

Charlemagne, the Saxons, and the Imperial Coronation of 800*

TO state at the beginning in one sentence the argument of this paper: it is that Charlemagne needed the imperial coronation of 800 because emperorship was the only conceptual framework within which he could validate and make acceptable his rule of the Saxon aristocracy after he had defeated them. If the argument is new and has any merit, one is bound to ask why it has taken until this time to put it forward. I can only answer that while much fine work has been done both on Charlemagne and the Saxons and on Charlemagne and the papacy, in fact these two themes have tended to appeal to scholars with distinct interests. In particular, the German historiographical tradition, which goes back in this point at least to Heinrich von Sybel,¹ has always woven the issues of emperorship and papacy tightly together, and Charlemagne's dealings with the papacy are taken axiomatically as the governing factor in the development of his imperial idea.

What causes hegemonies to expand into empires? P. A. Brunt has said that the Romans, although they loved to dwell on the sheer glory of their Empire, chose to believe that they had acquired their dominions justly by fighting for their own security, or, what amounts to nearly the same thing, by fighting for the protection of their allies.² Sir Michael Howard,

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1. Heinrich von Sybel, *Die deutsche Nation und das Kaiserreich* (1862). I have used the edition of Friedrich Schneider, *Universalstaat und Nationalstaat* (Innsbruck, 1943). In his discussion of Charlemagne, Sybel regarded Charlemagne's conquest of the Saxons as an advance toward the German nation state (the point of view from which he wrote); while his falling in with papal schemes for the conquest of the Lombards, leading to the imperial coronation, was regarded as the fatal impediment to the creation of such a state: see esp. pp. 173–76. Paul Fouracre, 'Frankish Gaul to 814', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. ii. c. 700–c. 900, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995), p. 105, shows himself one of the latest of a long line of heirs to this tradition, when he writes of Charlemagne: 'In view of the history of his rule in Italy since 774, and in the context of his close relations with the papacy, any explanation of Charlemagne's acquisition of a new title to match his unprecedented stature as a ruler of many peoples would seem to require little historical imagination.' On the other hand, the collection of papers, *Die Eingliederung der Sachsen in das Frankenreich*, ed. W. Lammers (Darmstadt, 1970), shows virtually no interest in Charlemagne, Empire and Papacy, those originally published in the 1930s being concerned with Charlemagne's Saxon wars as a Saxon issue, with Charlemagne and Widukind, and with the so-called Blood Bath of Verden.

2. P. A. Brunt, 'Laus Imperii', in *Imperialism in the Ancient World*, ed. P. D. A. Garnsey and C. R. Whitaker (Cambridge, 1978), p. 161.

in his Yigal Allon Lecture of 1982, has also seen security, along with trade and settlement, as one of the three fundamental elements in determining the growth of the British and other European seaborne empires – especially in the British occupation of Palestine. The security involved here was that of India, so we are perhaps a long way down the line of trade before security enters the reckoning, but that in itself is not without analogy to how economic factors and security are related to each other under Charlemagne. Howard quotes Lord Salisbury, whose exasperation with his military advisers for their obsession with security once issued in the remark that if they had their way they would garrison the moon to protect us against an attack from Mars.¹ Carolingian expansion really did have important security aspects in terms of the vulnerability of the Rhineland. The Rhine had on its west bank the churches of Cologne and Mainz, and further south Worms, vitally important for Carolingian civilization; on the lower Rhine was the royal palace of Nijmegen, and just below Mainz was that of Ingelheim where Charlemagne or Louis the Pious had the famous Orosian scheme of ancient historical and biblical paintings executed. Archaeologists have shown the importance of Rhine trade in this period, a trade which Charlemagne undoubtedly sought personally to control and profit from. It is now known that the Frisian entrepot of Dorestad on the North Sea, at the mouth of one of the arms of the Rhine delta, saw an explosive increase in activity between the 780s and the 820s, and the archaeological debris there shows that much of this was due to Middle Rhenish imports. Rhine wines were sent north down the river in casks of local timber which archaeologists have found because it was sometimes later reused to line wells, and in some cases the wine was there transferred to earthenware jars, which were themselves made in the large pottery-producing villages west of Cologne and Bonn. Lava querns from the Eifel Mountains, used for corn-grinding, have also been found in Dorestad, on many English sites including Ipswich, and at early Hedeby.² That this trade was of sizeable volume is shown by the number of silver coins circulating in north-west Europe in Charlemagne's time, running into millions according to Michael Metcalf's convincing estimates.³

In every way, therefore, the Rhine, if it was near to the frontier of Frankish settlement, was also an artery of Carolingian economic and cultural life. From Charlemagne's imperfectly known itinerary we see him four times in Nijmegen, three in Cologne, three in Ingelheim, four in Mainz, sixteen in Worms (though this doubtless has much to do with

1. Michael Howard, 'Empires, Nations and Wars', in *The Lessons of History* (Yale, 1991), pp. 21–48, esp. pp. 24–6.

2. Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe* (London, 1983), esp. pp. 99–101, 111–15. For lava querns, see David Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 117, 120.

3. D. M. Metcalf, 'The Prosperity of North-Western Europe in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries', *Economic History Review*, xx (1967), 344–57.

the start of military expeditions), and seven in Thionville on the Mosel which flows into the Rhine at Coblenz.¹ And yet the territory between the Rhine and the Weser afforded no natural protection from the pagan Saxons to the east and west of the latter river; its vulnerability is attested by a famous passage of Einhard:²

Now that the war in Italy was over, the one against the Saxons, which had been interrupted for the time being, was taken up once more. No war ever undertaken by the Frankish people was more prolonged, more full of atrocities or more demanding of effort. The Saxons, like almost all the peoples living in Germany, are ferocious by nature. They are much given to devil worship and they are hostile to our religion. They think it no dishonour to violate and transgress the laws of God and man. Hardly a day passed without some incident or other which was well calculated to break the peace. Our borders and theirs were contiguous and nearly everywhere in flat, open country, except, indeed, for a few places where great forests or mountain ranges interposed to separate the territories of the two peoples by a clear demarcation line. Murder, robbery and arson were of constant occurrence on both sides. In the end, the Franks were so irritated by these incidents that they decided that the time had come to abandon retaliatory measures and to undertake a full-scale war against these Saxons.

The general line of Charlemagne's strategy in face of the Saxon threat is clear from the Royal Frankish Annals. If he wished to protect the Rhine he had to control the Weser, and to prevent the free movement of Saxons between the two rivers. In 772 he captured Eresburg on a tributary of the Weser; in 775, after capturing fortresses on the way, he came to the Weser at Braunsberg, and succeeded in occupying both banks of the river; during the Spanish campaign of 778 he temporarily lost his grip on the Weser and the Saxons, advancing to Deutz on the Rhine, plundered along the river.³ To control the Weser really meant to conquer the Saxons and to conquer the Saxons meant also to christianize them. For as Michael Wallace-Hadrill wrote, 'to the Franks, no pacification of hostile peoples seemed possible until these peoples spoke the same religious language and accepted the moralities of dealings as between Christians.'⁴ Moreover, the Saxons, while remaining pagan, could easily negate missionary efforts among their neighbours the East Frisians, who had martyred St Boniface in 754. This is shown by the vicissitudinous career of Liudger, successor to Willibrord and Gregroy at Utrecht, and

1. A. Gauert, 'Zum Itinerar Karls des Grossen', in *Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, ed. W. Braunsfels, vol. i (Persönlichkeit und Geschichte), ed. Helmut Beumann (Düsseldorf, 1967), pp. 307–21; see especially map, pp. 312–313.

2. Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7 (translation of Lewis Thorpe, *Two Lives of Charlemagne* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 61–62).

3. *Annales Regni Francorum*, ed. G. H. Pertz and F. Kurze, *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum* (Hanover, 1895), pp. 40–52.

4. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, 1983), p. 183. How little the moralities of dealings between Franks and Saxons worked before the 790s, when the Franks tried to bind the Saxons by their own understanding of oaths, is shown by M. Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft: Untersuchungen zum Herrscherethos Karls des Grossen* (Sigmaringen, 1993), esp. pp. 75, 111–13, 121, 136.

by the fact that as late as 784 the Saxons could pressurize 'some Frisians' to join them in revolt.¹

It would not be to our purpose to do more than sketch the well-known story of Charlemagne's wars against the Saxons; the destruction of the Irminsul in 772 and the commandeering of the treasure associated with this great pagan tree shrine; the harsh Saxon capitulary of c. 782–85 with its provisions of death for those guilty of paganism or pagan practices such as cremation, and its signs of savage economic exploitation through tribute and tithes for churches; the blood-bath of Verden in 783 where supposedly 4,500 Saxons, presumably mainly warriors, were massacred; the baptism of the Saxon leader Widukind in 785 at the royal palace at Attigny, with Charlemagne as his godfather; the subsequent breaking of their treaties and revolts of the Saxons. How right were those ninth-century Saxon writers who, from the vantage point of Christianity, of absorption of the Saxons into Frankish hegemony, and also of a persisting Saxon patriotism, wrote of their courageous and persevering forbears of the eighth century with admiration and pride as worthy opponents of the greatest and cleverest of all kings.² By late 797, when he issued the second Saxon Capitulary, Charlemagne clearly thought that he had finally broken Saxon resistance once and for all, and he was probably right, for the evidence suggests that any further rebellion came only from the distant region of the Elbe.³ The Capitulary of 797, whether or not a complete record, takes a very different tone from that of c. 782–85, as if establishing Frankish rule among the Saxons indeed, with royal *missi* and other officials, but with parity between Frankish and Saxon nobility, respect for Saxon laws and apparently for their public assemblies, and measures for public order which invoke the consent of the Saxon *fideles*.⁴ All this is stressed by Arnold Angenendt in his fine study of Charlemagne's dealings with the Saxons.⁵ This capitu-

1. *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 66: 'et cum eis pars aliqua Frisonum'. While not wishing to imply that the Saxons were united against Charlemagne, it surely goes beyond evidence or likelihood to suggest, as Martin Lintzel did, that from 772 the Saxon aristocracy was largely with Charlemagne against the lower Saxon orders: see Eric J. Goldberg, 'Popular Revolt, Dynastic Politics, and Aristocratic Factionalism in the Early Middle Ages: The Saxon *Stellinga* Reconsidered', *Speculum*, lxx (1995), pp. 476–7, n. 47.

2. Helmut Beuman, 'Unterwerfung und Christianisierung der Sachsen durch Karl den Grossen', *Settimane di Studio*, Spoleto, xxviii/1 (1982), 129–68; see p. 134.

3. E.g. in the Bardengau in 799, and from the Saxons to the east of the Elbe in 802: *Annales Regni Francorum*, pp. 106, 117.

4. *Capitularia Regum Francorum*, ed. A. Boretius (MGH Legum Sectio II. Hanover, 1881), vol. i, pp. 71–2. Parity in breach of royal bann, cc. 1 and 2; Saxon consent, c. 9; respect for Saxon laws, e.g. cc. 10 and 11; implicit respect for Saxon assemblies and courts, cc. 1 and 4. See also Donald Bullough, *The Age of Charlemagne* (London, 1965), pp. 94–5.

5. Arnold Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaupe: Kaiser, Könige und Päpste als geistliche Patrone in der abendländischen Missionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1984), esp. p. 209.

lary, and its timing, seem to me not without significance for the imperial coronation of 800.

It is now generally agreed that the first move towards Charlemagne's imperial coronation was made only when Pope Leo III and the king met at Paderborn in the summer of 799. That is not to deny that the ground was being prepared earlier. Tom Noble has shown how the *Libri Carolini* can be viewed as constructing a whole counter-Byzantine imperial ideology for Charlemagne;¹ the condemnation of adoptionism at the same time (794), as Donald Bullough has argued, led to a resurgent apocalypticism which highlighted the need for imperial rule in the world to stave off the Antichrist;² and even Alcuin, on whose influence in the imperial respect Peter Classen poured cold water for having only a very generalized, Bedan notion of *imperium*, might have been thinking of Eusebius's emperors as much as the so-called Anglo-Saxon *bretwaldas*.³ But the Paderborn meeting may be taken to mark the first direct arrangement for an actual imperial coronation. Written in connection with this occasion was a poem, *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa*, a large part of which is an encomium of Charlemagne replete with imperial phraseology; Charlemagne is the beacon of Europe, the king who excels all other kings in the *culmen imperii*, and bathes his dukes and counts in the brilliance of his great love, the father of Europe, and *augustus*; while Aachen, with its forum, its baths, and its meeting place for the holy senate is described as a second Rome. The poem itself must have been written after 800, but probably soon after.⁴ It has been much commented upon. Less frequently noted is the paradox that all this praise was lavished upon Aachen in a composition of fine Virgilian style connected with a ceremonial meeting which could appropriately have taken place at Aachen, but was in fact at Paderborn. Paderborn whose buildings were begun by Charlemagne in the early 770s as an outpost amongst the Saxons, had the combination of a royal palace and church, like the palace and the church of Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, and

1. In a paper delivered to the London University Medieval History Seminar a few years ago. The section of Karl Hauck's paper 'Die Ausbreitung des Glaubens in Sachsen und die Verteidigung der römischen Kirche als konkurrierende Herrschaftsaufgaben Karls des Grossen', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, iv (1970), which is most relevant to the subject of the present article, is mainly concerned with the ceremonial parallelism of Charlemagne's *adventus* to Paderborn in 777 and that of Charlemagne and Pope Leo III in 799. But he argues (pp. 164–5) strongly that moves towards this meeting are traceable to 798 (i.e. the year following the Saxon Capitulary of 797).

2. I cannot recover the precise passage I had in mind, but it is implicit in much of the fine article, Donald Bullough, 'Alcuin and the Kingdom of Heaven: Liturgy, Theology and the Carolingian Age', reprinted in his *Carolingian Renewal. Sources and Heritage* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 161–240, particularly in the reference to Alcuin's correspondence with Beatus of Liebana, p. 232, n. 119.

3. Peter Classen, 'Karl der Grosse, das Pappstum und Byzanz', in *Karl der Grosse*, i, 571–2; and for Bede and Eusebius, see Henry Mayr-Harting, 'Bede's Patristic Thinking as an Historian', in *Historiographie in frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter (Vienna, 1994), pp. 367–74.

4. Text and translation, Peter Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (London, 1985), pp. 196–207. Dieter Schaller, 'De Karolo rege et Leone papa', in *Die Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, vol. iv, ed. K. Ruh *et al.* (Berlin, 1983), col. 1043, dates the work after 800 but before 804/14, rather than to 799. I would suggest that the Aachen court of 802 is the likeliest occasion, though not the only possible one, for its composition.

for a short period around the time of the consecration of its church in 777, Charlemagne called the place *Urbs Karoli*, almost certainly following the example of the Emperor Constantine and the new *civitas Constantini* which he would have known from Orosius. It proved politic to drop the experiment in naming after the (to the Franks) catastrophic risings of the Saxons in 778, but Paderborn was still the great royal centre in Saxon lands.¹ The meeting and imperial talk at Paderborn in 799, therefore, expressed Charlemagne's mastery of the Saxons, to an audience of Saxons, of the pope, and, perhaps not least important, to Charlemagne himself.

Before considering what special problem was posed for Charlemagne by rule over the Saxons, and by its validation, and how this problem could be solved by an emperorship, we need to consider two more general matters: the Einhard crux which made many historians of the past say that Charlemagne was an emperor against his will, and the justifications for the imperial coronation which were actually put forward at Rome in 800.

There is no need any longer to labour the arguments against the notion that Charlemagne was an emperor despite himself, for scholarly opinion is now overwhelmingly agreed that he was not a *Kaiser wider Willen*.² We must take seriously the fact of Charlemagne's expressing aversion to his actual coronation, in the first instance because such an expression of unwillingness was an ancient topos in imperial elevations.³ But beyond that, I would concur with Beumann that any actual aversion was not due only to the mode of crowning and Leo III's wresting a ceremonial initiative for the papacy in it, but also to the fact that Charlemagne did not wish for the name of the Roman Empire. True, the style which he took, *augustus imperator . . . Romanum gubernans imperium* may be found in the *Corpus Iuris* and could not at all have assuaged Byzantine feelings that their Roman Emperorship was being

1. Karl Hauck, 'Karl als neuer Konstantin 777: die archäologischen Entdeckungen in Paderborn in historischer Sicht', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, xx (1986), esp. 516–18. The *Carmen de Conversione Saxonum*, a poem Aldhelmian in style which presents Charlemagne as a triumphant conqueror and may well be by the Anglo-Saxon Lul, should probably be seen in the context of the dedication of Paderborn church in 777: see Karl Hauck, *Karolingische Taufpfalzen im Spiegel hofnaber Dichtung*, *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* I, Phil.-Hist. Kl. (1985, no. 1), pp. 36–74, text pp. 62–64. See also Peter Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford, 1987), p. 41.

2. Helmut Beumann, 'Nomen Imperatoris: Studien zur Kaiseridee Karls des Grossen', in his *Ideengeschichtliche Studien zu Einhard und anderen Geschichtsschreibern des frühern Mittelalters* (Darmstadt, 1962), esp. pp. 89–94. One may note also pp. 105–14, where Beumann shows that not only do the best texts of the Divisio of 806 (a text too often seen as a depreciation by Charlemagne of his own imperial position) have the imperial title, but also that this title was drawn from none other than the *Constitutum Constantini*. See recently on this subject, for instance, Joseph Semmler, 'Der vorbildliche Herrscher in seinem Jahrhundert: Karl der Grosse', in *Der Herrscher: Leitbild und Abbild in Mittelalter und Renaissance*, ed. Hans Hecker (Düsseldorf, 1990), p. 53.

3. The point is very well dealt with by Heinrich Fichtenau, 'Karl der Grosse und das Kaisertum', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, lxi (1953), esp. 264–71.

usurped,¹ a diplomatic upset which Einhard implies to be the root of Charlemagne's expression of aversion; but it was certainly a style which took the weight off his Roman rule (almost as if he were only a caretaker of the Roman empire), and placed it instead, when taken in conjunction with *rex Francorum et Langobardorum*, the rest of his style, on the germanic rule. I would certainly concur with Beumann that Charlemagne wanted to be *an* emperor.

Here we come to the importance of *nomen* in Charlemagne's time, of how one was named. The whole vast prosopographical research into the early medieval empire, its aristocracy and kinship structures, has been posited on the name-consciousness of the age.² The poem *Carolus Magnus et Leo Papa* itself has a most extraordinary piece of etymology for the name *Carolus*, deriving it from *cara* and *lux* to make a point about the sort of light which Charlemagne spread in his empire.³ The principal reference book for Carolingian scholars, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, was in the first instance a book about word-derivations, spurious as many of its actual etymologies were, posited on the supposition that to understand the name was vital in grasping the thing. We know, for instance, that Isidore's work was one of the earliest books to be acquired by the Cologne Cathedral library in its Carolingian Renaissance, almost certainly by Archbishop Hildebald of Cologne, none other than Charlemagne's own arch-chancellor.⁴ When Charlemagne's father, Pepin III, was anointed king in 751, it was after Pope Stephen II had given it as his opinion that he who had the power should have the *nomen* (of king); and when Louis the Pious was deserted by many of his bishops and aristocracy in 830 he was said to be emperor *only* in name, with the implication that therefore he ought not to have the name.⁵ M. I. Finley, writing about the Athenian Empire of the fifth century BC, and raising the question whether an empire could be defined as the territory ruled by an emperor, replied rather irascibly: 'Everyone knows that there are, and have been in the past, important empires not ruled by an emperor, and I see no purpose in playing word-games in order to get round that harmless linguistic anomaly'.⁶ Whatever the case in fifth-century Athens, however, it would have been impossible in our period to have an

1. Peter Classen, 'Romanum gubernans imperium: zur Vorgeschichte der Kaisertitulatur Karls des Grossen', *Deutsches Archiv*, ix (1952), 107-8.

2. E.g. K. F. Werner, 'Important Noble Families in the Kingdom of Charlemagne', in *The Medieval Nobility*, ed. and trans. Timothy Reuter (Amsterdam 1979), pp. 137-202; and Karl Schmid, in *Die Klostergemeinschaft von Fulda im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. Karl Schmid, vol. i (Munich, 1978), pp. 11-36.

3. Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, p. 200, ll. 55-56 and see footnote, *ibid*.

4. Anton Decker, 'Die Hildebold'sche Manuskriptensammlung des Kölner Domes', in A. Chamblu et al., *Festschrift der dreissigsten Versammlung deutscher Philologen etc.* (Bonn, 1895), p. 226, no. 63; and J. Fleckenstein, *Die Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige, 1. Grundlegung: die karolingische Hofkapelle* (Stuttgart, 1959), pp. 49-52.

5. Beumann, 'Nomen Imperatoris', p. 97.

6. M. I. Finley, 'The Fifth-Century Athenian Empire: A Balance Sheet', in *Imperialism in the Ancient World*, ed. P. D. A. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker (Cambridge, 1978), p. 103.

empire not ruled by an emperor, when such importance was attached to the title which went with power. In the early Middle Ages, word-games were themselves *Realpolitik*.

Carl Erdmann wrote two celebrated papers respectively on the Roman and non-Roman ideas of empire in the early Middle Ages, which are still perhaps the best way of understanding how a ruler might have the name of an emperor without having the name of Roman Emperor.¹ The Roman idea of empire had various ingredients. It was the heir to Greek and Roman wisdom; it could only be acquired by coronation in Rome (and hence would surely exclude a coronation at Aachen such as that of Louis the Pious); and above all it was universalist, as P. A. Brunt shows that the ancient Romans conceived their empire to be, in the sense that all other rule in the world must in some way be a mere reflection of the one true, Roman, world *imperium*.² Otto I was (*imperator*) *Romanus et orbis*, Roman emperor and emperor of the world, according to the nun Hrotsvita of Gandersheim, his cousin, in her epic poem about his deeds.³ The non-Roman idea of empire was not universalist and was not necessarily connected to Rome, but was rather based on the rule of many peoples, or *gentes*. Widukind of Corvey in his *Res Gestae Saxonicae* gives expression to this idea when he says that with his victories over the Hungarians and Slavs in 955, Otto I gained the fear and favour of many kings and peoples (*multorum regum ac gentium*), and became an emperor (he notoriously says nothing of Otto's imperial coronation at Rome in 962).⁴

Now this is a historian's distinction, as Erdmann himself well appreciated, and we should not suppose that people in the early Middle Ages identified themselves in a clear-cut way with either a Roman or a non-Roman school of imperial thought. Thus if I argue that the non-Roman idea, rather than the Roman, is the key to understanding Charlemagne's need for emperorship, especially given his attitude to Byzantium, that is not to deny that there were elements of Roman/universalist thinking at his court. One well-known work which sustained the Roman idea was the Commentary on Daniel by Jerome, whose interpretation of the fourth empire of the world in Nebuchadnezzar's dream as the Roman Empire became standard; and Peter of Pisa, who began his career at Charlemagne's court as a grammarian,

1. Carl Erdmann, 'Das ottonische Reich als Imperium Romanum', *Deutsches Archiv*, vi (1943), reprinted in his *Ottonische Studien* (Darmstadt, 1968), pp. 174–203; and 'Die nichtrömische Kaiseridee', in his *Forschungen zur politischen Ideewelt des Frühmittelalters* (Berlin, 1951), pp. 1–51.

2. Brunt, 'Laus Imperii', pp. 168–70.

3. Cited in Erdmann, *Ottonische Studien*, p. 185.

4. *Widukindi Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*, ed. H.-E. Lohmann and Paul Hirsch, MGH *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum* (Hanover, 1935), iii, 56, p. 135. See Erdmann, 'Die nichtrömische Kaiseridee', pp. 44–6.

later wrote a commentary on Daniel, using Jerome heavily.¹ Granted the fundamental usefulness of the distinction, however, Charlemagne fits more easily into the non-Roman than the Roman idea. It would seem that Regino of Prüm, the late-ninth-century Lotharingian writer, hit the right note when, referring to the Arnulphing house, he said: 'in Charles the Great it obtained the height of rule (*summum imperii fastigium*), not only of the Franks but also of diverse peoples and kingdoms.'²

Associated with the Aachen gathering of 802, at which the dukes and counts were present and Charlemagne (like an Augustus) gave the various peoples over whom he ruled their own written laws, was the display by Charlemagne of the large equestrian statue of Theoderic the Ostrogoth, which he had acquired in Ravenna.³ Not every Carolingian *eruditus* approved of this acquisition, in part because Theoderic had been a heretic and had no place in an empire with Christianity as its substratum; if we follow Hubert Schrade, the iconography of the arch later made by Einhard himself for the church of St Servatius, Maastricht, contained a pointed repudiation of it.⁴ Heretic or no, Theoderic was an invaluable germanic hero for Charlemagne, who was significantly going back to his germanic roots in the period immediately after his Roman coronation. And who was Theoderic but one who had been widely regarded as having the power of an emperor yet had not had the title of Roman emperor, who had ruled over a large part of the western empire as a kind of *gubernator*, and who had exercised varying degrees of superiority over diverse peoples (*gentes*) of germanic origin?⁵

Of the actual accounts of the coronation ceremony in St Peter's on Christmas Day 800, both the *Liber Pontificalis* and the Royal Frankish Annals, though they differ in important respects, have Charlemagne being acclaimed Emperor of the Romans.⁶ Perhaps, however, the

1. Text in *Platologia Latina*, vol. xcvi, cols. 1347–62. Walter Schlesinger, 'Kaisertum und Reichsteilung zur divisio regnorum von 806', in *Zum Kaisertum Karls des Grossen*, ed. G. Wolf (Darmstadt, 1972), pp. 133–4, points up the limits to Charlemagne's universalist claims, with an eye to the Byzantine empire.

2. Quoted by Erdmann, 'Die nichtrömische Kaiseridee', p. 29, note 4. The whole idea of Erdmann received a new injection of life with Herwig Wolfram's broadening of the discussion. He wrote of the way in which recognition of the *regna*-structure allowed the Carolingians to build their empire and the *gentes adquisitae* helped in the victory: H. Wolfram, 'The Shaping of the Early Medieval Principality', *Viator*, ii (1971), esp. p. 45.

3. At least Agnellus of Ravenna shows us that Charlemagne brought the statue north from Ravenna to Aachen immediately after his imperial coronation; cited by Hartmut Hoffman, 'Die Aachener Theoderichstatue', in *Die erste Jahrtausend*, Textband I, ed. V. H. Elbern (Düsseldorf, 1962), p. 318, n. 2.

4. Hubert Schrade, 'Zum Kuppelmosaik der Pfalzkapelle und zum Theoderich-Denkmal in Aachen', *Aachener Kunstblätter*, xxx (1965), 25–37, esp. 31. Walafrid Strabo, in his poem *De Imagine Tetrici*, c. 829, attacking the Theoderic statue, implicitly refers to Theoderic's heresy when he says that the opinion of the world adjudges Theoderic a blasphemer of God (*blasphemum dei*) and consigns him to eternal fire and the great abyss: *MGH Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, ed. E. Dümmler, vol. ii (Berlin, 1884), p. 371, ll. 36–7.

5. On all this, see Hoffman, 'Die Aachener Theoderichstatue', esp. pp. 319–20, 328.

6. *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 112; *Liber Pontificalis*, see *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes* (*Liber Pontificalis*), trans. with commentary, Raymond Davis (Liverpool, 1992), p. 191, line 8.

Lorsch Annals more nearly express Charlemagne's view, despite the impossibility of showing that they had a close connection with the court:¹

And since the name of emperor *nomen imperatoris* was at this time lacking among the Greeks and they had female rule *femineum imperium* among them, it then seemed to the *apostolicus* Leo and to all the holy fathers present at that council, as well as to the rest of the Christian people, that they ought to bestow the name of emperor upon Charles himself, king of the Franks, who held Rome itself where the Caesars had always been accustomed to have their seat, and the rest of the seats, which he held throughout Italy, Gaul and Germany: since almighty God had granted all these seats into his power, it seemed to them to be right that, with the help of God and at the request of the entire Christian people, he should have that name. King Charles was himself unwilling to deny this request of theirs and, having submitted with all humility to God and the petition of the *sacerdotes* and the entire Christian people, received the name of emperor, with the consecration of the lord pope Leo, on the very day of the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here the name of emperor is said to be conferred upon Charles, and one of the grounds for this was that he held Rome itself, an imperial seat; but he is not called emperor of the Romans, and the weight is taken off Rome by the reference to other seats in *Italia*, *Gallia* and *Germania*. By the phrase *reliquas sedes* other imperial seats must surely be meant, such as Ravenna in Italy, and Cologne and Trier, old imperial centres in *Gallia*. But what seats were meant in *Germania*? By Carolingian usage *Gallia* and *Germania* were separated from each other by the Rhine, on the west or Gallic bank of which Cologne and other important Carolingian places were located. So, says Beumann, this cannot mean only Roman *sedes* but must mean Carolingian ones too, and he implies that Frankfurt, where there was an important royal *palatium*, is an example of what was meant.² But it is difficult to see any sense in which Frankfurt could be regarded as an imperial seat. Classen proposed, without supporting evidence and as a counsel of despair, that *Germania* was an addition of the annalist, saying that there were no old imperial seats in *Germania*.³ I can think of one place, and one place only, which could have been considered any sort of an imperial seat to the east of the Rhine in 800, and that was Paderborn amongst the Saxons, earlier known as

1. *Annales Laureshamenses*, ed. G. H. Pertz (Hanover, 1826), MGH SS I, 38, trans. P. D. King, in *Charlemagne: Translated Sources* (Kendal, 1987), p. 144. D. A. Bullough, 'Europae Pater: Charlemagne and his Achievement in the Light of Recent Scholarship', *ante*, lxxxv (1970), 65, drew a masterly conclusion from discussions on the Lorsch Annals, which I think still holds. But two points should be noted. First, while it cannot after all be demonstrated that this is a source close to the court, neither can the opposite be established. Second, that whatever the case in this respect, it is generally agreed to be close in time to 800, and in point of *nomen* it seems to fit better with Charlemagne's own mind at the time as evidenced by his style and by Einhard, and also with the capitulary of 802, than does the propaganda of the *Liber Pontificalis* and the *Annales Regni Francorum*.

2. H. Beumann, 'Nomen Imperatoris: Studien zur Kaiseridee Karls des Grossen', *Historische Zeitschrift*, clxxxv (1958), 515-49, reprinted in his *Ideengeschichtliche Studien*, p. 91 and n. 4.

3. Classen, 'Karl der Grosse, das Papsttum und Byzanz', p. 579, n. 205.

Urbs Karoli in imitation of the *Civitas Constantini*, where Charlemagne and the pope must have actually discussed the matter of the empire the previous year.

Apart from the issue of whether Charlemagne was an emperor against his will, the other matter which I said needed consideration was the justification put forward for the imperial coronation at Rome in 800. This was two-pronged. First, to clear up Pope Leo III's problems in Rome and to exercise judgement between the pope and his enemies, it was not sufficient for Charlemagne to be *Patricius Romanorum*, a title already long since bestowed upon him by Pope Hadrian I; he needed to be emperor. Peter Classen's conclusion on this matter was a masterly one: it was by no means legally clear whether only an Emperor could deal with Roman rebels, but all unclarities were at once removed if there were an emperor in Rome.¹ It should be noted, however, that this explanation certainly covers only Leo III's motive for the coronation and leaves open the question of Charlemagne's. Why should they not be different? It often happens in history that two quite unconnected crises converge upon each other. Karl Leyser expounded just such a situation in the case of the Emperor Henry IV with the Saxon risings and the Investiture Contest of the 1070s.² Why should it not have been so with the crisis occasioned for Charlemagne by his completion of the Saxon conquests and the consequent issue of how to rule them peacefully on the one hand, and the crisis in Leo III's relations with the Roman aristocracy on the other hand? The second justification, that Charlemagne filled a vacancy in the Roman emperorship because a woman could not validly hold imperial rule, does not bear serious inspection as one of Charlemagne's motives; it was again a papal motivation, or so the above-quoted Lorsch Annals imply; and besides, Charlemagne's imperial fervour was unabated when Nicephorus I overthrew Irene at Constantinople in 802.³

The peculiar problem which the Saxons posed for Charlemagne was that although they had ethnic awareness in plenty, they had no kingship. Indeed they made a point of having no kingship as if kings represented a tyranny which that sophisticatedly organized albeit pagan people could do without. Why the Saxons had this outlook is less easy to establish than that they had it. But if one considers the forceful argument of Patrick Geary that ethnic consciousness in the early middle ages resulted from peoples doing battle together rather than modes of rule, the result of *duces ex virtute* rather than *reges ex nobilitate*, to use Tacitus's famous phraseology, it can at least be seen that there is no contradiction in saying that the Saxons had ethnic awareness in plenty but would not tolerate

1. Ibid., pp. 573–4.

2. Karl Leyser, 'The Crisis of Medieval Germany', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, lxix (1983), reprinted in his *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: The Gregorian Revolution and Beyond*, ed. Timothy Reuter (1994), esp. pp. 23–4.

3. See e.g. Louis Halphen, *Charlemagne et l'Empire Carolingien* (Paris, 1949), pp. 135–6.

kingship. And one may see some parallel between the Saxons and the Lombards, when the Lombards suspended their kingship for a period in Italy during the sixth century without sense of crisis or loss of ethnic identity, given how mingled with each other the forbears of Lombards and Saxons were in northern Europe in the fifth century.¹ When Charlemagne had conquered the Lombards in 774 there was a kingship, a Christian kingship indeed, that he could take over, and henceforward *rex Langobardorum* became a normal part of his style.² In Aquitaine, as Roger Collins has persuasively argued, there was no ethnic unity or awareness before Charlemagne's time (though long-since a Christian region, of course),³ and that in itself gave Charlemagne a certain freedom of hand; in 781 he established a kingship and had his tiny son Louis crowned king of Aquitaine.⁴ In Frisia, Charles Martel, having defeated King Radbod, suppressed the kingship and ruled directly, according to Alcuin in his *Life of Willibrord*,⁵ but it was not in the short term a good augury for Frankish control, to judge from St Boniface's martyrdom some decades later. We leave aside the Avars for the moment. With the Saxons everything was different. Bede, writing only seventy years before Charlemagne's coronation, said:⁶

These Old Saxons have no king, but several lords who are set over the nation. Whenever war is imminent, these cast lots impartially, and the one on whom the lot falls is followed and obeyed by all for the duration of the war; but as soon as the war ends, the lords revert to equality of status.

That Bede's observations on Saxon society and lack of kingship were well founded is clear from the oldest *Life of St Lebuin*, written by a Saxon in the mid-ninth century. Lebuin was a courageous, mid-eighth-century, Anglo-Saxon firebrand who had associated himself with Bishop Gregory of Utrecht and had been set to work in the borderland of the Saxons and Frisians, the missionary hot seat of Europe after Boniface's martyrdom, establishing his church (if establishing is the

1. Patrick Geary, 'Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, cxiii (1983), 15–26. On the Lombard interregnum, compare Chris Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society, 400–1000* (London, 1981), pp. 31–2. And on 'Lombards' and 'Saxons' earlier in North Europe, see for instance Lucien Musset, *Les Invasions: Les Vagues Germaniques* (Paris, 1965), p. 139, and Donald Bullough, 'The Ostrogothic and Lombard Kingdoms', in *The Dark Ages*, ed. David Talbot Rice (London, 1965), p. 171.

2. For the style *rex Francorum et Langobardorum*, see *Diplomatum Karolinorum*, Tomus I, ed. E. Mühlbacher, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Hanover, 1908), no. 80, p. 114 onwards. In an excellent discussion of 'Charlemagne's empire', K. F. Werner, 'L'empire carolingien et le Saint Empire', in *Le Concept d'Empire*, ed. M. Duverger, Hélène Ahrweiler, et al. (Paris, 1980), pp. 168–69, has pointed out that though an authentic ancient Roman Emperor, or a Justinian, might be a *victor of gentes*, he would never be their *rex*. Hence it was a new departure for Charlemagne to have the style *imperator augustus* and *rex Francorum et Langobardorum*. All the more reason to think that his refusal to take the style of Saxon kingship relates to a peculiarly Saxon problem.

3. Roger Collins, 'The Vaccaei, the Vaceti and the Rise of Vasconia', *Studia Historica*, vi (1988), esp. pp. 387–9.

4. *Annales Regni Francorum*, 781, p. 56.

5. Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe*, p. 200, n. 27.

6. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V, 10.

right word) at Deventer on the River Yssel.¹ Not long before Charlemagne renewed the Frankish wars against the Saxons, Lebuin somehow managed to gatecrash one of the annual meetings of the Saxons at Marklo, where according to the *Vita*, with representatives from each settlement they confirmed the laws, gave judgements and drew up plans for war and peace. These are the words of the probably Saxon author of the Life of St Lebuin, written between 840 and 865:²

Suddenly Lebuin appeared in the middle of the circle, clothed in his priestly garments, bearing a cross in his hands and a copy of the Gospels in the crook of his arm. Raising his voice, he cried: 'Listen to me, listen. I am the messenger of Almighty God and to you Saxons I bring his command.' Astonished at his words and at his unusual appearance, a hush fell upon the assembly. The man of God then followed up his announcement with these words: 'The God of heaven and Ruler of the world and His Son, Jesus Christ, command me to tell you that if you are willing to be and to do what His servants tell you He will confer benefits upon you such as you have never heard of before.' Then he added: 'As you have never had a king over you before this time, so no king will prevail against you and subject you to his domination. But if you are unwilling to accept God's commands, a king has been prepared nearby who will invade your lands, spoil and lay them waste and sap away your strength in war; he will lead you into exile, deprive you of your inheritance, slay you with the sword, and hand over your possessions to whom he has a mind: and afterwards you will be slaves both to him and his successors.'³

Here the problem emerges quite clearly. The neighbouring king – Charlemagne, of course, for the whole passage is heavy with hindsight – was good for rapine against the Saxons while they refused to accept God's commands and remained unconverted, but could never in the end have exercised kingly rule over them with their consent, and without their seriously losing face. I cannot help feeling that there is an important inaccuracy in C. H. Talbot's translation at this point. When Lebuin says that up to this time the Saxons had had no king, *ita non erit rex qui contra vos praevalere possit et sibi subicere*, rather than being translated, 'so no king will prevail against you and subject you to his domination', it ought to be, 'so it will not be a king who will prevail against you and subject

1. W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), p. 109.

2. *Vita Lebuini Antiqua*, ed. A. Hofmeister, MGH SS 30, 2 (Leipzig, 1934), pp. 789–95, at p. 794. For the date and Saxon authorship of the *Vita*, see Heinz Löwe, 'Entstehungszeit und Quellenwert der Vita Lebuini', *Deutsches Archiv*, xxi (1965), 345–70, esp. 354–66. Hubert Mordek cites the *Vita Lebuini* interestingly, but not in connection with the problem of kingship, in his 'Karl der Grosse: barbarischer Eroberer oder Baumeister Europas?' in *Deutschland in Europa*, ed. Bernd Martin (Munich, 1992), pp. 27–8. Janet Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World' in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge, 1994), p. 57, cites the same passage to say that although kingship was the basic political form for the Carolingians, they were aware that others, the ancient Israelites for a time, and 'until recently' the Saxons (but when did there ever come to be a King of the Saxons?) had managed without them.

3. The reference to the enslavement of the Saxons to Charlemagne's successors need not imply that Lebuin or the author of his *Vita* prophesied that this situation would be prolonged into the period of Saxon conversion, for already in 777 the Saxons' oath was also to connect them to Charlemagne's sons: Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft*, p. 121.

you to his domination'.¹ No, it would be an emperor. The mid-ninth-century writer understood the concerns of his own people a century earlier. An ethnically self-aware *gens*, they would not have to bear the unheard-of yoke of kingly rule, but could submit to a supra-gentile emperor, as if standing above the fray, who had, to use Widukind's phrase of Otto I, 'earned the fear and favour of many peoples'.² Karl Leyser put forward the argument in his discussion of Ottonian sacral kingship that although we could not know how many aristocrats had desisted from rebellion out of respect for the ruler's sacralty, at least it was a factor which helped failed rebels to save face when they submitted that they were submitting to a sacral person.³ *Mutatis mutandis*, that is the kind of argument I put forward concerning the Saxons' acquiescence in the rule of Charlemagne. Equally in all this, Charlemagne would have lost face by calling himself king of a people who were still mostly pagan, who had never had a kingship (note that he did not call *himself* king of the Aquitanians), and who from a Frankish point of view had proved themselves untrustworthy in all dealings.

Let us consider for a moment the issue of loss of face from a Saxon point of view, for reputation was of the highest importance to the warrior element of a heroic-age society. The reputation-consciousness of such a society was fuelled by the splendid talents of innumerable poets, by smiths who could express personal fame in their artefacts, and by the accepted oral/literary genre of public boasting. On the reputational side during Charlemagne's wars, the Saxons' greatest *gain* will undoubtedly have been the blood bath of Verden in 783. If but one tenth of the 4500 warriors said to have been slaughtered actually fell under Frankish swords, think what a series of laments for fallen warriors, what a *Gododdin*, what a subsequent celebration of reputation by poets, that would have made possible!⁴ In the debit column, their second gravest loss of face will have been the destruction of their sacred Irminsul, for which they went on the rampage, especially in 778, not seeking booty but revenge, as the so-called Annals of Einhard say:⁵ revenge, the classic germanic remedy for loss of face. Their most serious loss of face, however, must have been the baptism of Duke Widukind in 785, Charlemagne standing as his godfather, with every connotation of caring and loving superiority which Arnold Angenendt has taught us to associate with the godfatherly position.⁶ The Bulgarian aristocracy would im-

1. C. H. Talbot, *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany* (London, 1954), p. 232.

2. *Supra*, p. 1120, n. 4.

3. K. J. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (London, 1979), pp. 92–7.

4. Kenneth Jackson, *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969), esp. pp. 3–8, 19, 37–41.

5. *Annales Regni Francorum*, p. 53 (*Annales Q.D. Einhardi* 778): 'non praedandi sed ultionem exercendi'. For an interesting survey of the evidence for the Irminsul, arguing the close connection between religious belief and social order, Heinz Löwe, 'Die Irminsul und die Religion der Sachsen', *Deutsches Archiv*, v (1941), 1–22.

6. Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe*, pp. 91–126.

mediately revolt against Khan Boris when he accepted baptism from the Byzantines with the Emperor Michael as his godfather.¹ It is not surprising that Duke Widukind disappears from history so effectively after his baptism (some of his kinsmen remained with honour), that historians have been able to argue plausibly, though probably incorrectly, that he forthwith became a monk of Reichenau.² The Saxons did not take their humiliation lying down, although it was seven years before they mounted another serious revolt; after the massacre of Verden they probably had to wait for a new generation of young males to become of fighting age.

It was hard enough to defeat the Saxons in war, let alone to find a way of ruling them which saved their faces and gained their consent once they were defeated, Charlemagne's problem in the late 790s. This could not be solved either by his becoming their king or by their being incorporated, through a process of ethnogenesis, into the Frankish kingdom and *gens*. Let us note that Einhard never supposed the latter to have occurred under Charlemagne, as has sometimes been thought, for when he writes that the Saxons accepted Christianity and were united with the Franks as one people with them, he uses the word *populus* not *gens*, a word whose usage had nothing to do with ethnic sameness; he meant here that the Saxons became part of the Christian people, for which the normal phrase was *populus Christianus*.³ We have to wait until the late ninth century, and the Corvey poet known as *Saxo*, for any evidence that anyone thought of what had happened as a political fusion of two *gentes* into one;⁴ and when Widukind of Corvey wrote in the 960s, anxious as he was to emphasize the coalescence of Franks and Saxons, he said only that they had become *quasi una gens ex Christiana fide*, as if one *gens* as a result of Christianity (he had read Einhard), 'as we see them to-day'.⁵ Widukind, who in other places had plenty to say about tensions between Franks and Saxons in his own day, knew that, though there had been intermarriage, they had never in fact become one *gens*. Thus Charlemagne had the problem of ruling a separate *gens* without being able to call himself their king.

The eighth-century Saxons were actually in a better position to appreciate emperorship than kingship by reason of their own pagan cults. Karl Hauck has drawn attention to a gold bracteate from the polytheistic Saxon site of Gudme-Götterheim, a work of a prolific bracteate master, which has a representation of a prince of gods with the insignia of a late antique emperor, including spear, diadem, imperial

1. See, for instance, Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500-1453* (London, 1971), p. 85. I have discussed the subject in my *Two Conversions to Christianity, the Bulgarians and the Anglo-Saxons* (Stenton Lecture 1993, Reading, 1994), pp. 5-9.

2. See on this Angenendt, *Kaiserherrschaft und Königstaufe*, pp. 209-11.

3. Beumann, 'Nomen Imperatoris', p. 93. See also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography* (London, 1967), chapter 22.

4. Beumann, 'Unterwerfung und Christianisierung der Sachsen', p. 140.

5. *Widukindi Rerum Gestarum Saxoniarum*, I, 15, p. 25, line 13.

cloak and brooch. Just as one cannot understand images of *Christus Imperator* without representations of the late antique emperor, says Hauck, so one cannot penetrate the meaning of the golden God-pictures of the Saxons without bringing into view that an invincible, emperor-like God was known far to the north of the frontiers of the Roman Empire. Another bracteate from Gudme shows a prince of gods as the conqueror of a demonic animal, like Christ trampling on the beasts.¹

A fundamental aspect of finding a face-saving political framework within which to rule the Saxons after their defeat in the 790s was the question how to find a means of converting them to Christianity more effective than those which had so signally failed after 785. This is where Alcuin comes into his own. Alcuin's role in preparing the ideological ground for the imperial coronation may have been exaggerated, but he was undoubtedly to the forefront in emphasizing that Christianity should be spread by persuasion and preaching rather than by force. In a famous letter of 796 to Charlemagne, relating to how the defeated Avars should be treated, he urges (in Gregorian style) the provision of good preachers, sound in conduct, who would start the new converts on gentle teaching as if on babies' milk; he criticizes the greedy spirit which would impose the yoke of tithes on them; and he advocates the order of teaching contained in Augustine's *De Rudibus Catechizandis*.² The passing reference to the Saxons near the beginning of this letter, and to the fact that until now divine election seemed to have eluded them,³ suggests that Alcuin was using the occasion of the Avars to make veiled statements also about the approach to the Saxons, as does another letter of the same year to Maganfred, *arcarius*, openly criticizing the exaction of tithes from the Saxons.⁴ One cannot help noticing that, whatever happened in practice, tithes are trumpeted in the Saxon Capitulary of c. 782–85, but in that of 797 a silence falls on the subject.⁵ Charlemagne clearly changed course on the matter of the Saxon conversion from 797 onwards; in modern parlance, he did a U-turn. It seems to me that

1. Hauck, 'Karl als neuer Konstantin', esp. pp. 520–3 and Abb. 116, 117a.

2. *Alcuini Epistolae*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Epistolarum IV, Karolini Aevi II (Berlin, 1895), no. 110, pp. 156–9.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 157, ll. 13–16: 'Ecce quanta devotione et benignitate pro dilatione nominis Christi duriūm infelicis populi Saxonum per verae salutis consilium emollire laborasti. Sed quia electio necdum in illis divina fuisse videtur, remanent huc usque multi ex illis cum diabolo damnandi in sordibus consuetudinis pessime.'

4. *Ibid.*, no. 111, p. 161.

5. For these two capitularies, *Capitularia Regum Francorum*, pp. 68–72. On tithes in 782, see p. 69, cc. 16 and 17. For translations, P. D. King, *Charlemagne, Translated Sources*, pp. 205–8, 230–2. H.-D. Kahl, 'Karl der Grosse und die Sachsen: Stufen und Motive einer historischen Eskalation', *Politik, Gesellschaft, Geschichtsschreibung: Giessener Festgabe für František Graus*, ed. H. Ludat and R. C. Schwinges (Cologne/Vienna, 1982), pp. 49–130, stops when he has established the 'escalation' to forced conversion c. 778: see esp. p. 96. I think I am close here to a fine point of Johannes Fried, *Der Weg in die Geschichte: Die Ursprünge Deutschlands bis 1024, Propyläen Geschichte Deutschlands I* (Berlin, 1994), p. 329, that the Franks could seem endangered by Charlemagne's imperial rank; but the Saxons in particular profited from it. 'The Christian Emperor of Frankish birth protected the conquered Saxons from the presumption of his own people.'

Alcuin's letter, and the position which he took on this subject, was exactly what Charlemagne needed to enable him to change course in his methods of converting the Saxons without losing too much face himself in making the change. The letter had a function; Charlemagne could be seen to be responding to the urgent view of the devout and learned leader of his court school, and moreover responding to it when that leader was about to retire, a circumstance which often gives people extra moral authority.

In the long term, as the superb work of Helmut Beumann has shown, the Saxon aristocracy (as the Americans say) bought the deal, and allowed their faces to be saved.¹ Their ninth-century writers managed to think and write without reservation about Charlemagne as a great ruler and their apostle, albeit the *Translatio S. Liborii*, written (887–909) for Bishop Bisio of Paderborn, says that he preached to the Saxons with an iron tongue (*ferrea lingua*). At the same time they praised the *mores* and the *strenuitas* of their forbears. The Corvey author of the *Translatio S. Pusinnae* (862–75), after pleading in their favour the initial resistance to Christianity on the grounds of fidelity to their ancestral cults, even went so far as to account for Charlemagne's missionary success by the intelligence of the Saxons who had made their own conversion possible. These and others certainly allowed their faces to be saved by the historical interpretation which they put on Charlemagne's subjugation and Christianization of the Saxons. Most important for our purposes is the tenth-century Widukind of Corvey, for he implicitly regards Charlemagne as an emperor from the time he conquered the Saxons.² Admittedly Widukind was an interested party in so writing, because his theme was how Frankish power had passed, in a *translatio imperii*, to the Saxons of his own age;³ but he had an incomparable knowledge of Saxon traditions, and I think we have to accept that he reflects a deep-seated view of the Saxons that when they finally submitted, it was to an emperor.

Not only in the methods of conversion to Christianity did Charlemagne apparently do a volte-face around the time of his imperial coronation. It has recently been said that the *Leges Saxonum*, given probably in 802, are very brief and include Frankish rules that the Saxons were required to abide by.⁴ But there is evidence that the Saxon aristocracy subsequently believed that they had been conceded a law which was their own. In the 820s when the Saxon aristocrat Gottschalk,

1. Beumann, 'Unterwerfung und Christianisierung der Sachsen', esp. pp. 149–57.

2. *Widukindi Rerum Gestarum Saxoniarum*, i, 15, p. 25. Of Charlemagne's bringing the Saxons to the Christian faith he writes: 'Et nunc blanda suasionem, nunc bellorum impetu ad id coegit, tandemque tricesimo imperii sui anno obtinuit – imperator quippe ex rege creatus est – quod multis temporibus elaborando non defecit'.

3. See especially Helmut Beumann, *Widukind von Korvei* (Weimar, 1950), pp. 218–26, and his 'Einhard und die karolingische Tradition im ottonischen Corvey', *Westfalen*, xxx (1952), 150–74, reprinted in his *Ideengeschichtliche Studien*, esp. pp. 23–32.

4. Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe, 300–1000* (London, 1991), p. 275.

having been a child oblate of Fulda, left the monastery, his kinsmen claimed back his dowry on the grounds that the original grant had not been witnessed by a sufficient number of relatives according to Saxon Law.¹ In 842, according to the extraordinary tale of Nithard, when many Saxon nobles defected from the Emperor Lothar to his brother Louis the German, Lothar promised their underlings, the *frilingi* and *lazzi*, in order to subvert their loyalties and win them over, the same law in future which their ancestors had observed when they were still worshipping idols.² While noting the smear on Lothar by an extremely hostile writer, let us also note how it was conceived that the Saxon aristocracy of the 840s could be undermined by a return to their legal situation before their conversion.

One might think that any argument of my sort should equally include the Avars, the steppe nomads on the middle Danube whom Charlemagne defeated resoundingly if not quite finally in 795–6; but that is not so. The problem of the Saxons arose from the need for a concept by which Charlemagne could validate the incorporation of them into his dominions, whereas the Avars were un-incorporable. Unlike the Saxons with their rather sophisticated agrarian settlements and political system, the Avars remained essentially Turkic nomads. Some might question, in the light of the impressive archaeological excavations of Avar sites in Lower Austria led by Falco Daim, whether the Avars were truly nomads by the late eighth century. Daim has pointed to a peasant way of life, with simple houses and, latterly, village settlements.³ But the overwhelming impression of the Avars here is as meat eaters who engaged in

1. See Eckhard Freise, *Studien zum Einzugsbereich der Klostergemeinschaft von Fulda*, in *Die Klostergemeinschaft von Fulda im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. Karl Schmid (Munich, 1978), vol. ii/iii, p. 1027.

2. Nithard, *Histoire des Fils de Louis le Pieux*, ed. P. R. Lauer (Paris, 1964), iv, 2, p. 122, trans. B. W. Scholz, *Carolingian Chronicles* (Michigan, 1970), p. 167. The Annals of St Bertin for 841 have obviously the same tale, in the form that Lothar offered their underlings, *Stellinga*, the choice between some kind of written law and the customary law of the ancient Saxons, and they chose the latter, being 'always prone to evil': MGH SS I, 437–8, and *The Annals of St-Bertin*, trans. and annotated Janet L. Nelson (Manchester, 1991), p. 51, n. 7. The case is discussed by Rosamond McKitterick in her admirable introduction to *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. ii, p. 16, where, however, she seems to overlook that it was not said to be the Saxons as a whole, but only the underlings of the Saxon aristocracy, who wanted to reject written law. I have checked the references she gives at this point to Schott, herself, and Sellert, the last the most recent, and none of them discusses this case in particular, but rather the general issue of written law. This episode in no way tells against the ideological interpretation of the making of written law and might even be thought to reinforce it: see Patrick Wormald, 'Lex Scripta and Verbum Regis: Legislation and Germanic Kingship from Euric to Cnut', *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 105–38, who in any case does not imply that the 'symbolic' and 'practical' significances of written law are as mutually exclusive of each other as some have supposed that he does. For a highly illuminating analysis of the divisions of the Saxon aristocracy in the late 830s and early 840s and of the revolt of the *frilingi* and *lazzi* in that context, see now the important paper by Eric J. Goldberg, 'Popular Revolt, Dynastic Politics, and Aristocratic Factionalism in the Early Middle Ages: The Saxon *Stellinga* Reconsidered', *Speculum*, lxx (1993), 467–501.

3. Falco Daim, *Das awarische Gräberfeld von Leobersdorf, N. Ö.*, (Vienna, 1987), pp. 97–98, 275–87. Tents are mentioned at p. 97. For what may be the gradual process of the camp sites of 'sedentarizing nomads' developing into villages, and also for interaction between nomadic camps and sedentary settlements, see Roger Cribb, *Nomads in Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 151–61.

animal husbandry and hunting, a way of life essentially mobile and not rooted to particular lands as agriculturalists are. The settled way of Avar life is said also to imply the cultivation of wheat and perhaps other arable products.¹ Against the rich evidence of animal and fowl bones, and of horse-breeding, however, the only evidence of arable husbandry offered is finds of sickles, which could as well be used for clearing areas for animals or horse-breeding. Theodulph of Orleans, in his poem on the Court of Charlemagne, captured the truth in an amusing phrase when, writing in an old topos about peoples who bowed the neck to Charles, he referred to *Abares, Arabes, Nomadesque*.² As to the assimilation of the Avars, Charlemagne did not dream of attempting it; even the attempts to missionize them were half-hearted, as Arno of Salzburg's dull response to Alcuin's enthusiasm shows.³ Charlemagne's policy towards them was entirely one of defence, to keep them out. In 796 he created two marcher lordships against them, one in East Bavaria under Gerold, the other in the region of Aquileia under Eric of Friuli, lordships divided by the river Drau. Although by 803 both Gerold and Eric had been killed, the Bavarian capitularies of that year show that he persisted with the idea of buffers.⁴ When, by the capitulary of Thionville (805), Charlemagne drew up a list of customs posts across the east of his empire, principally to prevent weapons being traded to his enemies, it was a line which excluded the Slavs and Avars, the very enemies he feared, but included the Saxons. Furthermore, when Charlemagne divided his inheritance amongst his sons by the *Divisio* of 806, not only did he break with the tradition which would give every royal son the right to a share in Frankish lands, by keeping the whole Frankish kingdom intact under Charles (as Classen pointed out), but he also added the Saxons to Charles's portion. He was not, of course, styled king of the Saxons, although his younger brothers were respectively styled king of the Lombards and king of the Aquitainians.⁵ The reason why Charlemagne deported many Saxons from Nordalbingia to nearer the Rhineland where they could more easily be supervised, namely the worry that they would escape into the lands of his enemies, the Slavs and Danes, or be

1. Falco Daim and Andreas Lippert, *Das awarische Graberfeld von Sommerein am Leithagebirge*, N. Ö., (Vienna, 1984), pp. 124–5.

2. Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, p. 152, line 45.

3. For this, see Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren: ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa, 567–822* (Munich, 1988), p. 321.

4. Herwig Wolfram, *Die Geburt Mitteleuropas* (Vienna, 1987), pp. 259–64, explains all this well. Pohl, *Die Awaren*, p. 313, argues, moreover, that after the deposition of Tassilo as Duke of Bavaria in 788, Charlemagne played for the loyalty of the Bavarian aristocracy by encouraging their marcher lordships on the East.

5. Thionville c. 7, *Divisio Regnorum* c. 3, in *Capitularia Regum Francorum*, pp. 123, 127. See also Peter Classen, 'Karl der Grosse und die Thronfolge in Frankenreich', *Festschrift für H. Heimpehl* (Göttingen, 1972), vol. iii, esp. 221, 227. From at least 775 Charlemagne had thought of incorporating the Eastern Saxons into the *Regnum Francorum*: Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft*, p. 112.

stirred into rebellion by them, shows again the determination and indeed necessity to include the Saxons and keep others out.¹

To Charlemagne, dealing with nomads was like wrestling with a well-oiled opponent. When defeated, whole groups of them could slide out of view across distant rivers, especially the Theiss,² leaving behind them no lands to whose cultivation they were committed, and they could happily satisfy their sense of the sacrality of war by fighting each other. Then when one side or other was worsted, its leader would approach him for protection.³ A late but plausible Byzantine report has it that the Bulgar Krum (802–14) defeated the Avars and subsequently asked certain Avar captives why their once great empire had fallen. They attributed it to quarrels, trade matters, and over-indulgence in wine. No mention is made of Charlemagne. After that, Krum allegedly fixed heavy penalties for unjust accusations, lifted restrictions on trade, and had all the vines in his empire destroyed.⁴

Even those who feel on balance friendly to my hypothesis about the Saxons and Charlemagne's emperorship, may be worried that no contemporary breathes a surviving word about this motive for Charlemagne's coronation in 800. But so it often is in history. No contemporary says that a major motive of Otto I in his imperial coronation of 962 was to secure the establishment of the archbishopric of Magdeburg; we know it only from indirect evidence.⁵ No contemporary says that Louis XIV's motive for the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 was to show himself as much a champion of Catholicism as the Habsburgs who had just successfully withstood the Siege of Vienna in 1683; but Robin Briggs has made a strong case that this is what the motive was.⁶ Again, mine may look a very ephemeral explanation for the origins of so large a fact in history as the empire. But again, so it often is. Huge facts of history can be born of transient needs. On Christmas Day 800 Charlemagne did not know that he had started the Holy Roman Empire, that it would come to be called by that name three and half centuries later, that it would last for another seven and a half centuries thereafter, and that for another century and half after that the Roman Catholic liturgy of Good Friday would retain a bidding prayer for it. Likewise, a few decades later, the commissioners of the Treaty of Verdun, who arranged the partition of Charlemagne's empire amongst

1. *Annales Regni Francorum*, 804, p. 118.

2. This point seems to me eminently compatible with Pohl, *Die Awaren*, pp. 323–8, arguing, in his discussion, 'to where did the Avars disappear?' that they became mixed in with Slavs or other peoples in the Carpathian Basin (see map, pp. 510–11), or even joined the Bulgars.

3. See especially *Annales Regni Francorum*, 805, pp. 119–20.

4. Walter Pohl, *Die Awarenkriege Karls des Grossen, 788–803* (Vienna, 1988), pp. 27–8.

5. Henry Mayr-Harting, 'The Church of Magdeburg: Its Trade and its Town in the Tenth and Early Eleventh Centuries', in *Church and City 1000–1500: Essays in Honour of Christopher Brooke*, ed. David Abulafia, Michael Franklin and Miri Rubin (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 132–3.

6. Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France, 1560–1715* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 151–3.

his three surviving grandsons in 843, aiming primarily to make the shares equal,¹ did not know that they had created the Alsace-Lorraine problem over which France and Prussia would go to war in 1870. Janet Nelson has recently written that the idea of empire 'had been resurrected to legitimize Frankish imperialism; Frankish divisions made it hard to sustain'.² This trenchant observation seems quite compatible with my view that the imperial coronation of 800 met a very temporary need for Charlemagne. I have spoken about the emperorship as the conceptual framework. The hard business of absorbing the Saxons into his rule and Christianizing them is another story, a story of teaching, ecclesiastical foundations, arrangement of marriages etc. over many subsequent decades.³

It may be that in the course of my paper, I have stressed the emperorship as a means of saving the face of the Saxons, to the exclusion of how Charlemagne validated his rule over the Saxons *in his own mind*. Maybe Charlemagne sought 'a new ideological cement for the disparate peoples under (his) rule'; but what an early medieval ruler said to *himself* in the secrecy of his own bosom, how he justified himself to *himself*, and to God, was a far more important motivating factor than what is sometimes called propaganda. This was a psychological truth firmly grasped by one of the greatest ever Christian treatises on rule, well known at Charlemagne's court, Pope Gregory the Great's *Regula Pastoralis*.⁴ Gregory warns the ruler that he must judge himself inwardly, that he must turn the eye of his soul on his own infirmities, and that like David (and David was Charlemagne's nickname at court) the law of the Lord must be his 'meditation all the day'.⁵ The Holy Roman Empire was born less to facilitate the acquisition and exercise of power, than to canonize power already achieved, and to canonize it first and foremost in the eyes of its holders.

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1. F. Ganshof, 'On the Genesis and Significance of the Treaty of Verdun (843)', in his *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy: Studies in Carolingian History* (London, 1971), pp. 289–302.

2. Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire', pp. 71–2.

3. The subject of marriages between Franks and Saxons has been broached by various writers, e.g. Karl Jordan, 'Sachsen und das deutsche Königtum in hohen Mittelalter', *Historische Zeitschrift*, ccx (1970), 534–5. On missionary organization before 800, see Eckhard Freise, 'Die Sachsenmission Karls des Grossen und die Anfänge des Bistums Minden', in *An Weser und Wiehen: Festschrift für Wilhelm Brepohl* (Minden, 1983), pp. 57–100.

4. The clear implication, for instance, of Alcuin's letter of 796 to the Archbishop Eanbald II of York, advising him to take the work everywhere and read it often: *Alcuini Epistolae*, no. 116, p. 171.

5. Bk I, c. 11: *PL*, vol. lxxvii, col. 48D.