 650. Mayke de Jong has argued that this text was overshadowed by the more authoritative texts the bishops utilized, especially Scripture, but when read alongside these other texts, the discussion of the *rex iniquus* takes on a more profound meaning. De Jong, *Penitential*, 181-182; *eadem*, “Ecclesia,” 130.

teachings they had already covered elsewhere, the bishops included the ninth abuse precisely because it demonstrated the explicit connection between the actions of rulers and the fates of the lands and peoples they ruled. Such a connection not only linked a ruler's behavior to the temporal and spiritual success of their realm, but made successes and failures throughout the realm a means of interpreting God's judgement on the ruler and realm in question. After outlining the practices of a good ruler, the ninth abuse explains that

Observing these teachings establishes prosperity of the kingdom in the present and leads the king unto the better, heavenly kingdom. But whoever does not rule according to this law, without a doubt, suffers many adversities against his rule: for instance, the peace of the people is then often disrupted as conflicts are kindled in the realm; even the fruits of the land are lessened and the slaves of the people are impeded; and many sufferings spoil the prosperity of the realm; deaths of the beloved and of the free; the raids of enemies everywhere devastate the provinces; beasts tear apart herds of cattle and sheep; spring and winter storms hinder the fruitfulness of the lands and the bounty of the sea, and sometimes bolts of lightning ignites fields, the flowers of trees, and vines. But more than all of these things, the injustice of a king not only darkens the face of his present reign, but diminishes his sons and grandsons, that they will not maintain possession of the realm after him. Just so, because of the sin of Solomon, the Lord scattered the kingdom of the House of Israel from the hands of Solomon's sons, and because of the service of David the light of the king has always remained in his descendants in Jerusalem. See, now, how much the justice of a king prevails in the world is obvious to those who see: it is the peace of the peoples; the protection of the homeland; the guardian of the common folk; the defense of the clan; the zeal in times of faintness; the joy of mankind; the good weather; the calm seas; the fruitfulness of the earth; the consolation of the poor; the inheritance of sons; and its own hope of future blessedness.³⁴

³⁴ CP 829, c.55, 650: Haec prosperitatem regni in presenti faciunt et regem ad caelestia regna meliora perducunt. Qui vero secundum hanc legem non dispensat, multas nimirum adversitates imperii tolerat. Idcirco enim saepe pax populorum rumpitur et offendicula etiam de regno suscitatur, terrarum quoque fructus diminuuntur et servitia populorum praepediuntur, multi etiam dolores prosperitatem regni inficiunt, carorum et liberorum mortes tristitiam conferunt, hostium incursus provincias undique vastant, bestiae armentorum et pecorum greges dilacerant, tempestates veris et hiemis terrarum fecunditatem et maris ministeria prohibent et aliquando fulminum ictus segetes et arborum flores et pampinos exurunt. Super omnia vero regis iniustitia non solum praesentis imperii faciem fuscatur, sed etiam suos et nepotes, ne post se regni hereditatem teneant, obscurat.

Jonas, and the bishops' discussions he put to the page, utilized this passage to assert the bishops' capacity to evaluate royal behavior (and the *status regni* at large) based on the visible signs that accompanied it. Echoing the signs presented in Cathwulf's admonitory letter to Charlemagne, Jonas' use of the ninth abuse suggested that to properly exercise *iustitia*, a ruler must be humble and recognize the limits of royal power, and the success of the entire realm depended upon the ruler's *iustitia*.³⁵ Just as Adalhard had done in 822 at the Synod of Attigny, Jonas invoked the signs of righteousness and sin—now applied specifically to the ruler—and offered a readily accessible means of interpreting God's disposition towards the actions of a particular ruler. In the context of the events that led to Louis' calling of the Paris Council in 829, events that included invasions, natural disasters, and political upheaval, the inclusion of such a cosmological articulations of kingship amplified Louis and Lothar's own guilt that they had expressed in their *Epistola generalis*.³⁶

Employing this same reasoning and exercising their prophetic interpretive authority on the recent crises afflicting the empire, the bishops explained that:

Propter piaculum enim Salomonis regnum domus Israhel Dominus de manibus filiorum eius dispersit et propter meritum David regis lucernam de semine eius semper in Hierusalem reliquit. Ecce quantum iniustitia regis saeculo valet, intuentibus perspicuae patet. Pax populorum est, tutamentum patriae, inmunitas plebis, munimentum gentis, cura languorum, gaudium hominum, temperies aeris, serenitas maris, terre fecunditas, solatium pauperum, hereditas filiorum et sibimetipsi spes futurae beatitudinis.

³⁵ For a discussion of *iustitia* as a central feature of Carolingian political theory, such as it is, see Erkens, *Herrschersakralität*, 141. For a thorough exploration of *Sakralkönigtum* and the ideas informing it, see Erkens, *Herrschersakralität*, 135-136. Ewig, "Königsgedanken," 7-73; Fichtenau, *Imperium*, 64; Hattenhauer, "Rex," 1-38.

³⁶ Agobard, *De dispensatione ecclesiasticarum rerum*, c.2, 121-122: Qui, quoniam, ut Scripturę sacrę docent, peccata contrahunt infelicitates, perturbationes, clades et sterilitates im populos, tota sollicitudine curat, ut, bona quidem statuendo, mala uero destruendo, optineat una uobiscum apud Dominum, ut, remotis aduersis casibus, regnum sibi commissum prospere, Deo fauente, ualeat gubernare. *Epistola generalis*, 5: At, quia nos magis in hoc peccasse cognoscimus, qui forma salutis omnibus esse debuimus et omnium curam gerere et per auctoritatem imperialem pravorum acta, ne tantum ad crescerent, corrigere.

by His secret dispensation, God desired to weaken the empire by varieties of diverse diseases; to exhaust it by many disasters; to draw the divine sword against the empire *internally and externally*; and continuously to test the empire with plagues, which the Lord has threatened to those who refuse to obey His commands, rather inclining towards obeying preferably the evil things which He has forbidden.³⁷

After citing God's hidden reasoning, Jonas proceeded to explain how the disasters and other troubles suffered by the empire were a clear indictment of the disobedience of the entire realm, taking up language from Louis and Lothar's *Epistola generalis*, and echoing Charlemagne's circular letter of 807.³⁸ Combining the internal and external signs of divine anger the bishops had interpreted, Jonas recalled Louis' and Lothar's admission that the empire was being "scourged internally and externally simultaneously," but Jonas sharpened his argument, transforming Louis' and Lothar's *negligentia* into a much sharper form of willful disobedience.³⁹ By reinterpreting and reframing the crises afflicting the empire, Jonas declared the desperate need for episcopal intercession while making the case for their comparatively much greater prophetic responsibility to correct the empire and pronounce God's will.

Admonishing the Rulers and the People

³⁷ CP 829, 607: occulta sua dispensatione voluit, diversorum morborum generibus affici, multifariis cladibus conteri, divinum contra se mucronem *interius exteriusque* meritis exigentibus grassari plagasque, quas Dominus suis iussis oboedire nolentibus, sed potius ad mala, que vetuit, labentibus interminatus est, incessanter experiri (*emphasis added*).

³⁸ cf. *Epistola Generalis*, 5: Agitur siquidem iusto iudicio Dei, ut, quia in cunctis delinquimus, interius simul et exterius flagellemur; Charlemagne to Ghaerbald, 245-6: Certissimeque ab his exterioribus colligere possumus, nos per omnia Domino non placere interius, qui tanta mala compellimur tollerare exterius.

³⁹ CP 829, 607; cf. *Epistola Generalis*, 5: Agitur siquidem iusto iudicio Dei, ut, quia in cunctis delinquimus, interius simul et exterius flagellemur.

While Jonas had allowed both scriptural kings and prophets to exercise the prophetic authority of knowing God's will regarding the correction of a people, it did not take long for Jonas to clarify ultimately how indispensable bishops were in any effort to know God's will or to propitiate His anger. Elaborating on the idea of bishops as watchmen, Jonas added greater impact to their authority by returning to an image introduced in the beginning of the conciliar acts. The fifth chapter began by depicting the

danger that threatens the bishops, and [the danger] that each bishop must specifically warn the people of throughout his parishes, in order that they correct themselves and convert to God with a whole heart. Also, on account of the threatening dangers merited by our iniquities, let the bishops humbly beg for the mercy of the Lord for the life of the emperor, his wife, and his descendants, and the people subject to him.⁴⁰

This brief overview marked the return of a familiar leitmotiv, recalling Jonas' earlier claim that the bishops were empowered to see the threats to the empire and warn others of these same threats. Jonas argued that while it was necessary for the bishops to pray for "the life of the most pious and dear to God, Emperor Louis" and his family, the bishops' prayers must also secure the "safety and stability of the empire committed to him by God."⁴¹ Jonas underscored the bishops' duty to preach and to warn the people, in addition to praying on their behalf, by

⁴⁰ *CP* 829, c. 5, 612: De periculo, quod sacerdotibus imminet, et quod unusquisque in suis parroeciis suis populis specialiter denuntient, ut se corrigant et ad Deum ex toto corde convertant et pro periculis merito nostrae iniquitatis imminentibus necnon et pro vita imperatoris, coniugis et proles eius populi sibi subiecti Domini misericordiam humiliter exorent.

⁴¹ *CP* 829, c.5, 612-613: Deumque, quem peccando sibi iratum fecerant, digna paenitentiae satisfactione et elemosinarum largitione sibi placabilem facere satagant necnon et pro vita piissimi Deoque amabilis Hludowici imperatoris, coniugis prolesque eius incolomitate imperii sibi commissi stabilitate Dei inmensam misericordiam cernuis precibus implorent.

reminding his audience that the bishops could “perceive the wrath of the Lord advancing against the people of God, wrath driven on by their merits.”⁴²

Although Jonas and the bishops acknowledged how the fate of the realm rested firmly on the shoulders of the ruler, Jonas did so by defining good kingship according to the peace and harmony it produced. The definition used by the bishops insisted that a ruler’s responsibility was “to strive to rule and guide (*regere*) the people of God with equity and *iustitia*, that they might have peace and harmony.”⁴³ Throughout the chapter the bishops emphasized the royal need to exercise and protect justice, recalling the positive and negative consequences should the ruler fail in his responsibility, which responsibility came from God, and had to be exercised according to His will.⁴⁴ After illuminating the dangers that threatened the realm of an unrighteous ruler, Jonas included a section in parallel with the earlier chapter on the “danger that threatens the priests” should they not perform their duties.⁴⁵ This chapter, however, dealt with the “sin of the king,” should he fail in his *ministerium*, or should any fail whom he has appointed.⁴⁶ Supporting his arguments with references to the Old Testament, Jonas declared to his rulers and all they appointed that anyone who abused others under royal authority counted as a “sin of the king” (*peccatum regis*), a sin that could incur divine wrath in

⁴² CP 829, c.5, 613: Cum itaque praedicatoribus sune cessatione populo Dei praedicare necesse sit iuxta illud Isaiae: Clama, ne cesses; quasi tuba exalta vocem tuam et adnuntia populo meo scelera eorum et domui Iacob peccata eorum, tum maxime id eis facere necesse est, quando iram Domini contra populum Dei meritis exigentibus grassari perspexerunt.

⁴³ CP 829, c.56, 651: regale ministerium specialiter est populum Dei gubernare et regere cum equitate et iustitia et, ut pacem et concordiam habeant, studere.

⁴⁴ CP 829, c.56, 651-652: quod rex ministerium sibi commissum secundum voluntatem Dei exercere et adimplere debet. Cf. Hartmann, *Synoden*, 184.

⁴⁵ CP 829, c. 57, 652: De periculo, quod sacerdotibus imminet.

⁴⁶ CP 829, c.57, 653: Ad peccatum regis pertinet, quando iudicibus ministrisque iniquis ministerium suum adimplendum committit.

the myriad ways outlined previously.⁴⁷ Naming dukes and counts specifically, Jonas warned the king that he was not established to dominate or afflict the people, because such action “does not pertain to *iustitia*, but more to tyranny and wicked power.”⁴⁸ Tyranny, an idea utilized at various points in the second book of the Council of Paris’ acts, recalls the same idea used by Louis and Lothar in their *Epistola generalis*, where they described how “tyrants in this kingdom, who have striven to rend the peace of the Christian people and the unity of the imperial authority.”⁴⁹

While the parallel between king and tyrant, *rex et tyrannus*, appears to have been largely drawn from Isidore of Seville, the previous passage from the Paris acts and the *Epistola generalis* suggest a high degree of internalization and elaboration on the Isidorian model.⁵⁰ Jonas’ definition of the royal *ministerium* firmly grounded itself within the parameters drawn from *On the Twelve Abuses of the World*, in which context the episcopal claims to apostolic succession and powerful prophetic authority placed them in a strong position to evaluate royal behavior.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the episcopal claim to apostolic succession and claims to

⁴⁷ CP 829, c. 57, 653: De periculo regis et quod bene agentes remunerare, male vero agentes sua auctoritate comprimere causamque pauperum ad se ingredi debeat facere.

⁴⁸ CP 829, c.57, 654: His, quae praemissa sunt, declaratur, quod hi, qui post regem populum Dei regere debent, id est duces et comites, necesse est ut tales ad constituendum provideantur, qui sine periculo eius, a quo constituuntur, constitui possint, scientes se ad hoc positos esse, ut plebem Christi sibi natura aequalem recognoscant eamque clementer salvent et iuste regant, non ut dominantur et affligant neque ut populum Dei suum estiment aut ad suam gloriam sibi illum subiciant, quod non pertinet ad iustitiam, sed potius ad tyrannidem et iniquam potestatem.

⁴⁹ *Epistola generalis*, 4: Nec illud etiam dubitamus ex iusta vindicta illius evenire, quod saepe scandala per tyrannos in hoc regno exsurgunt, qui pacem populi christiani et unitatem imperii sua pravitate nituntur scindere. On the interpretation of the word *imperium* during Louis’ reign, see Patzold, “Palastrebellion,” 61 n. 90.

⁵⁰ Hans Hubert Anton has argued that the council claimed a legitimate king (i.e. not a tyrant) must first rule himself justly, then he must rule his household and those acting under his authority, and then the rest of the people. See Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, 207.

⁵¹ CP 829, c.55, 649-650.

prophetic authority greater than the king's need not be read as a claim of ecclesiastical supremacy in the political sphere. Instead, they sought to disentangle episcopal authority from royal authority, which would enable them to fulfil their prophetic function without interference: after all, the bishops understood their function as including the correction of their people and their emperors as well as themselves.⁵² In this way, Jonas did not contradict Louis' prophetic claims outright, emphasizing instead the bishops' own prophetic authority and underscoring the necessity and gravity of Louis' own royal authority and responsibility. And to that end, the bishops' work did not end with the council of Paris.

Putting Authority to Work

We cannot know what the bishops knew of Louis' plans in their preparations for the assembly in Worms, but since they had been ordered to report on the results of their councils, the bishops used the opportunity to engage the situation more directly, drawing up a document now referred to as the *Relatio episcoporum*. Probably presented to Louis at Worms at the end of the summer in 829, the *Relatio episcoporum* contained the pertinent chapters from the Paris council's acts as they were to be publicly presented to the co-emperors. As the MGH editors noted, however, the inscription and the greeting name only Louis, omitting Lothar entirely, for which they cited an earlier editor who explained that the letter was merely part of the conciliar acts, which were dedicated to both co-emperors.⁵³ While this omission may be a mere simplification or oversight, it may also suggest that the letter Jonas redacted

⁵² Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, 206-207; Erken, *Herrschersakralität*, 151. Cf. Suchan, "Kirchenpolitik," 17.

⁵³ MGH Cap II, no.196, 27, no.1.

into the conciliar acts as the third book was written closer to the end of the summer after Louis had already dismissed his eldest son, and that Jonas adapted what the bishops had formulated earlier to warn Louis of the gravity of his actions. Rather than focusing on the chapters they included—which echo what we have already discussed—I will focus on the introductory letter prefacing the *Relatio episcoporum*, wherein the bishops asserted their own prophetic interpretive authority that they had already claimed as their own during the Paris council.

After a formulaic greeting that recapitulated some of the *Epistola generalis*, the bishops immediately moved to the heart of why the council had met in the first place. They declared that

For since the divine sword has struck against the empire divinely committed to you, both *internally* and *externally* in the form of manifold disasters earned by our sins, wisely recognizing that these things only occur by the just judgement of God, you immediately admonished this past year in the writing of your serenity all the pastors of the churches, because *it is well known that they act as watchmen of the Lord and that the divine sword has come upon the land*, that is, upon sinners. They should remember their function as *watchmen*, and a three-day fast should be performed by all, that everyone, regardless of position, would turn to their conscience and recognize wherein they have offended God, so that they might not delay performing the payment of their penance swiftly. Furthermore, you had desired to deal generally in those specifics which it pleased you to include in your letter [i.e. the *Epistola generalis*], that, if God would grant to you peace and respite on all sides, that you might with the aid of the Lord correct whatever must be corrected that has been found, first, in you—in your person and *ministerium*. Thereafter, you desired to investigate whomever has displeased God in all the orders of your empire and recall them back to the path of righteousness *according to His will*, and with the consent of your faithful [bishops].⁵⁴

⁵⁴ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, 27-28: Nam cum mucro divinus imperium vobis divinitus commissum interius exteriusque merito nostrae iniquitatis multifariis attereret cladibus, prudenter animadvertentes, quod haec nonnisi iusto iudicio Dei evenirent, illico scriptis serenitatis vestrae anno praeterito cunctos aecclesiarum pastores admonuistis, ut, quia constabat eos speculatores Domini existere et gladium

As the bishops reminded the emperor, the “divine sword” had been raised against the empire in the years leading to 829, which conclusion they reached by interpreting the “manifold disasters” that their sins had earned.⁵⁵ The bishops applauded the emperor for recognizing the danger and quickly calling upon his bishops because—and here we see the council shining through—they are “watchmen,” recognizing that now the “divine sword” had come upon the land, but also watching for it in the future. Here the bishops were recalling how they had articulated their prophetic function from Ezechiel in the Paris Council, claiming the authority to recognize the approaching “wrath of the Lord” and warn the people accordingly by declaring the will of God unceasingly.⁵⁶

In the introduction to the *Relatio episcoporum*, the bishops rehearsed for Louis everything his and Lothar’s *Epistola generalis* sought, but reinterpreted the letter by emphasizing how Louis recalled the bishops to their prophetic function, as well as enjoining upon them the three-day fast that would reveal to them the specific character of their guilt and how it could be most quickly corrected.⁵⁷ By inverting the agency of the *Epistola generalis*,

divinum super terram, id est super peccatores Deum, grassari, meminerint speculationis suae et ieiunio triduo ab omnibus generaliter peracto unusquisque in quolibet ordine positus diligenter conscientiam suam conveniret et, ubi se Deum offendisse cognoscebat, maturato per poenitentiae satisfactionem corrigere non differret. In quibus etiam apicibus inserere vobis placuit, ut, si Deus pacem undique et otium vobis tribueret, in hoc placitum vestrum generale consumere voluissetis, ut primum, quicquid in vobis, id est in persona et ministerio vestro, corrigendum inveniretur, Domino auxiliante corrigeretis, deinde, quicumque in omnibus ordinibus imperii vestri Deo displiceret, inquireretis et secundum eius voluntatem cum consensu fidelium vestrorum ad tramitem rectitudinis revocaretis.

⁵⁵ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, 27.

⁵⁶ *CP* 829, c.5, 613: Cum itaque praedicatoribus sune cessatione populo Dei praedicare necesse sit iuxta illud Isaiae: Clama, ne cesses; quasi tuba exalta vocem tuam et adnuntia populo meo scelera eorum et domui Iacob peccata eorum, tum maxime id eis facere necesse est, quando iram Domini contra populum Dei meritis exigentibus grassari perspexerunt.

⁵⁷ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, 27.

the bishops situated themselves and their prophetic authority as the means through which Louis sought to “correct whatever must be corrected” and “recall [those needing correction] back to the path of righteousness *according to His will*,” adding for emphasis that Louis still required “the consent of your faithful [bishops].”⁵⁸ Essentially, in the bishops’ reinterpretation of the past year’s events, Louis acted according to God’s will *when* he reminded the bishops of their prophetic calling as watchmen and *when* he called the councils. Furthermore, so long as he worked alongside the bishops, Jonas also allowed that Louis could “recall [those needing correction] back to the path of righteousness,” all of which is far from how Louis presented his own role in the *Epistola generalis*.⁵⁹

The remainder of the *Relatio episcoporum* summarized and emphasized various elements from the much larger conciliar acts Jonas included certain chapters for Louis personally, and the very first among these reminded Louis of the bishops’ prophetic authority as successors of the apostles. “We humbly petition your excellence,” the *Relatio* reads, “that through you, your sons and nobles should acknowledge the priestly title, power, strength, and dignity.”⁶⁰ The petition continued by explaining how Louis, his sons, and his nobles should understand the bishops’ authority from the words of Christ, when he gave Peter the power to

⁵⁸ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, 28: in hoc placitum vestrum generale consumere voluissetis, ut primum, quicquid in vobis, id est in persona et ministerio vestro, corrigendum inveniretur, Domino auxiliante corrigeretis, deinde, quicumque in omnibus ordinibus imperii vestri Deo displiceret, inquireretis et secundum eius voluntatem cum consensu fidelium vestrorum ad tramitem rectitudinis revocaretis.

⁵⁹ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, 27-28: Domino auxiliante corrigeretis, deinde, quicumque in omnibus ordinibus imperii vestri Deo displiceret, inquireretis et secundum eius voluntatem cum consensu fidelium vestrorum ad tramitem rectitudinis revocaretis.

⁶⁰ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, 35: Petimus humiliter vestram excellentiam, ut per nos filii et procures vestri nomen, potestatem, vigorem et dignitatem sacerdotalem cognoscant.

bind and loose (Matthew 18:18-19), or the power to forgive sin (John 20:23).⁶¹ Adding a political dimension to their authority, the next section drew on a quotation from Rufinus' translation of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, describing how Constantine granted bishops the right to judge kings and emperors.⁶² Constantine, as the *Relatio* quoted, explained to the bishops that "God established and gave you power also to judge concerning us, and therefore we are rightly judged by you," adding that the bishops stood beyond the reach of human judgement, for only God could judge them.⁶³ Jonas rounded out this declaration by requesting that Louis respect the bishops' authority by recapitulating a previously used quotation from Julius Pomerius, claiming for bishops the prophetic responsibility to "placate God, averting wrath of future punishment from the people."⁶⁴ Asserting their prophetic authority as apostolic heirs, the bishops again sought to disentangle their authority from that of the emperor, and to affirm it as their unique claim without directly challenging the emperor.

While Jonas also dealt with the correction of the clergy and their acknowledgement of their own neglect, the document primarily offered a powerful and publicly forceful assertion of the bishops' prophetic authority that informed their correction of the emperor.⁶⁵ Their

⁶¹ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, 35: Quod ex verbis Domini facile intellegere possunt, quibus beato Petro, cuius vicem indigni gerimus, ait: Quodcumque ligaveris super terram, erunt ligata et in caelo, et quodcumque solveris super terram, erunt soluta et in caelo. Et alibi discipulis generaliter dicit: Accipite spiritum sanctum. Quorum remiseritis peccata, remittentur eis, et quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt.

⁶² *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, c.22, 35-36.

⁶³ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, 35-36: Illud etiam ad exemplum reducendum est, quod in Ecclesiastica historia Constantinus imperator episcopos ait: 'Deus' inquit 'constituit vos sacerdotes et potestatem vobis dedit de nobis quoque iudicandi, et ideo nos a vobis recte iudicamur; vos autem non potestis ab hominibus iudicari; propter quod Dei solius inter vos expectate iudicium, ut vestra iurgia, quaecumque sunt, ad illud divinum reserventur examen.'

⁶⁴ CP 829, c.4, 61: quo placatur Deus, avertunt iram futurae animadversionis a populo.

⁶⁵ For the assertion of their own authority, see cc.4, 5, 19. For their correction of the king, see especially cc. 55-57.

correction took the form of identifying certain unnamed individuals “for whose various crimes and disgraces the people have been scourged with famine and pestilences, and the condition of the church has been threatened, and the realm has been threatened.”⁶⁶ Interpreting the disasters threatening the people, the church, and the empire, the bishops began to utilize the authority they claimed to identify those responsible and condemn them more publicly than they had in the summer’s council.

In conclusion: From the time before the Paris Council of 829 to that of the *Relatio episcoporum*, likely presented to Louis later that summer, Louis and his bishops orchestrated fasts across the realm to seek revelation and propitiation in response to the signs and portents appearing throughout the empire. In response to Louis’ assertion of prophetic authority, however, the bishops in Paris competitively asserted their own prophetic authority in correcting the entire realm, which they symbolically represented using scriptural parallels: Louis and Lothar were depicted as the penitent kings Ahab and Manassas; the people of the empire were depicted as the sinful but ultimately penitent Ninevites; and the Church was depicted in the figure of the forgiven Mary.⁶⁷ Recognizing and interpreting the signs and portents that preceded the council, the bishops declared themselves the prophetic ‘watchmen’ of Ezekiel, uniquely called to recognize divine judgement hanging over the empire and to warn others in turn. It was their duty, after all, as the “successors of the apostles” and “the salvation of their subjects,” to propitiate God and turn away the “wrath of

⁶⁶ *Episcoporum ad Hludowicum imperatorem relatio*. 829, c.54, 44: Sunt sane diversorum malorum patratores, quos et lex divina improbat et condempnat, pro quorum etiam diversis sceleribus et flagitiis populus fame et pestilentia flagellatur et ecclesiae status infirmatur et regnum periclitatur.

⁶⁷ CP 829, *Praefatio*, 607.

future punishment from the people.”⁶⁸ Further, the bishops proclaimed that a bishop, by definition, was “the intermediary between man and God, and he announces His will unto the peoples.”⁶⁹ The emperor’s responsibility remained critical because he formed the cosmological and moral center of the realm and as such, great blessing and grievous disaster corresponded to how the rulers fulfilled their duties. In response to the visible, interpretable signs which accompanied royal successes or failures to enact *iustitia*, the bishops claimed, in no uncertain terms, prophetic interpretive authority as their unique, priestly *ministerium*, as heirs of the apostles: and their claims to correct their rulers would soon be put into practice.⁷⁰

II. Rebellions, 829-833

Agobard of Lyons and the Prophetic in Service of the Rebellion

The immediate impact of the 829 Paris Council is much debated, but its broader influence can be clearly seen throughout the rebellions that defined the final decade of Louis’ reign. A prime example comes from a familiar figure, Agobard of Lyons, whose eager efforts to interpret the signs of God’s will were put to use in his role as the “co-director” of the revolt against Louis and the emperor’s deposition in 833.⁷¹ Agobard’s works provide a powerful, if idiosyncratic, witness to the legacy of the 829 Paris Council and its formulation of prophetic

⁶⁸ CP 829, c.4, 611: Quod in successoribus apostolorum religio Christiana vigere et salvatio subiectionum debeat consistere... quo placatur Deus, avertunt iram futurae animadversionis a populo.

⁶⁹ CP 829, 608: quod per Malachiam prophetam Dominus ait: Labia sacerdotis custodiunt scientiam et legem requirunt ex ore eius, quia angelus Domini exercituum est, quod beatus Hieronimus ita exponit: Angelus autem, inquit, id est nuntius, sacerdos Dei verissime dicitur, quia Dei et hominum sequester est eius ad populos nuntiat voluntatem.

⁷⁰ Cf. Patzold, *Episcopus*, 164.

⁷¹ Nelson, “Last Years,” 47.

authority.⁷² Earlier in Louis' reign, Agobard had presented himself as an expert in interpreting God's mind and will in signs and portents. Attentive to changes in the political discourse, he now reframed himself as a watchman within the political chaos of 829 and the early 830s. In these later texts, Agobard abandoned the persona of the eager interpreter and moved forward with a forceful prophetic voice, willing to correct and chastise the emperor directly.

The first of Agobard's texts that concerns us here, '*On the Division of the Empire*' (*de divisione imperii*) is, in its form, comparable to Cathwulf's letter to Charlemagne, since it likely began as a sermon or relatively personal message to the ruler later re-formulated as a letter.⁷³ Unlike Cathwulf's praise-filled letter, however, Agobard used his text to correct the emperor and, informed by the claims of the Paris council, to save the emperor from himself. Relying on a series of 'apostolic' quotations from Scripture to justify his position, Agobard reiterated his allegiance to Louis by asking, "how can anyone appear to be loyal to you who, if they see or understand your danger, does not throw himself in as much as he can, to proclaim to you and make it known?"⁷⁴ Carefully asserting his loyalty while reiterating apostolic authorization, Agobard recalled the "danger to the king" outlined in the Paris Council in order to remind

⁷² For a contrasting discussion of Agobard's presence in the scholarship on the rebellions, see Cf. Wallace-Hadrill, *Church*, 231-232; Wattenbach-Levison-Löwe, III, 312-315.

⁷³ While the text resists precise dating, following Egon Boshof and Linda Dohmen, it appears to have been most likely written in 829 or 830, after the assembly in Worms but before the rebellion began in earnest. Dohmen, "Vorsehung," 147-148; Boshof, *Agobard*, 202-205. For a recent view doubting the early dating of the letter, see Patzold, *Einhard*, 341.

⁷⁴ Agobard, *de divisione imperii*, c.1: sicut apostolus docet (Romans 13:1)... propter quod et alius apostolus dicit: (1 Peter 2:13)... Cum autem haec ita sint, et omnes vobis fideles esse debeant, quomodo quisquam fidelis vobis esse poterit, si videns aut intelligens vestrum periculum, non se ingerit quantum potest, ut vobis indicet et cognitum faciat, si tamen locus aut facultas penitus illi non denegatur?

Louis of the council's claims to have the authority to correct their rulers.⁷⁵ Agobard reminded the emperor that

in the present year no one can number the many evils that have increased in the wearing down, disruption, agitation, and affliction of the land and those dwelling on it, as well as the conflicts we wage as if proper but are actually driven by no good reason, compelled by no need. If you had desired, you could have led a peaceful and calm life with your sons, no less than your father, and uncle [i.e., Charlemagne and Carloman].⁷⁶

Drawing from the conciliar acts, this time those alluding to the ninth abuse of the world, Agobard interpreted all of the troubles occurring throughout the empire as Louis' fault: If Louis had chosen to act appropriately, all of these problems would not have occurred.⁷⁷ To demonstrate where things began to go wrong, Agobard drew the emperor's mind back to the events of 817, when Louis—frightened by portentous events and the possibility of his death—promulgated the *Ordinatio imperii*, establishing the succession and the subsequent division of

⁷⁵ CP 829, c. 57, 653: De periculo regis et quod bene agentes remunerare, male vero agentes sua auctoritate conprimere causamque pauperum ad se ingredi debeat facere.

⁷⁶ Agobard, *de divisione*, c.3, 245-255: Anno itaque praesenti, in attritione et commotione, agitatione et afflictione terrae et habitantium in ea quanta mala increbuerint, nemo hominum est qui enumerare possit, nulla exigente causa, nulla compellente necessitate ut ita fieri oporteret certamina quae tenemus: quia si voluissetis, tranquillam et quietam vitam ageretis cum filiis vestris, non minus quam pater vester, et avus.

⁷⁷ Cf. CP 829, c.55, 650: Haec prosperitatem regni in presenti faciunt et regem ad caelestia regna meliora perducunt. Qui vero secundum hanc legem non dispensat, multas nimirum adversitates imperii tolerat. Idcirco enim saepe pax populorum rumpitur et offendicula etiam de regno suscitantur, terrarum quoque fructus diminuuntur et servitia populorum praepediuntur, multi etiam dolores prosperitatem regni inficiunt, carorum et liberorum mortes tristitiam conferunt, hostium incursus provincias undique vastant, bestiae armentorum et pecorum greges dilacerant, tempestates veris et hiemis terrarum fecunditatem et maris ministeria prohibent et aliquando fulminum ictus segetes et arborum flores et pampinos exurunt. Super omnia vero regis iniustitia non solum praesentis imperii faciem fuscatur, sed etiam suos et nepotes, ne post se regni hereditatem teneant, obscurat. Propter piaculum enim Salomonis regnum domus Israel Dominus de manibus filiorum eius dispersit et propter meritum David regis lucernam de semine eius semper in Hierusalem reliquit. Ecce quantum iniustitia regis saeculo valet, intuentibus perspicuae patet. Pax populorum est, tutamentum patriae, immunitas plebis, munimentum gentis, cura languorum, gaudium hominum, temperies aeris, serenitas maris, terre fecunditas, solatium pauperum, hereditas filiorum et sibimetipsi spes futurae beatitudinis.

the empire, and making Lothar his co-emperor.⁷⁸ Agobard, however, was less interested in the specifics of the *Ordinatio*: rather he focused on the authority Louis claimed when the emperor promulgated the text. Agobard argued that Louis' prime error was acting against his own revelation, an error evident in all of the troubles that Louis now endured.

Using Louis' words against him, Agobard reminded Louis that,

in order to place the name of emperor upon one of your three sons while you were able, and in this decision, you had been able to learn in every possible way the will of God. In order to learn God's will, you ordered that all perform three-day fasts; that priests present offerings to the Omnipotent God, who is gentle, meek, and very merciful to all who pray to Him; that there also be alms given in those three days larger than was customary, in order that the Omnipotent God, who rules the hearts of those hoping in Him with the greatest kindness, would pour His will into your heart, and permit your will be turned to another son, other than upon the son who had pleased God.⁷⁹

Agobard went on, "nobody," he stated, "doubted that this was filled and inspired by God in you."⁸⁰ This was not Agobard's only reason for admonishing Louis for acting against his own *Ordinatio* by effectively demoting Lothar as co-emperor. Agobard regarded the previous universal acceptance of Louis seeking and receiving God's will as equal to the consensus of the Frankish elites in support of the decision made, as well as the oaths all willingly swore to

⁷⁸ McKeon, "817: Un année désastreuse," 8; Nelson, "Kingdoms," 112

⁷⁹ Agobard, *de divisione*, c.4, 246: ut dum valeretis, nomen imperatoris uni ex tribus filiis vestris imponeretis, in quo voluntatem Dei quoquomodo cognoscere potuissetis. Propter quam cognoscendam iniunxistis ut facerent omnes ieiunium triduanum, offerrent sacerdotes sacrificia omnipotenti Deo, qui suavis et mitis et multae misericordiae est omnibus invocantibus se; fieret quoque ab omnibus eleemosyna per illud triduum solito largior, ut omnipotens Deus, qui summa benignitate regit corda in se sperantium, infunderet in corde vestro voluntatem suam, et non sineret super alium inclinari voluntatem vestram, nisi super eum qui sibi placuisset. (*emphasis added*). Cf. *Ordinatio Imperii*, Intro, 271: Idcirco necessarium duximus, ut ieiuniis et orationibus et elemosinarum largitionibus apud illum obtineremus quod nostra infirmitas non praesumebat.

⁸⁰ Agobard, *de divisione*, c.4, 246: itaque perfecistis omnia, quae in tali re facienda erant, tali fide et spe, ut hoc a Deo uobis infusum et inspiratum nemo dubitaret.

uphold the decision; and that the emperor himself had shown his acceptance by issuing edicts jointly with Lothar.⁸¹ As a participant in the assembly that promulgated the *Ordinatio* in 817, Agobard's primary complaint remained that Louis had sought, received, and enacted divine revelation, but now dared to act contrary to that revelation.

This complaint became clear in Agobard's rhetorical high point, when he declared to Louis that "God himself did not say to you, neither through an angel, nor through a prophet: *I regret having ordained things like this*, just like He said to Samuel concerning Saul."⁸² God had not given Louis leave change His will, as Agobard saw it, and to make his point the archbishop even listed the only acceptable means of receiving such a revelation. In addition, by adducing as a parallel Saul, the Old Testament king famously rejected by God through the prophet Samuel for appropriating the role of a priest during a sacrifice, Agobard deepened his rebuke by paralleling himself with Samuel in warning his ruler.⁸³ Ruling out any divine authorization for Louis' actions, Agobard then took up his prophetic voice by accusing Louis of having abandoned God by breaking with the *Ordinatio*: "that which you had chosen with God, you reject without God, even the *will of Him* who you sought in deciding. Not awaiting the finality of His will, you rejected the sanctioned decision."⁸⁴ Agobard reaffirmed again and again that Louis had indeed received a viable revelation, a fact that justified Agobard's own admonition

⁸¹ Agobard, *de divisione*, c.4, 246.

⁸² Agobard, *de divisione*, c.4, 247: cum neque per se ipsum Deum, neque per angelum, neque per prophetam uobis dixerit: *Penitet me ita constituisse*, sicut de Saule dixit Samueli.

⁸³ Cf. 1 Kings 15:11; compare with Saul's rejection, 1 Kings 13:7-14.

⁸⁴ Agobard, *de divisione*, c.4, 247: et ecce, sine ulla ratione et consilio, quem cum Deo elegistis, sine Deo repudiatis, et cuius uoluntatem in eligendo quesistis, non expectato exitu uoluntatis eius, rem probatam reprobatis. (*emphasis added*).

of Louis for acting against God's revealed will. In this way, Agobard prayed that God might "turn you from rejecting the inspiration of God" and from following the counsel of any who would suggest the emperor do so.⁸⁵

In concluding his letter to Louis, Agobard reiterated his earlier invocation of the troubles appearing throughout the empire that he had interpreted as signs of Louis' bad behavior, recalling that "we have suffered such great evils, such wickedness perpetrated this year on account of this affair."⁸⁶ Referring to Louis' departure from the revelations which informed the *Ordinatio imperii*, Agobard spoke as Samuel to Saul, and warned Louis that "we greatly fear, lest the anger of God cast you off."⁸⁷ Embodying the episcopal, prophetic authority articulated in Paris, Agobard interpreted the signs of God's anger and warned Louis that his actions against Lothar (and against God's will) had not only caused the misfortunes of the empire, but had also put his soul at great risk, something avoidable should he now follow Agobard's prophetic counsel.

Agobard after the Lügenfeld

Agobard's next attempt to chastise Louis with his prophetic authority came after Louis was abandoned by his supporters at the Lügenfeld, an event that soon found its way into the minds of Louis' opponents as a bloodless victory and miraculous sign of God's approval of the

⁸⁵ Agobard, *de divisione*, c.5, 248: Absit, absit. Avertat Deus a vobis ut inspirationem Dei repudietis, et voluntates hominum carnalia tantum sapientium statuatis, ut in errorem inducamini, et deducamini.

⁸⁶ Agobard, *de divisione*, c.6, 248: Et idcirco tanta mala, tanta scelera isto anno ex hac occasione perpetrata dolemus, et timemus ualde, ne in uos furor Dei concitetur.

⁸⁷ Agobard, *de divisione*, c.6, 248: Et idcirco tanta mala, tanta scelera isto anno ex hac occasione perpetrata dolemus, et timemus ualde, ne in uos furor Dei concitetur.

rebellion.⁸⁸ Among the sources dating to the time after the events at the *Rotfeld* and the assembly of Compiègne was Agobard of Lyons' *Liber Apologeticus*, a condemnation of Empress Judith and a defense of the actions of Louis' rebellious sons.⁸⁹ While his specific goal remains unclear beyond justifying the sons' rebellion against their father—a difficult enough task on its own—Agobard returned again to the prophetic model articulated in Paris in support of the rebels.

The first lines of Agobard's text establish the scriptural tone of the *Liber Apologeticus*, he began by declaring:

Hear these things all peoples, let the land hear and its fullness from the rising to the setting of the sun, from the north to the sea, and let them know and recognize together that the sons of the Lord and Emperor Louis were and are justly indignant, mindful and ready to cleanse their father's palace.⁹⁰

Adopting a biblical form from Isaiah and the Psalms, Agobard sought to use all the authority he could claim to defend the sons' actions against their father and condemn their stepmother.⁹¹ He would continue to utilize this same prophetic voice as he asked in the words of Jeremiah, although without attribution, "the Lord says, will I never visit on account of such

⁸⁸ For the best treatment of the events of the Lügenfeld and the historical memory of the event, see Booker, *Convictions*.

⁸⁹ Egon Boshof felt that Agobard wrote the first part of the *Liber Apologeticus* as a sermon, possibly to be delivered in conjunction with the impending battle at the *Rotfeld*. While the contents and argument of the first *Liber* support this dating, with the second coming later in conjunction with the emperor's forced penance at Soissons, the sermon-esque character of the texts deserves closer examination. Boshof, *Agobard*, 240. For a further discussion of the dating of this text, see Dohmen, "Vorsehung," 149; Booker, *Convictions*, 136; Boshof, *Agobard*, 232-234; de Jong, "Bride Shows."

⁹⁰ Agobard, *Liber Apologeticus* I, c.1, 309: Audite haec omnes gentes, audiat terra et plenitudo eius a solis ortu et occasu, ab aquilone et mari, et sciant et recogitent pariter, domni et imperatoris Luduici filios iuste fuisse et esse indignatos, et bene sentire et intendere ad expurgandum paternum palatium.

⁹¹ Cf. Psalm 48:2-3; Isaiah 45:6.

things?⁹² Declaring divine impatience with Louis' and Judith's bad behavior in biblical prophetic language, Agobard characterized the sons' rebellion as the Lord's 'visitation', as it were, the divine response to Louis and Judith's mismanagement.

In the second book of the *Liber apologeticus*, likely written before the emperor's penance at Soissons, Agobard again redeployed the prophetic as he proclaimed that

by His wondrous gentleness and sweetness, the all-powerful God calmed the troubles of this time and of these regions without the clash of arms! This event must not be remembered only half-heartedly, but ought to set ablaze swiftly the hearts of the faithful in the praises of God and the act of gratitude and ought to restore the anxious to a knowledge of God's shrewdness. Such trouble and disorder of this sort had a cause and origin that must not be kept silently inside: when the most Christian and most pious Lord Emperor Louis, therefore, had lost a partner of a good marriage, fitting to him in faith and good behavior, it became necessary that he should take another who could be a helper to him in directing and managing the palace and the realm. But *by the secret judgment of God*, a wife was selected of a different sort. Although initially she had submitted to her husband and Lord—overwhelmed by his strength and power—nevertheless, as time passed she was discovered to be capable of being like the trouble of great floods and a vault of bountiful disorder.⁹³

Beginning with the events at the *Rotfeld*, Agobard established the miraculous nature of the event, interpreting Louis' abandonment by his soldiers and retainers as a sign of divine approval for the rebellious sons' cause. Agobard interpreted this miraculous preservation of

⁹² Agobard, *Liber Apologeticus* I, c.3, 310: Numquid super his non uisitabo, dicit dominus? cf. Jer. 5:9.

⁹³ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus* II, c.2, 315: Commotio itaque huius temporis et harum regionum, quae mira omnipotentis Dei suauitate et dulcedine sine conflictu armorum sedata est, non segniter memoranda est, sed debet corda fidelium in laudibus Dei et gratiarum actione alacriter succendere, et ad sollertiam cautele sollicita reddere. Quae commotio et conturbatio quale habuerit initium uel originem, non est penitus reticendum. Igitur cum christianissimus et piissimus imperator domnus Luduuicus bonae coniugis, fide et moribus sibi congruentis, consortium amisisset, necesse fuit, ut aliam sibi acciperet, quae ei posset esse adiutrix in regimine et gubernatione palatii et regni. Sed occulto Dei iudicio talis assumpta est, quae, licet in primis annis, uiri et domini, sui uirtute et potestate pressa, subdita fuerit, tamen in processu temeris talis inuenta est, quae magnorum fluctuum commotio et conturbationis largus thesaurus esse posset.

life and peace against the backdrop of Judith's "disturbance and disorder" (*commotio et conturbatio*), employing language often used to depict negative signs and portents.⁹⁴ Further, before turning Judith into the cause of all the empire's troubles by comparing her to a "treasure house of bountiful disorder" (*conturbationis largus thesaurus*), Agobard explained that their marriage occurred "by the secret judgement of God" (*occulto Dei iudicio*), an idea within Agobard's thought which deserves closer attention.

Although Courtney Booker has argued that this phrase was "Agobard's customary way of admitting defeat" because such inexplicable phenomena must have been "simply the inscrutable manifestations of God's mysterious will," this explanation does not satisfy.⁹⁵ In the context of the political discourse of the early 830s, when Agobard claimed that something occurred by God's secret judgement, it appears that it is his way of acknowledging the superior knowledge of God, and the limits of human knowledge without revelation. Not only does such an admission declare the limits of one's own understanding, but it also emphasized the unique power of revelation, through which the limits of human understanding can be surpassed. In another tract wherein Agobard argued against the use of judicial duels to discern the truth of an issue, or to reveal God's judgement he explained that "we must believe all

⁹⁴ E.g. Agobard, *de divisione*, c.3, 248: Anno itaque praesenti, in attritione et commotione, agitatione et afflictione terrae et habitantium; *Epistola generalis*, 3: et ita Deo miserante fieret, nisi commotio inimicorum, sicut nostis, praepedisset; Paschasius, *Epitaphium Arsenii* II, c.8, 68: Pro quibus profecto mox commota sunt omnia viscera eius pietatis affectu, eo quod esset theatrum, honestatis olim, palatium factum, in quo tanta sortilegarum prestigia recidiva scaturierunt, quanta in omni mundo iam non credebantur esse; *CP* 829, c.69, 669: Dubium etenim non est, sicut multis est notum, quod a quibusdam praestigiis atque diabolicis inlusionibus ita mentes quorundam inficiantur proculis amatoris, cibis vel filacteriis, ut in insaniam versi a plerisque iudicentur, dum proprias non sentiunt contumelias. Ferunt enim suis maleficiis aera posse conturbare et grandines immittere, futura praedicere, fructus et lac auferre aliisque dare et innumera a talibus fieri dicuntur.

⁹⁵ Booker, *Convictions*, 150.

things by faith because nothing happens in the world except it is either caused or permitted by God,” and that the deaths of good men at the hands of the wicked “belongs to the secret judgement of God.”⁹⁶ Discussing a wider variety of juridical techniques for discerning the truth of a situation, Agobard made two clear claims, both of which appear within his second *Liber apologeticus* against Judith: first, all things occur by God’s will or permission, and second, that only God truly knows why things happen. These two claims of God’s universally causal will and its frequent secrecy, support Agobard’s own competitive use of the prophetic as he sought to shut down alternative claims and interpretations used by Louis and his advisors to support the emperor and Judith. Such an approach allowed Agobard to avoid accusing Louis directly, by attributing the decision to marry Judith to God’s secret judgement, rather than to the emperor’s own bad judgement. In this way, rather than “admitting defeat,” Agobard contrasted his own inspired interpretation of events with the fact that only God knows and thus only God can reveal why such things happen, an understanding that limited any alternative interpretations of the events of the past three years.⁹⁷

Reinforcing his attacks on Judith, Agobard layered his position with analogies to various scriptural wicked kings led astray by their wives, and the holy men who sought to correct them. Among these, Agobard expanded on the figure of Ahab, the king of Israel who

⁹⁶ Agobard, *Contra iudicium Dei*, c.5, 34: Tota namque fide credere debemus, quod nihil fiat in mundo, nisi Deo aut dispensante, aut permittente... pertinet hoc ad occulta iudicia Dei; Agobard, *Liber apologeticus* II, c.2, 315; Sed occulto Dei iudicio talis assumpta est... Cedat diuinis iudiciis, quia nihil in terra sine causa. For examples of further use of the idea in Agobard’s works, cf. *Adversus legem gundobadi*, c.9, 24; c.11, 26; *Contra iudicium Dei*, c.6, 34; *Adversum dogma felicitis*, c.9, c.38, 106; *Contra praeceptum impium de baptismo iudaicorum mancipiorum*, 187. Cf. Boshof, *Agobard*, 43-47.

⁹⁷ Compare with Booker’s interpretation in *Convictions*, 150.

“had sold himself to do evil in the presence of the Lord because his wife Jezebel stirred him up, and he became abominable.”⁹⁸ After explaining just how far Ahab had been driven from the correct path by his wife, Agobard reinserted himself into the example, noting how Ahab “had been corrected by the prophet Elijah, no, not corrected but compelled to do penance, by which Ahab did not remove, only delay the punishments he was due.”⁹⁹ Using Ahab’s fate as a warning for Louis and other Frankish rulers as well, Agobard explained how God chose and established another king “to punish the house of Ahab and his deceitful wife,” a king who was not offered salvation, but nevertheless fulfilled “the vengeance of the Lord zealously.”¹⁰⁰ Finally, in the fourth generation after Ahab, Agobard explained that the troubles only ended “because the blessed and holy priest Jojada ordered the most impious [king] Athaliah to be killed and established Joas in the place of his father, and cleansed Jerusalem of the filthiness and impure people.”¹⁰¹ While Agobard did not elaborate on the nature of Joas’ reign, the archbishop explained that while the blessed priest Jojada would receive “temporal and eternal rewards,” including being buried “in the city of David with the kings,” the king Joas only

⁹⁸ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus* II, c.5, 317: Igitur non fuit alter talis ut Ahab, qui uenundatus est, ut faceret malum in conspectu Domini. Concitauit enim eum Iezabel uxor sua, et abominabilis factus est. (3 Kings 21:25-26.)

⁹⁹ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus* II, c.5, 317: Et quaquam Ahab, concitante se uxore sua, errauerit a fide, et ea auctrice perpetraverit facinus illud de morte Naboth Hiezrahelitę, correptus tamen ab Helia propheta, non correctus, compulsus est agere penitentiam, qua actione penitentię mala sibi imminetia distulit, non abstulit.

¹⁰⁰ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus* II, c.5, 317-318: Hieu autem, quem Dominus suscitauit in regem ad puniendam domum Ahab et eius deceptricem uxorem, licet eternam uitam non promeruerit, eo quod a peccatis Hieroboam non recesserit, quia studiose exercuit ultiones Domini de Hiezabel et domo eius, quem illa concitauerat.

¹⁰¹ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus* II, c.5, 318: Beatus quoque Ioiadas et sanctus pontifex, quia Athaliah impiissimam interfici iussit et Ioas in solio patris collocauit, et Hierusalem a sordibus et inmunditiis purgauit.

received “temporal rewards.”¹⁰² Through this scriptural parallel, Agobard offered Louis a bleak vision of the future if he did not follow Agobard’s and the other bishops’ guidance.

Rather than merely justifying his own role, or the purposes of his fellow bishops, Agobard appears to have focused much more on convincing Louis to take up the penance in earnest and spare himself as well as his descendants. Finally, after briefly noting the biblical story of Samson’s own fall as a result of his wife’s influence, Agobard reached the crux of his argument, for which he had been establishing himself as a prophet throughout the tract. After explaining that at least Samson recognized his errors and was allowed a “glorious death,” Agobard explained that

it was considered fitting some time ago that the lord emperor piously contemplate so that he would not lose the heavenly and eternal kingdom, as he lost the earthly and temporal one by the deceit of a woman. Let him submit to divine judgements, because nothing on earth occurs without a reason.¹⁰³

While many of God’s judgements were secret, Agobard confidently asserted that the course they had decided upon, in choosing to rise up against the emperor and compel his penance, was God’s will to which Louis desperately needed to submit. Speaking with prophetic authority for the salvation of a threatened monarch, Agobard recalled his earlier claims that all things occur by God’s will, and that in this case, God’s judgements were far from secret, to him at least. Instead of seeking to justify a revolt in its own right, Agobard pronounced the

¹⁰² Agobard, *Liber apologeticus* II, c.5, 318: tali eum laude exornat Scriptura divina, dicens, Senuit autem Ioiada plenus dierum, et mortuus est, cum centum XXX esset annorum; sepelieruntque eum in ciuitate Dauid cum regibus, eo quod fecisset bonum cum Israel et cum domo eius. (cf. 2 Chronicles 24:15-16) Ecce iste pius sacerdos et temporali et eterna retributione remuneratus est, Hieu autem tantum temporali.

¹⁰³ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus* II, c.6, 318: Sic ergo dignetur dominus dudum imperator pie perpendere, ut celeste et sempiternum regnum non perdat, qui deceptus a muliere terrenum et temporale amisit. Cedat diuinis iudiciis, quia nihil in terra sine causa.

events of the revolt, beginning with the bloodless victory at the Lügenfeld as God's will, and as he had before, Agobard sought nothing more than to save the emperor from opposing God's will.

Judging the Emperor at Compiègne

Agobard's was not the only view in opposition to Louis. As a point of comparison with Agobard's own prophetic approach to Louis' penance, a text survives that offers an attending bishop's view of the public penance of Louis in 833, which he was forced to perform at Compiègne. By Autumn of 833, the rebel bishops felt confident enough to depose Louis and force him to perform a public penance. As a witness to their actions, one among the bishops recorded the acts of the synod of Compiègne under the leadership of Ebbo of Rheims, who had also directed the 829 Council of Paris.¹⁰⁴ This text, known as the *Episcoporum de poenitentia, quam Hludowicus imperator professus est, relatio Compendiensis* (833), or just the *Relatio compendiensis*, explained how the bishops assembled at Compiègne in 833 executed and defended their deposition of the emperor through their prophetic authority. The anonymous author of this brief text also took up the prophetic authority claimed in the Council of Paris four years previously, the anonymous author of the *Relatio compendiensis* recalled how the bishops began by articulating their apostolic authority to bind and loose, in combination with the warning that "if you do not warn the iniquitous man of his iniquity, and

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of Ebbo of Rheims, see McKeon, "Archbishop Ebbo," 437-447. Compare with Wattenbach-Levison-Löwe, II, 332-335.

he should die in his wickedness, I [God] will require his blood at your hand.”¹⁰⁵ The anonymous episcopal author then described how the bishops asserted their right and authority to call sinners to penance in the context of the general assembly at Compiègne.

First, before addressing Louis, the bishops warned Lothar “together with his followers to strive most faithfully to please the Lord, and that they would not postpone placating Him with compensation for everything in which they had offended Him.”¹⁰⁶ The bishops explained that their warnings and actions came as a result of “many things that arose through negligence in this empire. Things that pertained, according to *obvious signs*, to the scandal of the church, the ruin of the people, or the destruction of the kingdom.”¹⁰⁷ Interpreting as “obvious signs” the many negative things that had occurred as a result of Louis’ “negligence,” the bishops announced their intent to save the church, the people, and the empire. This wording closely invoked the tripartite division used in the introduction to the Council of Paris, where bishops sought to resolve the crises threatening the general *populus christianus* (the Ninevites), the rulers (Ahab and Manasses), and the church (Mary).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Relatio compendiensis*, 11: Si non annuntiaueris, inquit, iniquo iniquitatem suam, et ipse in impietate sua mortuus fuerit, sanguinem eius de many tua requiram (Ezechiel 3:18).

¹⁰⁶ Anonymous, *Relatio compendienses*, 13: Deinde tam memorato principi quam cuncto eius populo denunciare studuimus, ut Domino deuotissime placere studerent, et, in quibuscunque eum offenderant, satisfactione placere non differrent.

¹⁰⁷ *Relatio compendienses*, 13: Enumerata quippe sunt multa, quae per negligentiam in hoc imperio contigerunt, quae ad scandalum ecclesiae et ruinam populi uel regni interitum manifestis indiciis pertinebant.

¹⁰⁸ CP 829, 607: Legimus quippe Ninnivitis divina ultione dignis humiliter in tribulatione ad Deum clamantibus diuinitus subuentum. Nam et Ahab et Manases, reges idolatrae, paenitentiae satisfactione divinae obuiare ultioni. Meretrix porro illa evangelica, Maria nomine, profusione lacrimarum carere meruit enormitate multorum peccaminum. His et his similibus salutiferis documentis datur intelligi, quod Deus, bona cuncta iubens malaque omnia vetans, saepissime humane fragilitatis peccatis offensus et ad iracundiam provocatus, per paenitentiae (*lege poenitentia*) tamen dignam satisfactionem ab humanis erratibus suae severitatis debitam suspenderit, vindictam, adeo ut quem moles peccaminum provocauerat ad ultionem actuum pravorum correctio flexerit ad misericordissimam propitiationem. Cf. de Jong, *Penitential*, 176, 178.

As they continued, the bishops stated how Louis had received the a peaceful, united, and miraculously expanded kingdom “through the rule of Charles, the most excellent emperor of blessed memory, and through the labors of his predecessors.”¹⁰⁹ As Adalhard had done in 822 at Attigny, and as Nithard would do in his *Histories* later for Charles the Bald, the author here casts Charlemagne’s reign as a sort of golden age, in contrast to the present trials in which he found himself.¹¹⁰ The bishops proceeded to explain how Louis had been “protected under the same peace” as Charlemagne and his remaining ancestors, and that “as long as the same prince [Louis] had sought to please God and attend to his paternal example so that he would submit to the counsel of good men,” the condition of the realm would have “remained protected.”¹¹¹ In this way, the bishops sought to counter Louis’ grander assertions of authority and utilize claims of divine inspiration and approval to solidify their own authority: all of which the bishops claimed the right to re-interpret and evaluate.

The crux of the matter was that, in the bishops’ eyes, Louis did not please God or follow Charlemagne’s example. Thus, they asserted, Louis’ “shortsightedness or negligence” in his *ministerium* was the cause of the troubles the realm had been suffering.¹¹² In judgement over the emperor, the bishops declared that Louis had “incited God, scandalized the Holy

¹⁰⁹ *Relatio compendienses*, 13: Inter caetera etiam commemoratum est a nobis, et omnibus ad memoriam reductum, qualiter a Deo regnum istud per administrationem bonae memoriae Karoli praestantissimi imperatoris et per praedecessorum suorum laborem pacificum et unitum atque mirabiliter dilatatum fuerit.

¹¹⁰ Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings*, 135. Cf. de Jong, “Decaying,” 6-25; Dutton, *Historical Decline*.

¹¹¹ *Relatio compendienses*, 13: et domino Ludeuico imperatori a Deo ad regendum sub magna pace commissum Dominoque protegente sub eadem pace, quamdiu idem princeps Deo placere studuit et paternis exemplis uti ac bonorum hominum consiliis acquiescere curauit, conseruatum manserit.

¹¹² *Relatio compendienses*, 13: per eius inprudientiam uel negligentiam in tantam uenerit ignominiam et uilitatem, ut non solum amicis in moesticiam, sed etiam inimicis uenerit in derisionem.

Church,” and committed innumerable other sins that lead to a “communal destruction.”¹¹³ Far from mere suggestion or insinuation, the bishops’ statements demonstrated a confidence in their authority to declare God’s will as they stated that because Louis led the people to a “common destruction,” miraculously Louis “suddenly ha[d] his imperial power stripped from him by a just and divine judgment.”¹¹⁴ Later in the text the bishops would reiterate this statement as they rehearsed the accusation that Louis’ attempts to alter his plans for succession led his followers to break their oaths, a charge whose language recalled the accountability of the ruler for his servants discussed in Paris as a “danger to the king.”¹¹⁵ To support their charge, the bishops then explained that

how much this deed displeased God is clearly obvious, because afterwards neither he [Louis] nor the people subject to him deserved to have peace, but all were thrown into disorder as a punishment for sin sustained by the just judgement of God.¹¹⁶

As the author of the *Relatio* elaborated the bishops’ case against Louis, again and again he supported the gravest charges by invoking divine judgement and the signs that revealed it.

Here, as elsewhere, the language of the *Relatio* suggests that the author was deeply indebted to

¹¹³ *Relatio compendienses*, 14: fecerit et facere compulerit uel fieri permiserit, et in multis nefandis consiliis Deum irritauerit, et sanctam ecclesiam scandalizauerit, et, ut caetera, quae innumera sunt, omittamus, nouissime omnem populum sibi subiectum ad communem interitum contraxerit.

¹¹⁴ *Relatio compendienses*, 14: et ab eo diuino iustoque iudicio subito imperialis sit subtracta potestas.

¹¹⁵ *Relatio compendienses*, 16-17: Quod auctor scandali et perturbator pacis ac uiolator sacramentorum existendo pactum, quod propter pacem et unanimitatem imperii ecclesiaeque tranquillitatem communi consilio et consensu cunctorum fidelium suorum fuerat inter filios suos factum et per sacramentum confirmatum, super illicita potestate corruerit; et in eo quod fideles suos in contrarietatem eiusdem primi pacti et iuramenti aliud sacramentum iurare compulerit, in periurii reatum pro tantorum uiolatione sacramentorum procul dubio inciderit. *CP* 829, c.57, 653: Ad peccatum regis pertinet, quando iudicibus ministrisque iniquis ministerium suum adimplendum committit.

¹¹⁶ *Relatio compendienses*, 17: et quantum hoc factum Deo displicuerit, liquido claret, quia postea nec ipse nec populus sibi subiectus pacem habere meruit, sed omnes in perturbationem poenam peccati sustinendo iusto Dei iudicio inducti sunt.

the Paris Council, for he recalled two sections specifically: the first commenting on Ezechiel 3:18-19, discussing how the watchman must warn sinners to save his own soul, and the second commenting on Ecclesiasticus 10:8 warning how a kingdom would be given to another people if its rulers proved unrighteous.¹¹⁷ Layering the account of Louis' crimes with signs of God's judgement and suggestions of their own unavoidable responsibilities as prophetic watchmen, the author of the *Relatio* (and his fellow bishops) made the case for God's judgement against Louis so obvious that the acts of the assembly of Compiègne would appear as the mere confirmation of the much more divine stripping of Louis' imperial authority at the Lügenfeld.

Throughout the *Relatio Compendienses* the episcopal rebuke of the emperor relied on the bishops' prophetic authority as watchmen claimed in the 829 Paris Council, and their interpretation of the signs of Louis' negligence and of the overpowering sign of God's disapproval at the Lügenfeld. Although frequently noted in vague and unspecific terms likely because the audience was aware of the specific events, the bishops' interpretation of these signs formed the core of their case against Louis, and of their defining claim that Louis' deposition was not their doing but occurred by "the just judgement of God."¹¹⁸ While their

¹¹⁷ CP 829, 613: (Quoting Ezechiel 3:18-19) Sed ex eo, quod idem propheta infert: *Si autem tu adnuntiaveris impio et ille non fuerit conversus ab impietate sua et a via sua impia, ipse quidem in iniquitate sua morietur, tu autem animam tuam liberasti* et cetera, liquido claret, quia, si praedicator adnuntiaverit impio, ut se convertat a via impia et vivat, et impius non se correxerit, eiusdem impii poenae sacerdos particeps non erit. CP 829, 655: (Quoting Ecclesiasticus 10:8) *Regnum a gente in gentem transfertur propter iniustitias et iniurias et contumelias et diversos dolos*. Quibus verbis liquido claret, quod pietas, iustitia et misericordia stabiliant regnum et lesiones viduarum et pupillorum calimniaeque miserorum violentaque iudicia et perversio iustitiae evidenter illud evertant; unde et multorum regnorum conlapsio, quia pietatis, iustitiae et misericordie non habuerunt stabilimentum, his, quae praemissa sunt, patenter fidem adtribuit.

¹¹⁸ *Relatio compendienses*, 17: quia postea nec ipse nec populus sibi subiectus pacem habere meruit, sed omnes in perturbationem poenam peccati sustinendo iusto Dei iudicio inducti sunt. Cf. 14: et ab eo divino iustoque iudicio.

efforts to depose Louis would be undone later, the prophetic authority used by the bishops at Compiègne could not be as easily dismissed and required extensive effort on Louis' and his supporters' parts to overcome before they could unequivocally reinstate the emperor.¹¹⁹

The Visions and Fulfillments of Prophecy in Defense of the Emperor

Because of Louis' eventual victory and reassertion of power, we must consider ourselves fortunate that so much survives from the opposition itself, although the other side of the same coin means that many of the texts written in support of the emperor also survive from after Louis' reinstatement. Two texts offer a glimpse into how those loyal to Louis used the prophetic to support his rule and counter the claims of the rebels: Walahfrid Strabo's poem to the Empress Judith and Thegan's biography of Louis the Pious.¹²⁰ Both likely written between 834 and 835 (although Walahfrid's poem might have been written somewhat earlier), these texts attest to a period when Louis' fortunes were improving but the troubles were far from over.

Walahfrid's vision differs from the earlier texts from him we have investigated largely because he claimed to have seen the vision himself.¹²¹ Bypassing all claims to ascertain God's judgement and to identify the signs that proved it, Walahfrid described how, "at an inauspicious time, under the power of grief, while the schemes of deceit oppressed the pious

¹¹⁹ For a study of Louis' reinstatement, see Rid, "Wiedereinsetzung," 265–275.

¹²⁰ Walahfrid Strabo, *Ad eandem (Judith) de quodam somnio*, 379–380; Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, 168–277.

¹²¹ Compare with Paul Dutton's reading of this poem in Dutton, *Politics*, 105–107.

father and people,” he received a vision in his sleep.¹²² Walahfrid condemned the rebels and decried their attempts to take power from Louis in various ways while acknowledging the damage their actions were causing, and claimed that “no respite was mine through prophetic dreams until, without question by the power of God, He, striking down the terrible clouds of my earlier fear, He taught me to hope for calm weather.”¹²³ Emphasizing God’s power in revealing to him a reason to hope, Walahfrid described his “prophetic dreams” of Louis’ future rise to his former power by using imagery common in scriptural visions and those familiar with the prophetic discourse at Louis the Pious’ court.

Recalling the scriptural presentation of written artifacts, Walahfrid described being shown a beautiful book covered in “rhythmical verses in good order,” a text describing the “fates of king and the kingdom.”¹²⁴ Turning from strictly biblical imagery to something more localized in the court of Louis the Pious in the *Vision of a Certain Poor Woman* and Einhard’s *Vita Karoli*, Walahfrid described how Louis’ name was changed to *Equitatus*, a sign of Louis’ future recovery of power and position.¹²⁵ Before the book was taken from him, Walahfrid

¹²² Walahfrid Strabo, *De quodam somnio*, 379, lns. 1-3: Tempora infausta sub potestate dolendi | dum fraudis commenta pios populumque patremque | opprimerent.

¹²³ Walahfrid Strabo, *De quodam somnio*, 379, lns. 10-14: Nec requies praesaga mihi per somnia, donec | Haud dubia virtute deus, prisci atra timoris | Nubilia decutiens, nitidum sperare serenum | Edocuit.

¹²⁴ Walahfrid Strabo, *De quodam somnio*, 379, lns. 18-23: Visa libri series coram pulcherrima longi | Ante meos vultus, metricis qui versibus omnem | Rite superficiem gestabat in ordine plenam. | Dumque avidus rerum cautus per singula lector | Irem, animadverti seriem de casibus ipsam | Et regni et regis textu resonare pedestri. For examples of books presented in biblical visions, see Isaiah 29:11; Ezekiel 2:9; Rev. 5:1, 10:2, 20:12.

¹²⁵ Walahfrid Strabo, *De quodam somnio*, 379, lns. 24-28: Caesaris hic nomen quadam sub imagine versum, | Proque sacro semper Ludowici Equitatus illic | Nomine scriptus erat, neque me cognominis huius | Turbatat novitas, cum causa videlicet ipsa | personam exprimeret, notis notissima gestis.

learned that despite the treachery of the rebels Louis would be restored to his former position and confirmed this by interpreting the name symbolic *Equitatus*:

I immediately added to the hope of peace because of the portent of the name: that name, *Equitatus*, has portended the swift power of his courage, and the same portent confirms the following assertion: the exceedingly tolerant man, who will quickly be returned to prosperity, must not weep over his harsh burdens.¹²⁶

Layering his vision with scriptural imagery and signs we have already seen used in Louis' court, Walahfrid used his vision to reassure Judith (and any others for whom Walahfrid intended his poem) that Louis would soon return to power. Claiming a vision from God and interpreting the signs it contained, Walahfrid utilized the medium of a vision to counter the authority claims made by rebels who equally claimed to be performing God's will in deposing Louis. Walahfrid was no bishop and thus could not claim to predict the future or pronounce God's will in the same way as the rebel bishops could. Nevertheless, by claiming sudden divine inspiration and interpreting the primary sign it contained in a symbolic language consistent with the other vision texts circulated at Louis' court, Walahfrid could effectively counter the rebels' arguments without directly contradicting the rebel bishops' authority claims.

Defending the Emperor

In contrast to Walahfrid, Thegan, the suffragan bishop of Trier, focused his defense of Louis on attacking Ebbo of Rheims—the bishop who directed Louis' deposition—and sought to contradict Ebbo's authority much more directly. In his biography of the emperor, written

¹²⁶ Walahfrid Strabo, *De quodam somnio*, 380, lns. 41-45: *Nominis auspicio pacis spem protinus auxi: | Veloces virtutis opes Equitatus ille | Portendebat, idemque sequens assertio firmat, | Tristari nimium tolerantem pondera dura | Non debere, citos facturum in laeta recursus.*

shortly after Louis' restoration, Thegan took aim at the authority claims made by the rebels. Throughout his history, Thegan reinterpreted the rebellions against Louis and subverted their meaning, in the process writing himself into a much larger debate. Thegan composed his history as a counter-narrative to that of the rebels, interpreting the events on the *Rotfeld* as betrayal and claiming that Louis was the only reason that a bloodbath was avoided—because the emperor commanded his retainers to go to his sons' side to avoid the battle.¹²⁷ Beyond challenging the interpretation of events key to the rebels' arguments that Louis had been divinely judged, Thegan broke from his strict historical narrative by inserting two of his sermonizing commentaries into the narrative during his recounting of 817 (when Louis promulgated the *Ordinatio imperii*) and 833 (the episcopal assembly at Compiègne).¹²⁸ Taking aim at Ebbo of Rheims personally, and Ebbo as a symbol of the rebellious bishops as a whole, Thegan inserted his sermons to offer only mild correction to Louis for putting Ebbo in his position, and to attack the authority claimed by Ebbo and his allies. Booker and Tremp have argued that this sermon and the second that would follow Thegan's depiction of Louis' deposition at Compiègne, both show Thegan's use of scripture as a model to understand how the disastrous revolts could come about, and as such, the first sermon offered an anticipation of what the second would depict as fulfilled.¹²⁹ While Booker's interpretation focused much more on Thegan's efforts to depict Louis as a suffering, Job-like figure, Booker nevertheless

¹²⁷ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c. 42, 230.

¹²⁸ On Thegan's genre and models, see Booker, *Convictions*, 30.

¹²⁹ Tremp, *Studien*, 82-83; Booker, *Convictions*, 30-31.

noted that “Thegan understood Louis’ struggles within the larger context of divine fulfillment.”¹³⁰

In his second sermon that, as Tremp and Booker noted, fulfilled the warnings of the first, inserted in the text following Thegan’s depiction of the assembly at Compiègne, Thegan condemned those bishops whom betrayed Louis, who the emperor had “made honorable from the filthiest state of slavery” by elevating them.¹³¹ Beginning his second sermon, Thegan claimed that Jeremiah’s prophecy had been fulfilled, that “our slaves now rule” (Lamentations 5:8), from the moment when the rebel bishops had chosen to follow the worst of their lot, Ebbo, whom Thegan denounced as born of a slave.¹³² Throughout the sermon, Thegan spoke directly to Ebbo, who had already been deposed and punished, in order to prevent him from returning to his old bishopric.¹³³ Castigating the former archbishop, Thegan accused Ebbo of ignoring the words of the Lord (and the prophets, and the apostles), that explained how a slave could not be above his lord, that all have others placed above them to whom they must pay obedience, and that Ebbo must “Fear God and honor the king.”¹³⁴ Thegan accused Ebbo of failing this last command to such an extent that he “certainly will bear the wrath of God.”¹³⁵ After accusing Ebbo of acting at the behest of the devil himself, Louis’ biographer began to

¹³⁰ Booker, *Convictions*, 32.

¹³¹ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c.43, 230: Omnes enim episcopi molesti fuerunt ei, et maxime hi, qui ex vilissima servili condicione honoratos habebat, cum his, qui ex barbaris nacionibus ad hoc fastigium perducti sunt.

¹³² Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c.44, 232: Tunc impletum est epilogium Hieremię prophetę dicentis: servi dominati sunt nostri.

¹³³ Tremp, “Thegan und Astronomus,” 694.

¹³⁴ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c.44, 232-234: Et iterum alius dicit: Deum timete, regem honorificate. (Cf. 1 Peter 2:17-18). He also recited Lamentations 5:8; Matthew 4:9 and 10:24; Romans 13:1.

¹³⁵ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c.44, 234: Si unusquisque gratiam Dei adipisci poterit alia faciendo, profecto iram Dei habebit talia contempnendo.

wonder why Ebbo had not been punished as he should have been. “O Lord Jesus Christ,”

Thegan prayed,

where was your angel, who easily exterminated in a single night the first born of Egypt, and who in the camps of the Assyrians under the wicked king Sennacherib in a single night annihilated one hundred eighty-five thousand of the faithless, as witnessed by the prophet Isaiah? Or that angel who struck Herod the younger as he spoke, so that immediately he began to swarm with worms? And you Earth, you who sustained him at that time, why did you not open your mouth to devour him, just like once long ago you did to Dathan and Abiram?¹³⁶

Thegan’s tirade served multiple purposes within the text, though none as important as recalling to Ebbo what could have happened to him, had God acted as He had in what Thegan felt were comparable circumstances. This recollection of violent moments of divine intervention revealed the extreme punishment that Thegan felt Ebbo had earned, and further accentuated Thegan’s accusation, that “the prophet Zachariah prophesied you saying: you should not live, because you have spoken a lie in the name of the Lord.”¹³⁷ But why then did Thegan mention these punishments when none of them had been visited on Ebbo? Beyond adding scriptural weight to his attacks on Ebbo, Thegan’s comparison between the divine punishments that Ebbo deserved and the kindness he experienced served to enhance the goodness and mercy of Louis, whose forgiving nature evinced the “patience of holy Job.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c.44, 234: O Domine Iesu Christe, ubi erat angelus tuus, qui omnia primogenita Egypti una nocte facile delevit, et ille, qui in castris Assyriorum sub Sennacherib rege iniquo nocte una centum octuaginta quinque milia perfidorum extinxit, testante Esaia propheta? Aut ille, qui Herodem iuniorem concionantem percussit, ut statim scaterere cepit vermibus? Et tu terra, quæ eum sustinuisti illo in tempore, quaere non aperuisti os tuum, ut devorares eum, sicut iam olim fecisti Dathan et Abiron?

¹³⁷ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c.44, 234: Tibi vaticinavit Zacharias propheta dicens: non vivas, quia mendacium locutus es in nomine Domini. (cf. Zachariah 13:3).

¹³⁸ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, c.44, 236: sicut et patientia beati Iob. Booker, *Convictions*, 63-64; Wattenbach-Levison-Löwe, III, 335.

Thegan argued that Ebbo fulfilled Zachariah's prophecy and despite the rebel bishops' claims to prophetic authority, they had all been judged by God as much as any in the scriptural episodes he mentioned. Thegan's attacks meant to do more than attack Ebbo's parentage and his disloyalty to the emperor; instead Thegan sought to contradict Ebbo's and the rebel bishops' authority claims made in Compiègne echoing those made in the acts of the Paris Council.

Thus, Thegan invoked divine judgement more subtly by framing his attacks on Ebbo as an early prophetic warning fulfilled.¹³⁹ Yet when he formulated the fulfillment of the earlier prophetic warning, Thegan reached for a more direct form of prophetic speech in order to attack Ebbo at a level far deeper than merely insults about the former archbishop's low birth. Instead, Thegan attacked the very authority Ebbo and the other bishops assembled at Compiègne had utilized in their deposition of Louis, claiming that they were only spared the full extent of divine retribution because of the patience of their Job-like emperor, for whom the wicked bishops served as a refining trial.

III. Signs, Portents, and Punishment in the Final Years of Louis the Pious

Revelation, Inspiration, and Invocation

In contrast to Thegan, others writing in the context of competitive interpretation of the revolts and their aftermath were eager to demonstrate the hand of God unrestrained in its

¹³⁹ Cf. Booker, *Convictions*, 30-32.

punishment of the rebels. In the continuation of the *Royal Frankish Annals* known as the *Annals of St. Bertin*, the Andalusian bishop Prudentius of Troyes far surpassed Thegan in his willingness to invoke the prophetic in his history. While Prudentius' segment of the *Annals of St. Bertin* is emblematic of how the signs, portents, and prophecy were used in the historiography of Louis' late reign, Prudentius himself must first be compared to his contemporaries and situated in his context as an author. Prudentius does not stand out among his contemporaries for his invocation of God's will throughout his text, or for his juxtaposition of signs and portents with events in Carolingian political history, since these tactics had become relatively common in the historical writing of the 830s and beyond. Instead, we will focus on Prudentius because unlike many (unknown) authors of the other ninth-century annals, Prudentius likely wrote his early entries for, among others, Louis the Pious himself, and sought to influence the emperor with his work.¹⁴⁰

A long-time member of Louis' court and "resident of the imperial household," Prudentius was well-positioned to gain information and to challenge adversarial versions of the revolts.¹⁴¹ Prudentius explained how the restoration of Louis' power met with unanimous agreement, all knowing that the rebellious factions "had been destroyed by God's aid."¹⁴² Writing for Louis himself and members of the court, Prudentius carefully crafted his narrative

¹⁴⁰ Dutton, *Politics*, 109.

¹⁴¹ Nelson, *The Annals of St-Bertin*, 7-8.

¹⁴² *AB* a.835, 10: *illorum factionibus divino auxilio cassatis*.

in order to rehabilitate imperial authority while coming to terms with what must have appeared an increasingly chaotic realm.¹⁴³

While the precise location or authorship of various other contemporary historiographical sources prove more difficult to determine than that of the *Annals of St. Bertin*, their witness to the breakdown of Louis' late reign is indispensable for understanding Prudentius' work. In the second entry under his supervision, Prudentius recorded that in 836 Louis sought to call his son Lothar back from Italy, only to learn that a fever had broken out among Lothar's followers, allowing only a few to come at Louis' command.¹⁴⁴ Recalling the frequent refrain in official statements that disasters and disorder had struck the realm "internally at the same time as externally," Prudentius recalled that "at the same time Northmen ravaged Dorestad and Frisia again."¹⁴⁵ By the end of the year and into 837, following yet another attack by Northmen on Dorestad, Prudentius noted that among Lothar's senior advisers and followers, Wala, Hugh, and Lambert had all died, although the causes of their deaths are left unexplained.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Dutton, *Politics*, 109; Ganz, "Epitaphium Arsenii," 538.

¹⁴⁴ AB a.836, 12: In quo cum dona annualia more solito reciperet ac Hlotharium opperiretur, nunciatus est febri correptus nullatenus advenireposse.

¹⁴⁵ *Epistola Generalis*, 5: Agitur siquidem iusto iudicio Dei, ut, quia in cunctis delinquimus, interius simul et exterius flagellemur. CP 829, 607: occulta sua dispensatione voluit, diversorum morborum generibus affici, multifariis cladibus conteri, divinum contra se mucronem *interius exteriusque* meritis exigentibus grassari plagasque, quas Dominus suis iussis oboedire nolentibus, sed potius ad mala, que vetuit, labentibus interminatus est, incessanter experiri (*emphasis added*). MGH Cap I, no.124, pp. 245-6: Certissimeque ab his exterioribus colligere possumus, nos per omnia Domino non placere interius, qui tanta mala compellimur tollerare exterius. AB a.836, 12: Eodem tempore Nordmanni Dorestadum et FRisiam rursus depopulati sunt.

¹⁴⁶ AB a.836-837, 13-14.

In similar fashion, other contemporary annals recorded many signs and portents appearing throughout the realm in their entries for these same years, an example of Paul Dutton's "ordering of disorder," and specifically in the case of Prudentius and the *Annals of St. Bertin*, an attempt to "draw Louis' attention to the troubled state of the empire."¹⁴⁷ While the purpose cannot be attributed to the other annals with as much certainty as with the *Annals of St. Bertin*, the techniques used and content chosen by the authors of these annals all suggest great interest in the signs and portents paralleling the troubles throughout their world.

Thus, to place Prudentius in his context, we must compare him with his historiographic contemporaries. For example, the author of the *Annals of Fulda* framed his entry for 838 by beginning with an earthquake near Speyer and Worms, after which ships were being built against the increasing Viking threat, and ending with a report on the death of Louis' son, Pippin King of Aquitaine.¹⁴⁸ In contrast, the Prudentius described how

the moon, in its fifteenth form (the full moon), suffered an eclipse in the middle of the night on December the fifteenth. Pippin, son of the emperor, and the king of Aquitaine, died on the thirteenth of December leaving two sons behind, Pippin and Charles.¹⁴⁹

While reminiscent of the court historians' prefiguration of the death of Pippin's mother, Queen Irmingard, with an eclipse in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, by the 830s, such juxtaposition had become commonplace. The difference in Prudentius' ordering of events is significant,

¹⁴⁷ Dutton, *Politics*, 109.

¹⁴⁸ *AF* a.838, 22-24: Kal. Febr. Vespere terrae motus apud Sanctum Nazarium et in Wormacense ac Spirense et Lobadunense factus est. Naves contra Nordmannos aedificantur... Pippinus quoque filius eius, rex Aquitaniorum, mense Novembrio eiusdem anni defunctus est.

¹⁴⁹ *AB* a.838, 38: Eclipsin luna quinta decima medio noctis Nonas passa est. Pippinus, filius imperatoris, rex Aquitaniae, Idus Decembris defunctus est, relictis duobus filiis Pippino et Karolo.

however, as it suggests a close connection where the author of the *Annals of Fulda* drew no such comparison. While some modern scholars have claimed that those authors who sought to read portents were “treading a fine line between orthodoxy and heresy,” there is no evidence for this claim and reveals modern assumptions about orthodoxy and heresy more than it does early medieval ideas.¹⁵⁰ This use of signs and portents within historiography likely proved so pervasive in the ninth-century Latin West because it had the potential to reveal the judgements of the divine, and to make them open to interpretation and invocation. For a further example of the same fascination with signs and portents in the ninth-century understanding and interpretation of events, the author of the *Annals of Xanten* recalled how, in 838,

the winter was intense with rain and wind, and thunder was heard on the twenty-first of January, and similarly on the sixteenth of February great thunder was heard, and with exceeding heat the sun burned the land, and in certain parts of the land there were earthquakes, and flames in the form of a dragon appeared in the sky. In the same year, a heretical perversity was born. In the same year, in the fifth night before the birth of the Lord a massive thunderclap was heard and lightning was seen, and in many ways mankind’s miseries and calamities increased daily.¹⁵¹

This entry, teeming with signs and portents linked to a growing heresy and other “miseries,” belongs to a culture of interpretation shared by Prudentius and his *Annals*, so close to Louis’ court. As much a resource for invoking God’s will in political discourse as it was an argument

¹⁵⁰ Ashley, “Symbols,” 40, citing Flint, *Rise*.

¹⁵¹ *AX* a. 838, 342: Hiemps pluvialis et ventosa valde, et mense Ianuario XII. Kal. Februarii tonitruum auditum est, similiter mense Februarii XIII Kal Martii tonitruum est auditum magnum, et nimis ardor solis terram urebat, et in quibusdam partibus terrae motus factus est, et ignis forma draconis in aere visus est. Eodem anno heretica pravitas orta est. Eodem anno V. nocte ante natale Domini fragor tonitruum magni auditus est et fulguris visus, et multis modis miseria et calamitas hominum cotidie augebatur.

in the same debates, these entries and their focus on strange signs and portents are signs of the widespread perceived need to interpret and reveal the divine judgement behind human affairs. This conclusion is supported by recent paleoclimatological research suggesting that while certain years in the eighth and ninth centuries experienced demonstrably more extreme weather, there were not enough years of extreme weather to warrant the profound increase in the attention paid throughout ninth-century historical works to signs and portents, disasters and other oddities.¹⁵² As Paul Dutton has argued, the Carolingian historical record (especially in the ninth-century) is “thick” with such interest in the weather, and dendochronology does not support any significant worsening of conditions in the ninth century.¹⁵³ Following Dutton further, he made the critical distinction that “‘weather’ is human, but ‘climate’ is not necessarily so,” and that by investigating how early medieval authors engaged with the weather and climate, we begin to understand “their own physical, cultural and intellectual engagement with a changing world.”¹⁵⁴ While Dutton’s arguments provide a valuable starting point to understand the dramatic increase in the recording of signs and portents in the 830s, this increase must be understood as a further witness to the transformed nature of the thought that dominated Carolingian politics, and specifically the place of the prophetic therein.

Reading the World Beyond Historical Writing

¹⁵² Cf. McCormick, Dutton, and Mayewski, “Volcanoes,” 865-895; Foot, “Plenty, Portents and Plague,” 33.

¹⁵³ Dutton, “Observations,” 170-171.

¹⁵⁴ Dutton, “Observations,” 168, 180.

Although much of the fascination with signs and portents in the 830s appears in historiographic sources, a letter from Einhard suggests just how broadly, and how seriously, such signs were taken. As the anonymous author of the *Annals of Fulda* wrote in the entry for 837, many of the leading supporters of Lothar died in Italy and in April “a starry comet appeared in the sign of Libra and was visible for three nights,” after which Vikings extorted tribute from Frisia.¹⁵⁵ This nova, once believed to be Halley’s comet, drew the attention of more than the annalist in East Francia as it caused Einhard to write a letter of warning to Louis soon thereafter.¹⁵⁶ In his letter to the emperor, Einhard began by affirming that “the appearance of new and unexpected stars” was a sign of disaster to come—with the new star at Christ’s birth as the sole exception.¹⁵⁷ Einhard interpreted the nova as offering “fitting signs of our just desserts and announc[ing] a future disaster that we deserve.”¹⁵⁸ Einhard did not single out Louis as the only figure responsible, nor as uniquely under the baleful judgement suggested by the appearance of the nova. Instead, Einhard hinted at competing interpretations of the nova as he sought to focus the emperor’s attention on the most important and essential aspect of the nova’s appearance. Einhard asked Louis

what is the difference, if the human race should be forewarned of the threatening wrath by the announcement of a man, an angel, or a star? Only this is necessary, that the appearance of the star I have seen is understood as not without meaning, but as warning mortals, so that by performing penance

¹⁵⁵ *AF*, a.837, 27-28: Plures ex primoribus Italiae defuncti sunt, inter quos praecipui fuerunt Lantbertus et Hugus. Stella cometes in signo Librae apparuit III. Id. April. et per tres noctes visa est. Nordmanni tributum exactantes in Walchram insulam venerunt.

¹⁵⁶ For a discussion of the 837 nova, see Ashley, “Night sky,” 27-49.

¹⁵⁷ Einhard, Ep. 40, 129: novus et insolitus siderum ortus.

¹⁵⁸ Einhard, Ep. 40, 130: Quae, ut reor, congrua meritis nostris presagia fecit et cladem, qua digni sumus, venturam indicavit.

and praying for the mercy of the Lord they might strive to avoid the future danger.¹⁵⁹

Subordinating all means of divine communication to their ultimate purpose, Einhard sought to bypass distracting questions of agency to focus on the most important feature: God has warned us, and we must respond. While we will look at Einhard's own interpretation in a moment, the response it demanded was simple and general, lacking the specific or direct accusations of Louis or other figures. Einhard only felt that Louis' subjects must perform penance in order to avoid divine anger and the promised disaster. Confirming his interpretation of the celestial sign and its veracity, Einhard equated his interpretation to the biblical prophecies of Jonah and Jeremiah, reminding the emperor that Jonah's warning brought the people of Nineveh to penitential contrition, successfully delaying the city's prophesied destruction.¹⁶⁰ In contrast to this positive outcome, Einhard then recalled the disastrous fate of Jerusalem prophesied by Jeremiah, declaring himself "confident that [God] desires to treat us similarly, so long as, unlike them [the citizens of Jerusalem, i.e. Jeremiah's doomed audience], we do not fail to perform sincere penance."¹⁶¹

Einhard's own interpretation of the portent demonstrated that the trouble was far from over. Suggesting that the letter was part of a larger discussion regarding the portent's meaning, Einhard explained that

¹⁵⁹ Einhard, Ep. 40, 130: Quid enim interest, utrum homine vel angelo vel stella nuntiante inminens ira generi predicetur humano? Hoc tantum est necessarium, ut intelligatur supervacuum non fuisse sideris visi apparitionem, sed admonuisse mortales, ut penitendo et Domini misericordiam invocando futurum certent declinare periculum.

¹⁶⁰ Einhard, Ep. 40, 130.

¹⁶¹ Einhard, Ep. 40, 130: quod etiam et erga nos eum facere velle confidimus, si similiter ut illi ex toto corde poenitentiam agere non neglegemus.

if only that disaster that it is said the fleets of Northmen visited upon parts of this empire were able to fulfill everything promised by the appearance of that dreadful comet. But I fear that an even greater retribution must punish us as indicated by that deadly portent, although they [who were attacked by Northmen] have already experienced a sufficiently painful and severe punishment upon themselves and all they owned when that powerful storm [i.e. the Northmen] coming from the sea crashed violently against them. Fare well my most pious emperor and live joyfully everywhere.¹⁶²

Unlike the *Annals of Fulda* or other sources that juxtapose such portents with events and only thereby suggest connection and meaning, Einhard demonstrated great confidence in his ability to interpret the nova's meaning. Suggesting that others had believed the warning had been fulfilled in the Viking attacks on Frisia, Einhard rejected this possibility out of hand, offering a warning more in keeping with those of Jonah and Jeremiah.

Reading the 'Comet'

In contrast with Einhard's dour interpretation, Lupus, a monk and extremely learned polymath in Ferrières, offered another explanation of comets in a letter to another monk Altuin.¹⁶³ Focusing on two categories of parallels used earlier by Alcuin for the interpretation of such manifestations—specifically Scripture and history—Lupus explained to his correspondent that

regarding the comets that have appeared, there appears more to fear than to uncover. Because holy scripture says nothing anywhere regarding these things,

¹⁶² Einhard, Ep. 40, 130: Et o utinam clades illa, quam nuper classis Nordmannica partibus regni huius intulisse dicitur, illam horrendi sideris apparitionem expiare potuisset. Sed vereor, ne graviori vindicta plectendum sit, quod tam ferali ostento significatum est, licet satis gravem et asperam ultionem in semetipsis ac suis omnibus experti fuissent hi, quibus illa ex oceano veniens valida tempestas tam vehementer incubuit. Bene valeat dominus meus piissimus imperator et vivat laete ubique.

¹⁶³ Lupus, Ep. 20, 26-28. For a bibliography of Lupus and his works, see Orlandi, "Lupo di Ferrière," 99-122; Noble, "Lupus of Ferrières," 232-250.

that which the Gentiles discovered through experience with these appearances we can imagine, or rather fear.¹⁶⁴

Drawing upon a range of ancient sources, from Vergil to Josephus to Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus, Lupus explained that comets "portend pestilence, famine, or war."¹⁶⁵ Lupus quoted Virgil that at Caesar's death there appeared an unheard number of comets, and added that Josephus mentioned a comet lingering over Jerusalem before the city was destroyed, only then offering a counter-example of a comet that portended the future success of king Mithridates.¹⁶⁶ Finally, Lupus explained that he had seen the recent comet but instead of saying anything other than that he had seen it, he reminded his friend of several books Aluin had asked for.¹⁶⁷

The Focused Study of Portents

Clearly there was more to fear than discuss, since Lupus treated the comet as more of an intellectual problem than an immediate concern. Lupus' ready list of comparable portents and interest in the meaning of the comet demonstrate an interest in the prophetic that has only begun to be studied in detail. Lupus' conclusions compare well with the *Vademecum* of Walahfrid Strabo in the manuscript Codex Sangallensis 878.¹⁶⁸ We have encountered

¹⁶⁴ Lupus, Ep. 20, 28: de cometis qui visi sunt timendum quam disserendum videtur. Et quia de his nil usquam divina loquitur auctoritas, id opinari, immo metuere possumus, quod gentiles illis apparentibus usuprehenderunt.

¹⁶⁵ Lupus, Ep. 20, 28: Hii portendere cometas pestilentiam vel famem vel bella tradiderunt.

¹⁶⁶ Lupus, Ep. 20, 28.

¹⁶⁷ Lupus, Ep. 20, 28: deinde ipsa quoque stella sublata est. Librum quem petisti multi, quibus non erat commodandus, meum post reditum flagitarunt.

¹⁶⁸ For a detailed study of the manuscript and its contents, see Corradini, "Das Zeitbuch," 39-62. Eric Ramirez-Weaver brought the following study to my attention after I could integrate it into my dissertation: Wesley Stevens, *Rhetoric and Reckoning in the Ninth Century: The 'Vademecum' of Walahfrid Strabo* (Brepols, 2018).

Walahfrid before as he wrote himself into Louis' court through the poetic rendering of a vision and by comparing Louis with the prophet Moses. Here, however, we see an ongoing concern of his that was added to throughout his life. Compiled over the course of his adult life (ca. 825-849), Walahfrid Strabo's *Vademecum* includes notes and excerpts on nearly every topic of interest to ninth-century scholars.¹⁶⁹ One section of the manuscript comprised excerpts from ancient and late antique historical works; the common thread amidst the excerpts was that they all recorded natural catastrophes, astronomical signs, plagues, famines, other inexplicable natural phenomena, and the political events attached to them.¹⁷⁰ Following Richard Corradini's analysis of these excerpts, Walahfrid used the history of signs and portents to illuminate a sort of "Parallelwelt von göttlichen Zeichen" (a parallel world of divine signs), and Walahfrid used his collection as, again following Corradini, an "Interpretationsinstrument" (an instrument for interpretation) for what he claimed to be "Teil der göttlichen Vorhersehung und der kosmischen Zyklen die menschliche Geschichte begleitet" (accompanied human history as part of the divine prediction and of the cosmic cycles.)¹⁷¹ While Walahfrid continued to add to and comment on his *Vademecum* throughout his life, and thus long after Louis the Pious' death and the end of this study, his work nevertheless reflects the deepening interest in the prophetic that is mirrored in Einhard's and Lupus' letters.

¹⁶⁹ Corradini, "Das Zeitbuch," 40.

¹⁷⁰ St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek 878, pp. 242-262.

¹⁷¹ Corradini, "Das Zeitbuch," 48.

Looking at these three sources, a few critical details begin to become clear. First, they all acknowledge divine agency in the natural and political events, while suggesting a lively discussion on the actual meaning of interpreted events. Lupus agreed with the portentous quality of the comet, but in contrast, he approached its interpretation in a much more casual and detached fashion. Second, as Einhard makes so clear, collapsing the categories of human, angelic or, literally, natural revelation, the critical feature of any such event was its meaning. Comparing Einhard's fear and doubt with Lupus' curiosity, however, reinforces just how debatable the meaning and importance of such a portentous event could be. To one, the portentous comet offered an intriguing mystery likely predicting something bad, but received no more comment. To the other, the comet stood as a dire warning that promised something far worse than they had yet experienced. This must remind us that while the prophetic had become a powerful and widespread means of authoritative engagement in political discourse, by the end of Louis' reign it had also become accessible far beyond the political elite and even became a topic of personal study.

Framing the Prophetic to Warn the Emperor in the Annals of St. Bertin

Prophetic interpretive authority had become as contested as every other means of asserting power or authority. Showing itself in letters, personal notebooks, and throughout the historiography of the 830s, interest in the signs and portents of God's will had permeated Carolingian elite culture. We must not forget, however, that the interest in historiographic signs and portents belonged to the same discourse that saw the Paris Council articulating the authority of the scriptural prophets and pronouncing divine judgement as they deposed their

emperor. To understand how connected this discourse was, Prudentius' entry for 839 provides a powerful example of this connection. Prudentius was not alone in recording the year's portents: the author of the *Annals of Fulda* recalled another comet appearing alongside other "portents in the sky," which the annalist described as having "reddened the peaceful night sky and for several nights many little flames similar to stars appeared to dash across the sky;"¹⁷² the author of the *Annals of Xanten* also described "enormous whirlwinds" that caused massive flooding beyond the coasts, and "a blaze of fire appeared over the entire sea," while in March of the same year, "astonishing battle-lines appeared towards the end of the day in the sky."¹⁷³ Prudentius demonstrated a comparable interest in such events, echoing the chaos apparent elsewhere, but he showed a more determined effort to influence the aged Louis.

Prudentius explained that as Louis returned to Francia after Easter, he received messengers from the Anglo-Saxon king Aethelwulf of Wessex, asking if the king could pass through Francia to Rome. Aethelwulf had dispatched them to ask Louis for permission to pass through the empire and go to Rome with the messengers explaining that Aethelwulf wanted to warn Louis "about the trouble threatening the salvation of the souls of his subjects, because of a vision shown to a certain person among the Anglo-Saxons that greatly terrified their

¹⁷² *AF* a.839, 24: Eodem quoque anno stella cometes in signo Arietis apparuit et prodigia alia in caelo visa sunt. Nam et caelum noctu serenum rubuit et per aliquot noctes igniculi plurimi instar stellarum per aerem discurrere videbantur.

¹⁷³ *AX* a.839, 342-344: VII Kal. Ianuاريorum ingens venti turbo ortus est, ita ut fluctus maris valde inundabant supra terminos et litus, miserabiliter innumerabilem turmam humani generis in vilis et vicis circumpositis simul cum edificiis consumpserunt... Classes enim in mari revertentes disruptae sunt, et flamma ignis supra totum mare visa est. Eodem anno VIII. Kal. Aprilis admirandae acies apparuerunt vespascente die in caelo, in modum domus rotundae totum caeli ambitum circumducentes.

souls.”¹⁷⁴ Prudentius explained that Aethewulf’s messengers also presented a written version of the vision to Louis that Prudentius then included in the entry in its entirety.¹⁷⁵ Reminiscent of the other revelatory visions and dreams that claimed to have made their way into Louis’ hands throughout his reign, this text suggests that Louis’ appetite for knowing God’s will remained strong and well-known beyond the empire’s boundaries. Prudentius framed the vision within his entry as a warning to Louis and used the frame to demonstrate the vision’s fulfillment.

Presenting the account of the Anglo-Saxon vision offered to Louis by King Aethelwulf, Prudentius framed it with troubling signs and dire events that he hoped would confirm the warnings presented in the vision.¹⁷⁶ The entry began by narrating Louis’ continuing attempts to contain his rebellious and malcontent sons and their subjects, only to find his efforts frustrated on every side.¹⁷⁷ Beginning his narration of the fulfillment of the vision before he recorded the vision itself, Prudentius then described how an Alemannic deacon named Bodo, who had served in Louis’ court, converted to Judaism.¹⁷⁸ After detailing Bodo’s conversion (including shaving his head, letting his beard grow, marrying a daughter of a Jew, naming

¹⁷⁴ *AB* a.839, 40: Verum post sanctum pascha imperatori in Francia repedanti rex Anglorum legatus misit, postulans per Franciam pergendi Romam orationis gratia transitum sibi ab imperatore tribui, monens etiam curam subiectorum sibi erga animarum salutem sollicitus impendendam, quoniam visio cuidam apud illos ostensa non minimum animos eorum terruerat.

¹⁷⁵ *AB* a.839, 40-42.

¹⁷⁶ Dutton argued that this entry was meant to warn Louis that “if the sinning did not stop, then certain disaster awaited.” Dutton, *Politics*, 110.

¹⁷⁷ *AB* a.839, 38-40.

¹⁷⁸ *AB* a.839, 38-39: Interea lacrimabile nimiumque cunctis catholicae aeclesiae filiis ingemescendum, fama perferente, innotuit: Bodonem diaconum, Alamannica gente progenitum et ab ipsis paene cunabulis in christiana religione palatinis eruditionibus divinis humanisque litteris aliquatenus inbutum... relicta christianitate ad iudaismum sese converterit. Possibly the same Bodo to whom Walahfrid Strabo had dedicated a poem, Walahfrid Strabo, *Carmen* 34, MGH Poet. II, 386. For a recent treatment of Bodo’s conversion, see Riess, “Aachen,” 131-157.

himself Eleazar, wearing a sword, and selling his travelling companions as slaves), he explained that Eleazar's actions were so terrible that Louis could hardly believe it.¹⁷⁹ In the wake of the conversion, Prudentius described the flooding mentioned by the other annals, adding to the other accounts that after careful counting, two thousand seven hundred and seventy-three people died.¹⁸⁰ While it dated to a month later, Prudentius then described how in February "likewise, it came about that battle lines and flames of other colors could be seen in the sky, but also frequent shooting stars trailing fiery tails."¹⁸¹ With political troubles, a seemingly unheard of conversion to Judaism, and plentiful ominous signs all around, Prudentius constructed a disquieting frame for a vision that prophesied even greater trouble to come.

Described as "the vision of a devout presbyter from the land of the English," this vision claimed to have been received one night after Christmas as the priest arose from sleep and an unknown figure led him to an unfamiliar and wondrous place.¹⁸² After entering a church in this unfamiliar place, the priest saw a group of boys reading books "written not only in black

¹⁷⁹ *AB* a.839, 38-40: uod quando augustis cunctisque christianae fidei gratiaredemptis luctuosum extiterit, difficultas, qua imperatori id facile credendum persuaderi non potuit, patenter omnibus indicavit.

¹⁸⁰ *AB* a.839, 40-42: Praeterea die septimo Kalendas Ianuarii, die videlicet passionis beati Stepheni protomartyris, tanta inundatio contra morem maritimorum aestuum per totam paene Frisiam occupavit, ut aggeribus arenarum illic copiosis, quos dunos vocitant, fere coaequaretur, et omnia quaecumque involverat, tam homines quam animalia caetera et domos, absumpserit; quorum numerus diligentissime conprehensus duorum milium quadrigentorum triginta septem relatus est.

¹⁸¹ *AB* a.839, 40-42: Acies quoque in caelo igneas colorumque aliorum mensis Februarii, sed et stellas igneos crines emmitentes crebro videri contigit. Translation adapted from Nelson, *Annals of St. Bertin*, 42.

¹⁸² *AB* a.839, 40-42: Visio cuiusdam religiosi praesbiteri de terra Anglorum, quae post natalem Domini ei rapto a corpore ostensa est. Quadam nocte cum idem religiosus praesbiter dormiret, quidam homo ad eum venit, praecipiens illi, ut eum sequeretur.

letters, but also in blood.”¹⁸³ When the priest asked his guide about the blood-red lines in the books, the guide explained that “the lines of blood that you see in the books, are the diverse sins of the Christian people,” a recording of the great disobedience of the people.¹⁸⁴ Identifying the boys reading as the saints who sought to aid and intervene on behalf of those whose sins the saints read about, the guide then explained that if they did not continue in their prayers for mankind, that is, “if these souls of the saints were not praying so unceasingly with lamentations to God, then there would already have been an end to as many evils among the Christian people.”¹⁸⁵ To prove how many were threatened by the threat of approaching judgement, the guide asked the visionary priest

Do you remember, that while in the present year, crops came forth abundantly in the earth, even on the trees and vines, but because of the sins of mankind, the greatest part perished, not surviving for the use and benefit of mankind? But if the Christian people do not quickly perform penance for their various vices and outrages and do not better and more honorably observe the day of the Lord, then the greatest danger, impossible to endure, will quickly come upon them: that is, for three days and nights the thickest clouds will expand across the land [of the Christian people], and immediately pagan people with a massive number of ships will come upon them and will destroy with fire and sword the greatest part of the people and the land of the Christians with all which they possess. Nevertheless, if the Christian people desire to perform true penance and strive to correct their sins with fasting, prayer, and alms according to the commands of the Lord, then they will be able to escape these punishments and dangers through the intercession of the saints.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ *AB* a.839, 42: Et cum ad illos adpropinquaret, ut videret quod legerent, perspexit, libros eorum non solum nigris litteris, verum etiam sanguineis esse descriptos, ita videlicet ut una linea nigris esset litteris descripta et altera sanguineis.

¹⁸⁴ *AB* a.839, 42: Lineae sanguineae, quas in istis libris conspicias diuersa hominum christianorum peccata sunt, quia ea quae in libris diuinis illis precepta et iussa sunt minime facere et adimplere volunt.

¹⁸⁵ *AB* a.839, 42: et nisi istae animae sanctorum tam incessanter cum fletu ad Deum clamarent, iam aliquatenus finis tantorum malorum in christiano populo esset.

¹⁸⁶ *AB* a.839, 42: Recordaris, quia anno praesenti fruges non solum in terra, verum etiam in arboribus et vitibus habundanter ostensa sunt, sed propter peccata hominum maxima pars illarum periit, quae ad usum atque utilitatem humanam non pervenit; quod si cito homines christiani de variis vitiis et facinoribus eorum non

Strikingly resonant with the warnings of Einhard's demon Wiggo, the vision comfortably interpreted the portents it described from the previous year as a reliable sign that gave authority to the prophesied warning: repent or the pagans—likely the Vikings—will destroy most of you and your kingdoms! In contrast to many of the comparable Frankish visions or prophecies, the vision sent by the king of Wessex to the Carolingian emperor did not single out the rulers as explicitly responsible for the destruction sent as a sign, or the worse destruction promised.¹⁸⁷ Whether interpreted as a gift from Aethelwulf, or as a reframed message from Prudentius, the vision (as it survives) was clearly crafted to appeal to Louis' interest in knowing God's will. That is, despite all that had occurred, others within and beyond the empire saw Louis as still very interested in knowing God's will and anxious about acting accordingly.

But beyond a simple—if urgent—call to repentance, Prudentius may have had a more specific admonition in mind for his monarch. Prudentius depicted Aethelwulf planning to journey to Rome in order to beg for intercession for his people as a result of the prophetic warning, and at the same time, acting as an intercessor himself. Following this reasoning, Prudentius depicted Aethelwulf as an example for Louis, a king who would go to great lengths to save his people according to the prophetic warning of an unnamed priest. If Prudentius

egerint poenitentiam et diem dominicum melius et honorabilius non observaverint, cito super eos maximum et intolerabile periculum veniet; videlicet tribus diebus et noctibus super terram illorum nebula spississima [*sic*] expandetur, et statim homines pagani cum inmensa multitudine navium super illos venient et maximam partem populi et terrae christianorum cum omnibus quae possident igne ferroque devastabunt. Sed tamen, si adhuc veram poenitentiam agere volunt et peccata illorum iuxta praeceptum Domini in ieiunio et oratione atque elemosinis emendare studuerint, tunc has poenas et pericula per intercessionem sanctorum evadere poterunt.

¹⁸⁷ Dutton, *Politics*, 108.

hoped to offer Aethelwulf, in this brief moment, as an example for Louis to follow, then the frame he chose for the vision could not be more appropriate to Louis. In contrast to the signs interpreted in the vision, namely a simple crop failure, Prudentius described the state of Louis' realm in fairly dire terms. Prudentius described at length the continuing struggles between Louis and his sons, and the mounting warfare and raiding along the borders of the realm, to which Prudentius added that

the army of the emperor was tried throughout a clear autumn by the continuous harshness, no less the disadvantage, of the sun. For instance, fever carried away the greatest part of the army, as a part of them died, and part of them returned by a most difficult retreat. Compelled by necessity, and detained by the severity of the imminent winter, Louis dissolved the remainder of the army and withdrew to Poitiers for the winter.¹⁸⁸

After reminding the emperor of the vision, its portent of a failed harvest and its prophecy of worse to come, Prudentius' depiction of how nature itself appeared to oppose Louis' army echoed the vision and confirmed that the vision was already beginning to be fulfilled.

Although Prudentius' precise purpose in warning Louis remains uncertain, nevertheless the entry for 839 demonstrates a strong link to the language of the prophetic that had become so commonplace in the political discourse of the decade. Prudentius did more than "[string] together a series of worrisome events for the year 839" when he layered his entry with a vision from abroad that prophesied an approaching disaster and signs and portents that confirmed the veracity of the prophecy.¹⁸⁹ Unlike Einhard writing a letter to Louis, Prudentius chose a

¹⁸⁸ *AB* a.839, 50: Imperatoris exercitus continua autumnī serenitate solisque inclementia non parum incommoditatis expertus est. Nam febri maxima ex parte correptus, partim occubuit, partim difficillima regressione reversus est. Qua imperator necessitate compulsus, et asperitate hiemis imminētis detentus, absoluto reliquo exercitu, ad Pictavos in hiberna concessit.

¹⁸⁹ Dutton, *Politics*, 109.

different medium, but conveyed a very similar message and a very similar authority to back it. While these approaches may not accurately reflect how successful Louis was in gaining his power after being deposed, they nevertheless suggest that concern remained about the fate of the empire and those concerned knew that Louis was best influenced by communicating to him an authoritative interpretation of the will of God.

IV. The Prophetic Legacy of Louis the Pious

Contesting Louis' Legacy: The Astronomer and the Vita Hludowici Imperatoris

Writing within a year of Louis' death in 840, the anonymous author known to scholars as the Astronomer wrote a lengthy biography of the recently deceased monarch, a work that placed Louis' relationship with the prophetic at its center.¹⁹⁰ In what David Ganz has called "the most intimate moment of the Astronomer's biography of Louis the Pious," the Astronomer returned to 837, to the nova, thought to be a comet, and related how Louis had asked for him personally to aid in interpreting the comet (hence his pseudonym 'the Astronomer') and the interaction that followed.¹⁹¹ Far from revealing the fear and concern Einhard showed in his 837 letter on the nova believed to be a comet, the Astronomer described Louis' confident and authoritative ability to interpret the comet's meaning and do precisely what the divine portent had suggested. In many ways, this intimate moment is the

¹⁹⁰ For the dating and closer studies of the Astronomer's texts, see Ganz, "Astronomer," 129-148; Goetz, "Perception," 15-36; Weihs, *Pietas*; Buchner, "Entstehungszeit," 14-45.

¹⁹¹ Ganz, "Astronomer," 130.

key to how the Astronomer sought to define Louis' legacy a short time after the emperor's death: Louis, in the Astronomer's telling, ruled by seeking and acting on divine inspiration and succeeded because of his confidence in his interpretation of God's will and ability to act on it.

The 'comet' in 837 is the keystone in the Astronomer's depiction of Louis as a divinely guided ruler, and it tied together various moments throughout the biography when the Astronomer re-interpreted events he drew from the *Royal Frankish Annals* or the *Annals of St. Bertin* and demonstrated Louis' sensitivity to divine guidance. Throughout his biography, the Astronomer included the signs and portents recorded in his sources, and just as often sharpened the suggestions of his sources to specify more precisely the meanings of the events. Describing the events of 817, for example, the Astronomer described how in that year "the moon eclipsed in the fifth of February in the second hour of the night, and a portentous comet appeared in the sign of Sagittarius. In the third month Pope Stephen died after returning to Rome from Francia."¹⁹² Compared to the court historians and the *Royal Frankish Annals*, the Astronomer adapted the entry only lightly, but enough to juxtapose the eclipse, the comet, and the pope's death more closely. The Astronomer would do the same with a solar eclipse and the death of Irmingard, Louis' first wife, and a comet and the death of Louis' son Pippin, further demonstrating his understanding of the interconnectedness of nature and the political

¹⁹² Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 27, pp. 370-372: Eo anno luna nonis februarii defecit hora noctis II; cometarum sydus portentuosum in signo apparuit Agitatoris. Stephenus papa tertio mense, postquam Frantia Romam rediit, ultimum diem clausit. Cf. *ARF* a. 817, 145: Luna Non. Febr. Hora noctis secunda defecit, et cometes in signo Agitatoris apparuit. Interea Stephenus papa tertio, postquam Romam venerat, mense, sed nondum exacto, circiter VIII. Kal. Febr. diem obiit.

world.¹⁹³ While these events have nothing to do with Louis directly, they exemplify how the Astronomer's entire narrative adapted its sources to give many events a stronger sense of the divine hand guiding them.

An example of how the Astronomer depicted Louis seeking to know God's will and acting on it is the cluster of portents reported in the *Royal Frankish Annals'* entry for 823. The Astronomer wrote that

the appearance of certain portentous signs concerned the spirit of the emperor, especially an earthquake in the Aachen palace, strange noises during the night time, the twelve-month fasts of a certain girl who abstained entirely from all food, repeated and unfamiliar lightning strikes, stones falling with hail, and a disease of men and animals. Because of each of these signs, the most pious emperor repeatedly ordered fasts, earnest prayers, and the distribution of alms to propitiate God through the service of the priests, claiming confidently that through these signs a great, future disaster for mankind was portended. Likewise, in this same year, in June, a son was born to [Louis] from Queen Judith, whom it pleased to be called Charles at the time of baptism.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 31, 388: Ubi dum Hirmengardis regina longo fatigaretur incommodo, duobus post regressionem imperatoris diebus supervixit et tertio die obiit, V. nonas octobris. Quo anno eclipsis contigit solis VIII. idus iulii. c.59, 528: Qua hieme, id est kalendis ianuarii, sevus comete ignis in signo apparuit Scorpii non multo post solis occubitus. Cuius minacem vultum non multo post excessus est Pippini subsecutus.

¹⁹⁴ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 37, 420-422: Eo tempore quedam prodigiosa signa apparentia animum imperatoris sollicitabant, precipue terrae motus palatii Aquensis et sonitus inauditi nocturno sub tempore, et puellae cuiusdam ieiunia XII mensibus omni penitus cybo abstinentis, crebra et inusitata fulgura, lapidum cum grandine casus, pestilentia hominum et animalium. Propter quae singula piissimus imperator crebro fieri ieiunia, orationumque instantia atque elemosinarum largitionibus divinitatem per sacerdotium monebat offitium placandum certissime dicens, per haec portendi magnam humano generi futuram cladem. Quo etiam anno mense iunio natus est filius ei ex Iudith regina, quem tempore baptismi Karolum vocitare placuit. Cf. *ARF* a.823, 163-164: Hoc anno prodigia quaedam extitisse narrantur, in quibus praecipua fuerunt in Aquense palatio terrae motus et in territorio Tullense iuxta villam Commercium puella quaedam annorum fere XII ab omni cibo per decem menses abstinens. Et in Saxonia in pago, qui vocatur Firihsaizi, viginti tres villae igne caelesti concrematae, et fulgora sereno atque interdium de caelo cadentia. Et in territorio Cumetensi Italiae civitatis in vico Grabadona in ecclesia sancti Iohannis baptistae imago sanctae Mariae puerum Iesum gremio continentis ac magorum munera offerentium in absida eiusdem ecclesiae depicta et ob nimiam vetustatem obscurata et pene abolita tanta claritate per duorum dierum spatia effulsit, ut omnem splendorem novae picturae suae vetustatis pulchritudine cernentibus penitus vincere videretur. Magorum tamen imagines praeter munera, quae offerebant, minime claritas illa inradiavit. Et in multis regionibus fruges grandinis vastatione deletae atque in quibusdam

The Astronomer adapted the entry from the *Royal Frankish Annals* to make it clear that Louis recognized the portents for what they were, understood them to foretell a “great, future disaster for mankind,” and that Louis’ propitiation seems to have worked. Showing his political leanings after Louis’ death, the Astronomer also edited the cluster of portents he found in the *Royal Frankish Annals*, removing the ecphrasis of the miraculously restored image in Gravedona entirely. Omitting the former centerpiece of the passage transformed the passage from a cautious warning about the troubles that might arise from Charles the Bald’s birth to a confident display of Louis’ prophetic interpretive authority and its success.

In the contest over Louis’ legacy, the Astronomer could not alter the facts of Louis’ reign, so he wrote a lengthy re-interpretation of the brief success of the rebels against Louis and the emperor’s deposition. While he primarily depicted Louis as a patient ruler made holy by his sufferings, the Astronomer also managed to depict the rebels as struck down by divine judgement. Adapting Prudentius’ account of Lothar and his supporters in Italy, after Louis’ restoration, the Astronomer explained that at the same time Lothar learned of a summons to appear before his father, “it is wondrous to relate how many plagues of death attacked the people who followed Lothar.”¹⁹⁵ The correlated deaths of the core of Lothar’s primary

locis simul cum ipsa grandine veri lapides atque ingentis ponderis decidere visi; domus quoque de caelo tactae hominesque ac caetera animalia passim fulminum ictu praeter solitum crebro exanimata dicuntur. Secuta est ingens pestilentia atque hominum mortalitas, quae per totam Franciam inmaniter usquequaque grassata est et innumeram hominum multitudinem diversi sexus et aetatis gravissime seviendo consumpsit.

¹⁹⁵ The Astronomer’s list of those dead included Jesse, former bishop of Amiens, Bishop Elias of Troyes, Abbot Wala of Corbie, Matfrid, Hugh, Lambert, Godefrid, Godefrid’s son Godefrid, Count Agimbert of Pertois, Burghart, and Richard. Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c.56, 512-514: Ea tempestate quanta lues mortalis populum, qui Hlotharium secuti sunt, invaserit, mirabile est dictu. In brevi enim, a kalendis septembribus usque ad missam sancti Martini, hii primores eius vita excesserunt: Iesse olim Ambianensis episcopus, Helias Trecassine urbis episcopus, Uuala Corbiensis monasterii abbas, Matfridus, Hugo, Lantbertus, Godefridus, itemque filius eius

supporters and advisers became in the Astronomer's narrative the ultimate witnesses to God revealing His interpretation of their behavior. As the Astronomer explained it,

God showed in them cut down in the manner of a two-sided sword, how beneficial and how reasonable it would be to heed, that which is proven to have proceeded from His mouth: *The wise, he said, do not glory in wisdom, neither the strong in their strength, nor the wealthy in their wealth* (Jeremiah 9:23).¹⁹⁶

Building on Prudentius' version of the events, the Astronomer drew the clear connection between these former rebels and their deaths by illness: God used illness as a sign and a punishment. After depicting Louis as patiently suffering the wickedness of the rebels, unable to alter the events in any substantive ways, the Astronomer took every opportunity to invoke God's judgement upon those who had rebelled against Louis.

Drawing together his commitment to the fact that the political world became truly intelligible through the signs and portents that adorned it and Louis' ability to understand and act correctly upon those signs, the Astronomer included his personal witness of the emperor's interpretive capacity. Following the appearance of the nova during the celebration of Easter, the Astronomer claimed he had been summoned to consult with the emperor regarding the appearance. Describing Louis as "most studious of such things," the Astronomer noted that after Louis had observed the "always dire and sorrowful portent" for some time, he

Godefridus, Agimbertus comes Pertensis, Burgaritus quondam prefectus venatoribus regalibus sed et Richardus vix evasit, non post multum et ipse moritur. For more on the Astronomer's adaptation of Prudentius, see Booker, *Convictions*, 34.

¹⁹⁶ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c.56, 514: Sed illis in morem bini sevi ensis subrutis ostendit Deus, quam salubre sit quamque sobrium observare, quod ex eius ore probatur procedere: Non gloriatur, inquiens, sapiens in sapientia, nec fortis in fortitudine sua, nec dives in divitiis suis.

invited the Astronomer to interpret the portent and present his findings to Louis.¹⁹⁷ Not wanting to offend the emperor, and assuming that the obvious interpretation of a comet would be negative, the Astronomer began to offer some explanation that clearly fell short of Louis' expectations. Louis quickly corrected the Astronomer, explaining that "there is one thing that you yet still refuse to say: it is said that by this portent a change in the kingdom and even the death of a ruler is revealed."¹⁹⁸ Writing to evoke a teaching dialogue with Louis cast as the wise teacher and the Astronomer as the learner, the Astronomer countered the emperor's gloomy interpretation with the authority of Jeremiah, quoting the prophet in saying "do not fear the signs of heaven that frighten the heathens."¹⁹⁹ Again asserting Louis' great wisdom concerning such portents, the Astronomer wrote that Louis warned him that

we must not fear anything except Him, the Creator of us and of that star. But as we are sinners and unrepentant, we cannot praise and wonder at His mercy enough, Who deigns to warn our ignorance with such signs. Because, this portent indicates both to me and all people generally, therefore let us do all things in our ability and knowledge to improve, lest perhaps we are found unworthy of the mercy, having asked for it ahead of time, but prevented by our unrepentant state.²⁰⁰

After giving Louis the final word on the interpretation of the comet, the Astronomer explained that, "as was reported to us," Louis remained awake throughout the night "honoring

¹⁹⁷ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 58, 518: At vero mediante festivitate paschali dirum semper ac triste portentum, id est comete sidus, in signo Virginis apparuit. c. 58, 520: Quod cum imperator talium studiossimus primus, ut ea constitit, conspexisset.

¹⁹⁸ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c.58, 522: unum est inquit quod adhuc silentio premis: mutationem enim regni mortemque principis hoc monstrari portento dicitur.

¹⁹⁹ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 58, 522: A signis caeli ne timueritis, que pavent gentes. Jeremiah 10:2. I must thank Richard Corradini for bringing the underlying pedagogical structure of this episode to my attention.

²⁰⁰ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c.58, 522: Non alium, inquit, timere debemus praeter illum, qui nostri et huius creator est syderis. Sed eius clementiam non satis mirari et laudare possumus, qui nostram inhertiam, cum simus peccatores et inpenitentes, talibus ammonere dignatur inditiis (*lege* indiciis). Quia ergo et me et omnes communiter hoc tangit ostentum, omnes pro posse et sapere ad meliora festinemus, ne forte misericordiam illo praerogante et nostra inpenitudine inpediente, nos illa inveniamur indigni.

God with praises and prayers” until the morning.²⁰¹ Having thus first prayed to God and sought to propitiate Him, in the morning Louis ordered that alms be distributed to the poor and to the servants of God, prayers be offered and masses sung, suggesting a more extensive response to the portent.²⁰² To clarify Louis’ motives, the Astronomer was certain to explain that the emperor did these things “not so much fearing for his own sake as *foreseeing* for the *ecclesia* granted to him.”²⁰³ Closing out the narrative, the Astronomer reminded his audience that everything the emperor engaged in at this time met with incredible success, speeding “to a successful outcome.”²⁰⁴

In many ways, the Astronomer used this episode to depict Louis’ relationship with the prophetic in ideal form, a relationship that defined Louis’ royal authority for the Astronomer. In response to a dread portent, Louis acknowledged it, interpreted it, personally prepared himself, and then orchestrated the appropriate response throughout his realm. In stark contrast to the concern and fear Einhard demonstrated in his letter to Louis about the same nova, the Astronomer described how Louis effectively stepped around the words of a prophet and felt no fear despite knowing the dire warning carried by the appearance. In this idealized image that summarized Louis’ own behavior throughout his reign, the Astronomer depicted Louis as recognizing God’s warnings through portents and doing what God required, to care for the spiritual and secular salvation of his realm. While the Astronomer’s depiction of Louis’

²⁰¹ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c.58, 524: ut relatum nobis est, pene pervigilem ac Dei laudibus et obsecrationibus honeratam luci supervenienti praesentavit.

²⁰² Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c.58, 524.

²⁰³ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c.58, 524: Non tantum sibi metuens, quantum ecclesiae sibi creditae prospiciens.

²⁰⁴ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c.58, 524: omniaque quae illo tempore illi placuerunt, prospero eventu cucurrerunt.

prophetic legacy does reflect the realities of Louis' reign, it reveals far more about the changed world after Louis' death.

Conclusion

In contrast to Charlemagne's reserved and cautious use of the prophetic, Louis frequently claimed divine inspiration and made no secret of his appetite for such. Although the second half of Louis' reign saw few of the official statements that helped popularize such claims in Frankish political discourse, it saw individuals use similar claims to depose Louis, to defend him, and to continue to counsel his actions. The bishops gathered in 829 in Paris made an indelible impression on how the prophetic would be articulated and employed politically, and yet no group or individual managed to monopolize who could interpret or pronounce God's will. Despite the contested nature of such authority, the discourse during the rebellions and the later sources show that the use of, and serious interest in signs, portents, and prophetic authority only grew. Refined, focused, and deployed, claims of direct divine inspiration or the interpretation of God's will through signs became a significant presence on every side of political debates. Even after the decline of Carolingian imperial authority witnessed in the 830s and after Louis' death, those still invested in the fate of the empire depicted Louis' use of the prophetic as a way to rehabilitate the memory of his reign. Although the Astronomer's portrait of Louis reveals more about the nature of politics in the 840s than during Louis' lifetime, it is likely that Louis would have approved of the biography that defined his life as a struggle to know and enact God's will.

Coda

Recently it has been remarked that “prophecy was always connected with political power in the Carolingian world.”¹ While I have sought with this dissertation to affirm this statement in general, I have shown how the prophetic become so integral to the political culture of the Carolingian world as the result of a profound transformation across the reigns of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious. When we look forward to the world after Louis’ death in 840, we see a world in which the will of God was invoked throughout historical works; where kings claimed visions and others crafted historical visions for political debate and commentary; where rulers requested commentaries on the biblical prophets in great numbers; and where individuals claimed to be prophets and prophetesses and preached their revelations to all who would listen. Although these expressions of the prophetic became ubiquitous by the middle of the ninth century in the Frankish kingdoms, they cannot be rightly understood without understanding the roots and development of such behavior in the previous seventy years, developments that gave shape to the “prophecy [that] was always connected with political power in the Carolingian world.”

In historical memory, Louis the Pious was not the only Carolingian to be memorialized in prophetic terms by later authors as the Astronomer had memorialized Louis. Charlemagne and his reign became a touchstone for many historical authors commenting on the troubles throughout the Frankish kingdoms in the ninth century. Nithard, Charlemagne’s

¹ Gillis, *Heresy*, 191, citing Dutton, *Politics*.

grandson by his daughter Bertha, was commissioned by Charles the Bald in the early 840s to write four books of history regarding the current struggles of the 840s.² In the final passages of his histories, Nithard described Charlemagne's reign as a sharp contrast to the current political turmoil, an apparent golden age when the people were united in righteousness and God was pleased.³ To confirm the comparison, Nithard wrote that

Even the elements were once harmonious in every way, now, in contrast, they are threatening to all things, as Scripture, handed down as a divine gift, testifies: *And the whole world will fight against the unwise* (Wisdom 5:21). At that same time there was an eclipse of the moon on the twentieth of March. In addition much snow fell on the same night and to the sadness of all, as I mentioned above, it struck by the just judgement of God. I discuss these events for this reason: because everywhere pillaging and every kind of evil has sown itself, and from above the imbalance of the weather has snatched away the hope of all good people.⁴

For Nithard, nature manifested God's just judgement and offered an irrefutable condemnation of the current state of things, especially in comparison to the harmony between the righteous living of Charlemagne's reign and the bounty of nature that he claimed accompanied it.

Similarly, in the 869 entry in the *Annals of Xanten*, the annalist described a comet, followed by a massive storm and deadly flooding that killed many, only to be followed by a summer heat and famine so terrible that some turned to cannibalism.⁵ Interpreting these signs, the annalist explained that "at this time, as the prophet spoke: *because of the sins of the land there are many*

² On Nithard's histories, see Nelson, "History-writing," 440; Booker, "Humanist," 231–258.

³ Nithard, *Historiarum libri quattuor*, bk. 4, c. 7, pp. 156–158.

⁴ Nithard, *Historiarum libri quattuor*, bk. 4, c. 7, pp. 156–158: *Ipsa elementa tunc cuique rei congrua, nunc autem omnibus ubique contraria, uti Scriptura divino munere prolata testatur: Et pugnabit orbis terrarum contra insensatos. Per idem tempus eclipsis lunae XIII kal. Aprilis contigit; nix insuper multa eadem nocte cecidit meroremque omnibus, uti praefatum est, iusto Deo iudicio incussit. Id propterea inquam, quia hinc inde ubique rapine et omnigena mala sese inserebant, illinc aeris intemperies spem omnium bonorum eripiebat.*

⁵ AX, a. 869, 362.

princes (Proverbs 28:2), and four kings rule in the kingdom once of Charlemagne.”⁶

Interpreting the signs as the fulfilment of scriptural warnings, the annalist explained how the once unified realm of Charlemagne had been reduced to such division.

Revealing a further development in the memory of Charlemagne’s reign, Notker ‘the Stammerer’ wrote the *Deeds of Charlemagne* in the 880s for the then ruler, Charlemagne’s great-grandson, Charles the Fat.⁷ From the very first page, Notker contextualized Charlemagne’s reign within Daniel’s vision of the four great world empires, or rather as the culmination of it, claiming that

the Almighty Director of events and Regulator of kingdoms and times, when He had crushed the iron or clay feet of the wondrous statue among the Romans, He raised another more wondrous statue among the Franks, with the illustrious Charles as the golden head.”⁸

For Notker, however, Charlemagne was not merely the fulfillment of prophecy and of a new historical age, but gifted with prophetic foresight himself. Writing for Charles the Fat, Notker inserted into his work “a prophecy that was uttered, well known to all, by the most wise Charlemagne,” about Louis the German, Charles’ father.⁹ Because Charlemagne’s prophetic words, according to Notker, could for some reason not be translated into Latin, Notker simply borrowed a famous prophecy referring to St. Ambrose, but this would not be the last prophecy

⁶ AX, a. 869, 362: Eo tempore, ut propheta ait: propter peccata terrae multi principes eius, quattuor reges regnaverunt in regno quondam Karoli Magni.

⁷ On Notker’s context and content, see MacLean, *Kingship*, 199-229.

⁸ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, bk. 1, c. 1, p. 1: Bk 1, c.1, p.1: Omnipotens rerum dispositor ordinatorque regnorum et temporum, cum illius admirande statue pedes ferreos vel testaceos comminuisset in Romanis, alterius non minus admirabilis statue caput aureum per illustrem Karolum erexit in Francis. Compare with the dream interpreted in Daniel 2.

⁹ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, bk. 2, c. 10, p. 65: Et quia ita se obtulit occasio, ut de indicibili patre vestro incideret honoranda mentio, libet commemorare praesagium, quod de ille sapientissimum constat protulisse Karolum.

he ascribed to Charlemagne.¹⁰ As Notker would claim, while Charlemagne sat at breakfast in a coastal city in Northern Gaul, he saw a scouting ship of Northmen approaching, and watched it for some time. When those with Charlemagne asked why he stared out the window and wept, Charles explained:

Oh, my faithful followers, do you know why I weep so much? I do not fear this ship, because such trifles and nobodies cannot manage to hurt me. But without a doubt I am saddened because they dared to attack this coast while I live, and I am tormented with the greatest pain since I prophecy how much evil they will do to my descendants and their subjects.¹¹

Notker's history illustrates Charlemagne's uncanny insight and prophetic talents throughout the course of his text, and offers an image at odds with contemporary evidence of Charlemagne's revelatory claims, but in keeping with those of the later ninth century. Nearly a decade before, in the 874 entry in the *Annals of Fulda*, that annalist described how Louis the German had been spending his time in prayer when he received a vision of his father, Louis the Pious, suffering "in dire straits" and begging for Louis the German to intercede.¹² The annalist explained that Louis the Pious, although righteous in his life, had not heeded the warnings delivered to him by Einhard from the angel Gabriel, and thus needed help from his son to be released from torment.¹³

¹⁰ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, bk. 2, c. 10, p. 65: Quod cum Hludowicus imperatori retulisset, ille huiusmodi sententiam promulgavit: "Si vixerit puerulus iste, aliquid magni erit." Quae verba ideo de Ambrosio mutuati sumus, quia Karolus quae dixit, non possunt examussim in Latinum converti. Nec inmerito prophetiam de sancto Ambrosio magno accomodaverim Hludowico.

¹¹ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, bk 2, c. 14, pp. 77-78: Scitis, inquit, o fideles mei, quid tantopere ploraverim? Non hoc ait timeo, quod isti nuge et nihili mihi aliquid nocere praevaleant. Sed nimirum contristor, quod me vivente ausi sunt litus istud attingere, et maximo dolore torquereor, quia praevideo, quanta mala posteris meis et eorum sunt facturi subiectus.

¹² T. Reuter (trans.), *The Annals of Fulda* (Manchester, 1992), 74.

¹³ *AF*, 74.

Louis the German's interest in dreams and visions was more than a narrative device for the annalist in the *Annals of Fulda*. Another text likely written for Louis the German between 869 and 875 recalled a vision seen by Charlemagne of a sword with four mysterious words written on it.¹⁴ Known as the *Vision of Charlemagne* (*Visio Karoli Magni*), the author of the vision text mirrored the writing on the wall recorded in Daniel 5:5-28, that the prophet Daniel interpreted as predicting the downfall of King Belshazzar, in these words on the sword.¹⁵ In the *Vision of Charlemagne*, Charles played the prophetic role as he interpreted the mysterious words on the sword, *raht*, *radoleiba*, *nasg*, and *enti*, explaining that the last word, “*enti* means end, and can be understood in two ways: either it will be the end of the world or of our descendants, meaning that none of our progeny will be ruling the people of the Franks.”¹⁶ While the precise purpose of the text and its intended effect on Louis the German remains unclear, it is nevertheless a powerful reminder of how, by the end of the ninth century, Charlemagne was already remembered as a prophetic ruler.¹⁷

In addition to the more dramatic historical texts and vision texts, the period following Louis' death also witnessed a burgeoning interest in commentaries on the prophetic books of Scripture. Lothar I, Louis' co-emperor, requested from Hrabanus Maurus commentaries on the

¹⁴ For a study and edition of the text, see Geary, “Germanic Tradition,” 49-76.

¹⁵ *Visio Karoli Magni*, Geary (ed.), 75.

¹⁶ *Visio Karoli Magni*, Geary (ed.), 75: *Enti, id est finis, duobus modis intellegi potest: Aut enim finis seculi tunc erit aut stirpis nostrae; scilicet quod nullus de progenie nostra deinceps in gente Francorum regnaturus sit.*

¹⁷ For a comparable late-ninth-century vision text, see the *Visio Eucherii*, utilized by Hincmar of Rheims (d. 882) in his 858 Capitulary of Quierzy, because the vision depicted Charles Martell as suffering in hell for his encroachment on ecclesiastical property. For an overview of the vision, see Nonn, “Das Bild,” 111-114. On the context of this letter, see Goldberg, *Struggle*, 250-262.

books of Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Ezekiel.¹⁸ Marianne Pollheimer argued that Hrabanus understood the relationship between bishop and ruler to be the same as between prophet and king in Scripture.¹⁹ In the preface to his commentary on Jeremiah and Lamentations, Hrabanus took up this prophetic posture to warn his patron that God always warned the wicked through signs and through prophets before true judgement would begin.²⁰ Along with Hrabanus, Haimo of Auxerre also found an audience for his numerous commentaries on prophetic books of Scripture.²¹ As Sumi Shimahara has demonstrated, Haimo used his commentaries to offer sharp criticism of the social and political world around him, in much the same way as the annals and other historical works did with the signs and portents they included and interpreted.²²

While Haimo and Hrabanus both stuck close to Scripture in their attempts to use the prophetic as a means of advising rulers or criticizing the world around them, the years following Louis' death witnessed individuals willing to go much further, and proclaim themselves prophets to similar ends. In the *Annals of Fulda*, the annalist described how in 847 a "false prophetess" named Thiota was condemned in Mainz because

she had disturbed the diocese of Bishop Salomon [I of Constance] not a little with her prophecies. For she said that she knew a definite date for the ending of the world, and other things known only to God, as if they had been divinely

¹⁸ On Hrabanus' commentaries, see de Jong, "Empire," 191; Matter, "Lamentations," 137-63.

¹⁹ Pollheimer, "Prediger," 292, 299.

²⁰ Hrabanus Maurus, *Expositionis super Jeremiam prophetam libri viginti*, PL 111.793-1272; the prologue is partially edited in MGH Ep. III, pp. 443-444.

²¹ For an excellent survey of Haimo's approach to prophetic scripture, see Shimahara, "Prophétiser," 51-80.

²² Shimahara, "Prophétiser," 56-59.

reported to her; she predicted that the world would see its last day that same year.”²³

While the annalist expressed shock that commoners and even priests began to believe her, it is noteworthy that she was only punished because she taken up “the ministry of preaching... against the custom of the church,” and not punished for the her prophecies per se.²⁴ A similar case arose a year later, when a monk, Gottschalk of Orbais, was condemned of heresy.²⁵

Described by Matthew Gillis as “a prophetic leader of dissent,” Gottschalk claimed a prophetic vision in his conflict with archbishop Hincmar of Rheims and on an earlier occasion, served the Croat king Trpimir “as both a missionary and prophet or soothsayer.”²⁶ While both Thiota and Gottschalk were condemned by ecclesiastical authorities, neither was punished for acting as prophets.

Another self-proclaimed prophet, Audradus Modicus, fared far better than his contemporaries Thiota and Gottschalk. Claiming to have received revelations from God in the years 840 to 853, Audradus styled himself after Ezekiel and Jeremiah and compiled his revelations for publication.²⁷ One of his revelations, for example, narrated that on the first of March, 845, while Audradus was praying, “the spirit of the Lord took me up in the highest, and the angel said to me: “Know that the Northmen will come to Paris and then return, and to this

²³ *AF* a. 847, 26-27. The translation is from Reuter.

²⁴ *AF* a. 847, 26-27. The translation is from Reuter.

²⁵ On Gottschalk’s life and legacy, see Gillis, *Heresy*.

²⁶ Gillis, *Heresy*, 101 and 178.

²⁷ On the life and career of Audradus, see W. Mohr, “Audradus.” Cf. B. Apsner, *Vertrag und Konsens*, 190-201; Dutton, *Politics*, 129; Levison, “Die Politik,” 239.

people is given ten years for penance.”²⁸ Positioning himself as an intermediary between God and the Franks, Audradus presented his revelations to Pope Leo IV and the West Frankish king Charles the Bald, revelations that assessed recent history and condemned various Frankish nobles by interpreting portents, predicting future catastrophes, and proclaiming biblical prophecies as fulfilled before their eyes.²⁹ Reminiscent of the monk John who offered his revelation to Charlemagne and the Pope Hadrian, Audradus, a lowly suffragan bishop, succeeded in promulgating his revelations and using the authority he claimed through them to address another Carolingian king and another pope.

While this survey remains brief and superficial, it demonstrates the prominent place of the prophetic in the Frankish world after Louis’ death. Despite the seeming commonality of interpreting signs and portents, claiming dreams, visions, and revelations throughout the evidence for ninth century Frankish politics, such behavior operated within patterns established long before. Only by understanding Charlemagne’s comparatively reserved and cautious claims of divine guidance, followed by Louis’ hunger for inspiration and divine direction, can we appreciate the dramatic changes visible after Louis’ death. As a result of their behavior that popularized the interpretation and appropriation of God’s will, and the

²⁸ Audradus Modicus, *Liber revelationum*, 379-380: Mense primo, vicesima die mensis, aurora diei eram orans ait Audradus salute ecclesiarum, ut daret deus cor poenitens omnibus et misereretur illis, et cecidit super me mentis excessus et rapuit me spiritus domini in excelsum. Et ait angelus ad me: ‘Scias Normannos Parisius esse venturos et inde reversuros et huic genti decem annos ad poenitentiam dari factum est autem, ut, ascendentibus Normannis per Sequauam fluvium, occurreret eis Karolus rex cum exercitu equitem et peditum. Et non potuerunt prohibere eos. Quin Parisius, sicut dominus dixerat, intrarent vigilia pascha V. Kal. Aprilis et Karolus apud monasterium sancti Dyonisii resedit. Et dederunt rex et populus Normannis pecuniam multam. Et reversi sunt in terram suam.

²⁹ Mohr, “Audradus,” 240-243. For a brief overview of Audradus’ message to Charles the Bald, see Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision*, 146-147.

inability of any single individual or group to dominate such authority, it became one of the most powerful and persuasive modes in the politics of the ninth century and beyond.

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