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PAGAN, PIRATE, SUBJECT, SAINT
Defining and Redefining Saxons
150-900 A.D.

HEIDEN, ROVER, ONDERDAAN, HEILIGE
Het definiëren en herdefiniëren van Saksen
150-900 n. Chr.

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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Voor Janneke

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1. The most ferocious of enemies	
<i>Saxons from a Roman perspective</i>	27
1.1. Ptolemy and the second-century Saxons?	30
1.2. Saxons and Franks	33
1.3. Litus Saxonicum	37
1.4. Saxons in Britain	39
1.5. A panegyrist's perspective: Claudius Claudianus	45
1.6. Christian moralists: Ambrose and Salvian	48
1.7. Gildas and the Ruin of Britain	51
1.8. Saxons in a changing world: Sidonius Apollinaris	57
1.9. Conclusion	65
2. Rebels, subjects, neighbours	
<i>Saxons from a Frankish perspective</i>	70
2.1. A Latin panegyrist in a barbarian kingdom: Venantius Fortunatus	73
2.2. The limits of continuity: the curious case of Gregory of Tours	84
2.3. Saxons in seventh-century Frankish history-writing	97
2.4. Saxons in early eighth-century Frankish history-writing	106
2.5. Conclusion	111
3. Gens perfida or populus Christianus?	
<i>The Saxons and the Saxon Wars in Carolingian historiography</i>	115
3.1. 'It could certainly have ended sooner'	115
3.2. The early roots of fides	122

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3.3. Narrating the Saxon Wars	128
3.4. From gens perfida to populus Christianus	131
3.5. ‘Like a dog returning to its vomit’: the insurrection of 792	136
3.6. The benefits of hindsight: remembering the Saxon Wars after 804	140
3.7. Conclusion	145
4. Offering God’s Law to God’s People	
<i>Saxons in the Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae</i>	147
4.1. Unexpected advice	147
4.2. The <i>Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae</i>	151
4.3. Paganism and infidelity	154
4.4. Biblical punishment and sacerdotal ministry	166
4.5. Contextualizing the <i>Capitulatio</i>	172
4.6. Mission from Mainz	180
4.7. Richulf, Saxony and the <i>Capitulatio</i>	187
4.8. Richulf and Alcuin	198
4.9. Conclusion	203
5. From defeat to salvation	
<i>Remembering the Saxon Wars in Carolingian Saxony</i>	206
5.1. A brave new world	206
5.2. Towards a Saxon past	211
5.3. Winners and losers	214
5.4. An episcopal past: Paderborn	224
5.5. Monastic memory: Herford and Corvey	233
5.6. Carolingian counts, founding families: Hessi and Widukind	250
5.7. Saxons writing for Franks: the Poeta Saxo	263
5.8. Conclusion	273
Conclusion	276
Bibliography	286
Samenvatting/ Summary in Dutch	332
Curriculum vitae	339

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DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AL</i>	<i>Annales Laureshamenses (= Annals of Lorsch)</i>
<i>AM</i>	<i>Annales Mosellani</i>
<i>AMP</i>	<i>Annales Mettenses Priores</i>
<i>AP</i>	<i>Annales Petaviani</i>
<i>ARF</i>	<i>Annales regni Francorum</i>
<i>AASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
<i>Blaise</i>	<i>Dictionnaire Latin-français des Auteurs Chrétiens (Blaise, A.)</i>
<i>BT Lat</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>DA</i>	<i>Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters</i>
<i>DnP</i>	<i>Der neue Pauly</i>
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
<i>Auct. ant.</i>	<i>Auctores antiquissimi</i>
<i>Capit.</i>	<i>Capitularia regum Francorum</i>
<i>Conc.</i>	<i>Concilia</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>Diplomata</i>
<i>Dt. MA</i>	<i>Deutsches Mittelalter. Kritische Studientexte</i>
<i>Epp.</i>	<i>Epistulae in Quarto</i>
<i>Epp. sel.</i>	<i>Epistulae selectae in usum scholarum</i>
<i>Poet.</i>	<i>Poetae latini aevi carolini</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>Scriptores in Folio</i>
<i>SS rer. Germ.</i>	<i>Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum seperatim editi</i>
<i>SS rer. Lang.</i>	<i>Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum</i>
<i>SS rer. Merov.</i>	<i>Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum</i>
<i>NA</i>	<i>Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde</i>

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

<i>OLD</i>	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>Reviser</i>	<i>Annales qui dicuntur Einhardi</i> (= 'Revised' version of the <i>Annales regni Francorum</i>)
<i>s.a.</i>	<i>sub anno</i>

INTRODUCTION

Early in 850, the Saxon nobleman Waltbert journeyed across the Alps to Rome. Waltbert had various matters to attend to in the Holy City. As a *fidelis* of the Carolingian Emperor Lothar I, he was to make an appearance at the imperial coronation of Lothar's son Louis II at Easter 850. Furthermore, he planned to make a pilgrimage to the graves of the apostles Peter and Paul and of the various other martyrs buried in the city's suburbs. A third goal was contingent on papal approval. Waltbert had recently founded a church on his lands in Wildeshausen, Westphalia, and he was keen to obtain relics for his new foundation. To facilitate this enterprise, he had in his possession various letters of introduction written on his behest by Emperor Lothar.¹ One was addressed to Pope Leo IV and implored the pontiff to assist the Saxon on his pursuit. Leo, now, was not known for his accommodating stance towards 'treasure hunters' from across the Alps. Yet here was a request he was not in a position to refuse.² Over the previous years, Lothar and his son Louis had repeatedly offered the pope military and financial aid against the Saracens, who were proving an increasing menace to central Italy. The unwritten laws of reciprocity dictated that Leo now assist Lothar's man. The pope thus received Waltbert kindly and agreed to offer him the remains of St Alexander, a second-century martyr. Following the solemnities that encompassed such an exchange, Waltbert took his leave and returned to Saxony, stopping at various towns and monasteries on the way.³ He eventually reached Wildeshausen, where the holy corpse was solemnly reinterred.

¹ They survive in the *Translatio s. Alexandri*, ed. Krusch (Göttingen, 1933), c. 4, pp. 428-29.

² H. Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen im 9. Jahrhundert. Über Kommunikation, Mobilität und Öffentlichkeit im Frühmittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2002), pp. 243-45.

³ For the itinerary, Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen*, pp. 304-15.

At some point after Waltbert's return from Rome in 851, the Saxon count approached the Frankish monastery of Fulda for a so-called 'Translationsbericht', a written account of the relics' transfer and the miraculous events surrounding it. Waltbert's motives for approaching Fulda, rather than the nearby Saxon monastery of Corvey, are uncertain. Possibly, Waltbert had become acquainted with monks from Fulda in Rome or during his return trip. He may also have been unwilling to approach Corvey, which belonged to the sphere of influence of the Ecbertiner, a rival Saxon family.⁴ Either way, Fulda accepted Waltbert's request. The task was taken up by none other than Rudolf (d. 865), the head of Fulda's scriptorium and a renowned hagiographer.⁵ Rudolf, however, was already getting on in years at that point, and died before finishing the project. It was temporarily put on hold, before it was picked up by Rudolf's student Meginhart, who finished it somewhere between 865 and 888.⁶ By the time of Rudolf's death, the old monk had only written an introductory section of the text. This introduction had the format of a short history of the Saxons from their earliest origins to their subjugation and conversion by the Frankish king Charlemagne (d. 814).⁷ Though it covers no more than four pages in a modern edition, Rudolf's history is nowadays considered one of the primary sources about the Continental Saxons. This is largely due to the fact that his text is the earliest of its sort to survive. The Saxons were mentioned in writing as early as the second century AD, yet the ninth-century Frankish monk was the first to offer them a history.

⁴ See below, chapter 5.

⁵ For an overview of Rudolf's work, H. Löwe, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter. Vorzeit und Karolinger*, VI (Weimar, 1990), pp. 709-14. For more recent studies of Rudolf's work, see J. Raaijmakers, *The Making of the Monastic Community of Fulda, c.744-c.900* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 218-39 and B. Yorke, 'Rudolf of Fulda's *Vita S. Leobae*: Hagiography and Historical Reality', in H. Sauer and J. Story (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent* (Tempe, 2011), pp. 199-216.

⁶ As evinced by the introductory letter attached to the text, *Translatio s. Alexandri*, p. 436.

⁷ But see, E. Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817 – 876* (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 178-79, who assumes that Rudolf composed his history independently of Waltbert's request, but that Meginhart subsequently incorporated the work in the *Translatio s. Alexandri*. Apart from ignoring the introductory letter, this assumption also fails to explain why Rudolf's history concludes with the baptism of the Saxon rebel leader Widukind, Waltbert's grandfather. See also chapter 5.

Like most early medieval origin stories, Rudolf's history starts with a migration: 'The Saxon people, as ancient tradition recounts, broke away from the Angles, the inhabitants of Britain. They sailed across the ocean, driven to the coasts of Germania by the need to find a dwelling-place, and landed at a place called Haduloha'.⁸ Following their arrival in Germania, the Saxons were caught up in a conflict between the Frankish king Thioteric and his Thuringian son-in-law Irminfrid. The Frankish king decided to enlist the Saxon newcomers in his army, in exchange for land to settle on. With Saxon help, the Frankish king crushed his Thuringian adversaries, and handed their land over to the Saxons as promised. Thus, the Saxons came to be settled in Germania. Their southern neighbours were the Franks and surviving Thuringians, to the North their land bordered on the 'savage peoples' of the Northmen, to the East lived the Obodrites, and to the West the Frisians. Although they were surrounded by other peoples, the Saxons were hesitant to intermarry, endeavouring instead 'to make a particular and pure people, similar only to itself'.⁹ Hence the fact that all Saxons came to share a similar appearance, body size and hair colour. This rigidity also extended into their social organisation. The Saxon people was divided in four 'orders': nobles, freemen, freedmen, and slaves. Intermarriage between orders was forbidden by law, on pain of death.

Rudolf goes on to list many other Saxon customs, all of which contribute to the image of a noble people with a single unhappy flaw:

They used the best laws for the punishment of criminals. And they took care to include among their upright customs many useful practises that were in accordance with natural law. These could have helped them obtain true

⁸ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 1, p. 423: Saxonum gens, sicut tradit antiquitas, ab Anglis Britanniae incolis egressa, per Oceanum navigans Germaniae litoribus studio et necessitate quaerendarum sedium appulsa est in loco, qui vocatur Haduloha...

⁹ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 1, p. 424: Generis quoque ac nobilitatis suae providissimam curam habentes, nec facile ullis aliarum gentium vel sibi inferiorum conubiis infecti, propriam et sinceram et tantum sui similem gentem facere conati sunt.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

blessedness, had they not been ignorant of their Creator and adverse to the truth of worshipping Him.¹⁰

The Saxons were not Christians. Instead, they worshipped false divinities like Mercury, to whom they occasionally sacrificed humans. They also consecrated trees and groves, and practiced various forms of divination. They cast twigs, interpreted the flight-patterns of birds and consulted the neighing of horses. This situation changed when the Saxons entered a conflict with their former allies, the Franks. Following a border dispute, the Frankish king Charlemagne decided to wage a war against his Saxon neighbours, which lasted over three decades. In the end, Charlemagne prevailed and the Saxons were incorporated into his realm. They agreed to abandon their ancestral ceremonies, accept the Christian faith, and be united with the Franks ‘into a single people’. Bishops and priests were appointed over them, who instructed the Saxons in the faith and baptized them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Then, at last, the Saxons became part of the ‘people of God’, to whom they belong until ‘the present day’.

Few historians today would take Rudolf’s rendition of Saxon history at face value.¹¹ At several key points, his narrative deviates from how modern scholarship has come to reconstruct the early history of the Saxons. Arguably the most conspicuous deviation occurs in the very first sentence, with Rudolf’s

¹⁰ Latin translations in this thesis are my own, unless stated otherwise. *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 2, p. 424: Legibus etiam ad vindictam malefactorum optimis utebantur. Et multa utilia atque secundum legem naturae honesta in morum probitate habere studuerunt, quae eis ad veram beatitudinem promerendam proficere potuissent, si ignorantiam creatoris sui non haberent, et a veritate culturae illius non essent alieni.

¹¹ See for instance the introduction by Bruno Krusch, the most recent editor of the text, B. Krusch ‘Die Übertragung des H. Alexander von Rom nach Wildeshausen durch den Enkel Widukinds. Das älteste niedersächsische Geschichtsdenkmal’, *Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philol.-hist. Klasse*, 4 (1933), pp. 405-36, here 407-11. For more recent critiques, see M. Becher, *Rex, Dux und Gens. Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des sächsischen Herzogtums im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert* (Husum, 1996), pp. 31-35, I. Wood, ‘Beyond Satraps and Ostriches: Political and Social Structures of the Saxons in the early Carolingian Period’, in D.H. Green and F. Siegmund (eds.), *The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century: an Ethnographic Perspective* (San Marino, 2003), pp. 271-297, here 280-82 and M. Springer, *Die Sachsen* (Stuttgart, 2004), pp. 63-65.

assertion that the Saxons migrated to Germania from Britain. Late antiquity indeed witnessed migrations across the Channel, but mainly in the other direction. During the fourth and fifth centuries, members of various continental groups, including the Saxons, moved across the Channel to the Isles. By Rudolf's time, the inhabitants of the Isles had come to be known as 'Angles' (*Angli*) or, less commonly, 'Anglo-Saxons' (*Angli Saxones*).¹² That Rudolf had the Saxons migrate away from the Angles to the Continent instead was not a mistake. It was a conscious literary decision. An arrival from the sea was an acceptable origin story for an early medieval people, and it made for a clear-cut beginning to an otherwise obscure past.¹³ Moreover, it allowed Rudolf to present the Saxons as the newcomers on the Continent and the Franks as their senior allies, foreshadowing, as it were, the ninth-century situation, in which the Saxons were under Frankish rule.¹⁴ This is not the only time we find Rudolf projecting contemporary realities back into the past. His list of neighbouring peoples – Franks, Thuringians, Northmen, Abodrites and Frisians – was a remarkably accurate reconstruction of the political landscape of his own times. That the Northmen were singled out as *gentes ferocissimas*, most savage peoples, testifies to Rudolf's familiarity with the Viking raids on the Frankish coasts in the 850s and 860s. His assertion that the Saxons were as of old divided in four distinct classes – nobles, freemen, freedmen and slaves – and that intermarriage between these classes was punishable by death, also had a ninth-century pedigree. Saxon incorporation into the Frankish realm had resulted in a sharpening of social distinctions among the Saxon population.¹⁵ In 841, tensions had come to a head when marginalized Saxon groups had risen

¹² For the development of the terminology, see P.C. Wormald, 'Bede, the Bretwaldas and the Origins of the *gens Anglorum*', in Wormald, D.A. Bullough and R. Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society. Studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99-129. See also S. Reynolds, 'What Do We Mean by "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxons"?', *Journal of British Studies*, 24 (1985), pp. 395-414.

¹³ A. Plassmann, *Origo gentis: Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen* (Berlin, 2006), pp. 360-61 and R. Wenskus, 'Sachsen-Angelsachsen-Thüringer', in W. Lammers, *Entstehung und Verfassung des Sachsenstammes* (Darmstadt, 1967), pp. 483-545, here 503-504.

¹⁴ Becher, *Rex*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁵ See chapter 5.

against the Saxon ruling elite.¹⁶ This so-called Stellinga Revolt had been put down by 843, mainly through a Carolingian intervention. The revolt ensured, however, that in the subsequent decades, (elite) commentators started to emphasise the significance of Saxon class division and began to stress its historical roots.¹⁷

Rudolf, then, was no so much resurrecting Saxon history from bygone times, as reconstructing it in the here and now. His was an idealized version of the Saxon past, which was meant to foreshadow and legitimize the Saxons' current condition as Christian subjects of the Frankish kings. The constructed nature of Rudolf's story is nowhere more evident than in his portrayal of Saxon physical traits and customs. This was not a picture based on experience or inquiry among his Saxon acquaintances like Walbert. Nearly everything he said on this topic, from the Saxons' large bodies and reluctance to intermarry, to their worship of Mercury and fondness for divination, derived from the first-century Roman historian Tacitus.¹⁸ Tacitus, now, had never written a word about Saxons, but he did compose an ethnography of the peoples of Germania. This treatise is notorious among classicists for being in essence an attempt at criticism by contrast: Tacitus offered fanciful descriptions of noble barbarians and their honest customs to reproach the moral degeneracy of his own Roman society.¹⁹ It was not, and was not meant to be, an objective study of 'Germanic'

¹⁶ C. Wickham, 'Space and Society in Early Medieval Peasant Conflicts', in *Uomo e spazio nell'alto Medioevo* (Spoleto, 2003), pp. 551-85, here 569-71 and E.J. Goldberg, 'Popular Revolt, Dynastic Politics and Aristocratic Factionalism in the Early Middle Ages: The Saxon "Stellinga" Reconsidered', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), pp. 467-501.

¹⁷ I. Rembold, 'The Politics of Christianization in Carolingian Saxony', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2014, pp. 76-116.

¹⁸ Tacitus, *Germania* (= *de origine et situ Germanorum*), ed. J.G.C. Anderson (Oxford, 1961), cc. 4, 9-10. For Rudolf's use of Tacitus, see V. Huth, 'Die karolingische Entdeckung "Deutschlands", Tacitus' "Germania" und die Archäologie des Wissens im 9. Jahrhundert', in U. Ludwig and T. Schilp (eds.), *Nomen et fraternitas. Festschrift für Dieter Geuenich zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 625-644 and R. Schuhmann, 'tamquam oder quamquam: Zu Tacitus, *Germania*, c.4 und zur Überlieferung der *Germania* im Mittelalter', *Glotta*, 79.1 (2003), pp. 205-23.

¹⁹ For a critical analysis of this theme in Tacitus' work, with references to earlier literature, see E.S. Gruen, 'Tacitus on the Germans', in Gruen (ed.), *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton, 2011), pp. 159-178.

customs. Yet this was not what Rudolf intended either, when he took to copying Tacitus' work. It was of secondary importance to him whether the Saxons had really consulted the neighing of horses or used the best laws for the punishment of criminals. What he needed was an explanatory framework for their subjugation and Christianization by the Frankish king Charlemagne. Hence, he turned the Saxons into noble pagans, whose sole impediment to eternal blessedness was their unfamiliarity with Christianity. As Rudolf himself elaborated following his exposé on Saxon pagan customs: 'I have recounted these things, so that the prudent reader might perceive, from what darkness of error they have been delivered through the grace and mercy of God, when by the light of True Faith, He deigned to lead them to recognize His name.'²⁰

Rudolf's history brings to light one of the central predicaments faced by modern students of the late antique and early medieval Saxons. Judging solely from the quantity of the available material, the Saxons are a well-documented people. Starting with the Alexandrian geographer Ptolemy in the second century AD, there survives an impressive corpus of Roman, Frankish and eventually Saxon documentation about Saxons. Before the Saxon incorporation into the Frankish realm, however, this material suffers from two significant deficits. First, that none of these texts was composed by someone identifying as Saxon. Second, that nearly all of these texts treated the Saxons as 'outsiders' or 'others', who were somehow excluded from the authors' own society or 'in-group'. As a result, the early Saxons remain, in the words of Ian Wood, an ill-defined people.²¹ Roman authors treated them as a static, homogenous group active on or beyond the periphery of the Roman world. What little was said about their appearance, customs and political organisation was shaped by literary clichés and authorial prejudices. Charlemagne's Saxon Wars (772-804) initiated a shift in perspective where the Saxons were concerned. A thirty-year-long war fought on Saxon territory inevitably gave the Franks a clearer idea about the territorial dimensions of 'Saxony'. Frankish authors also became

²⁰ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 2, p. 425: Haec vero ideo commemoravi, quo prudens lector agnoscat, a quantis errorum tenebris per Dei gratiam et misericordiam sint liberati, quando eos ad cognitionem sui nomine lumine verae fidei perducere dignatus est.

²¹ Wood, 'Beyond Satraps and Ostriches', p. 286.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

increasingly aware of complexities in Saxon society, and started documenting Saxon sub-groups, social distinctions and the activities of Saxon leaders. The Saxons became still better defined in the second half of the ninth century, when Saxons started to write for themselves, or in the case of Waltbert, commissioned others to write for them. In 'Saxon' texts, the Saxons typically appear like a dynamic and coherent people. For the first time, authors also begin to write about the Saxon past. Yet as we have just seen above, such Saxon self-perception was very much informed by their contemporary circumstances. Post-conquest Saxony was profoundly shaped by the changes wrought during the Saxon Wars. Its inhabitants, and in particular the Saxon ruling elite, identified as Christian members of the Frankish realm, and loyal subjects of the Carolingian rulers. The pre-conquest period held little appeal for them. Indeed, for most ninth-century Saxon authors, the Saxon past began with their subjugation and conversion by Charlemagne, the episode that had given rise to their current situation. The few Saxons that did venture deeper into the Saxon past, needed Roman and Frankish texts to help them find their footing. Rudolf's work is a case in point. The first and only Saxon origin story to survive from the ninth century was composed by a Frankish monk, who drew on a little-known Roman treatise on ethnography to outline the beliefs and customs of the pre-conquest Saxons.

Research on this thesis started four years ago, in 2010. My initial object of study was the barbarian group known in the modern literature as the Saxons or Continental Saxons. What I ended up writing about, however, was not so much a people as an ethnic label: 'Saxons', or in Latin, *Saxones*. Shortly put, this thesis looks at written representations of Saxons in the Roman and post-Roman West. It specifically asks how these representations developed in response to the Saxon incorporation into the Frankish realm, when Saxons went from outsiders to insiders. One could argue, of course, that to study representations of Saxons *is* to study a people. In a ninth-century context, this is largely correct. Here, the term *Saxones* typically refers to (elite) members of a coherent group, living between the lower Rhine and Elbe, in what is now northern Germany. Yet

before the Saxon incorporation into the Frankish empire, this link is rather more tenuous, and it becomes increasingly so the further one tries to trace the term *Saxones* back in time. In the face of this uncertainty, it would be inaccurate to say that I study representations of the Continental Saxons. I study a label, which over time became increasingly tied to a people.

My decision to study representations rather than a people was born out of two considerations. First, I became aware that over the past few decades, early medieval ‘peoplehood’ or ethnicity has become a hugely contested area of research, for historians as well as archaeologists. The outlines of this ‘ethnicity debate’ will be sketched in due time. For now, it suffices to say that narrative strategies and textual representations have become increasingly central to the study of barbarian peoples. Second, I was inspired by a number of recent studies on the Saxons, which impressed on me the particular complications involved in studying this people, especially before the ninth century.

One of these studies was Matthias Becher’s masterful *Rex, Dux und Gens*, published in 1996.²² The title refers to the three phenomena that stand at the core of Becher’s book: the administrative organisation of Saxony under the Carolingian and Ottonian kings (*rex*), the establishment of a ducal dignity in Saxony under the Ottonians (*dux*), and the development of the Saxon people (*gens*) in the course of the ninth and tenth centuries. Becher’s underlying argument is that these three themes are closely intertwined and should be studied together. Changes in Saxon peoplehood can only be understood against the background of Saxony’s (administrative) integration into the Carolingian empire following the Saxon Wars. In fact, the effects of integration were so profound, according to Becher, that they initiated ‘a new episode in the Saxon ethnogenesis’, as a result of which the Saxons came to define themselves, probably for the first time, as a unified people.²³ Becher’s study raises an important follow-up question: if the ninth century witnessed the birth, or re-birth, of the Saxon people, what then can be said about the Saxons prior to their incorporation into the Frankish empire? This question was addressed by

²² Becher, *Rex, Dux und Gens*.

²³ Becher, *Rex, Dux und Gens*, p. 108.

Becher himself in three articles published in 1999,²⁴ and subsequently also by Ian Wood in a paper included in the 2003 volume of the *Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology* series.²⁵ Careful reading of the eighth-century source-material led Becher and Wood to arrive at a rather similar conclusion: that the pre-conquest Saxons were a fragmented people that consisted of several more or less autonomous sub-groups. The intensification of Franco-Saxon hostilities during the eighth century may have acted as a catalyst for greater unity among the Saxons, but even by the end of the eighth century it would still have been problematic to speak about a single Saxon people. One of the added appeals of this model is that it convincingly explains why it had taken Charlemagne's superior Frankish armies thirty-three years to subjugate their north-eastern neighbours: they were not facing a unified enemy that could be vanquished by means of a single decisive victory, but several Saxon groups, each of which had to be subjugated, and kept subjugated, separately. Another striking feature of Becher's and Wood's contributions is their rigorous re-assessment of the textual record and its reliability as a source of information on the pre-conquest Saxons. Both are reluctant to use post-conquest texts as windows on pre-conquest Saxon society, a practice that has long characterized modern *Sachsenforschung*. But pre-conquest texts did not escape close scrutiny either. How well could Roman authors really distinguish between Franks and Saxons? (not very well, according

²⁴ M. Becher, "Non enim habent regem idem Antiqui Saxones ..." Verfassung und Ethnogenese in Sachsen während des 8. Jahrhunderts', in J. Jarnut, M. Wemhoff and H.-J. Häßler (eds.), *Sachsen und Franken in Westfalen*, Studien zur Sachsenforschung 12 (Oldenburg, 1999), pp. 1-31; M. Becher, 'Die Sachsen im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert. Verfassung und Ethnogenese', in C. Stiegemann and M. Wemhoff (eds.), *799 – Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit* (Mainz, 1999), 1, pp. 188-194; M. Becher, 'Sachsen vom 6. bis 8. Jahrhundert: Nebenland des Frankenreiches', in F. Both and H. Aouni (eds.), *Über allen Fronten. Nordwestdeutschland zwischen Augustus und Karl dem Großen* (Oldenburg, 1999), pp. 145-161.

²⁵ Wood, 'Beyond Satraps and Ostriches', pp. 271-297. For earlier work involving Saxons, see I. Wood, 'An Absence of Saints? The Evidence for the Christianisation of Saxony', in P. Godman, J. Jarnut and P. Johaneck (eds.), *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung: Das Epos "Karolus Magnus et Leo papa" und der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799* (Berlin, 2002), pp. 335-352, I. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (Harlow, 2001), I. Wood, 'The Channel from the 4th to the 7th centuries AD', in S. McGrail (ed.), *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons. Papers Presented to a Conference at Oxford in November 1988* (London, 1990), pp. 93-99.

to Wood).²⁶ And can we simply assume that the various Saxon sub-groups listed by Frankish historians represented long-standing Saxon entities? (we cannot, according to Becher).²⁷

Another scholar who took a critical look at the written material on the early Saxons is Matthias Springer.²⁸ A recurring theme in his work is the fluidity of the term *Saxones*, especially in the Roman textual record. Between the second and fifth century AD, we are offered diverging geographical locations for the group(s) described as *Saxones*. This could and has been read as evidence that during that period, the Saxons, or at least certain Saxons, moved south-westwards from the Elbe region towards Gaul and the British Isles.²⁹ Springer, however, argues that in late antique writing, the term *Saxones* did not necessarily refer to an ethnic group. Roman authors, he suggests, often used *Saxones* as a generic term for coastal raiders, much like ninth-century authors would come to use the term ‘Northmen’.³⁰ In fact, the term *Saxones* should only be taken to refer to ‘real’ Saxons when it is used in relation to groups north-east of the Rhine, where the Saxon were located in Charlemagne’s time. In other cases, the term denotes ethnically heterogeneous pirates or Anglo-Saxons.³¹ Springer’s argument is not without complications. For one, his neat categorisation of the various meanings of the term *Saxones* (pirates, Anglo-Saxons, real Saxons) is a modern one. He does not stop to ask whether late antique authors themselves perceived *Saxones* to be a fluid term that could at once denote an ethnic group and ethnically heterogeneous pirates (we will see below that many did not). On a different level, one may wonder whether

²⁶ Wood, ‘Beyond Satraps and Ostriches’, p. 271. See also Wood, ‘The Channel’, pp. 95-6.

²⁷ Becher, “Non enim habent regem”, pp. 19-23.

²⁸ M. Springer, ‘Alte Sachsen und neue Sachsen?’, in B. Ludowici and H. Pöppelmann (eds.), *Das Miteinander, Nebeneinander und Gegeneinander von Kulturen* (Stuttgart, 2011), pp. 183-188; M. Springer, ‘Die Einteilung des alten Sachsens’, in P. Nitschke and M. Feuerle (eds.), *Imperium et comitatus. Das Reich und die Region* (Frankfurt a. M., 2009), pp. 131-148; M. Springer, *Die Sachsen* (2004); M. Springer, ‘Location in Space and Time’, in Green and Siegmund (eds.), *The Continental Saxons* (2003), pp. 11-36.

²⁹ See the map in W. Lammers, ‘Die Stammesbildung bei den Sachsen. Eine Forschungsbilanz’, *Westfälische Forschungen*, 10 (1957), pp. 25-57, here pp. 35-36.

³⁰ Springer, ‘Location in Space and Time’, pp. 15-17.

³¹ Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 12.

Springer's *a priori* definition of 'die Sachsen' as a territorially defined entity, a group north-east of the Rhine, is not overly static and essentialist. That said, his argument that references to *Saxones* cannot automatically be taken to refer to members of a single, ethnically homogenous group is a convincing one, even though it seriously impedes our ability to 'know' the early Saxons.

Becher, Wood and Springer critically evaluated texts about *Saxones*. In the end, however, their main goal was still to use these texts as sources of information on 'the Saxons', i.e. the people. Texts were auxiliary to, not the objects of, their respective studies.³² One of the few authors to look specifically at textual representations of Saxons is Hans-Werner Goetz, who in 2004 published an article entitled "'Sachsen" in der Wahrnehmung fränkischer und ottonischer Geschichtsschreiber'.³³ Goetz investigates changes in the way early medieval historians observed Saxons. He looks at three aspects in particular: the frequency with which early medieval historians spoke about Saxons, the connotations they attached to Saxons (enemies, allies, subjects, etc.) and finally whether they defined Saxons as a people or as inhabitants of a territory. Goetz concludes that historians spoke most frequently about Saxons in the context of Charlemagne's Saxon Wars. The Saxon incorporation into the Frankish realm also initiated two further developments. First, historians began to look more positively at Saxons, whereas before the ninth century Saxons were usually depicted in very negative terms. Second, the territorial aspect of the term *Saxones* became more pronounced following the integration, culminating in the

³² The exception is Ian Wood's *The Missionary Life*, which, though not exclusively on Saxons, is very much text-oriented.

³³ H-W. Goetz, "'Sachsen" in der Wahrnehmung fränkischer und ottonischer Geschichtsschreiber', in Goetz et al. (eds.), *Vorstellungsgeschichte* (Bochum, 2007), pp. 391-408. First published in H. Seibert and G. Thoma (eds.), *Von Sachsen bis Jerusalem. Menschen und Institutionen im Wandel der Zeit. Festschrift für Wolfgang Giese zum 65. Geburtstag* (München (2004), pp. 73-94. See furthermore, H. Beumann, 'Die Hagiographie "bewältigt": Unterwerfung und Christianisierung der Sachsen durch Karl den Große', in *Christianizzazione ed Organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell'alto medioevo*, Settimane di Studio del centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo 28.1 (Spoleto, 1982), pp. 129-163 and E. Shuler, 'The Saxons within Carolingian Christendom: Post-Conquest Identity in the Translationes of Vitus, Pusinna and Liborius', *Journal of Medieval History*, 36 (2010), pp. 39-54. Both deal with representations of Saxons in post-conquest texts.

Ottonian period, where a Saxon could also refer to an inhabitant of the region of Saxony. Goetz sought to draw general conclusions about a period that spanned over five centuries. This led him to adopt a very cursory approach to the textual record. Briefly put, he asks *how* early medieval historians referred to Saxons, but not *why* they did so. The narrative strategies, authorial ambitions and political agendas of individual authors were not part of Goetz' analysis. In accordance with the title of his contribution, he treated authors as passive 'observers' of Saxons, rather than as skilful narrators who shaped and used Saxons to pursue particular literary and political goals.

This study opts for the latter approach. It does not just investigate late antique and early medieval writing about Saxons, but also the narrative, moral and political considerations that informed such writing. Its underlying assumption is that textual representations of Saxons can neither be reduced to mere observations of reality, nor to a purely literary discourse that took place outside of reality. Rather, such written representations should be interpreted as active attempts to cope with and influence reality. In a way, what we look at when we study late antique and early medieval writing about *Saxones* is an ongoing discourse on Saxon identity. The earliest surviving contributions to this discourse are by Roman authors, who perceived Saxons as outsiders, and shaped them accordingly. They cast Saxons as noble savages, agents of divine wrath or vanquished enemies that served to boost the military credentials of Roman emperors. At the same time, these authors were inevitably influenced by larger political developments like the political disintegration of the Western Empire, the loss of Roman military hegemony and the increasingly pressing 'Saxon' raids on the Roman borders. Frankish historians faced new challenges when writing about Saxons. How to legitimize Frankish military aggression towards their north-eastern neighbours? But also: on what terms to accept a former enemy as insiders and members of the realm? From the ninth century onwards, we have access to Saxon self-perception. Or rather, we have access to the self-perception of a privileged Saxon elite, whose members employed hagiography and poetry to re-invent 'the Saxons' as a Christian people under Carolingian rule. This also involved re-inventing a Saxon past.

It is this ongoing and active discourse on Saxon identity that I tried to capture in my title: *Defining and Redefining Saxons, 150-900*. The decision to leave out the article – Saxons rather than *the* Saxons – is deliberate. This is not a study of a single people. Rather, it is a study of a label, which may eventually have come to denote a people. Chronologically speaking, this study ranges from the earliest textual reference to Saxons in the second century AD, till the development of Carolingian Saxony in the ninth century. To stop at 900 is a practical choice, but not an arbitrary one. The early tenth century witnessed the disintegration of Carolingian rule in Saxony and the rise to power of the Ottonians, a local Saxon dynasty. As shown by Becher, Ottonian rule (919-1024) created a whole new playing field for Saxon identity formation, the effects of which can be traced well into the eleventh century.³⁴ This thesis draws the boundary before this complex development. It looks at Saxon self-perception, but only under Carolingian rule.

Today, looking into early medieval peoples like the Saxons is to enter a field of research that is short on certainties but rich in methodological complications and theoretical debate.³⁵ Yet this was not always so. Up till the first half of the

³⁴ Becher, *Rex*, pp. 108-109.

³⁵ The past five decades witnessed a steady stream of publications on ethnicity in the late antique and early medieval period. The following volumes offer a good overview of the various methodologies and theories currently in use: W. Pohl and G. Heydemann (eds.), *Strategies of Identification. Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2013); W. Pohl, C. Gantner and R. Payne (eds.), *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: the West, Byzantium and the Islamic world, 300-1100* (Farnham, 2012); T. Derks and N. Roymans (eds.), *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity. The Role of Power and Tradition* (Amsterdam, 2009); I. Garipzanov, P. Geary and P. Urbanczyk (eds.), *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2008); T.F.X. Noble (ed.), *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms* (London, 2006); H-W. Goetz, J. Jarnut, and W. Pohl (eds.), *Regna and gentes. The Relationship Between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003); A. Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2002); W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800* (Leiden, 1998). For more specific studies that had a particular impact on the debate, see E. James, *Europe's Barbarians: AD 200-600* (Harlow, 2009); G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge, 2007); W. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: the Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, 2006); W. Pohl, *Die Germanen* (München, 2004); P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic*

twentieth century, research into early medieval peoples was relatively unproblematic. Scholars regarded ‘peoples’ as descent-based entities, readily distinguishable from each other on the basis of a fixed set of physical and cultural traits, such as appearance and language. These defining traits were passed on unaltered from generation to generation, ensuring a people’s continued existence over the centuries. This model of peoplehood was thought to apply not just to the modern nation state, but also to the ancient and medieval world. The various ethnonyms (*Franci*, *Saxones*, etc.) encountered in antique and medieval sources were thought to reflect unchanging historical entities, whose movements the historian could trace through time. Thus, when Ptolemy reported on Σάξονες (Sáxones) in the second century AD, he was referring to the very same group that Charlemagne would eventually conquer in the late eighth century. In a similar vein, the pagan customs which Charlemagne sought to eradicate as part of his missionary agenda, were the same customs which the Saxons had already known and honoured in the second century AD.³⁶ Following the work of the German archaeologist Gustav Kossinna, this essentialist approach to ethnicity acquired archaeological validation.³⁷ It was already established practice among archaeologists to classify pottery, metalwork and other artefacts into different ‘cultures’ on the basis of typological similarities and differences. Kossinna argued that if the typological boundaries separating one material culture from other cultures were sharp enough, then that culture must represent the physical remains of a distinct people. By comparing this evidence with the textual record, it was possible to establish distinct material cultures for the Franks, the Goths, the Saxons and

Italy 489-554 (Cambridge, 1997); P.J. Heather, *The Goths* (1996); P. Geary, ‘Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages’, *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 113 (1983), pp. 15-26; H. Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie* (München, 1979), translated as Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, 1988); R. Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung. Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes* (Cologne, 1961).

³⁶ For a splendid example of such thinking, see the critical apparatus to the *Leges Saxonum*, ed. K. von Richthofen and K.F. von Richthofen, MGH Leges 5 (Hannover, 1875-89).

³⁷ G. Kossinna, *Ursprung und Verbreitung der Germanen in vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1926-1927).

many other peoples. This, in turn, allowed scholars to document the movements of these peoples prior to their appearance in the textual record.

Under the old paradigm, then, the existence of peoples such as the Saxons was accepted as logical and self-evident. Both the textual and archaeological record were treated as objective windows into these peoples' past. During the second half of the twentieth century, this theoretical framework unravelled completely. The unproblematic alignment between peoples, texts and archaeological remains became vastly problematic. The horrors of World War II had shown that it was a frighteningly small step from thinking about peoples in terms of biology and race, to championing the superiority of one race and claiming the inferiority of others. As a result, the post-war period witnessed a radical shift in scholarly thinking about ethnicity. Peoplehood was no longer regarded as a biological given, but as something that was culturally constructed.³⁸ By extension, peoples were not treated as fixed, unchangeable entities, but as dynamic groups, that could and did change over time. It did not take long for these ideas to find their way to the study of the late antique period. Previously, the focus in this field had been on documenting the movements of barbarian tribes during the so-called Migration Period (ca. 300-600). Now, scholars started asking after the origins (*ethnogenesis*) of these barbarian groups: when and how did they emerge as consistent entities, and what kept them together, if not inherited biological and cultural bonds?

A pioneering contribution to the debate was Reinhard Wenskus' *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*, published in 1961, but gaining real influence only two decades later.³⁹ Wenskus argued that the barbarian groups that figure so prominently in the late antique sources were in fact heterogeneous bodies of people, that changed constantly over time through absorption of outsiders,

³⁸ There exists a wealth of material on this theme. Important contributions include: J. Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam, 2006); P. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: the Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002), T.H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London, 1993), E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, 1992), B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Bergen, 1969).

³⁹ Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*.

assimilation with other groups and division into sub-groups. It was thus highly relevant to ask how such heterogeneous entities were able to retain a sense of collective identity, as seems implied by the continuous use of ethnic labels like *Franci* and *Saxones* in the textual record. Wenskus famously proposed the existence of a *Traditionskern*, a core of elite members within a group that acted as a repository of stories, origin myths and cultural values.⁴⁰ It was through such a kernel of tradition that barbarian groups could retain an overall sense of coherence and identity, even if new members were continually added. According to this model, a group like the Goths would thus have consisted of a relatively small nucleus of ‘full’ carriers of Gothicness, with a large, heterogeneous and changing body of peoples surrounding it, who came to share in Gothic identity but may also have retained previous allegiances.⁴¹

The *Traditionskern* model has been criticized as overly elitist and overly focused on ‘Germanic’ traditions.⁴² Yet Wenskus’ assumption that there was an element of choice to ethnic identity has become a corner stone of modern thinking on barbarian peoples. Walther Pohl has shown how weapons, clothing and names could function as ‘strategies of distinction’, by which members of one group raised ‘boundaries’ between themselves and others.⁴³ Patrick Geary has drawn attention to the ‘situational’ character of early medieval ethnicity.⁴⁴ A person’s ethnic identity was not inherently meaningful, but derived its meaning and importance from the context in which it was mentioned or used. In fact, early medieval individuals could boast several ethnic affiliations; it depended on

⁴⁰ Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*, pp. 52-82.

⁴¹ See also the introduction to Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 1-18.

⁴² In particular by the contributors to the 2002 volume edited by Andrew Gillett. See W. Goffart, ‘Does the Distant Past Impinge on the Invasion Age Germans?’, in Gillett (ed) *On Barbarian Identity*, pp. 21-37 and A.C. Murray, ‘Reinhard Wenskus on “Ethnogenesis”, Ethnicity, and the Origins of the Franks’, *ibid*, pp. 39-68. But see also the response in that same volume by Walther Pohl, ‘Ethnicity, Theory, and Tradition: a Response’, pp. 221-239, which offers a more balanced view on the merits and flaws of Wenskus’ work.

⁴³ W. Pohl, ‘Telling the difference – Signs of ethnic identity’, in Pohl and Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction* (1998), pp. 17-69. The notion of ‘boundaries’ was adopted from the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth, see Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), pp. 9-38.

⁴⁴ Geary, ‘Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct’ (1983), pp. 15-26.

context which of these affiliations prevailed. This point is illustrated by Patrick Amory in his detailed study of Ostrogothic Italy: ‘A soldier in Italy in 510 could belong to the Catholic Church, own tax-bearing property and speak the Latin language. As a soldier he could be called a “Goth” by the king, as a Latin-speaking tax-payer a “Roman”, as a member of the Catholic Church and an inhabitant of Italy, a citizen of the *imperium Christianum* [...] At different moments in his life, different labels would be of use to him or to the powers who chose to classify him in such ways’.⁴⁵

In the end, scholars had to concede that there existed few fixed criteria for early medieval peoplehood. Language, religion, law, appearance, customs and a shared belief in a common ancestry could all help define ethnic identity in the early Middle Ages. But none of these categories applied to all cases. Walter Pohl ultimately distinguishes only two ‘hard’ conditions for a group to define, or be defined, as a people. First, being distinguished through a specific ethnonym (Frank, Saxon, Goth, etc.). Second, the belief that ethnic identification is not a deliberate choice, but the result of certain ‘deep structures’. In other words, ethnicity *can* be consciously adopted, but it typically requires the illusion that it is not.⁴⁶

By the time Wenskus published his *Stammesbildung und Verfassung* in 1961, archaeologists were launching their own assault on the old model.⁴⁷ Kossinna had argued that it was possible to connect archaeological ‘cultures’ to homogenous peoples mentioned in the historical sources. As the amount of available data grew, it became evident that the archaeological record was rather more disorderly than Kossinna’s neat model of culture equals people allowed for. In many cases, the typological boundaries between different material cultures turned out to be less sharp than previously assumed. At the same time, artefacts associated with a particular people appeared in regions where that people had not been historically active. Thus, silver-foil brooches typically

⁴⁵ Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy* (1997), p. 13.

⁴⁶ W. Pohl, ‘Introduction – Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile’, in Pohl and Heydemann (eds.), *Strategies of Identification* (2013), pp. 1-64, here 3.

⁴⁷ For an overview of the development of archaeological theory in the second half of the twentieth century, see M. Johnson, *Archaeological Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, 1999).

associated with the Visigoths were found in the Middle Rhine and Middle Danube regions, where none of the written sources located them.⁴⁸ Either the written record was incorrect, or silver-foil brooches were not exclusively 'Visigothic'. On a more fundamental level, archaeologists started to acknowledge that the cultures in which they classified findings were not 'authentic' categories at all, but modern constructs, based almost entirely on physical appearance.⁴⁹ Such typological categories are useful for establishing a chronology of objects. Yet the (symbolic) meaning or value of an object within a society could also have been defined by non-physical attributes. Frans Theuws and Monica Alkemade discuss this in a 2000 contribution on sword-dispositions in early medieval Gaul. The swords which a Frankish king distributed among his followers derived their meaning not from their appearance (which may well have differed typologically), but from the fact that they were distributed by that king.⁵⁰ Grouping these swords into Frankish and Alemanic sword types, and reading them as 'signs' or 'statements' of ethnic identity, is to misinterpret their function in early medieval society. Apparently, then, being buried with weapons or jewellery of a particular type was not necessarily a statement of ethnic identity. Or to cite Chris Wickham (a historian): 'a man or a woman with a Lombard-style brooch is no more necessarily a Lombard than a family in Bradford with a Toyota is Japanese; artefacts are no secure guide to ethnicity'.⁵¹

⁴⁸ James, *Europe's Barbarians* (2009), pp. 113-116.

⁴⁹ S. Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity. Constructing Identities in the Past and the Present* (London, 1997), pp. 107-27.

⁵⁰ F.C.W.J. Theuws and M. Alkemade, 'A Kind of Mirror for Men: Sword Depositions in Late Antique Northern Gaul', in Theuws and J.L. Nelson (eds.), *Rituals of Power. From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2000), pp. 401-476, in particular 443-46, 466. For the plurality of meanings that could be attached to swords and other weapons, see also F.C.W.J. Theuws, 'Grave Goods, Ethnicity and the Rhetoric of Burial Rites in Late Antique Northern Gaul', in Derks and Roymans (eds.), *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity* (2009), pp. 283-320. On the relation between burial rites and ethnicity in early medieval Gaul, see furthermore, B. Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 2003), pp. 100-110.

⁵¹ C. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society 400-1000* (London, 1981), p. 68.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

While archaeologists were busy calling into question the link between material culture and ethnicity, historians were doing the same for the written sources. A turning point here was the publication in 1988 of Walter Goffart's *Narrators of Barbarian History*.⁵² The work offered a literary (re)analysis of four early medieval authors who each wrote a key work on barbarian history: Jordanes for the Goths, Gregory of Tours for the Franks, Bede for the Anglo-Saxons and Paul the Deacon for the Lombards. Though Goffart disavowed a particular interest in the ethnicity debate, his work had a profound impact on this debate nevertheless.⁵³ He concluded that all four authors were ingenious narrators, who used and modelled the past to pursue their own literary agendas. While they should not be dismissed as historians altogether, their value as repositories of genuine oral traditions and origin stories was, in Goffart's estimation, very limited. In the following decades, similar reservations came to be voiced with regard to the Roman textual record.⁵⁴ While certainly not lacking in detail and flavour, Roman ethnography and history-writing were fundamentally flawed as a window on barbarian peoples and their customs. At some level, every Roman historian from Julius Caesar to Ammianus Marcellinus indulged in generalization, misrepresentation, ethnocentricity and excessive moralizing when reporting on barbarian outsiders. Their reports tell us more about their own authorial agendas and the mentality of their (Roman) audiences, than about the peoples they purportedly described.

Authorial agendas are not the only barrier between textual representation and ethnic 'reality'. Another is the fluidity of ethnic terminology. Our main handle on late antique peoples are ethnic labels like *Saxo* or *Francus*. But the use of these labels appears itself to have been flexible and open to change. We have already looked at Matthias Spinger's comments on the use of the label *Saxo* in Roman texts. The problem, however, is not restricted to 'outside' witnesses. As

⁵² W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History: A.D. 550-800. Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988).

⁵³ See Goffart's remarks in the preface to the paperback edition of *The Narrators* (Notre Dame, 2005), xi-xiv.

⁵⁴ Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 40-55, Pohl, 'Ethnicity, Theory, and Tradition: a Response', pp. 237-39.

shown by Helmut Reimitz and Hans-Werner Goetz, the meaning of the term *Francus* in Frankish texts not only developed over time, but was also dependent on context.⁵⁵ In a military situation, a Frank could simply denote a military man (as opposed to non-military ‘Romans’). The term could be used territorially to denote the inhabitants of the Frankish kingdoms. By extension, a partisan author might decide to restrict his use of the term to the inhabitants of one particular Frankish region or kingdom. Thus, the Neustrian author of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* often used the term Frank to refer to the elite of the Neustrian kingdom, consciously excluding the Austrasian Franks.⁵⁶ Even when used in the plural to denote collective action, the term *Franci* could implicitly convey social and gender connotations: the Franks as the male members of the warrior elite. On a related note, it is worth repeating a point made by Janet Nelson on several occasions: in Latin, nouns do not take articles. *Franci* can refer to ‘the Franks’ but also to ‘Franks’ (i.e. certain Franks). This may seem a trivial difference, but it is all too easy to confuse peoples with representatives of peoples, or to mistake a raiding party for an entire people on the move.

All in all, it seems reasonable to conclude that collecting hard facts about early medieval peoples is rather more difficult than a century ago. No longer are such peoples treated as fixed, unchanging entities, whose movements, customs and beliefs can be objectively measured through the study of texts and artefacts. There is now a growing consensus that early medieval peoples were heterogeneous groups, whose composition changed over time. Membership was not an inherited given, but had to be performed, unconsciously as well consciously, through so-called ‘strategies of distinction’. At the same time, the importance of ethnic identity and ethnic distinctions varied according to

⁵⁵ H-W. Goetz, ‘Zur Wandlung des Frankennamens im Frühmittelalter’, in W. Pohl and M. Diesenberger (eds.), *Integration und Herrschaft. Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter*, Forschungen des Geschichte des Mittelalters 3 (Vienna, 2002), pp. 133-50 and H. Reimitz ‘*Omnes Franci*: Identifications and Identities of the Early Medieval Franks’, in Garipzanov, Geary and Urbańczyk (eds.), *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs (2008)*, pp. 51-68.

⁵⁶ R.A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford, 1987), p. 76 and I. Wood, ‘Defining the Franks: Frankish Origins in Early Medieval Historiography’, in S. Forde, L. Johnson and A.V. Murray (eds.), *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds, 1995), pp. 47-57, here 48.

situation: under Charlemagne, Franks and Saxons each had their own law code, but when the king issued regulations regarding church reforms, they were all treated as members of the *populus Dei*.⁵⁷ To complicate matters further, the textual record has been exposed as a capricious witness: less a window on ethnic reality than a distorting mirror. Texts composed by ‘outsiders’ tend to be prejudiced, ill-informed and moralistic. Texts composed by ‘insiders’ may be less hostile and better informed, but tend to be relatively late: the earliest Frankish texts derive from the sixth century, the earliest Saxon material from the ninth. Regardless of an author’s background, the equation ethnonym = ethnic group is far from self-evident. Depending on context, ethnic labels could also have political, territorial, legal, gender, social, and religious connotations.

Faced with such a formidable assault on old certainties, the student of early medieval peoples might feel destined for endless deconstruction and scholarly self-interrogation. This study, however, opts for a rather practical approach. It focuses on textual representations of the Saxons from 150 to 900 AD, but it does not treat this focus as a methodological strait-jacket that should be kept on at all times. Nor do I work from the *a priori* assumption that the ‘real’ Saxons are forever beyond our reach. When the situation presents itself, I am not above asking straightforward questions: what exactly did this author know about Saxons, who told him, and in what circumstances? Are we dealing with an arm-chair historian who never saw a Saxon in his life and relied exclusively on books? Or with someone like Gregory of Tours, who during his career as bishop hosted a Saxon asylum-seeker in his church and witnessed the public execution of several others? One of the benefits of looking into the context in which authors wrote is that such questions can often be answered with some precision. On a different level, it bears reminding that texts were never written in a socio-political vacuum. We have may dismissed late antique texts as objective windows onto reality, but they can still be read as attempts to cope with and influence reality. The fact that three late antique authors independently of each other decided to cast the Saxons as a scourge of God,

⁵⁷ J.L. Nelson, ‘Frankish Identity in Charlemagne’s Empire’, in Garipzanov et al. (eds.), *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs*, pp. 71-83, here 75.

indicates a shared intellectual outlook. But it also shows that Saxon attacks on the Roman borders were a real issue in this period, that pressed heavily on these authors' minds. Likewise, when Rudolf of Fulda ended his Saxon history with the statement that the Saxons were henceforth included in the people of God, he was not so much stating a fact, as voicing an ambition. He was inviting his (Saxon) audience to buy into a particular model of community: they were Saxon subjects of Frankish kings, but above all, they should perceive themselves as Christians in a Christian polity. What I offer, then, is a history of representations, in the implicit understanding that representations were never completely cut off from an actual historical context, however elusive.

This thesis consists of five chapters and is divided in two parts. Part I deals with written representations of Saxons prior to the Saxon Wars (772-804). It consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on texts compiled in the Roman Empire between ca. 150-500. In these texts, Saxons figure almost exclusively as barbarian outsiders attacking the Roman borders. Geographically, they are defined by the places they attack, rather than by any distinct area of habitation. It is doubtful, at any rate, whether these texts report on the movements of a single coherent people. There are indications that many Roman authors applied the term *Saxones* to any person involved in piracy in the area of the Channel. This is reflected also in how these authors report on the fifth-century continental migration to the Isles. Though scholarship now believes these migrations to have involved many different groups, contemporary authors generally referred to them as *Saxones*. The study of pre-conquest perspectives on the Saxons continues in chapter 2, which looks at authors working in the Frankish realm in the period 550-750. Their views on the Saxons are less static than those of their Roman predecessors. On the one hand, we witness a continuation of Roman literary traditions, resulting in the familiar imagery of the Saxon as barbarian outsider. On the other hand, there is an inclusive undercurrent to Frankish historiography. In Gregory of Tours's influential *Histories*, we see Frankish kings treating Saxon groups in Western Gaul as subjects and enlisting them in Frankish armies. Saxon groups east of the Rhine

also become the target of Frankish military ambitions. By the early eighth century, this split between western Saxons and eastern Saxons has largely disappeared in Frankish historiography. The Saxons have become a rather well-defined people, living east of the Rhine, that belonged, or should belong, to the Frankish sphere of influence.

Part II deals with Frankish and Saxon texts composed during or in the wake of the Saxon Wars. It consists of three chapters. A characteristic feature of the Frankish material is that the Saxons have clearly moved to the centre of the Frankish agenda, resulting in more detailed, if not necessarily more accurate, reporting. For many Frankish historians, the conquest and conversion of the Saxons was one of the great accomplishments of Charlemagne's reign. Yet it was also, in a way, a controversial achievement. No other war of conquest had inflicted so many casualties among the Frankish elite and so clearly challenged the self-evidence of Frankish military hegemony. Historians were desperate to explain why it had taken a divinely ordained king and his ever-triumphant army of Franks more than three decades to subjugate their pagan neighbours. Their explanations will be looked at in chapter 3. Another controversial issue was the Saxon conversion to Christianity. No one doubted that the Saxons should be brought into the Christian fold. But what were acceptable means to accomplish this? Was force a legitimate tool? Chapter 4 will re-evaluate the most important piece of evidence for Charlemagne's 'Gewaltmission' against the Saxons: his first Saxon capitulary, also known as the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*. It will be argued that this document, while indeed forcing Saxons to be Christian, was concerned not with converting pagans to Christianity, but with keeping an already converted people from betraying its faith, to king as well as to God. In chapter 5, the final chapter, the focus shifts from representations *of* the Saxons, to representations *by* the Saxons. It looks at texts written by, or on the behest of, ninth-century Saxons. It asks two closely related questions. One, how did these Saxons deal with their new-found membership of the Frankish realm? Two, what did they make of the three decades of warfare and bloodshed that had enforced this membership? Though most of these texts were produced after 850, the Saxon Wars still loomed large in such writing. It was a period the post-

conquest Saxons found difficult to remember but impossible to forget. For better or for worse, the ninth-century Saxons ‘owed’ their current circumstances to the events of 772-804. In such a context, the question was not whether to remember the Saxon Wars, but *how* to remember them.

Having set out the contents of this thesis, it seems fitting to conclude this introduction with a short outline of what this thesis does *not* contain. The amount of available written material on Saxons is vast, too vast to cover in a single PhD thesis. Therefore, I had to be realistic in choosing what to include and what not. One aspect I decided not to cover exhaustively, though not for lack of interest, is insular and Anglo-Saxon perspectives on the Saxons. In modern scholarship, Continental Saxons and Anglo-Saxons are typically treated as two distinct peoples. Before the eighth century, however, early medieval authors appear not to have recognised this distinction, at least not in their terminology: they simply referred to *Saxones*. It would have been interesting to pursue this line further, and ask how subsequent insular authors distinguished (or failed to distinguish) between these two groups. As it stands, I offer detailed readings of the two earliest and most important insular authors, the sixth-century Briton Gildas (who does not distinguish between Anglo-Saxons and Saxons) and the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon Bede (who does).

A second area in which I was forced to make allowances is the ninth-century ‘Saxon’ material. Linguists will notice the absence of the *Genesis* and the *Heliand*, two ninth-century works composed in Old Saxon. I happily refer them to the recently defended doctoral dissertation of Ingrid Rembold, in which she investigates these works and their reception and function in Saxon society.⁵⁸ The ninth century also produced several hagiographical texts on missionary activity in Saxony. Though they contain valuable information about the Christianization of the Saxons, most of these texts were produced outside Saxony. Moreover, much has already been said on this corpus by Ian Wood in his *The Missionary Life*. Therefore, my interaction with these texts is limited.

⁵⁸ I. Rembold, ‘The Politics of Christianization in Carolingian Saxony’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2014.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

What this thesis does offer, however, is a detailed analysis of seven centuries' worth of writing about Saxons. From the earliest references in the Roman textual record to ninth-century Saxon hagiography, Saxons were constantly redefined. This thesis maps this process. It explains why and how Saxons changed from outsiders to insiders, from pirates and pagans to subjects and saints.

CHAPTER ONE

The most ferocious of enemies

Saxons from a Roman perspective

This chapter deals with the earliest surviving reports on *Saxones*, composed in the Roman Empire from the second till the fifth century AD. These reports represent a diverse body of texts.¹ It includes historiography, hagiography, geography, panegyric, letters and administrative documents. There are pagans as well as Christians among their authors. Many wrote in Gaul or Italy; some worked in Africa or the Near-East; one resided in sub-Roman Britain. Naturally, these authors represent different timeframes and experiences. The Alexandrian polymath Ptolemy (d. ca. 168), arguably the earliest known author to mention Saxons, worked during the stable reign of the Antonines. It is doubtful whether Saxons had appeared at the Roman *limes* at this point, and more doubtful still whether Ptolemy ever met a Saxon himself. Sidonius Apollinaris (d. ca. 489) was bishop of Clermont when Gaul was already transforming from a Roman province into a post-Roman kingdom. His letters give the impression that he had firsthand experience with the Saxon pirates roaming the North-Sea; ‘the most ferocious of enemies’, was the considerate description Sidonius offered one of his sea-bound friends.²

In addition to these differences in outlook, we will come across different authorial agendas. Here, texts need not even be compared diachronically for

¹ For a chronological overview of all narrative references to Saxons in late antique sources, see Lammers, ‘Die Stammesbildung’, pp. 33-39.

² Sidonius, *Epistulae*, ed. C. Lütjohann, MGH Auct. ant. 8 (Berlin, 1887), lib. 8, ep. 6, p. 132: *hostis est omni hoste truculentior.*

discrepancies to appear. The Saxons described by Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) in one of his exhortative letters to the emperor Theodosius, are radically different from the Saxons sailing through the panegyric poetry of Claudius Claudianus (d. 404). Both men worked in late fourth-century Milan, Ambrose under Emperor Theodosius, Claudian under Theodosius' son Honorius. Yet each approached the Saxons with his own agenda. Claudian wrote for an audience that liked to hear about barbarians perishing at the hands of Roman generals. His Saxons, we will see, obliged handsomely. Ambrose, on the other hand, cast the Saxons as agents of divine displeasure, a scourge with which God punished the wicked, and with which Ambrose himself hoped to bully the emperor into altering his religious policies. The manner in which late antique authors treated barbarian groups like the Saxons was thus heavily dependent on context, convention and authorial intention. One of the foremost goals of this chapter is in fact to unearth the various motives that induced authors to write about Saxons and to present them in the way they did.

Though Roman authors came to depict Saxons in different ways, these depictions were usually a variation on the same basic type: the Saxon as outsider, someone who stood outside the community to which these authors themselves belonged. This status was reflected also in the terminology employed. Romans typically referred to their own community as a *populus*, a term that, following Cicero, could be understood in rather specific terms: 'not just any group of men assembled in any way, but an assemblage of some size associated with one another through agreement on law and community of interest'.³ The preferred term for non-Roman peoples, on the other hand, was *gens* or *natio*. These usually denoted a group or people based on descent, as is demonstrated by their etymological connection to the verbs *gigno* ('to bring forth') and *nascor* ('to be born') respectively. Here, according to Patrick Geary, we come across a subtle but important dichotomy separating Roman self-

³ Cicero, *De re publica*, ed. J.E.G. Zetzel (Cambridge, 1995), 1.39, pp. 53, 127-29: 'Est igitur,' inquit AFRICANUS, 'res publica res populi, populus autem non omnis hominum coetus quoquo modo congregatus, sed coetus multitudinis iuris consensu et utilitatis communione sociatus. For the translation, see Zetzel, *Cicero: On the Commonwealth and On the Laws* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 18.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

perception from how they looked at others.⁴ While Roman authors readily thought of themselves as a dynamic community bound by law and common purpose, they were hesitant to extend this definition to non-Roman peoples. With the exception of her cultural models (Greece) and ancient foes (Persia, Carthage), Rome's neighbouring peoples were typically thought of as descent-based and static.⁵ In so far as such peoples had a history, it began only when they came into contact with Rome. The term *gens*, then, could have rather negative connotations, especially when used in opposition to *populus*. In such cases, it typically denoted an 'outside' people or group. To be true, there was a great deal of ambiguity to Roman usage of terms like *populus*, *gens* and *natio*.⁶ This ambiguity was further exacerbated by Christianity, with its universal aspirations. Jesus' final instruction to his disciples in Matthew 28:19, for instance, were remarkably inclusionary: 'Go forth and teach all nations (*omnes gentes*)'.⁷ In line with such sentiments, a Christian Roman like Augustine of Hippo could speak about the people of God (*populus Dei*), a community of the faithful whose prospective members were the collective nations (*gentes*) of the earth.⁸ By and large, however, we will see that the authors dealt with below did not extend any sort of membership-status to Saxons. They perceived them as outsiders operating on or beyond the fringes of the Roman Empire.

⁴ Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, pp. 46-52. See also F. W. Walbank, 'Nationality as a Factor in Roman History', in Walbank (ed.), *Selected Papers. Studies in Greek and Roman History and Historiography* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 57-77.

⁵ For an overview, see J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (Chapel Hill, 1979). See also, E.S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton, 2011).

⁶ Thus B. Zientara, 'Populus – Gens – Natio. Einige Probleme aus dem Bereich der ethnischen Terminologie des frühen Mittelalters', in O. Dann (ed.), *Nationalismus in vorindustrieller Zeit* (München, 1986), pp. 11-20.

⁷ Matt. 28:19: euntes ergo docete omnes gentes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.

⁸ J.D. Adams, *The Populus of Augustine and Jerome: a Study in the Patristic Sense of Community* (New Haven, 1971), p. 54. See also the comments in Walter Pohl, 'Strategies of Identification', pp. 21-22.

1.1. Ptolemy and the second-century Saxons?

Arguably the earliest known text to mention Saxons is Ptolemy's *Geographia*, composed ca. 150 AD in Alexandria.⁹ Though first and foremost a treatise on cartography, the *Geographia* also offers a geographical account of the world as it was known by the second century AD. Unlike Tacitus, Ptolemy did not dwell on the customs of the lands and peoples he described; he merely recorded their geographical location. Σάξονες (Sáxones) appear several times in a chapter on Germania Magna, a section of the work that is notoriously difficult to interpret.¹⁰ Ptolemy locates the Saxons next to the Chauci, whom he places along the coastal regions between the rivers Ems and Elbe. From the Elbe onwards, up to the 'neck' of the Cimbrian (Jutland) peninsula, live the Saxons.¹¹ They also inhabit three islands north of the Elbe.¹² The Saxons are cut off in the North, on the Cimbrian/Jutland peninsula, by the Sigulonen, a group we know nothing about.¹³ Their eastern border stretches as far as the river

⁹ Ptolemy, *Geographia*, ed. (with trans.) A. Stückelberger and G. Graßhoff, *Ptolemaios. Handbuch der Geographie* (Basel, 2006), 2 vols.

¹⁰ Ptolemy, *Geographia*, II, 11, 11, pp. 226-7; II, 11, 13, pp. 226-7; II, 11, 17, pp. 228-29; II, 11, 31, pp. 234-35. For Saxons in the *Geographia*, see most recently, E. Seebold, 'Ptolemäus und die Sachsen. Mit Überlegungen zum Status von Namen im Materialteil der Geographie', *Beiträge zur Namenforschung*, 47 (2012), pp. 191-206. For the *Geographia*'s section on Germania Magna, see A. Kleinberg et al., *Germania und die Insel Thule: die Entschlüsselung von Ptolemaios' "Atlas der Oikumene"* (Darmstadt, 2010), pp. 21-67, in particular 21-22 for the problems related to this section. See also, F.E. Grünzweig, 'Gross-Germanien', in A. Stückelberger and F. Mittenhuber (eds.), *Ptolemaios. Handbuch der Geographie. Ergänzungsband* (Basel, 2009), pp. 305-11 and H. Reichert, 'Germanien in der kartographischen Sicht des Ptolemaios', in S. Zimmer (ed.), *Gerhard Rasch. Antike geographischen Namen nördlich der Alpen*, Ergänzungsbande zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, 47 (Berlin, 2005), pp. 249-84.

¹¹ Ptolemy, *Geographia*, II, 11, 11, pp. 226-27: ἐφεξῆς δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν ἀρχένα τῆς Κυμβριχῆς Χερσονήσου Σάξονες.

¹² Ptolemy, *Geographia*, II, 11, 31, pp. 234-35: Νῆσοι δὲ ὑπέρκεινται τῆς Γερμανίας κατὰ μὲν τὰς τοῦ ἄλβιος ἐκβολὰς αἱ καλούμεναι Σαξόνων τρεῖς, ὧν τὸ μεταξύ ἐπέχει μοίρας. For a possible identification of these islands, see Kleinberg et al., *Germania und die Insel Thule*, p. 40; H-W. Goetz and K.W. Welwei, *Altes Germanien. Auszüge aus den antiken Quellen über die Germanen und ihre Beziehungen zum römischen Reich. Quellen der alten Geschichte bis zum Jahre 238 n. Chr.*, Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters 1a (Darmstadt, 1995), p. 191.

¹³ Wenskus, *Stammesbildung*, p. 245.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

Chalusos, which cannot be identified with any certainty.¹⁴ Based on these landmarks, it seems reasonable to conclude that Ptolemy meant to locate the Saxons somewhere in modern Schleswig-Holstein, just south of Denmark and the Jutland Peninsula.¹⁵

Scholars disagree on what to make of Ptolemy's account. One obvious point of inquiry is how the Alexandria-based author knew about the regions he described.¹⁶ It is usually assumed that he had access, either directly or indirectly, to reports of a Roman naval expedition that took place in 5 AD.¹⁷ This implies that Saxons would already have been known at that point. Yet it also raises new concerns. First, it would suggest that Ptolemy's report on Germania Magna was outdated by more than a century. Second, it begs the question why that other Roman treatise on the region, Tacitus' *Germania*, composed ca. 96 AD, does not mention Saxons. Various solutions have been proposed to these predicaments. The most radical of these is by Ulrich Kahrstedt in 1934, who argued that our current reading of Σάξονες in Ptolemy's *Geographia* is in fact the result of a corruption in the manuscript transmission.¹⁸ Ptolemy, he argued, never referred to Saxones. Instead, he referred to Aviones, a group that was known to Tacitus, who located them somewhere on the Jutland Peninsula.¹⁹ None of the surviving manuscripts of Ptolemy's *Geographia* was copied before

¹⁴ See for the discussion on the Chalusos with references to earlier literature, Kleinberg et al., *Germania und die Insel Thule*, p. 36.

¹⁵ See also the map in Stückelberger and Graßhoff (ed.), *Ptolemaios. Handbuch der Geographie*, pp. 788-9.

¹⁶ Ptolemy himself claims to have relied both on previous scholars and on his own observations, Ptolemy, *Geographia*, VII, 5, 1, pp. 742-43. For his sources, see A. Stückelberger, 'Zu den Quellen der *Geographie*', in Stückelberger and Mittenhuber (eds.), *Ergänzungsband* (2009), pp. 122-33.

¹⁷ The expedition is recorded by Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*, 2.167; *Res gestae divi Augusti*, 26.2.4; Velleius Paterculus, *Historiarum libri duo*, 2.106. See also Kleinberg et al., *Germania und die Insel Thule*, pp. 22-23 and T. Grane, 'Roman Sources for the Geography and Ethnography of Germania', in L. Jørgensen, B. Storgaard and L.G. Thomsen (eds.), *The Spoils of Victory – The North in the Shadow of the Roman Empire* (Copenhagen, 2003), pp. 126-47.

¹⁸ U. Kahrstedt, 'Die politische Geschichte Niedersachsens in der Römerzeit', *Nachrichten aus Niedersachsens Urgeschichte*, 8 (1934) pp. 1-20, here 18-20.

¹⁹ Tacitus, *Germania*, 40.

1300. The earliest manuscripts are divided in two groups: Ω and Ξ.²⁰ The manuscripts in group Ω read Ἄξονες (Axones) rather than Σάξονες (Saxones) in many (but not all) cases.²¹ Thus a scenario could be proposed in which, at an early stage of the text's transmission, when manuscripts were still copied in Greek Uncials, a scribe erroneously rendered ABIONEΣ (Aviones) into AΞONEΣ (Axones).²² Faced with this unfamiliar group, later scribes could then have opted to amend AΞONEΣ into the more familiar ΣΑΞONEΣ (Saxones). Most scholars today reject Kahrstedt's hypothesis, on two grounds.²³ First, that Vaticanus Graecus 191, the sole surviving representative of the Ξ group and commonly considered the most authoritative manuscript, reads Σάξονες.²⁴ Second, that when it comes to Ptolemy's reference to the three Saxon islands above the Elbe (Ptolemy II, 2, 31), the manuscripts in the Ω group do not refer to Ἄξονες but to νῆσοι Σαζόνων, 'islands of the Sazons' (sic). For the original form Aviones to have been selectively rendered into Sazones, another set of highly unlikely scribal errors would have been required.²⁵ An original reading of Saxones, on the other hand, would have required only a minor error (ζ for ξ). On the whole, the most likely option seems to be that Ptolemy actually referred to Saxons.

The reason Ptolemy's references to Saxons have attracted such close scrutiny, is that the *Geographia* tends to affect how we can interpret later references to Saxons. Saxons are not mentioned again until the second half of the fourth century. We have to wait until the early eighth century for someone

²⁰ On the manuscript transmission, see Stückelberger and Mittenhuber (eds.), *Ergänzungsband*, pp. 10-119, with 22 for a stemma.

²¹ See the critical apparatus in Ptolemy, *Geographia*, ed. Stückelberger and Graßhoff, *Ptolemaios. Handbuch der Geographie*, p. 226, n. 5 and p. 234, n. 9 and Seebold, 'Ptolemäus und die Sachsen', pp. 196-97.

²² Kahrstedt, 'Die politische Geschichte', pp. 19-20.

²³ Seebold, 'Ptolemäus und die Sachsen'; H. Reichert, 'Ptolemaios', in *Reallexicon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 23 (2003), p. 586; Wenskus, *Stammesbildung* (1961), p. 74, n. 380. But see Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 27-29, who accepts the theory.

²⁴ Stückelberger and Mittenhuber (eds.), *Ergänzungsband*, pp. 13, 22.

²⁵ See Seebold, 'Ptolemäus und die Sachsen', p. 197.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

to once again locate Saxons so precisely in space.²⁶ The stakes, therefore, are high. Accepting Ptolemy as a reliable source about Saxons, offers one a potential handle on the geographically unspecified Saxons roaming the fourth- and fifth-century sources: they are attacking or expanding from their homeland near the Elbe. If Ptolemy is discounted, then the Saxons of late antiquity remain a more ill-defined group: raiders appearing at the Roman *limes*, sometimes from ‘across the Rhine’, but usually from the sea.

1.2. Saxons and Franks

Σάξονες are not mentioned again until 356, when they appear in an oration for Emperor Constantius II, composed by his nephew, the later emperor Julian (the Apostate). The reference is short and circumstantial, and rather typical of how Saxons tend to appear in late antique writing. Julian recalls how the usurper Magnentius, who ruled in Gaul between 351 and 353, received support from Franks and Saxons, whom he introduces as ‘the most warlike of the peoples (ἔθνῶν) who live beyond the Rhine and on the shores of the western sea’.²⁷ Julian adds that Franks and Saxons readily supported the would-be emperor because of their ‘ties of kinship’. This could be an attempt at defamation where Magnentius was concerned. The usurper’s alleged barbarian origins were an established trope among his detractors.²⁸ There is another noteworthy dimension to Julian’s contention, however. Apparently, Julian, who campaigned extensively in the Rhine region, considered Franks and Saxons to

²⁶ By the anonymous ‘Cosmographer of Ravenna’, *Ravennatis anonymi Cosmographia*, ed. M. Pinder and G. Parthey (Berlin, 1860), I, 11, p. 27; IV, 17-18, pp. 212-13; IV, 23, p. 225; IV, 25, p. 229; IV, 46, p. 324; V, 30-31, pp. 422-23. See for the Cosmographer, with references to earlier literature, K. Guckelsberger and F. Mittenhuber, ‘Überlegungen zur Kosmographie des anonymen Geographen von Ravenna’, in K. Geus and M. Rathmann (eds.), *Vermessung der Oikumene* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 287-310.

²⁷ Julian, *Orationes*, I, ed. (with trans.) T.E. Page et al. (Cambridge, MA, 1962), 34D, pp. 89-91: ἡκολούθουν δὲ αὐτῷ κατὰ τὸ ξυγγενὲς ζύμμαχοι προθυμότατοι Φράγγοι καὶ Σάξονες, τῶν ὑπὲρ τὸν Ῥῆνον καὶ περὶ τὴν ἔσπερίαν θάλατταν ἔθνῶν τὰ μαχίμωτατα. I follow the translation of the editor.

²⁸ For a recent assessment of this long-standing issue, with references to earlier literature, see J.F. Drinkwater, ‘The Revolt and the Ethnic Origin of the Usurper Magnentius (350-353) and the Rebellion of Vetricano’, *Chiron*, 30 (2000), pp. 131-59, in particular 138-45.

be related somehow. As it turns out, he was not the only author to link these two groups.²⁹

With Julian commences a series of historiographical and panegyric references to Saxon attacks on the Roman frontiers. Gaul is the initial target, but from ca. 380 onwards we also start to hear about Saxon raids on Britain.³⁰ Before looking at some of these reports in greater detail, it is worthwhile to point out several overriding themes that emerge from the textual record as a whole. One is the unwillingness or inability of many authors to firmly locate these Saxons in space. Ammianus Marcellinus, whose military experience in Gaul and Germania makes him one of the more informed and reliable witnesses, has been accused of consciously employing vague language to hide his ignorance of a Saxon homeland.³¹ His lengthy coverage of a Saxon raid in 370 certainly leaves the reader guessing. Saxons are shown to arrive at an unspecified Roman border ‘after they traversed the perils of the Ocean’.³² After several engagements with Roman defenders, they prepare to return ‘whence they have come’ (*unde venerunt*).³³ The early fifth-century historian Orosius does only marginally better. He introduces Saxons as ‘a people stationed among the coasts and inaccessible swamps of the Ocean, fearsome for their courage and mobility’.³⁴

In so far as commentators do associate Saxons with a particular region, this is the region they attack, rather than the region they set out from. Here too, though, Saxons are characterized as volatile, and for that reason, exceptionally

²⁹ Wood, ‘The Channel’, pp. 95-6.

³⁰ Chronologically speaking, the first author to refer to Saxon attacks in Britain is Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* (= *Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*), ed. W. Seyfarth, L. Jacob-Karau and I. Ulmann (Leipzig, 1978), 2 vols., 26.4.5, p. 9.

³¹ J. den Boeft et al., *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXVIII* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 231-33.

³² Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 28.5.1, p. 86: *Erupit Augustis ter consulibus Saxonum multitudo et oceani difficultatibus permeatis Romanum limitem gradu petebat*

³³ Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 28.5.4, p. 86.

³⁴ Orosius, *Historiarum aduersum paganos libri*, ed. M-P. Arnaud-Lindet (Paris, 1990-91), 3 vols., 7.32.10: *Valentinianus Saxones, gentem in Oceani litoribus et paludibus inuis sitam, uirtute atque agilitate terribilem, periculosam Romanis finibus eruptionem magna mole meditantes in ipsis Francorum finibus oppressit.*

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

dangerous. Ammianus, Claudian and Sidonius all remark on a Saxon tendency to arrive unexpectedly and to strike at a wide range of targets ('wherever the wind leads them').³⁵ As said in the introduction, Matthias Springer has taken this geographical diversity to mean that late antique authors employed the term *Saxones* not to refer to a coherent ethnic group ('Die Sachsen'), but to ethnically unspecified coastal raiders ('Raubscharen, die übers Meer führen und die Küsten Galliens und Britanniens heimsuchten').³⁶ This is a complex point. On the one hand, it can certainly be argued that the raiders referred to as *Saxones* were ethnically diverse, and that the composition of such raiding parties would have varied with the occasion. That is, the *Saxones* of the fourth- and fifth-century sources cannot be equated with a homogenous Saxon people. But we should be careful not to confuse *our* interpretation of Roman reports on Saxon raiders with how Roman authors themselves perceived things. For contrary to what Springer suggests about the background of these Saxon raiders, Roman authors tend to treat them as a coherent group. Orosius referred to *Saxones* as a *gens* – a descent-based people – and so did many other fourth- and fifth-century authors.³⁷

Another recurring theme is the continued affiliation of Saxons with Franks, especially in fourth-century sources. The two groups appear as neighbours (*confines*),³⁸ partners in crime³⁹ and even, in the case of Julian,

³⁵ Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 28.2.12, p. 74; Claudian, *De consulatu Stilichonis*, ed. T. Birt, MGH Auct. act. 10 (Berlin, 1892), lib. 2, v. 250-51, p. 212; Sidonius, *Epistulae*, 8.6.14, p. 132. The Ammianus reference has been contested on paleographical grounds by P. Barthelomew, 'Fourth-century Saxons', *Britannia*, 15 (1984), pp. 169-85, here 172-73.

³⁶ Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 46.

³⁷ Ambrose, *Epistulae*, ed. M. Zelzer, CSEL 82.3 (1982), no. 74, p. 69: a Saxonum gente; Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei*, ed. C. Halm, MGH Auct. ant. 1,1 (Berlin, 1877), 4.14, p. 49: gens Saxonum fera est; Gildas, *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, ed. T. Mommsen, MGH Auct. ant. 13 (Berlin, 1898), c. 26, p. 40: ista gente; Symmachus, *Epistulae*, ed. O. Seeck, MGH Auct. act. 6,1 (Berlin, 1883), lib. 2, no. 46, p. 57: desperatae gentis impias manus. See also Julian, *Orations*, I, 34D, pp. 89-91.

³⁸ Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 27.8.5, p. 47; Jerome, *Vita Hilarion*, ed. A.A.R. Bastiaensen (Rome, 1975), c. 22, p. 102.

³⁹ Eutropius, *Breviarium ab urbe condita*, ed. C. Santini (Leipzig, 1979), 9.21, p. 62; Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 27.8.5, p. 47; Ambrose, *Epistulae*, no. 74, p. 69; Orosius, *Historiarum aduersum paganos libri*, 7.25.3.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

ethnically related groups. Several sources also mention Saxon incursions into Frankish territory in the early 370s.⁴⁰ Ian Wood has suggested that Roman commentators had trouble distinguishing between Franks and Saxons.⁴¹ When fourth-century authors mention Frankish, Saxon, or Franco-Saxon incursions on the Roman borders, the raiders could in reality have belonged to any combination of these groups. Even when from the 390s onwards, Roman authors start to separate Franks and Saxons, and link them to their own specific spheres of influence, there is no guarantee that we can now trace the activities of two separate homogenous groups. Wood also pointed at another characteristic of Roman commentators: their tendency to project contemporary perceptions of ethnic groups into the past. A case in point are the pirates that invested the coasts of Gaul under the emperor Diocletian (285-305). Third- and early fourth-century panegyrists referred to these pirates as Franks.⁴² The mid-fourth-century historian Aurelius Victor called them *Germani*.⁴³ Eutropius and Orosius, writing in the late fourth and early fifth century respectively, characterized the third-century raiders as Franks and Saxons.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Jerome, *Chronicon*, ed. R.W.O. Helm, *Die Chronik des Hieronymus: Hieronymi Chronicon*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte 47 (Berlin, 1956), s.a. 373, p. 246; Orosius, *Historiarum aduersum paganos libri*, 7.32.10; Zosimos, *Historia Nova*, ed. F. Paschoud (Paris, 1979), 3.6.1-2, pp. 15-16. See furthermore, Barthelomew, 'Fourth-century Saxons', pp. 169-71.

⁴¹ See Wood, 'The Channel', pp. 93-97.

⁴² *Panegyrici Latini*, ed. E. Galletier, *Panegyriques Latins*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1949), III, 7, 2, p. 56; X, 17, 1, p. 180. I follow the chronological ordering of Galletier, rather than the manuscript order. See for commentary and translations, C.E.V Nixon and B.S. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors* (Berkeley, 1994).

⁴³ Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus* (= *Historiae abbreviatae*), ed. F. Pichlmayr (Leipzig, 1911), c. 39, p. 118.

⁴⁴ Eutropius, *Breviarium*, 9.21, p. 62; Orosius, *Historiarum aduersum paganos libri*, 7.25.3.

1.3. *Litus Saxonicum*

A special place in the debate on the late antique Saxons belongs to the *litus Saxonicum*, the ‘Saxon shore’.⁴⁵ *Litus Saxonicum* was the name by which the Romans allegedly designated a series of fortifications that adorned the coastlines of late Roman Gaul and Britain. Semantically, the term allows for two alternative readings: a coastline to ward off Saxons or a coastline inhabited by Saxons. Most scholars today incline towards the former option: a defence-line against ‘Saxons’, or more generally, against raiders from the sea.⁴⁶ This begs an obvious follow-up question: when was this coastal defence system, this *litus Saxonicum*, established and operative?

On either side of the Channel, there is plenty of archaeological evidence for the presence of coastal fortifications during the imperial period. Archaeologists have shown that Roman forts adorned the southeast coast of Britain as early as the first century AD, though their function is thought to have changed over time.⁴⁷ Up to ca. 200, their function was primarily logistical: they served as harbours and supply bases to the *classis Britannica*, the British fleet, whose main task was to secure and maintain a (military) supply line to the island. In the course of the third century, the Channel and its fleet came under increasing pressure from pirates and barbarian raiding parties. This led to renewed building activity on the southeast coast of Britain, aimed more specifically at defence: new forts were established and old sites were refurbished and fortified. Remnants of these defence works can still be found scattered along the British coastline, with some sites like at Richborough and Pevensey being particularly well preserved. While the evidence for the Continent is less

⁴⁵ For an introduction to the Saxon Shore, see A. Pearson, *The Roman Shore Forts: Coastal Defences of Southern Britain* (Stroud, 2002) and P. Bennet and V.A. Maxfield, *The Saxon Shore: a Handbook* (Exeter, 1989).

⁴⁶ Thus M.E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain* (New York, 1996), pp. 33-36 and J.G.F. Hind, ‘*Litus Saxonicum* – The meaning of “Saxon Shore”’, in W.S. Hanson and L.J.F. Keppie (eds.), *Roman Frontier Studies* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 317-24.

⁴⁷ Pearson, *The Roman Shore Forts*, pp. 47-66.

spectacular, it shows a similar picture: by the end of the third century, the coasts of Armorica were defended by a string of military fortifications.⁴⁸

There is little reason, then, to dispute the existence of some sort of coastal defence system. The problem, however, lies in the name: *Litus Saxonicum*. It is attested only once, in the final decade of the fourth century, when it surfaces in the so-called *Notitia Dignitatum*.⁴⁹ The *Notitia Dignitatum* is a list of all major civil and military officials stationed in the late Roman Empire. The text is divided in an eastern section and a western section. It comes complete with illustrations of each magistrate's insignia, as well as the insignia of the units and towns under their command.⁵⁰ Thus, we read how in Britain, a certain 'count of the Saxon shore' (*comes litoris saxonici*) carried responsibility for nine forts, each with their own unit.⁵¹ For Gaul, the dukes of the Armorican region and of Belgica Secunda are also listed as commanding fortifications *in litore Saxonico*, on the Saxon shore.⁵² The *Notitia*, it deserves to be underlined, is a notoriously complicated source.⁵³ It survives only in a number of mid-fifteenth-century illuminated manuscripts, which go back to a now-lost Carolingian codex from the late ninth century.⁵⁴ The text as a whole is thought to have been drawn up ca. 395, but the western section probably continued to be updated until ca. 430.⁵⁵ Old and outdated information appears not to have been removed, however, making it difficult to ascribe the section on the *litus Saxonicum* to a particular date. Indeed, it is quite possible that the command of the Saxon

⁴⁸ Pearson, *The Roman Shore Forts*, p. 64.

⁴⁹ For a concise introduction, see the lemma 'Notitia Dignitatum' in the *EAH*, pp. 4814-17. I use here the edition by O. Seeck, *Notitia dignitatum : accedunt notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae et latercula provinciarum* (Berlin, 1876).

⁵⁰ On the illustrations, see P. Berger, *The Insignia of the Notitia Dignitatum* (New York, 1981).

⁵¹ *Notitia dignitatum*, II, c. 28. Most have been linked to existing fortifications on the south-eastern coasts, S. Johnson, *The Roman Forts of the Saxon Shore* (London, 1976), pp. 65-71.

⁵² *Notitia dignitatum*, II, cc. 37-38, pp. 204-208.

⁵³ M. Kulikowski, 'The "Notitia Dignitatum" as a Historical Source', *Historia*, 49 (2000), pp. 358-77. See also the conclusion in R. O'Hara, 'An Assessment of the *Notitia Dignitatum* as a Historical Source for the Late Roman Bureaucracy', unpublished doctoral dissertation, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2013, pp. 199-201.

⁵⁴ For the manuscript transmission, M.D. Reeve, 'The *Notitia Dignitatum*', in L.D. Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmissions. A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 253-57.

⁵⁵ O'Hara, 'An Assessment of the *Notitia Dignitatum*', pp. 17-34.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

Shore had already ceased operating by the 430s.⁵⁶ On a more fundamental note, it remains far from evident what purpose this document would have served. Traditionally, the *Notitia* has been interpreted as an administrative document that was somehow employed in the imperial bureaucracy.⁵⁷ More recent contributions also emphasize the text's ideological dimension.⁵⁸ The *Notitia* served to create the illusion of order, stability and unity in an empire where these things were increasingly contested. Following this line of thinking, the *Notitia* represented an ideal, not a reality.

All of this leaves us with little concrete information about Saxons. We know there to have been a coastal defence system and we know that certain sections of this defence system at a certain point carried the name *litus Saxonicum*, presumably after the raiders attacking the coasts. In the absence of other literary references to the *litus Saxonicum*, however, it is difficult to establish at what point the name came into use and how widely it was used.⁵⁹

1.4. Saxons in Britain

One final issue should be addressed before moving on to the individual agendas of late antique authors. This is the thorny matter of the 'Saxon' migration to Britain. That some form of overseas migration took place between the late fourth and late fifth centuries is widely attested in archaeological and literary sources.⁶⁰ From the fifth century onwards, material culture on the Isles starts to

⁵⁶ Wood, 'The Channel', p. 94.

⁵⁷ See for instance, D. Hoffmann, *Das Spätromische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia Dignitatum*, Epigraphische Studien, 7 (Düsseldorf, 1969).

⁵⁸ Thus P. Brennan, 'The Notitia Dignitatum', in C. Nicolet (ed.), *Les littératures techniques dans l'antiquité romaine* (Geneva, 1996), pp. 147-78. For a response, Kulikowski, 'The "Notitia Dignitatum"'.

⁵⁹ J. Cotterill, 'Saxon Raiding and the Role of the Late Roman Coastal Forts of Britain', *Britannia*, 24 (1993), pp. 227-41, here 231-32 and Wood, 'The Channel', pp. 94-5, who argues that the command of the Saxon Shore must have been created before the 406 rebellion of Constantine III in Britain.

⁶⁰ R. Prien, *Archäologie und Migration. Vergleichende Studien zur archäologischen Nachweisbarkeit von Wanderungsbewegungen* (Bonn, 2005), pp. 53-88; C. Hills, *The Origins of the English* (London, 2003); H. Härke, 'Population Replacement or Acculturation? An Archaeological Perspective on Population and Migration in Post-Roman Britain', in H.L.C. Tristram (ed.), *The*

show a number of conspicuous developments, especially in the southeastern regions. Burial rites, jewellery, clothing and settlement patterns take on novel forms, which can be linked to material cultures found in fourth-century Germany and Denmark.⁶¹ Such changes are generally held to be due to the appearance on the Isles of ‘Germanic’ migrants from the Continent. There is little agreement, however, on the details of this process, i.e. the number of migrants involved, the timeframe in which they arrived, the degree of violence that encompassed their settlement, and the fate of the native Romano-Britons in the settled areas. As it stands, the archaeological record can be called upon to advocate a scenario of large-scale migration and population displacement, but also one in which a small warrior elite came to rule over a largely indigenous, if rapidly assimilating, population.⁶² That said, the general tendency in post-WOII scholarship has been to move away from the notion of a swift, destructive invasion, towards that of a more gradual process of migration, the form and impact of which varied according to region.

A similar turn in scholarly opinion can be discerned with regard to the ethnicity of the migrants.⁶³ For a long time, debate on the topic was resolved within the well-defined parameters set out by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (c. 731). The *Historia Ecclesiastica* offers the first insider’s account of the origins of what the author himself referred to as ‘the English nation’ (*gens Anglorum*).⁶⁴

Celtic Englishes, 3 (Heidelberg, 2003), pp. 13-28; H. Härke, ‘Britten und Angelsachsen im nachrömischen England: zum Nachweis der einheimischen Bevölkerung in den angelsächsischen Landnahmegebieten’, in H.-J. Häfslér (ed.), *Die Wanderung der Angeln nach England*, Studien zur Sachsenforschung 11 (Oldenburg, 1998), pp. 87-119; H.F. Hamerow, ‘Migration Theory and the Anglo-Saxon “Identity Crisis”’, in J. Chapman and Hamerow (eds.), *Migrations and Invasions in Archaeological Explanation* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 33-44; C.J. Arnold, *An Archaeology of the Early Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London, 2nd edn, 1997), pp. 19-32. See also H.F. Hamerow, D.A. Hinton and S. Crawford (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (Oxford, 2011).

⁶¹ Prien, *Archäologie und Migration*, pp. 66-87; Härke, ‘Britten und Angelsachsen’.

⁶² Härke, ‘Population Replacement or Acculturation?’; Hamerow, ‘Migration Theory’.

⁶³ See the contribution in J. Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons From the Migration Period to the Eighth Century. An ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge, 1997).

⁶⁴ On Bede’s use of ethnic terminology, A.H. Merills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 290-306, W. Pohl, ‘Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles: A Comparative Perspective’, in Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 7-32 and Wormald, ‘Bede’.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

Taking his cue from the British historian Gildas, Bede claimed that his earliest ancestors been invited onto the island by the British king Vortigern, who needed their help against the native Picts and Scots. Gildas had referred to the continental immigrants simply as *Saxones*. Bede, on the other hand, asserted that ‘they had come from the three strongest peoples of Germania, that is, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes’.⁶⁵ He went on to link these three peoples to the various kingdoms that adorned the Britain of his own day. Each of these, he claimed, could trace its ancestry to one of the three Germanic peoples (Bede’s own Northumbria, for example, derived from the Angles).

Bede’s account makes for an appealing and clear-cut story. And up to quite recently, the story was taken more or less for granted: archaeological research into the cemeteries and settlements of ‘Anglo-Saxon England’ was geared mostly towards filling in the finer details of a fixed scenario of three separate peoples coming to settle in three separate regions.⁶⁶ But over the past few decades, this picture has become increasingly untenable. For one, the notion of three sharply distinguishable areas of Saxon, English and Jutish influence in fifth-century Britain does not hold up archaeologically: objects assignable to separate material cultures on the basis of their physical characteristics, all too often turn up together in one and the same region. Furthermore, fifth-century British soil testifies to a far greater diversity than just three material cultures: it also shows ‘Frankish’, ‘Alemenic’, ‘Frisian and ‘Thuringian’ influences.⁶⁷ That is, if one subscribes to the notion that there exists a clear and direct link between material culture and ethnicity, something most archaeologists today are hesitant to do. It is problematic, if not impossible, to identify a Saxon solely from the shape of a broche or the pattern decorating an urn.

In addition to such archaeological complications, there is the matter of Bede himself. Though modern commentators tend to treat Bede as the most

⁶⁵ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.15, p. 31: Advenerant autem de tribus Germaniae populis fortioribus, id est, Saxonibus, Anglis, Jutis.

⁶⁶ J.N.L. Myres, *The English Settlements* (Oxford, 2nd edn, 1986); F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1943).

⁶⁷ See Wood, ‘Before and After the Migration to Britain’, in Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons*, p. 42.

coherent and gifted of the ‘narrators of barbarian history’, there is an increasing emphasis on the fact that his origin story was in essence an eighth-century story.⁶⁸ The three centuries that separated it from the events it purported to describe, had witnessed the emergence on the Isles of an entirely new political system, known nowadays as the ‘Anglo-Saxon kingdoms’.⁶⁹ With it, had developed new loyalties, new identities, and inevitably, new origin stories; stories that, as Bede himself showed only too well, were firmly grounded in the present, which they were made to explain and legitimate. Given this tendency to reinterpret the past with an eye to the present – a tendency, indeed, we modern students of the *adventus Saxonum* cannot reasonably claim to be exempt from⁷⁰ – it is doubtful that the continental migrations to Britain had been as simple and clear-cut a process as Bede came to represent it by the eighth century.

This is a sobering and perhaps rather unsatisfying conclusion. The question inevitably arises whether the contemporary Roman textual record could be called upon to fill the gap left by this somewhat unceremonious dismissal of the Venerable Bede. For most part, the answer is negative. An insular perspective is absent before the sixth-century Briton Gildas, whose gloomy lamentations on the ‘arrival of the Saxons’ will be looked at more closely below. Fourth- and fifth-century continental authors do refer to movements across the Channel on occasion. But they usually seem to refer to raids rather than actual settlement.⁷¹ The first author to hint at a Saxon

⁶⁸ Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, pp. 51-84; Merills, *History and Geography*, pp. 229-309; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 235-328.

⁶⁹ H.F. Hamerow, ‘The Earliest Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms’, in P.J. Fouracre (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History. 1: C. 500-700* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 263-288.

⁷⁰ See D.H. White, ‘Changing Views of the “Adventus Saxonum” in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century English Scholarship’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32 (1971), pp. 585-94.

⁷¹ See for an overview of the written sources, H. Vollrath, ‘Die Landnahme der Angelsachsen nach der Zeugnis der erzählenden Quellen’, in M. Müller-Wille and R. Schneider (eds.), *Ausgewählte Probleme europäischer Landnahmen des Früh- und Hochmittelalters. Methodische Grundlagendiskussion im Grenzbereich zwischen Archäologie und Geschichte* (Sigmaringen, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 317-37. On the question of synchronization between continental and insular evidence, I. Wood, ‘The End of Roman Britain: Continental Evidence and Parallels’, M. Lapidge and D.N. Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 1-25.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

presence on the Isles is the late fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus. Whilst speaking of the shared reign of Valentinian and Valens, he characterizes their first year of rule, that is 364, as a time when ‘war-trumpets seemed to be sounding throughout the Roman world’ and ‘savage nations rose and poured across the nearest frontiers’.⁷² Roman Britain, too, fell victim to this upheaval and found itself harassed by no less than four *saevissimae gentes*: Picts, Saxons, Scots and ‘Attacotti’.⁷³ Three years later, in 367, Britain was beset by a *barbarica conspiratione*.⁷⁴ Historians disagree on whether this was a conspiracy by barbarians, or a revolt by the Roman garrisons stationed on the island, which in turn allowed barbarian raiders to go about unchecked.⁷⁵ Either way, the island is said to have been under attack by Picts, Scots and Attacotti, who were eventually repelled by the intervention of Theodosius the Elder. Saxons and Franks were also on the move, but kept their marauding to the coasts of Gaul.

The fifth century offers more reports on Saxon raids on the Isles.⁷⁶ A concise but significant witness is the *Chronicle of 452*, compiled in Gaul in the late fifth or early sixth century.⁷⁷ The *Chronicle* contains two entries that involve Saxons and Britain. The first of these, situated around the year 410, is a model of annalistic brevity: ‘Britain was laid to waste by an incursion of Saxons’.⁷⁸ The second, situated ca. 441, is equally succinct, but invokes a more

⁷² Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 26.4.5, p. 13.

⁷³ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 26.4.5, p. 13: Gallias Raetias que simul Alamanni populabantur; Sarmatae Pannonias et Quadi; Picti Saxonesque et Scotti et Attacotti Britannos aerumnis uexauere continuis; Austoriani Mauricae que aliae gentes Africam solito acrius incursabant; Thracias et diripiebant praedatorii globi Gothorum. See also R.S.O. Tomlin, ‘Ammianus Marcellinus 26.4.5-6’, *Classical Quarterly*, 29 (1979), pp. 470-78, who argues that 26.4.5 is only a narrative preview of subsequent invasions, including the one mentioned in 27.8.5.

⁷⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 27.8.5, p. 47.

⁷⁵ J. den Boeft et al., *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXVII* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 192-95 and Bartholomew, ‘Fourth-century Saxons’, pp. 173-77.

⁷⁶ For Claudian, see below, paragraph 4.5.

⁷⁷ R.W. Burgess, ‘The Gallic Chronicle of 452: a New Critical Edition with a Brief Introduction’, in R.W. Mathisen and D.R. Shanzer (eds.), *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources* (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 52-84.

⁷⁸ *Chronicle of 452*, ed. Burgess (Aldershot, 2001), p. 74: Britanniae Saxonum incursione devastatae.

definite feeling of loss: ‘Britain, which up to the present day suffered various calamities and misfortunes, is reduced to the authority of the Saxons’.⁷⁹ Whilst the chronology of these entries has been disputed, the underlying sentiment need not be discounted.⁸⁰ Here was a continental author who considered Roman Britain lost to its ‘Saxon’ invaders by the 440s. This testimony is somewhat at odds with that of another continental witness: the late fifth-century hagiographer Constantius of Lyon, who composed an influential *Vita* on the Gallo-Roman bishop Germanus of Auxerre (d. ca. 448).⁸¹ Among Germanus’ many memorable achievements, Constantius lists a visit to Britain ca. 429, in the company of Felix of Troyes. Though their original task was to battle Pelagianism, the bishops were soon asked by the Britons to aid them against an impending raid by Saxons and Picts.⁸² The duo turned out to be as effective against ‘enemies in the flesh’ as against ‘enemies in the spirit’:⁸³ after baptizing the British troops, they directed them to a strategic spot in between two mountain ridges, and ordered them to jump the passing enemy on a prearranged signal – a triple shout of Hallelujah. As was proper for men of such saintly stature, their guidance led to an entirely bloodless triumph: Germanus’ Hallelujah was taken up by the Britons and soon began to echo through the mountains, whereupon the Saxons and Picts fled in terror, believing that ‘not

⁷⁹ *Chronicle of 452*, p. 80: Britanniae usque ad hoc tempus variis cladibus eventibusque latae in dicionem Saxonum rediguntur.

⁸⁰ R. W. Burgess, ‘The Dark Ages Return to Fifth-Century Britain: The “Restored” Gallic Chronicle Exploded’, *Britannia*, 21 (1990), pp. 185-195; M.E. Jones and J. Casey, ‘The Gallic Chronicle Restored: A Chronology for the Anglo-Saxon Invasions and the End of Roman Britain’, *Britannia*, 19 (1988), pp. 367-398; I. Wood, ‘The Fall of the Western Empire and the End of Roman Britain’, *Britannia*, 18 (1987), pp. 251-262; S. Muhlberger, ‘The Gallic Chronicle of 452 and Its Authority for British Events’, *Britannia*, 14 (1983), pp. 23-33.

⁸¹ E.A. Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1988).

⁸² Constantius of Lyon, *Vita Germani*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. 7 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1920), c. 17, pp. 263-4. Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, pp. 39-54.

⁸³ Constantius, *Vita Germani*, c. 18, p. 265: superatisque hostibus vel spiritalibus vel carne conspicuis.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

only the surrounding rocks had come down on them, but the firmament of heaven itself.⁸⁴

Ultimately, then, the Roman textual record does not offer a grand narrative of the continental migrations to Britain, at least not of the sort provided by Bede. From a continental perspective, these migrations were mostly hostile raids on the British coasts and borders, which continued for over half a century, and involved various continental and insular groups. To be sure, *Saxones* are the most prominently attested group among the raiders, certainly when compared to Bede's other two Germanic ancestors – the Jutes and Angles – who are not mentioned in the contemporary record at all. It would go too far, however, to discount the archaeological evidence and conclude that the continental migration to Britain had, after all, been mostly a Saxon affair. Rather, we see that by the fifth century, *Saxo* had become the preferred term for sea-faring raiders across the Channel.

1.5. A panegyrist's perspective: Claudius Claudianus

Not all authors referred to Saxons simply for the sake of documenting their activity. In fact, most did not. As a barbarian threat, Saxons had various roles to play in the literary endeavours of fourth- and fifth-century Romans. Few authors refer as frequently to Saxons as the late fourth-century poet Claudius Claudianus (d. 404). Claudian spent much of his career at the Milanese court of Emperor Honorius, alternately celebrating his patrons in hefty panegyric, or lashing out at their eastern rivals in brilliant vituperations.⁸⁵ Barbarians were a set feature in both enterprises.⁸⁶ Claudian accused his enemies at

⁸⁴ Constantius, *Vita Germani*, c. 18, p. 264: Hostile agmen terrore prosternitur, et ruisse super se non solum rupes circumdatas, verum etiam ipsam caeli machinam contremescunt. Note J. Evans, 'St Germanus in Britain', *Archaeologia cantiana*, 80 (1965), p. 180 (as cited by Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, p. 42): 'what kind of victory was this, which dispersed a large band of savages over a peaceful countryside to burn, loot and murder as they pleased'.

⁸⁵ A. Cameron, *Claudian. Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970). For Claudian's poetry, I use the edition by T. Birt, *MGH Auct. act. 10* (Berlin, 1892).

⁸⁶ See P.G. Christiansen, *The Use of Images by Claudius Claudianus* (The Hague, 1969), pp. 76-83; H.L. Levy, 'Themes of Encomium and Invective in Claudian', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 89 (1958), pp. 336-47, here 343-45. More generally on

Constantinople either of failing to keep the barbarians out or consciously turning the empire over to their rapine and destruction.⁸⁷ His patrons in the West he measured by their ability to protect Rome from its external foes.⁸⁸ Where the material for a positive verdict was lacking, as was the case with the child-emperor Honorius, convention allowed the deeds of notable ancestors to be invoked.⁸⁹ Claudian's approach did not require lengthy exposés on the particulars of individual barbarian groups. Indeed, none of his references to Saxons exceed two lines of hexameter.⁹⁰ The point was rather to collect as many scalps as possible; to celebrate Theodosius the Elder, Honorius' grandfather, as a vanquisher of Moors, Saxons, Picts, Scots and Britons.⁹¹ Yet despite his limited interest in the Saxons as a particular group, Claudian managed to paint a distinct picture of them. First, he joined contemporary authors in associating them with piracy and attacks from the sea ('with the Saxon tamed, the sea is calmer').⁹² Second, he was the first author to exclusively associate them with the Isles rather than the Continent ('the Orkneys dripped with slaughtered Saxon').⁹³ Finally, Claudian was the first to fully disconnect the Saxons from the Franks.

Latin Panegyric, see R. Rees, 'A Modern History of Latin Panegyric', in Rees (ed.), *Latin Panegyric* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 3-48, with 33-34 for the element of military victories.

⁸⁷ A good example is Claudian's *In Rufinum*, lib. 2, v. 22-85, pp. 35-37, in which he accuses the East-Roman consul Flavius Rufinus of conspiring with the Goths, with disastrous results. See for commentary, H.L. Levy, *Claudian's In Rufinum: an Exegetical commentary* (Detroit, 1971), pp. 125-42. On Claudian's invectives in general, F. Garambois-Vasquez, *Les invectives de Claudien: une poésie de la violence* (Brussels, 2007), with pp. 223-49 on the use of barbarian imagery.

⁸⁸ P. Fargues, *Claudien: Études sur sa poésie et son temps* (Paris, 1933), pp. 94-120.

⁸⁹ See for instance Claudian, *Panegyricus de quarto cons. Honorii*, v. 18-97, pp. 151-53, which invokes the military achievements of Honorius' grandfather Theodosius the Elder, and subsequently of his father, emperor Theodosius. For commentary on this poem, see J. Lehner, *Poesie und Politik in Claudians Panegyrikus auf das Vierte Konsulat des Kaisers Honorius: ein Kommentar* (Königstein, 1984), pp. 21-37.

⁹⁰ Claudian, *Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii*, v. 218, p. 134; *In Eutropium*, lib. I, v. 392-93, p. 88; *Panegyricus de quarto cons. Honorii*, v. 31-32, p. 151; *Carmina minora*, no. 25, v. 89, p. 305; *De consulatu Stilichonis*, lib. 2, v. 255, p. 212.

⁹¹ Claudian, *Panegyricus de quarto cons. Honorii*, v. 24-40, p. 151.

⁹² Claudian, *In Eutropium*, lib. I, v. 392-93, p. 88: *domito quod Saxone Tethys / mitior.*

⁹³ Claudian, *Panegyricus de quarto cons. Honorii*, v. 31-32, p. 151: *maduerunt Saxone fuso / Orcades.*

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

These themes meet rather spectacularly in Claudian's panegyric on the first consulate of Stilicho in 400.⁹⁴ Halfway through the poem, Claudian conjures up a truly memorable scene: the provinces of the West, taking on human form, assemble at the Palatine Hill, to beseech the Goddess Roma on Stilicho's behalf.⁹⁵ Third to raise her voice is Britain, 'clad in the skin of some Caledonian beast, her cheeks tattooed, an azure cloak sweeping at her feet, feigning the waves of the Ocean':⁹⁶

Stilicho guarded me also', she intones, 'when at the mercy of neighbouring tribes, the Scot roused all Hibernia against me and the sea foamed to the beat of hostile oars. Thanks to his care I had no need to fear the Scottish arms or tremble at the Pict, or keep watch along all my coasts for the Saxon, who would come whatever wind might blow.'⁹⁷

With hindsight, there is an ironic ring to Britain's exuberant praise, as only ten years later, in 410, Emperor Honorius officially withdrew all Roman troops from Britain, leaving the Romano-Britons to fend for themselves.⁹⁸ It is unclear, at any rate, what exactly Stilicho did in the preceding decades to protect

⁹⁴ This is among Claudian's most oft-studied poems. See for commentaries, G.M. Müller, *Lectiones Claudiana: Studien zu Poetik und Funktion der politisch-zeitgeschichtlichen Dichtungen Claudians* (Heidelberg, 2011), pp. 277-312; C. Schindler, *Per carmina laudes. Untersuchungen zur spätantiken Verspanegyrik von Claudian bis Coripp* (Berlin, 2009), pp. 109-37; S. Döpp, *Zeitgeschichte in Dichtungen Claudians* (Wiesbaden, 1980), pp. 175-198; U. Keudel, *Poetische Vorläufer und Vorbilder in Claudians De consulatu Stilichonis* (Göttingen, 1970).

⁹⁵ Just one of many instances of prosopopoeia in Claudian's poetry, see Christiansen, *The Use of Images*, pp. 49-75.

⁹⁶ Claudian, *De consulatu Stilichonis*, lib. 2, v. 247-49, pp. 211-12: inde Caledonio uelata Britannia monstro / ferro picta genas, cuius uestigia uerrit / caeruleus Oceani que aestum mentitur amictus. I follow here the translation of M. Platnauer, *Claudian*, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard, 1956), vol. 2, p. 21.

⁹⁷ Claudian, *De consulatu Stilichonis*, lib. 2, v. 250-51, p. 212: 'me quoque uicinis pereuntem gentibus' / inquit 'muniuit Stilicho, totam cum Scottus Iuernen / mouit et infesto spumauit remige Tethys, / illius effectum curis, ne tela timerem / Scottica, ne Pictum tremere, ne litore toto / prospicerem dubiis uenturum Saxona uentis'. Trans. by Platnauer, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 2, p. 21.

⁹⁸ See Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, pp. 245-52.

Britain, or whether he actually fought against Saxons.⁹⁹ Yet regardless of the poetic licence Claudian no doubt employed to honour the Roman general, he offered a categorisation of barbarian enemies among rather strict geographical lines. Saxons belonged to the *gentes* attacking Roman Britain, together with Picts and Scots. Franks, conversely, belonged to the Continent. Indeed, it is Gaul, speaking second, who claims Stilicho brought peace to the Rhineland by subduing Franks and *Germani*.¹⁰⁰

1.6. Christian moralists: Ambrose and Salvian

Claudian referred to Saxons not because he was particularly interested in them, but because he considered vanquished barbarians an appropriate theme for panegyric. This ‘instrumental’ approach towards barbarians in general, and Saxons in specific, is evident also with several Christian authors of the period, though in a different form. Ambrose of Milan mentions Saxons once, in his first epistle to the emperor Theodosius, dated ca. 388/89.¹⁰¹ The events leading up to the letter are well known: at the Mesopotamian town of Callinicum, a Christian mob had burnt down a synagogue, possibly at the instigation of the local bishop. Thereupon, the emperor had ordered the culprits to be put on trial and the bishop to pay for the restoration. This ‘sacrilege’ was unacceptable to Ambrose, who called on Theodosius to retract his ruling, eventually writing him a semi-public letter of exhortation.¹⁰² Ambrose’s defence rested on a radical contention: a Christian polity should in no way facilitate non-Christian

⁹⁹ M. Miller, ‘Stilicho’s Pictish War’, *Britannia*, 6 (1975), pp. 141-45; Frere, *Britannia. A History of Roman Britain* (London, 1967), pp. 355-56. Ironically, Stilicho would himself be presented as a barbarian betrayer by Rutilius Namatius, *De reditu suo*, ed. E. Doblhofer, (Heidelberg, 1972), 2.41-60; see for an analysis of this section, O. Schissel von Fleschenberg, *Claudius Rutilius Namatianus gegen Stilicho* (Vienna, Leipzig, 1920), pp. 5-74.

¹⁰⁰ Claudian, *De consulatu Stilichonis*, lib. 2, v. 243-48, p. 211 : ‘Qui mihi Germanos solus Francosque subegit, / Cur nondum legitur fastis ?..’

¹⁰¹ Ambrose, *Epistulae*, no. 74, p. 69.

¹⁰² The circumstances are rather more complicated. At the time Ambrose wrote his letter, Theodosius had already retracted his ruling that the bishop pay for the restoration of the synagogue. See I. van Renswoude, ‘Licence to Speak. The Rhetoric of Free Speech in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Utrecht University, 2011, pp. 157-166.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

worship; in fact, it should not even extend to such worship the protection of Roman law.¹⁰³ This main line of argumentation Ambrose embellished with several auxiliary arguments and *exempla*, one of which involved Saxons. At a certain point in the letter, Ambrose reminds the emperor of the recent usurper Maximus (383-388), who, like Theodosius, had supported Jews after the destruction of a synagogue in Rome.¹⁰⁴ God's rebuke, Ambrose affirms, had not been late in coming. 'Thus he was immediately defeated by Franks, by the people of the Saxons, in Sicily, at Siscia, at Petavio, that is, everywhere'.¹⁰⁵ As with Claudian's remarks about Stilicho saving Britain, it is unclear to which defeat Ambrose is referring, and whether it really involved Franks and Saxons. He may well have mentioned Franks and Saxons simply as an established type of barbarian enemies.¹⁰⁶ Either way, Ambrose invited his audience to look at these enemies in a specific light: Franks and Saxons had acted as instruments of divine vengeance, sent by God to destroy 'an impious man'. Theodosius, the bishop cautions, was not to follow that man's 'unholy precedents'. Indeed, 'what damaged and caused the defeated man to founder, the victor must not imitate, but condemn'.¹⁰⁷ In other words, if Theodosius continued to defend the Jews, Franks and Saxons might well be summoned again.

Ambrose was not the only author who used Saxons to hector his audience. He found a worthy successor in the Christian moralist Salvian of Marseilles (d. ca. 475).¹⁰⁸ Raised in the Rhineland, Salvian eventually abandoned the frontier in favour of the monastic community of Lérins, before settling for good in Marseilles. There, between 439 and 450, he composed his most famous treatise,

¹⁰³ J. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan. Political Letters and Speeches* (Liverpool, 2005), pp. 95-6.

¹⁰⁴ Ambrose, *Epistulae*, no. 74, p. 69.

¹⁰⁵ Ambrose, *Epistulae*, no. 74, p. 69: Ille igitur statim a Francis, a Saxonum gente, in Sicilia, Sisciae, Petavione, ubique denique terrarum victus est.

¹⁰⁶ Though see Lammers, 'Die Stammesbildung', p. 36 and Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 38, who take this passage to refer to another Saxon attack on the coasts of Gaul ca. 388.

¹⁰⁷ Ambrose, *Epistulae*, 74, p. 69: Abolenda cum impio sunt etiam impietatis exempla. Quod illi nocuit et quod victus offendit, hoc non sequi debet sed damnare qui vicit. I follow here the translation by Liebeschuetz, *Political Letters and Speeches*, p. 107.

¹⁰⁸ For an introduction to Salvian, see D. Lambert, *Salvian of Marseilles: a Late Roman Social Critic* (Oxford, 2003).

*On the government of God.*¹⁰⁹ The work portrayed the Roman Empire, or what was left of it by the middle of the fifth century, in distinctly elegiac tones: a realm groaning under the weight of its own sin, fully responsible for its own impending demise.¹¹⁰ Main agents of this demise, in Salvian's opinion, were the barbarians, and in particular the Vandals, whose recent conquest of Africa (439 AD) pressed heavily on the author's mind. 'We are judged by the ever-present judgment of God', he exclaims at one point, 'and thus a most slothful people has been aroused to accomplish our destruction and shame'.¹¹¹ Yet for Salvian, the barbarians were no random instrument of divine punishment, as they had been for Ambrose in his letter to Theodosius. The realities of fifth-century Gaul led Salvian to arrive at a far more disquieting assessment: God allowed the barbarians to triumph, because he judged them more pious and less sinful than the Romans.¹¹² This was the case not just with the Vandals, who, after all, were Christians (if Arians). It applied even to the 'pagan' peoples Salvian had fled in his youth: Franks, Saxons, Alans and Gepides.¹¹³ For sure, these peoples were wretched, dangerous and deeply sinful. But as Salvian underlines at several points in his work: 'those who know the law of God and neglect it, are more guilty than those who fail to observe it through lack of knowledge'.¹¹⁴ Therefore, Salvian had no qualms about holding these peoples up to his readers

¹⁰⁹ Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei*, with 4.14, p. 49; 4.17, p. 52; 7.15, p. 95 for references to Saxons.

¹¹⁰ D. Lambert, 'Uses of Decay: History in Salvian's *De gubernatione Dei*', *Augustinian Studies*, 30.2 (1999), pp. 115-30.

¹¹¹ Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei*, 7.12: *Iudicamur itaque etiam praesente iudico a deo, et ideo excitata est in perniciem ac dedecus nostrum gens ignavissima, quae de loco ad locum pergens, de urbe in urbem transiens universa vastaret.* I follow here the translation, with minor alterations, by E.M. Sanford, *On the Government of God*, Columbia Record of Civilization (New York, 1930), p. 204.

¹¹² D. Lambert, 'The Barbarians in Salvian's *De Gubernatione Dei*', S. Mitchell and G. Greatrex (eds.), *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity* (London, 2000), pp. 103-116 and M. Maas, 'Ethnicity, Orthodoxy and Community in Salvian of Marseilles', in J.F. Drinkwater and H. Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul: a Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge, 1992) pp. 275-84.

¹¹³ Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei*, 4.14.67. For Salvian ordering barbarians into heretics and pagans, see Maas, 'Ethnicity', p. 276.

¹¹⁴ Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei*, 7.1.1: *magis peccare eos, qui scientes neglegant legem dei quam qui non faciunt nescientes.* Trans. by Sanford, *On the Government of God*, p. 189.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

like a mirror of sorts, contrasting their alleged flaws with the still greater excesses committed in Roman society, especially in Roman Africa:

I know of no wickedness that did not abound there [i.e. Africa], whereas even pagan and barbarous nations, though they have evil ways especially characteristic of their own people, still do not merit reproach in all things. The nation of the Goths is treacherous but chaste, the Alans unchaste but not treacherous; the Franks are deceitful but hospitable, *the Saxons savage in their cruelty but admirable for their chastity*; to conclude, all peoples have their own peculiar vices accompanied by their own good qualities. But among the Africans practically without exception there is nothing but evil.¹¹⁵

Scholars have wondered whether Salvian knew Tacitus.¹¹⁶ Certainly, the above passage reminds us of the many ‘noble savages’ roaming the latter’s *Germania*. The association should remind us to tread carefully. Presumably, Salvian was in a better position than most to have seen or heard about actual Saxons. And the fact that he repeatedly calls on Saxons in his work, suggests that he expected his audience to be familiar with them as well. Yet as with many of Tacitus’ fanciful descriptions of Germanic institutions and beliefs, the above assessment of the Saxons as a cruel but chaste people is in essence a moralizing one. It is an assessment not of the Saxons, but of Salvian’s own Roman society, which he presents as lacking even when compared to the most savage outsiders.

1.7. Gildas and the Ruin of Britain

Salvian was not alone in bemoaning the moral disintegration of (Roman) society. Laments of this sort could be heard throughout the late antique world,

¹¹⁵ Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei*, 7.15.63-64: Nullam enim improbitatem scio, quae illic non redundavit, cum utique etiam paganae ac ferae gentes, etsi habent specialiter mala propria, non sint tamen in his omnia execratione digna. Gothorum gens perfida sed pudica est, Alanorum impudica sed minus perfida, Franci mendaces sed hospitales, Saxones crudelitate efferi sed castitate mirandi: omnes denique gentes habent sicut peculiaris mala ita etiam quaedam bona. In Afris paene omnibus nescio quid non malum. Trans. with minor alterations, Sanford, *On the Government of God*, p. 209.

¹¹⁶ Maas, ‘Ethnicity’, p. 279.

even across the Channel, where they were voiced by the enigmatic Briton known as Gildas.¹¹⁷ One could argue that with Gildas, we venture somewhat outside the thematic and chronological boundaries set at the onset of this chapter. His sole narrative work to survive in full – *De excidio Britanniae* (On the Ruin of Britain) – is commonly attributed to the first half of the sixth century, though some would prefer the final decades of the fifth.¹¹⁸ For Gildas, therefore, the end of Roman rule in Britain was not an impending calamity, but a *fait accompli*. And so was that other development, the ‘arrival of the Saxons’, which makes for one of the central tragedies of the *Excidio*. Apart from his work, we know little about Gildas himself. In all likelihood, he resided in the western regions of the Island, under British rule, but the precise location is disputed.¹¹⁹ It is probable that he was a monk.

Despite the fact that Gildas lived in a post-Roman Britain, his work is reminiscent in many ways of the Christian authors dealt with above.¹²⁰ To some extent, the parallel stems from Gildas’ style, which still bespeaks an easy familiarity with the rhetorical traditions of late antiquity.¹²¹ More importantly,

¹¹⁷ The amount of available literature on Gildas is vast. Notable studies include: K.L. George, *Gildas's "De excidio Britonum" and the Early British Church* (Woodbridge, 2009); Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, pp. 36-50; N.J. Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester, 1995); F. Kerlouégan, *Le de excidio britanniae de Gildas, les destinées de la culture latine dans l'île de Bretagne au VI^e siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1987); M. Lapidge and D.N. Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge, 1984). See also the review article by A. Breeze, ‘Gildas: Renewed Approaches’, *Northern History*, 47.1 (2010), pp. 155-162.

¹¹⁸ For a date between 515-20, see T.D. O’Sullivan, *The de Excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date* (Leiden, 1978), p. 180; for the 485-520s, Wood, ‘The End of Roman Britain’, p. 23. For 479-84, Higham, *The English Conquest*, p. 137.

¹¹⁹ A. Plassmann, ‘Gildas’, in J.T. Koch (ed.), *Celtic culture*, 3 (2006), pp. 806-810. See also A. Breeze, ‘Where was Gildas Born?’, *Northern History*, 45.2 (2008), pp. 347-350.

¹²⁰ See for instance, Higham, *The English Conquest*, pp. 9-10.

¹²¹ By the sixth century, Roman schools of rhetoric were probably no longer operative on the Isles. But private *rhetores* may still have offered their services. See Lapidge, ‘Gildas’s Education and the Latin Culture of sub-Roman Britain’, in *Gildas: New Approaches* (1984), pp. 27-50, N. Wright, ‘Gildas’ Prose Style and its Origins’, in Wright, *History and Literature in Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West: Studies in Intertextuality* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 107-28 and Kerlouégan, ‘Le latin de *Excidio Britanniae* de Gildas’, in W.M. Barley and R.P.C Hanson (eds.) *Christianity in Britain, 300-700* (Leicester, 1968), pp. 151-76. But see E.H. Thompson, ‘Gildas and the History of Britain’, *Britannia*, 10 (1979), 203-226, in particular 210, for a less generous assessment of Gildas’ Latinity.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

Gildas mirrors Salvian and consorts in looking at the world through a distinctly moralizing lens. The brunt of the *Excidio* was an exhortation against the moral degeneration of British society. Its particular targets were Britain's secular leaders ('tyrants' according to Gildas) and clergy. Gildas started off his Jeremiad with a short history of Britain, from Roman times until the present. A devoted student of the Old Testament, Gildas liked to compare his fellow Britons to the ancient Israelites: they were undeniably a 'Chosen People', but with a hopeless tendency to stray from God's commands.¹²² It was this tendency, as Gildas' almost masochistic rendering of British history made painfully clear, that had often brought the New Israel on the brink of ruin in the past, and continued to do so in the present.

Gildas follows other late antique authors, as well as the Old Testament, in casting outside peoples as the main agents of divine displeasure. The first wave of barbarian invaders to fall upon the Britons were the Picts and the Scots. Their arrival was precipitated by two grave errors on the part of the Britons: they had embraced the Arian heresy, and the 'tyrant' of the Britons, Magnus Maximus, had rebelled against the Roman emperor and invaded Gaul with an army.¹²³ Neither event is dated in the *Excidio*, but the reference to the usurper Maximus (d. 388) suggests we are in the early 380s. Bereft of Roman support, and 'completely ignorant of the practice of war', the Britons soon fell victim to the 'fierce peoples from across the sea'.¹²⁴ Twice, Britain's 'exalted defenders' (*auxiliores egregii*), that is the Romans, could be imposed upon to dispatch a relief force to the Island, to fend off the Scottish and Pictish raiders. A third and final petition for help was famously addressed to the continental Roman

¹²² George, *Gildas' de Excidio Britonum*, pp. 29-41. More generally on Gildas' use of the bible, N. Perkins, 'Biblical Allusion and Prophetic Authority in Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae*', in *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, 20 (2010), pp. 78-112.

¹²³ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, cc. 12-15, pp. 32-3.

¹²⁴ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 14, p. 33: Exin Britannia [...] omnis belli usu ignara penitus, duabus primum gentibus transmarinis vehementer saevis, Scotorum a circione, Pictorum ab aquilone, calcabilis, multos stupet gemetque per annos. Compare Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1.12, p. 25: Transmarinas autem dicimus has gentes, non quod extra Brittaniam essent positae sed quia a parte Brettonum erant remotae, duobus sinibus maris interiacentibus, quorum unus ab orientali mari, alter ab occidentali, Britanniae terras longe lateque inrumpit, quamvis ad se invicem pertingere non possint.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

commander Aëtius (d. 454): 'To Aëtius, thrice consul, the groans of the Britons [...] the barbarians drive us to the sea, and the sea drives us back to the barbarians; between one and the other, two sorts of death await us: we are either slain or drowned'.¹²⁵ A harrowing plea indeed, but Roman help was no longer forthcoming.

Left to their own devices, the Britons started to 'trust not to man but to God', which enabled them to defeat their enemies for the time being.¹²⁶ But with their inevitable relapse into vice came renewed rumours of outside invasions.¹²⁷ Then, instead of mending their ways and turning to God once more, the Britons made their single most fateful mistake:

Then all the councillors, together with that proud tyrant Vortigern, the leader of the Britons, were overtaken by such blindness, that they devised for their country this protection, or indeed, this doom: that those ferocious and impious Saxons, hateful to God and men, would be admitted onto the island, like wolves into the sheepfold, to repel the northern nations. Nothing was ever so pernicious to the island, nothing was ever so bitter. [...] Those very men, whom, when absent, they had dreaded more than death itself, were deliberately invited to reside, so to speak, under one and the same roof.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 20, p. 36: Igitur rursus miserae mittentes epistolas reliquiae ad Aetium romanae potestatis uirum, modo loquentes: 'Aetio ter consuli gemitus Britannorum'; et post pauca querentes: 'repellunt barbari ad mare, repellit mare ad barbaros; inter haec duo genera funerum aut iugulamur aut mergimur'; nec pro eis quicquam adiutorii habent.

¹²⁶ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 20, p. 36: Et tum primum inimicis per multos annos in terra agentibus, strages dabant, non confidentes in homine, sed in Deo.

¹²⁷ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, cc. 21-22, pp. 36-8.

¹²⁸ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 23, p. 38: Tum omnes consilarii una cum superbo tyranno Gurthrigerno Britannorum duce caecantur, adinuenientes tale praesidium, immo excidium patriae, ut ferocissimi illi nefandi nominis Saxones deo hominibusque inuisi, quasi in caulas lupi, in insulam ad retundendas aquilones gentes intromitterentur. Quo utique nihil ei usquam perniciosius nihilque amarius factum est. O altissimam sensus caliginem! O desperabilem crudamque mentis hebetudinem! Quos propensius morte, cum abessent, tremebant, sponte, ut ita dicam, sub unius tecti culmine inuitabant.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

Thus Gildas' take on the *adventus Saxonum*, which, if the British author is to be believed, was not a hostile invasion at all. Rather, the Britons 'sealed their own doom' by inviting the Saxons in themselves.

Gildas' rendition of these and subsequent events defies easy interpretation by modern historians. Chronological markers remain mostly absent, whilst other details have to be extracted from a thick and unyielding layer of self-righteous moralism. One of the few certainties to be had is Gildas' exceptional loathing of the Saxons, whom he prefers to call not by name, but by a variety of increasingly grotesque similes.¹²⁹ Gildas' Saxons are a far cry removed, therefore, from the semi-noble savages figuring in Salvian's work. Though instruments of divine vengeance, they are *worse* rather than better than Gildas' own Britons. They are first seen to arrive on the Island in three ships, 'a pride of whelps springing forth from the lair of the barbaric lioness'.¹³⁰ Soon, 'a larger train of attendants and dogs' was dispatched by 'that same mother', so as to join their 'bastard comrades'. Gildas greets their settlement in Britain with a typical mix of resentment and sermonizing: 'from that time onwards, a seed of iniquity, a root of bitterness, a poisonous sprout *worthy of our deeds* shot forth from our soil, into savage branches and tendrils'.¹³¹ Gildas ceases his exhortations long enough to lay out the basic terms under which the Saxons came to settle in Britain: there was a treaty (*foedus*), according to which the Saxons would act like soldiers (*sicut militibus*) for their British hosts (*hospitibus*), in return for regular provisions (*annona, epimonia*).¹³² But with the breaking of the treaty by

¹²⁹ Gildas refers to *saxones* only once. It has been suggested that Gildas limited his references to Saxons out of fear of reprisals, Highham, *The English Conquest*, p. 54. Considering the acerbic nature of the similes Gildas came to employ instead, this suggestion seems far-fetched.

¹³⁰ The notion of three ships finds a parallel in the slightly later work of Jordanes, *Getica*, ed. T. Mommsen, MGH Auct. ant. 5,1 (Berlin, 1882), cc. 94-95, p. 82, who states that the Goths arrived from Scandinavia in three ships: *meminisse debes me in initio de Scandzae insulae gremio Gothos dixisse egressos cum Berich rege suo, tribus tantum navibus vectos ad ripam Oceani citerioris, id est Gothiscandza*. On the notion of three ships in origin stories, Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, pp. 96-7.

¹³¹ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, ed. T. Mommsen, MGH Auct. ant. 13 (Berlin, 1898), c. 23, p. 39: *Inde germen iniquitatis, radix amaritudinis, virulenta plantatio nostris condigna meritis, in nostro cespite, ferocibus palmitibus pampinusque, pullulabat*.

¹³² Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 23, p. 39. See also Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, p. 50.

the rapacious Saxons, the narrative dissolves once again into a tale of fire and brimstone. The Saxons are said to have fallen upon the Britons like the Assyrians upon Judea, and thus to have effected once more the words of the ‘weeping prophet’ (*Propheta deplorans*): ‘O God, the gentiles have come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple they have defiled’ (Psalm 78:1). Britons were slaughtered or enslaved, whilst towns and churches were brought to ruin, until not even the dead could be buried beyond ‘the horrible remains of homes, and the bellies of beasts and birds’.¹³³

And yet, there was a cathartic quality to the devastation wrought upon the Britons. The survivors, Gildas affirms, were ‘strengthened in God’, and under the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus, the one remaining Roman on the island (!), were finally able to achieve a victory against their Saxon tormentors.¹³⁴ Thus commenced a final round of trials for the Britons: ‘from that point onwards, sometimes our fellow citizens won, sometimes our enemies, so that through this people [of the Saxons], the Lord could test in his usual way the present Israel, whether it loves him or not’.¹³⁵ In the end, however, Gildas leaves uncertain the fate of his people. He relates how a period of peace was established after the famous battle of Badon, which the Bretons are said to have won against the Saxons in the forty-fourth year after their first victory under Ambrosius.¹³⁶ Yet he concludes the historical section of his work with the ominous assertion that a new generation (*aetas*) has since come into being, ‘ignorant of that troublesome time and accustomed only to the present serenity’; a generation, inevitably, that has again forsaken its former virtues, and is now ‘rushing headlong into hell’.¹³⁷

¹³³ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 24, p. 39.

¹³⁴ Gildas is the earliest surviving author to mention this legendary figure. See also N.J. Lacy and G. Ashe, ‘Ambrosius Aurelianus’, in *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (New York, 1996), pp. 6-7.

¹³⁵ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 25, p. 40: Et ex eo tempore nunc cives, nunc hostes vincebant, ut in ista gente experiretur Dominus solito more praesentem Israelem, utrum diligeret eum, an non.

¹³⁶ The precise date of the so-called Battles of Badon is hugely contested by historians. For an introduction to this longstanding issue, George, *Gildas’ De Excidio Britonum*, pp. 2-4.

¹³⁷ Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, c. 26, p. 41: At illis decedentibus cum successisset aetas tempestatis illius nescia et praesentis tantum serenitatis experta ita cuncta ueritatis ac iustitiae moderamina concussa ac subuersa sunt, ut earum non dicam uestigium, sed ne monumentum

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

Gildas' blood-soaked account of the 'war of the Saxon federates' has solicited strong responses from modern commentators, both from those who embrace whole-heartedly his visions of rampant violence and utter destruction, and those who claim this view is to some, or even a considerable extent, exaggerated.¹³⁸ This is not the place to settle the matter. Certainly, there seems to be no reason to deny that Gildas was relating a violent and traumatic episode from the past. His deep aversion of the Saxons, which goes beyond anything we have seen so far, can reasonably be explained by their very real involvement in these violent decades, as well as their continued presence on the Isles in Gildas' own days. But Gildas did not commemorate for the mere sake of commemoration. Like many of the Christian historians of late antiquity, he wrote his tearful history to convey a lesson, and for this reason it cannot be taken at face value.

1.8. Saxons in a changing world: Sidonius Apollinaris

Context, it seems, strongly influenced how late antique authors presented Saxons and other barbarian groups. No author reflects this more clearly than the fifth-century poet and bishop Sidonius Apollinaris. Like Salvian, Sidonius was conscious of the fact that he lived in a changing world. He was born to an influential Gallo-Roman family ca. 430, when Gaul was still a Roman province. By the time of his death somewhere in the 480s, his diocese of Clermont was under Visigothic rule and there was no longer an emperor in the West.¹³⁹ The

quidem in supra dictis propemodum ordinibus appareat, exceptis paucis et ualde paucis, qui ob amissionem tantae multitudinis, quae cotidie prona ruit ad tartara, tam breuis numerus habentur, ut eos quodammodo uenerabilis mater ecclesia in suo sinu recumbentes non uideat, quos solos ueros filios habet.

¹³⁸ For the latter view, see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 197-98; I. Wood, 'The Final Phase', in M. Todd (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Britain* (Malden, 2004), pp. 428-442; Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, pp. 43-53; Higham, *The English Conquest*, pp. 35-66. For a more literal interpretation of Gildas' account, see Thompson, *Saint Germanus*, pp. 91-115.

¹³⁹ See for Sidonius' life, F-M. Kaufmann, *Studien zu Sidonius Apollinaris* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), pp. 41-64 and J.D. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome, AD 407-485* (Oxford, 1994). A critical but influential essay on Sidonius' life and works can be found in the Loeb translation by W.B. Anderson, *Sidonius. Poems and Letters*, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1956), ix-lxxiv. For current approaches to Sidonius' work, especially from a linguistic and literary

political developments of the fifth century strongly influenced Sidonius' career and work.¹⁴⁰ More specifically, they are reflected in his shifting (literary) attitude towards barbarians.¹⁴¹

Sidonius spent the first part of his career as so many educated Roman aristocrats had before him: composing panegyric for a succession of emperors in Rome and obtaining various honours and offices in return. He dedicated his first panegyric to his father-in-law Avitus, who rose to the purple in 455.¹⁴² The poem's treatment of Saxons recalls the efforts of Claudian half a century earlier. Saxons appear as one among a host of barbarian enemies, said to have been brought to heels by the new emperor.¹⁴³ As often, their specific domain is the sea, whence they threaten the coasts of Armorica (before Avitus's timely appearance, that is).¹⁴⁴ Sidonius also links the Saxons to Britain, though in a roundabout fashion. In a section dealing with Avitus' predecessors, Sidonius claims that Julius Caesar had already achieved victories over Scots, Picts and

perspective, see the contributions in J.A. van Waarden and G. Kelly (eds.), *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris* (Leuven, 2013).

¹⁴⁰ D. Frye, 'Aristocratic Responses to Late Roman Urban Change: The Examples of Ausonius and Sidonius in Gaul', *The Classical World*, 96.2 (2003), pp. 185-96 and E.J. Goldberg, 'The fall of the Roman Empire Revisited: Sidonius Apollinaris and His Crisis of Identity', *Essays in History* 37 (1995), pp. 1-5.

¹⁴¹ On Sidonius' perception of barbarians, G. Halsall, 'Funny Foreigners: Laughing with the Barbarians in Late Antiquity', in Halsall (ed.), *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 89-113, here 93-96 and Kaufmann, *Studien zu Sidonius Apollinaris*, pp. 79-219.

¹⁴² For this poem, Schindler, *Per carmina laudes*, pp. 182-198 and L. Watson, 'Representing the Past, Redefining the Future: Sidonius Apollinaris' Panegyrics of Avitus and Anthemius', in M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 177-98. For Sidonius' poems and letters I use the edition by C. Lütjohann, MGH Auct. ant. 8 (Berlin, 1887).

¹⁴³ Sidonius, *Carmina*, no. 7, v. 388-91, p. 213: Vt primum ingesti pondus suscepit honoris, / legas qui veniam poscant, Alamanne, furori, / Saxonis incursus cessat, Chattumque palustri / alligat Albis aqua. For a comparison between these two authors, see G. Kelly, 'Sidonius and Claudian', in van Waarden and G. Kelly (eds.), *New Approaches*, pp. 171-91.

¹⁴⁴ Sidonius, *Carmina*, no. 7, v. 369-75, p. 212: quin et Aremoricus piratam Saxona tractus / sperabat, cui pelle salum sulcare Britannum / ludus et assuto glaucum mare findere lembo. / Francus Germanum primum Belgamque secundum / sternebat, Rhenumque ferox, Alamanne, bibebas / Romani ripis et utroque superbus in agro / vel civis vel victor eras.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

Saxons during his campaigns in Britain.¹⁴⁵ In reality, Julius Caesar had done nothing of the sort, at least not against these peoples. Again, we find a fifth-century author projecting contemporary ethnic perceptions back into the past, in this case to the first century BC.

Sometime between 469 and 470, Sidonius relinquished the prefecture of Rome for the episcopal see of Clermont. There are indications that Sidonius' consecration was a demotion rather than a promotion; a forced exit from power following his ill-considered support for the traitor Arvandus.¹⁴⁶ As bishop, Sidonius continued to write panegyric on occasion, but no longer for Roman emperors. The 460s and 470s witnessed the dramatic expansion of the Visigoths, who had resided in Gaul as *foederati* since 418.¹⁴⁷ In 475, Sidonius' Clermont fell to the Visigothic king Euric, after a lengthy siege. Sidonius' leading role in the town's defence resulted in his exile, as well as the confiscation of his beloved estates at Aviaticum.¹⁴⁸ Though a devastating blow to his stature and reputation, Sidonius seems not to have suffered his plight meekly. Whilst staying in Bordeaux around 476, waiting in vain for his appeal to be judged by Euric, the disgraced bishop decided to further his own case by doing what he knew best: writing Euric a congratulatory piece of verse. Aware that such things required a measure of roundaboutness, he sent the poem to his friend Lampridius, who like many other Gallo-Roman aristocrats, had opted to get in line with the new regime and to offer his services at the Visigothic court. Sidonius was well aware of his friend's connections and no doubt expected him

¹⁴⁵ Sidonius, *Carmina*, no. 7, v. 87-89, p. 205: *victricia Caesar / signa Caledonios transvexit ad usque Britannos; / fuderit et quamquam Scotum et cum Saxone Pictum, / hostes quaesivit, quem iam natura vetabat / quaerere plus homines.*

¹⁴⁶ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, pp. 150-167.

¹⁴⁷ M. Kulikowski, 'The Visigothic Settlement in Aquitania: The Imperial Perspective', in R.W. Mathisen and D.R. Shanzer (eds.), *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, pp. 26-38. See also, H.S. Sivan, 'Sidonius Apollinaris, Theodoric II, and Gothic-Roman Politics from Avitus to Anthemius', *Hermes*, 117 (1989), pp. 85-94.

¹⁴⁸ J.D. Harries, 'Sidonius Apollinaris, Rome and the Barbarians: a Climate of Treason', in Drinkwater and Elton (eds), *Fifth-Century Gaul* (1992), pp. 298-308.

to present his work to Euric.¹⁴⁹ The poem presented the Visigothic king in a manner that would have befitted a Roman emperor. Euric is shown receiving embassies and pleas from a variety of peoples. ‘A subjected world requests his rulings’, Sidonius summarizes his favourable impression of the Bordeaux court.¹⁵⁰ But though familiar in theme and language, the image is not entirely that of old.¹⁵¹ Gone is the sharp distinction between a superior Rome and its barbarian foes. Here, the Roman is but one of the supplicants seeking Euric’s protection. Gone also, apparently, is the need to depict non-Romans as lesser and hostile. To a non-Roman audience, Saxon sea-faring could be described without its usual connotations of piracy. Instead, Sidonius characterized the Saxons in attendance at Euric’s court by their physique and hairstyle:

There [at Bordeaux] we see the blue-eyed Saxon, accustomed to the sea, but fearful of the land. The razor blade, content no more to hold its usual course round the head’s extremity, drives back the hairline, with clean strokes shearing to the skin, thus making the head look smaller and the face longer.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ On this letter, Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, pp. 18, 240-42, Kaufmann, *Studien zu Sidonius Apollinaris*, pp. 130-33 and W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans: A.D. 418-584. The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 248-51.

¹⁵⁰ Sidonius, *Epistulae*, lib. 8, no. 9, v. 20, p. 136: *responsa petit subactus orbis*.

¹⁵¹ Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris*, pp. 240-42. Note also Harries’ remarks (pp. 17-18) on the place and function of *Ep.* 8.9 in the letter-collection (book 8) published ca. 479-480. *Ep.* 8.8, which directly precedes the letter to Lampridius/Euric in the collection, was the only letter in book 8 that derived from the 860s. It addresses a certain Syagrius about his desire to obtain consular office in Rome. According to Harries, Sidonius put these two letters together to create a contrast between the situation in the 860s, when Sidonius and his fellow aristocrats could still look to Rome for patronage and offices, and the situation a decade later, when they had to depend on barbarian kings like Euric. The bleakness of their situation would have received further emphasis in *Ep.* 8.11, where it is revealed that Lampridius, the official addressee of *Ep.* 8.9, was murdered by his own slaves shortly after 475. For the organizational principles behind Sidonius’ letter-collection, in particular books 7-9, see R. Gibson, ‘Reading the Letters of Sidonius by the Book’, in van Waarden and Kelly (eds.), *New Approaches*, pp. 195-220.

¹⁵² Sidonius, *Epistulae*, lib. 8, no. 9, v. 21-26, p. 136: *istic Saxona caeruleum videmus / assuetum ante salo solum timere; / cuius verticis extimas per oras / non contenta suos tenere morsus / alat lammina marginem comarum, / et sic crinibus ad cutem recisis / decrescit caput additurque*

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

It is unclear whether Sidonius' poem had the desired effect. But soon after 476, Euric restored Sidonius to part of his estates and allowed him to return to Clermont.

Between Sidonius' panegyric of 455 and his poem of 476, we are offered different impressions of the Saxons. Should we conclude from this that over the course of two decades, the author's view of this group changed, softened even? Not necessarily. What changed was first and foremost the context in which Sidonius wrote, and which demanded from him different treatments of non-Roman peoples. What was suitable for an Avitus, was less suitable for a Euric, and vice versa. That Sidonius could still present the Saxons as depraved outsiders is shown in one of his surviving letters, composed ca. 480, and published subsequently by the author himself.¹⁵³ The letter's addressee was Namatius, another Gallo-Roman aristocrat in Euric's service, who at the time acted as commander of the Visigothic fleet. Judging from the various topics addressed over the course of the letter, it was part of an on-going correspondence between the two men. Near the end of the letter, however, it takes a sudden turn, away from the previous pleasantries. Sidonius explains how he was just about to conclude his own 'ramblings', when someone came by who informed him that Namatius was currently on duty, 'coasting the curving shores of the Ocean against the bowed galleys of the Saxons'.¹⁵⁴ It is unclear whether this news really caught up with Sidonius at the precise moment he was finishing his letter. We may well find him dabbling in some Ciceronian epistolary convention.¹⁵⁵ Either way, the news of Namatius' naval campaign induced Sidonius to go off on a lengthy description of Saxon (nautical)

vultus. The translation, with some alterations, is by O.M. Dalton, *The Letters of Sidonius* (Oxford, 1915), vol. 2, pp. 155-56.

¹⁵³ See for Sidonius' letter collections, R.W. Mathisen, 'Dating the Letters of Sidonius', in van Waarden and Kelly (eds.), *New Approaches* (2013), pp. 221-248. See furthermore, J.A. van Waarden, *Writing to Survive: a Commentary on Sidonius Apollinaris Letters book 7. 1: The episcopal letters 1 – 11* (Leuven, 2009), pp. 8-9, 30-34 and Köhler, *C. Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius Briefe Buch I: Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Heidelberg, 1995), pp. 6-18.

¹⁵⁴ Sidonius, *Epistulae*, lib. 8, no. 6, c. 13, p. 132: inter officia nunc nautae, modo militis litoribus Oceani curvis inerrare contra Saxonum pandos myoparones.

¹⁵⁵ On Sidonius' style, see van Waarden, *Writing to Survive*, pp. 55-66.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

customs. This description is the first of its kind to survive in the late antique record and all the more valuable because its author appears to have drawn on first- and secondhand experience with Saxons.¹⁵⁶ This is, to be sure, no guarantee for truthfulness. We are still dealing with a fifth-century Roman aristocrat, with a Roman's aversion to barbarians, and a late antique aristocrat's desperate need to showcase his literary prowess.

Sidonius' introduction of the Saxons certainly attests to all these elements at once. 'You will deem there to be as many pirate captains as you have seen Saxon oarsmen', he informs his friend at sea, 'so alike are all in giving orders and obeying them, in teaching robbery and being taught it'.¹⁵⁷ Though Saxons are thus credited with a typically barbarian lack of discipline, Sidonius underlines they are not to be trifled with:

That enemy surpasses all other enemies in fierceness. He attacks unforeseen, and when foreseen he slips away; he despises those who bar his way, and he destroys those whom he catches unawares; if he pursues, he intercepts; if he flees, he escapes. Moreover, shipwreck, far from terrifying them, is their training. With the perils of the sea they are not merely acquainted, but utterly familiar; for since a storm whenever it occurs lulls into security the object of their attack and prevents the coming attack from being observed by victims, they gladly endure dangers amid billows and jagged rocks, in the hope of achieving surprise.¹⁵⁸

To this chilling report, Sidonius adds even more disquieting details. He explains that whenever Saxons prepare to set out for their homeland (*patriam*) – as usual, no destination is forthcoming – custom (*mos*) dictates they sacrifice

¹⁵⁶ Kaufmann, *Studien zu Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 168.

¹⁵⁷ Sidonius, *Epistulae*, lib. 8, no. 6, c. 14, p. 132: quorum quot remiges videris, totidem te cernere putes archipiratas: ita simul omnes imperant parent, docent discunt latrocinari.

¹⁵⁸ Sidonius, *Epistulae*, lib. 8, no. 6, c. 14, p. 132: hostis est omni hoste truculentior. improvisus aggreditur praevisus elabitur; spernit obiectos sternit incautos; si sequatur, interceptit, si fugiat, evadit. ad hoc exercent illos naufragia, non terrent. est eis quaedam cum discriminibus pelagi non notitia solum, sed familiaritas. nam quoniam ipsa si qua tempestas est huc securos efficit occupandos, huc prospici vetat occupaturos, in medio fluctuum scopulorumque confragosorum spe superventus laeti periclitantur. The translation, with some alterations, is by Anderson, *Sidonius. Poems and Letters*, vol. 2, p. 431.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

one tenth of their captives.¹⁵⁹ To whom these captives are sacrificed remains unclear. Sidonius does elaborate that the victims are chosen by lot, and killed *per aquales et cruciarias poenas*. This phrase has been taken to mean that the victims were either drowned or crucified.¹⁶⁰ Another option is that they were made to die ‘through tortuous drowning’.

What are we to make of this alleged Saxon custom? It is commonly accepted that human sacrifice indeed existed in antiquity, though the range, form and meaning of such practices are contested.¹⁶¹ We should note as well, that this is not the only occasion Saxons are associated with human sacrifice. Ennodius of Pavia (d. 521) claimed Franks, Heruli and Saxons burned human victims in order to pacify the ire of their gods.¹⁶² Two-and-a-half centuries later, Charlemagne’s first Saxon Capitulary (ca. 795) legislated against the ‘pagan custom’ of sacrificing humans to the devil or to demons.¹⁶³ To be sure, none of these descriptions is even remotely objective or dispassionate. They are one-sided accounts by outside witnesses, bent, at least in part, on discrediting the group or religion they describe. In a seminal article on the claim of human sacrifice in antiquity, J. Rives suggested that ‘human sacrifice functioned in the Graeco-Roman world, as in our own, as a basic cultural sign whose essential meaning was understood by all’.¹⁶⁴ By accusing someone of human sacrifice, Rives argued, an author signalled in the clearest of terms that there existed a cultural boundary between those whom he accused and those whom he himself associated with. This boundary could be understood as a divide between civilization and barbarism, or alternatively, between good religion and bad

¹⁵⁹ Sidonius, *Epistulae*, lib. 8, no. 6, c. 15, p. 132.

¹⁶⁰ Anderson, *Sidonius. Poems and Letters*, p. 431 and Kaufmann, *Studien zu Sidonius Apollinaris*, p. 167.

¹⁶¹ Two seminal publications on human sacrifice in antiquity are D.D. Hughes, *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece* (London, 1991) and J. Rives, ‘Human Sacrifice among Pagans and Christians’, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 85 (1995), pp. 65-85. In 2007, two volumes were published on the topic: K. Finsterbusch, A. Lange and K.F. Diethard Römheld (eds.), *Human Sacrifice in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Leiden, 2007) and J.N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice*, *Studies in the History and Anthropology of Religion* 1 (Leuven, 2007).

¹⁶² Ennodius of Pavia, *Opusculum* 4, ed. F. Vogel, MGH Auct. ant. 7 (Berlin, 1885), p. 187.

¹⁶³ *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, ed. A. Boretius, MGH Capit. 1 (Hanover, 1883), c. 9, p. 69.

¹⁶⁴ Rives, ‘Human Sacrifice’, p. 83. See also Isaac, *The Invention*, pp. 474-6.

religion. Evidently, different authors had different opinions on who belonged on which side of the divide. Pagan Romans were accustomed to accuse Christian sects of human sacrifice.¹⁶⁵ Christian authors eventually came to repay the favour, by associating pagan worship with similar excesses.

Though a Christian, Sidonius was no theological hardliner.¹⁶⁶ This is reflected in his stance towards Saxons practicing human sacrifice. While he condemns Saxon religious custom as false and misconceived (i.e. bad religion), the terms of his condemnation remain remarkably unpartisan. He does not, for instance, characterize Saxons as pagans. Nor does he contrast their rites with a clearly defined norm of Christianity. Instead, Sidonius points out that the Saxon custom of human sacrifice is particularly tragic because it is ‘superstitious’, a qualification that would have been as negative in a classical context as it was in a Christian one.¹⁶⁷ On the whole, Sidonius appears less concerned with the fact that Saxons sacrifice humans, or that such behaviour is unchristian, than with the fact that they mistake such practices for religious and salutary: ‘Rather than cleansed by sacrifices of this sort, they are polluted by its sacrilege. Still, they consider it a religious act (*religiosum putant*) to perpetrate such a horrible slaughter, and to take anguish from the prisoner instead of ransom’.¹⁶⁸

We might ask, by way of conclusion, why Sidonius would have felt the need to explain Saxon custom to a friend whom he knew to be fighting Saxons at sea. Certainly, such a person would have had ample experience with Saxon naval tactics, and would have neither required nor appreciated a reminder of what was in store for him, were he to fall in Saxon hands? Sidonius himself

¹⁶⁵ L.R. Lanzillotta, ‘The Early Christians and Human Sacrifice’, in Bremmer (ed.), *The Strange World*, pp. 81-102, with plenty of references to primary sources.

¹⁶⁶ P. Rousseau, ‘In Search of Sidonius the Bishop’, *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 25 (1976), pp. 356-77.

¹⁶⁷ Sidonius, *Epistulae*, lib. 8, no. 6, c. 15, pp. 132-3: praeterea, priusquam de continenti in patriam vela laxantes hostico mordaces anchoras vado vellant, mos est remeaturis decimum quemque captorum per aquales et cruciarias poenas plus ob hoc tristi quod superstitioso, ritu necare superque collectam turbam periturorum mortis iniquitatem sortis aequitate dispergere.

¹⁶⁸ Sidonius, *Epistulae*, lib. 8, no. 6, c. 15, p. 133: et per huiusmodi non tam sacrificia purgati quam sacrilegia polluti religiosum putant caedis infaustae perpetratores de capite captivo magis exigere tormenta quam pretia.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

presents his account as a warning from a worried friend, though he concedes that his worries are probably unfounded.¹⁶⁹ Namatius is too prudent to be taken by surprise. And the apprehension that friends are wont to feel on each other's account when separated, is due more to uncertainty than to actual danger. Most importantly, Namatius is accompanying the banners of a 'victorious people', that is, the Visigoths. In the end, therefore, Sidonius might well have just seized the opportunity to present an educated fellow Roman with some interesting bits of knowledge and hearsay on a non-Roman group, duly wrapped up in stylized prose. It is good that he did, for the result, whether reliable or not, is the only detailed description of Saxon custom to survive up till the sixth century.

1.9. Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, we have encountered Saxons in a number of guises: barbarian invaders, a pirate threat, instruments of divine vengeance, pagans and semi-noble savages. Underlying this variety, though, was a fairly consistent picture: the Saxon as a barbarian outsider, diametrically opposed to the authors' own Roman, British and/or Christian society. The one exception, perhaps, was Sidonius' poem for Euric, where Saxons appeared alongside Romans as supplicants at the Visigothic court. It is worthwhile, by way of conclusion, to try and look for a degree of moderation to this picture, even if our sources seem disinclined to offer any.

Few would deny that late antiquity witnessed barbarian invasions or that barbarian groups played a major role in the political disintegration of the

¹⁶⁹ Sidonius, *Epistulae*, lib. 8, no. 6, cc. 13, 16, pp. 132-33: unde nunc etiam ut quam plurimum caveas, causa successit maxuma monendi. [...] qua de re metuo multa, suspicor varia, quamquam me e contrario ingentia hortentur: primum, quod victoris populi signa comitaris; dein quod in sapientes viros, quos inter iure censis, minus annuo licere fortuitis; tertio, quod pro sodalibus fide iunctis, sede discretis frequenter incutiunt et tuta maerorem, quia promptius de actionibus longinquis ambigendisque sinistra quaeque metus augurat.

empire.¹⁷⁰ Still, these invasions were less cataclysmic and abrupt than a Salvian would have us believe. Nor should we confuse political disintegration with moral or cultural decline. Generally speaking, these were not primitive savages battering against the increasingly ill-guarded gates of a superior Roman civilization that was desperately trying to keep them out. Those branded barbarians by Roman authors were often less ‘other’ and more involved in Roman society than their literary detractors are willing to concede. The frontier regions, in particular, constituted what Peter Brown dubbed a ‘middle ground’, where Romans and non-Romans closely interacted on social, cultural and economic levels.¹⁷¹ Force, at any rate, was but one of the means through which barbarians entered the Roman world. From Augustus onwards, it had become established Roman policy to allow allied barbarian groups to settle within the empire on occasion, often resulting in far-going Romanization.¹⁷² By far the most convenient and oft-tried route to inclusion was through the army. The armies of the Republic had already employed barbarian groups as auxiliaries. By the fourth century AD, barbarians formed the backbone of the Roman military, as soldiers but also as commanders.¹⁷³

Admittedly, there is less literary evidence for Saxon inclusion in Roman society than there is for many other barbarian groups. We remember how Julian claimed the usurper Maxentius (350-53) received military support from Franks and Saxons. Ammianus Marcellinus offers another hint in his account of a Saxon incursion that took place in 370, probably on the shores of Gaul.¹⁷⁴ Ammianus reports how the local Roman commander struggled to resist the Saxon attacks and prudently decided to call for backup. Upon the arrival of a Roman force under *magister militum* Severus, the Saxon raiders immediately

¹⁷⁰ For a good introduction to the various points of view, see G. Halsall, ‘Movers and Shakers: the Barbarians and the Fall of Rome’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 8 (1999), pp. 131-145. More recently, James, *Europe’s Barbarians* (2009) and Goffart, *Barbarian Tides* (2005).

¹⁷¹ P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (Chichester, 10th edn, 2013), p. 51.

¹⁷² Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, pp. 119-186; G. Halsall, ‘The Technique of Barbarian Settlement in the Fifth Century: a Reply to Walter Goffart’, *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 3 (2010), pp. 99-112.

¹⁷³ P. Southern and K.R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (London, 1996), pp. 39-66.

¹⁷⁴ Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 28.5.1-7.

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

sued for peace, which the Romans conceded under certain conditions. One of these, was that the Saxons would hand over a contingent of young men ‘fit for military duty’.¹⁷⁵ The goal, no doubt, was twofold: to leech away Saxon strength, whilst adding to that of the Roman army.¹⁷⁶ It is unclear, incidentally, whether these particular young men ever made it to become recruits. Ammianus describes how after the Saxon invaders had been given leave to depart, a Roman force set out to ambush them and ended up slaughtering the departing Saxons to the last man. Ammianus is aware this hardly amounts to an honest victory, but offers practical reasons to condone it nevertheless: ‘Although a just spectator shall condemn this for a disgraceful and faithless act, he shall, upon closer consideration, not declare it unbecoming that a lethal band of robbers was annihilated when the opportunity finally presented itself’.¹⁷⁷

Possible evidence for more structural Saxon involvement in the Roman military can be found in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. As said, the *Notitia* is a problematic source, since it contains sections that belong to various periods in time, from the late fourth- till the early fifth century. Saxons are mentioned once, among the troops stationed in Phoenicia. Alongside an *ala Francorum* and an *ala Alamannorum*, we find an *ala Saxonum*, a Saxon auxiliary division.¹⁷⁸ To be sure, this division need not always have consisted of Saxons. It is commonly assumed that such divisions were originally made up of the group whose name they carried, but that their composition changed over time, sometimes with nothing but the name remaining.¹⁷⁹ Archaeologists have linked the existence of such a Saxon division to certain findings in the Ems-Elbe region, which Saxons

¹⁷⁵ Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 28.5.3, p. 86: diu que uariatis consiliis, cum id rei publicae conducere uideretur, | pactis indutiis et datis ex condicione proposita iuuenibus multis habilibus ad militiam discedere permissi sunt Saxones sine impedimento, unde uenerant, reuersuri.

¹⁷⁶ Drijvers, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXVIII*, p. 236.

¹⁷⁷ Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, 28.5.7, p. 86: ac licet iustus quidam arbiter rerum factum incusabit perfidum et deforme, pensato tamen negotio non feret indigne manum latronum exitialem tandem copia data consumptam.

¹⁷⁸ *Notitia Dignitatum*, II.32.

¹⁷⁹ Hoffmann, *Das spätrömische Bewegungsheer*, vol. 1, p. 140.

are thought to have inhabited by the fourth century.¹⁸⁰ Many fourth-century graves in this region contain objects – belts, jewellery, weapons – that belonged to the Roman military. Presumably, then, these were graves of barbarian soldiers and officers, who resettled across the border upon completion of their service. Evidently, the fact that they were buried with their military equipment raises the question of how non-Roman such barbarian veterans could still have been after decades of serving in the Roman army.

Soldiering was not the only Roman profession Saxons could enter. There is evidence of another, more sinister occupation that Saxons fulfilled on occasion, though it hardly counts as an example of Saxon inclusion in Roman society. The Roman statesman Symmachus (d. 402), in one of his letters to his close friend Flavianus, relates the tragic case of a group of captured Saxons who found themselves assigned to the arena.¹⁸¹ The Saxons had been given to Symmachus by the usurper Eugenius (r. 392-94), to be used as gladiators in the *munera* which Symmachus was hosting in Rome in honour of the questorship of his ten-year-old son. Where and how Eugenius had gotten his hands on these Saxons is left unexplained. Some commentators speculate they may have been captured during Arbogast's 392 campaign in Cologne.¹⁸² The Saxons, we learn from Symmachus' letter, had not performed to their owner's satisfaction. On the first day of the games, instead of fighting in the arena, twenty-nine of them had opted to break each other's neck, *sine laqueo*, with their bare hands, as Symmachus adds with evident exasperation. They were not the first captives to choose suicide over the bloody spectacle of the Roman arena. Seneca the Younger (d. 65 AD) famously described a German gladiator who eluded his guards by stuffing a lavatory sponge down his throat.¹⁸³ But where Seneca

¹⁸⁰ H.W. Böhme, 'Sächsische Söldner im römischen Heer: das Land zwischen Ems und Niederelbe während des 4. und 5. Jahrhunderts', in Both and Aouni (eds.), *Über allen Fronten* (1999), pp. 49-73.

¹⁸¹ Symmachus, *Epistulae*, lib. 2, no. 46, p. 57.

¹⁸² Thus J-P. Callu, *Symmaque. Lettres*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1972), p. 185 and G.A. Cecconi, *Commento storico al libro II dell'Epistolario di Q. Aurelio Simmaco* (Pisa, 2002), pp. 304-313.

¹⁸³ Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, ed. O. Hense (Leipzig, 1938), no. 70, cc. 20-22, p. 240: Nuper in ludo bestiariorum unus e germanis, cum ad matutina spectacula pararetur, secessit ad exonerandum corpus: nullum aliud illi dabatur sine custode secretum: ibi lignum id, quod ad

1. SAXONS FROM A ROMAN PERSPECTIVE

applauded this *vir fortis* as an example of a resourceful man's control over his own destiny, Symmachus complained bitterly about 'the impious hands of a desperate nation' and denounced the Saxon gladiators as 'a bunch viler than Spartacus', whom he would have gladly traded in for a pack of Libyan beasts.¹⁸⁴ His only consolation was the example of Socrates, who had always taken such adversities in stride.

Symmachus' letter may stand as a final example to one of the overriding themes of this chapter. Going through three centuries of Roman writing about *Saxones*, we have had to conclude again and again that Roman impressions of Saxons were closely tied up with the context an author was writing from, as well as the expectations of his audience. Roman authors seldom simply recorded Saxon activity. As with many other barbarian groups, Saxons were consciously shaped to fit authorial ambitions and literary conventions. Symmachus' is an interesting case, in this regard, in that his depiction of Saxons was informed not just by the fact that he was writing a letter to a fellow aristocrat, but also by his personal economic loss (though it will hardly register as such with the modern observer). It is tempting to see in Symmachus' callous complaints something of the true face of the Roman senatorial elite, at least where their treatment and appreciation of barbarian peoples were concerned. Whilst Seneca could praise the suicide of a German gladiator when writing from a safe distance, the noble savage turned into a sub-human one soon enough when he dared threaten a Roman senator's purse and public credibility.

emundanda obscena adhaerente spongia positum est, totum in gulam farsit et interclusis faucibus spiritum elisit.

¹⁸⁴ Symmachus, *Epistulae*, lib. 2, no. 46, p. 57: nam quando prohibuisset privata custodia desperatae gentis impias manus, cum viginti et novem Saxonum fractas sine laqueo fauces primus ludi gladiatorii dies viderit? nihil igitur moror familiam Spartaco nequiores velimque, si ita facile factu est, hanc munificentiam principis Libycarum largitione mutari.

CHAPTER TWO

Rebels, subjects, neighbours *Saxons from a Frankish perspective*

A new kind of Christian barbarian kingdom had been established north of the Alps – one which changed forever the face of the West [...] a loose confederation of barbarian chieftains had been replaced by a single ruler whose wealth was matched only by his capacity for violence; an uneasy alliance of pagan and Arian barbarians and Christian Romans had been replaced by a kingdom unified culticly under a Christian king recognized by the emperor in Constantinople and supported by orthodox bishops, the representatives of the Gallo-Roman elite. In spite of the disunity and internecine violence that characterized the reign of Clovis's sons and grandsons, the transformation of the West would continue along the lines he had begun.¹

Thus concludes Patrick Geary's analysis of the rise of the Frankish kingdom under the Merovingians. This rise began in the fifth century, when Franks and several other barbarians groups came to settle in the Roman province of Gaul. Their formal status was that of allies or *foederati*. But as Roman administrative control over the province disintegrated, barbarian groups came to function more and more as its *de facto* authorities. Frankish influence was initially confined to Northern Gaul, but spread rapidly under the Frankish king Clovis

¹ P. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of Merovingian world* (New York, 1988), pp. 115-16.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

(d. 511).² Using a combination of force and diplomacy, Clovis managed to overcome both his Frankish rivals and the various other power-holders in Gaul. This included the Roman general Syagrius, defeated in 486, and the Visigoths, who were pushed south of the Pyrenees in 507 following the famous battle of Vouillé (near Poitiers). By the time of Clovis' death in 511, most of northern and central Gaul was united under a single Frankish, and Christian, family: the Merovingians. This family did not practice primogeniture, as a result of which all of Clovis' four sons came to inherit a share of their father's territory. During the subsequent centuries, the Frankish kingdom would occasionally be united under a single ruler, but more often than not power remained divided among two or more Merovingian kings. This situation engendered a particular *modus operandi* among the Merovingians, which is exemplified by the reign of Clovis' sons: the four brothers engaged in violent internecine strife, but also co-operated against external foes, which resulted in further territorial expansion. Burgundy and the Thuringian kingdom were incorporated into the Frankish realm in the 520s and 530s. Aquitaine, Bavaria and the lands beyond the Rhine were also brought under Frankish influence. The extent to which such peripheral regions found themselves under actual Frankish rule, as opposed to being haphazardly threatened into dispensing with cattle and good, fluctuated with the strength and ambitions of individual Frankish kings.³ This holds true, in particular, for the territories north-east of the Rhine, where Merovingian rule was nearly always more an ambition than a reality. That said, rule over many peoples became an important part of Merovingian royal ideology. This is expressed clearly in a famous letter from the Austrasian king Theudebert I (d. 547) to the East-Roman emperor Justinian I (d. 565).⁴ Having been asked by the emperor's legates about the extent of his realm, Theudebert did not hesitate to style himself a ruler over Visigoths, Thuringians

² I follow here the narrative found in R. van Dam, 'Merovingian Gaul and the Frankish Conquests', in Fouracre (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 1 (2005), pp. 193-231 and I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London, 1994), pp. 33-54.

³ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 159-80.

⁴ *Epistulae Austraciae*, ed. W. Gundlach, MGH Epp. 3 (Berlin, 1892), no. 20, pp. 132-33.

and Saxons, with a territory that stretched from Francia to Pannonia, and the northern regions of Italy.⁵

The Frankish kingdom established by Clovis and his warlike progeny serves as the political framework of this chapter. It looks at the various written representations of Saxons that circulated in the Frankish realm in the period 550-750. Not all of these texts were necessarily written by Franks. The poet Venantius Fortunatus was born in Italy and trained in Ravenna, before he crossed the Alps to compose verse at the courts of Clovis' grandsons. Gregory of Tours, the most prolific historian of sixth-century Gaul, was born to a distinguished Gallo-Roman family, which had already served as bishops in their home territory of the Auvergne before it had become part of a Frankish kingdom. In a way, the first Frankish author dealt with in this chapter is the enigmatic seventh-century historian known as 'Fredegar'. It remains to be seen whether such diverging backgrounds also translated to diverging views on Saxons. It deserves to be underlined, though, that on some level, all three authors were members of the Frankish polity. They relied on Frankish patronage, they interacted with Frankish kings, and identified, to some extent, with Frankish political and military ambitions.

As in the previous chapter, our main concern will be to contextualise 'Frankish' writing about Saxons. This chapter asks *how* authors and audiences in the Frankish realm defined Saxons. But it also asks *why* they did so. In particular, this chapter seeks to draw a comparison between the 'Frankish' discourse on Saxons and the 'Roman' one. Are Saxons still being defined as barbarian outsiders? Or did the fact that authors were themselves members of a barbarian successor kingdom result in a more inclusive discourse? And what were the effects of Frankish military expansion?

⁵ For discussion of the veracity of these claims, see R. Collins, 'Theodebert I, rex magnus Francorum', in P. Wormald, D. Bullough and R. Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society. Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), pp.7-33 here 10-12.

2.1. A Latin panegyrist in a barbarian kingdom: Venantius Fortunatus

Roman literary traditions are still reflected in the works of the poet Venantius Fortunatus (d. 610). Born ca. 540 in Duplavis (near Treviso) and educated in Ravenna, Venantius eventually left Italy, or what was left of it after the Gothic Wars (535-554), for Merovingian Gaul.⁶ Upon arrival early in 566, he immediately established himself as a poet of merit by delivering the *epithalamium* at the royal wedding of the Austrasian king Sigibert and the Gothic princess Brunhild.⁷ Venantius spent the subsequent decades travelling from court to court, dedicating verse to kings, queens, bishops, nuns and courtiers, and composing several prose hagiographies in between.⁸ Even without the opportunities offered by an imperial court, the rewards for such ‘venal flattery’⁹ were still considerable: after a life coated in leisure, endangered only occasionally by the untimely demise of yet another Merovingian benefactor, he was appointed to the episcopal see of Poitiers ca. 593, which he would occupy until his death in 610.

Venantius offered his Merovingian patrons poetry in a conspicuously classicizing style.¹⁰ Rome, its history and cultural achievements are recurring points of reference in his work. He was well aware of the contradiction inherent in this situation: a classically trained poet writing distinguished Latin verse for patrons whom his Roman examples would have branded ‘barbarian’. Yet where

⁶ For an introduction to his life and career, see J. George, *Venantius Fortunatus. A Latin Poet in Merovingian Gaul* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 4-34.

⁷ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, ed. F. Leo, MGH Auct. ant. 4.1. (Berlin, 1881), 6.1., pp. 124-29. See also M. Roberts, ‘The Use of Myth in the Latin Epithalamia from Statius to Venantius Fortunatus’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 119 (1989), pp. 321-48.

⁸ On Venantius’ hagiography, R. Collins, ‘Observations on the Form, Language and Public of the Prose Biographies of Venantius Fortunatus in the Hagiography of Merovingian Gaul’, in H.B. Clarke and M. Brennan (eds.), *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 105-31 and S. Coates, ‘Venantius Fortunatus and the Image of Episcopal Authority in Late Antique and Early Merovingian Gaul’, *The English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), pp. 1109-37.

⁹ The phrase ‘venal flatterer’ was famously coined by Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in the Merovingian Age* (New York, 1926), p. 333.

¹⁰ H. Elß, *Untersuchungen über den Stil und Sprache des Venantius Fortunatus* (Heidelberg, 1907).

to a Sidonius this situation would still have been a potential source of anxiety,¹¹ Venantius seems to have suffered his self-imposed plight lightly and with humour.¹² A case in point is the prologue to his first seven books of poems, dedicated in 576 to his good friend Gregory of Tours. Venantius famously styles himself a ‘second Orpheus’, but one who compares rather poorly to the wandering bard from Greek mythology.¹³ The *novus Orpheus lyricus* is constantly worn out from the road and excessive drinking, draws inspiration alternatively from the cold and from alcohol, only to end up performing mediocre songs for an unresponsive audience of barbarian revellers. These are, of course, the familiar Roman clichés about the world above the Alps and the sort of climatological, artistic and culinary hardships a man of culture could expect to undergo there.¹⁴ Yet as the preface to seven books of poetry composed for these same barbarian revellers, Venantius’ complaints appear good-natured and self-mocking rather than bitter and hostile. In truth, as Peter Godman has convincingly argued, the fact that Venantius was able to build a career in the Frankish kingdoms was a clear sign that classical assumptions about uncultured barbarians did not really apply to his Frankish patrons. This was an audience, in Godman’s words, ‘that relished, indeed required, emphasis on its links with classical antiquity as a means of defining the lineage and legitimacy of its present influence’. And Venantius’ poems were ‘the very commodity which made it plain that they were not barbarians’.¹⁵

What Venantius sought to celebrate in his patrons, especially his royal ones, was a *synthesis* of Roman, Frankish and Christian culture.¹⁶ In his panegyric for King Charibert (d. 567), delivered in front of the people of Paris shortly before the king’s death, Venantius commenced by making Charibert’s kingship the object of universal approval among his subjects: ‘the barbarian applauds him on one side, the Roman on the other; a single acclamation

¹¹ But see Halsall, ‘Funny Foreigners’, pp. 93-96.

¹² J. Szövérfy, ‘A la source de l’humanisme chrétien médiéval: “Romanus” et “Barbarus” chez Venance Fortunat’, *Aevum*, 45 (1971), pp. 77-86, here 85.

¹³ Venantius, *Carmina*, praefatio, p. 2.

¹⁴ Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, pp. 411-39.

¹⁵ P. Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Franks Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford, 1987), p. 21.

¹⁶ Szövérfy, ‘A la source de l’humanisme’, pp. 82-86.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

resounds in various tongues'.¹⁷ A later passage sought to establish Charibert as a ruler in both biblical and Roman traditions: his is the clemency of David, the wisdom of Solomon, the sense of duty of the emperor Trajan and the stern dignity of the Republican general Fabius Maximus Cunctator.¹⁸ By way of conclusion, Venantius stressed Charibert's more than satisfactory command of both the Roman and Frankish language:

Though you are sprung from noble Sigambrian stock,
the Latin language flourishes in your eloquence.
How learned of speech are you in your own tongue,
who overcomes us Romans in eloquence?¹⁹

That Venantius spared his Merovingian audience the label of barbarian outsider, did not mean he dispensed with the format altogether. He continued, for example, to employ that familiar imagery of the Roman general triumphing over peripheral foes. Saxons and other outside peoples continued to be crushed in the field as proof of the martial prowess of Venantius' patrons. The main difference was that the triumphant Roman general of fourth-century panegyric was now a Frank, or someone fighting under a Frankish banner. One of Venantius' earliest works was a short panegyric dedicated to Sigibert and Brunhild, the royal couple that had facilitated his introduction in Merovingian society.²⁰ Among other things, the poem dealt with Brunhild's recent conversion from Arianism to Catholicism ('your excellent wife is graced with Catholic ways').²¹ Venantius' initial concern, however, was to establish

¹⁷ Venantius, *Carmina*, 6.2., p. 131, v. 7-8: hinc cui barbaries, illinc Romania plaudit/ diversis linguis laus sonat una viri. I follow here the translation by Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems* (Liverpool, 1995), p. 34. See on this poem also Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, pp. 21-28.

¹⁸ Venantius, *Carmina*, 6.2., p. 133, v. 77-84.

¹⁹ Venantius, *Carmina*, 6.2., p. 133, v. 97-100: cum sis progenitus clara de gente Sigamber, / floret in eloquio lingua Latina tuo. / qualis es in propria docto sermone loquella, / qui nos Romanos vincis in eloquio? Trans. with some alterations by George, *Personal and Political Poems*, pp. 37-38.

²⁰ Venantius, *Carmina*, 6.1a, pp. 129-30. See on this poem, George, *Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 40-43 and Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, pp. 21-37.

²¹ Venantius, *Carmina*, 6.1a, p. 130, v. 29: catholico cultu decorata est optima coniunx.

Sigibert's credentials as a 'conqueror' or *victor*, which is indeed the very first word of the poem. The poet sought to achieve this by invoking a single, but seemingly important, military feat: 'The Thuringian with the Saxon, brooding on their own destruction, cry back and forth that so many men have perished to the glory of one man'.²² We next learn that the king had personally led his men into battle against the Thuringians and Saxons, proceeding on foot before the lines. Yet Venantius was careful to underline that Sigibert did not wage war for the mere sake of war. Nor was he the sort of man to get carried away by the thrills of battle: 'Your wars have granted peace with new-found prosperity, and your sword has brought forth new-found joy' [...] 'although your victory may exalt, the more your undertake, the more clement you remain'.²³

Military prowess was not the exclusive prerogative of Merovingian royalty. One of Venantius' more elaborate poems was dedicated to his friend Lupus, a Gallo-Roman who served Sigibert as duke of Champagne.²⁴ A large section of the poem revolved around Lupus' eminent role in a battle against Danes and Saxons. Half the army was apparently under his command when it clashed with the enemy near the river Borda. Venantius depicts the ensuing battle-scene in vivid colours:

As victor you sweated under the weight of your iron-clad tunic, gleaming under the cloud of dust. Long you fought on, pursuing as the line of battle fled, until the end was reached at the Lahn with its glassy waters. That river gave burial to all who had fled without resistance.²⁵

²² Venantius, *Carmina*, 6.1a, p. 130, v. 11-12: Saxone Thoringo resonat, sua damna moventes, unius ad laudem tot cecidisse viros. Trans. George, *Personal and Political Poems*, p. 32.

²³ Venantius, *Carmina*, 6.1a, p. 129, v. 15-18: prosperitate nova pacem tua bella dederunt / et peperit gladius gaudia certa tuus. / plus tamen ut placeas, cum sit victoria iactans, / tu magis unde subis, mitior inde manes. Trans. George, *Personal and Political Poems*, p. 32.

²⁴ Venantius, *Carmina*, 7.7, pp. 159-61. On this poem, see also George, *A Latin Poet*, pp. 79-81. On Lupus, see A.E. Jones jr., *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul: Strategies and Opportunities for the Non-Elite* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 104-105 and J.R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1992), p. 799.

²⁵ Venantius, *Carmina*, 7.7., p. 160, pp. 49-60: ferratae tunicae sudasti pondere victor / et sub pulverea nube coruscus eras, / tamque diu pugnax acie fugiente secutus, / Laugona dum vitreis

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

Even when there were no personal deeds in the field to be celebrated, panegyric allowed the fruits of victory to be enjoyed vicariously. The Frankish courtier Conda emerges from Venantius' panegyric above all as an able administrator, who held his own under a succession of kings.²⁶ Venantius credits him with a string of honours and administrative posts held under Theuderic, Theudebert, Theudebald and finally Sigibert. Yet the military element could not be passed over entirely. 'Saxony in mourning proclaims the valour that you had', Venantius asserts rather abruptly near the end of the poem. This valour, we learn, was based partly on the fact that, even as an old man, Conda had not refused to take up arms against the Saxons (*laus est arma truci non timuisse seni*). More importantly, however, it derived from the fact that in that same battle, fighting for country and king, Conda had lost two of his sons. 'May you not mourn grievously that both died manfully', Venantius consoles the father, 'for to die with praise will be to live forever'.²⁷

Presumably, these were real military engagements that Venantius invoked in his poetry.²⁸ After all, his patrons would hardly have welcomed his praise, often delivered publicly in front of their peers, had it been based on fictional deeds. That said, none of the Franco-Saxon engagements referred to above are attested elsewhere in the sources. We know not, therefore, whether they signify attempts at conquest or subjugation by Sigibert, or whether Austrasia also suffered from hostile incursions during his reign. Venantius does offer some pointers regarding the location of the *Saxones* and the region he calls *Saxonia*. In the poem for duke Lupus we come across two rivers: the Bordaa and the Laugona. The former cannot be identified with any certainty. The latter,

terminus esset aquis. / qui fugiebat iners, amnis dedit ille sepulchrum: / pro duce felici flumina bella gerunt. Trans. by George, *Personal and Political Poems*, pp. 60-61.

²⁶ Venantius, *Carmina*, 7.16, pp. 171-72. On this poem, see George, *A Latin Poet*, pp. 82-84. On Conda, see Jones jr., *Social Mobility*, pp. 105-6.

²⁷ Venantius, *Carmina*, 7.16, pp. 171-72, v. 47-52: quae fuerit virtus, tristis Saxoniam cantat: / laus est arma truci non timuisse seni; / pro patriae votis et magno regis amore / quo duo natorum funera cara iacent. / nec graviter doleas cecidisse viriliter ambos, / nam pro laude mori vivere semper erit. Trans. by George, *Personal and Political Poems*, pp. 66-7.

²⁸ On the reliability of panegyric in military matters, see Rees, 'A Modern History of Latin Panegyric', pp. 33-34.

however, has been equated with the Lahn, a right tributary of the Rhine, which enters the river just below Koblenz in the Middle Rhine area.²⁹ Twice, also, Venantius has Saxons appear in the company of another group, Thuringians and Danes respectively. This pairing of peoples calls to mind that Roman tendency to couple Saxons and Franks – a sign that Roman authors had trouble distinguishing between the two groups. It is doubtful whether the same phenomenon is at work here, though. The Franks were very much acquainted with the Thuringians, whose kingdom in the region of the Unstrut they had helped destroy in the 520s.³⁰ Venantius himself dedicated a poem on the kingdom's fall to the Thuringian princess Radegunde, who had established a religious community in Poitiers after her capture by the Franks.³¹ *Dani* are attested less frequently in the sixth-century sources.³² Venantius' contemporary Gregory of Tours describes a Danish naval raid on the coasts of Gaul ca. 516, possibly in the region of Nijmegen.³³ The Danes were headed on the occasion by their king Chlochilaich, who was killed soon thereafter when the Frankish king Theuderic I dispatched his son Theudebert to deal with the invaders.³⁴ Though Gregory mentions a Danish *patriam*, he refrains from locating it. It is usually assumed the *Dani* resided somewhere north of the Frankish realm.

All in all, there is no guarantee that Venantius was a reliable judge of ethnic distinctions. But there is no reason either to assume he was simply making up names, especially considering what was said above about audiences expecting some degree of 'truth' from a panegyrist. It is not unlikely, in this

²⁹ M. Reydellet, *Venance Fortunat: Poèmes*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1998), p. 96, n. 33-34.

³⁰ Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*, pp. 551-60. See also Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 50-51, 162.

³¹ Venantius, *De excidio Thoringiae*, MGH Auct. ant. 4.1., pp. 271-75. On Radegunde, J.M.H. Smith, 'Radegundis peccatrix: Authorizations of Virginité in Late Antique Gaul', in P. Rousseau and M. Papoutsakis (eds.), *Transformations of Late Antiquity* (Aldershot, 2009), pp. 303-326.

³² Garipzanov, 'Frontier Identities: Carolingian Frontier and the *gens Danorum*', in Garipzanov et al. (eds.), *Franks, Northmen and Slavs* (2008), pp. 113-42, here 118-19.

³³ Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum decem*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1.1. (Hanover, 1951), 3.3, p. 99. The lower Rhine area is mentioned only in an early eighth-century source, *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ed. B. Brusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 2 (Hanover, 1888), c. 19, p. 274.

³⁴ This king is often equated with the Hygelac found in Beowulf, see G. Storms, 'The Significance of Hygelac's Raid', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 14 (1970), pp. 3-26.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

sense, that there were Saxons across the Rhine in the sixth century, and that they were cooperating with other groups in their vicinity, like the Thuringians and Danes.

Not all Venantius' claims about Merovingian military achievements were equally reliable. A dubious, if highly interesting case is his public celebration of King Chilperic at the synod of Berny-Rivière in 580. The circumstances were decidedly less frivolous than with the previous poems. The synod had been convened by the king to judge the case of Venantius' friend Gregory of Tours, who stood accused of spreading salacious rumours about the chastity of Queen Fredegunde.³⁵ This was a potentially explosive situation, and Venantius' performance at the synod has been interpreted as a calculated attempt to defuse it.³⁶ By offering an idealized picture of Chilperic's virtues in war *and* peace, he tried to induce the king to act accordingly and to reconcile himself with his bishop, as in fact he did. In practice, such a stratagem meant manoeuvring through a minefield of political sensibilities, including the assassination in 575 of Chilperic's brother Sigibert, Venantius' previous patron. One of the few areas of traditional encomium that was relatively safe for the poet to venture in, was Chilperic's deeds abroad. In truth, the Merovingian king had been too preoccupied with fending and killing off his rivals to achieve much of note in this particular area.³⁷ Venantius therefore went at it from a different angle: rather than celebrate specific victories, he buried his listeners under an avalanche of peoples whom Chilperic, by mere reputation, kept loyal and peaceful. Coupled with an elusive reference to the achievements of Chilperic's

³⁵ The story is rehearsed in detail by Gregory himself, Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, V, 49, pp. 258-63.

³⁶ Thus J. George, 'Poet as Politician: Venantius Fortunatus' Panegyric to King Chilperic', in *Journal of Medieval History*, 15 (1989), pp. 5-18, Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, pp. 28-37, R. van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 185, 213-14. But see more recently M. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 46-48, who argues that Gregory had already reconciled himself with Chilperic prior to the synod and that the synod was thus mainly a formality.

³⁷ For an overview of Chilperic's life and deeds, see Martindale, *Prosopography*, pp. 291-96. On Chilperic's reputation, especially in Gregory of Tours' *Histories*, see G. Halsall, 'Nero and Herod? The Death of Chilperic and Gregory's Writing of History', in K.A. Mitchell and I. Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 337-350.

formidable father Clothar,³⁸ the result was just about unspecific enough to be flattering:

You are here hailed as victor and give protection far and wide, to prevent the armed rebel rampaging through the countryside of Gaul. You inspire fear in the Goth, the Basque, the Dane, the Jute, the Saxon, and the Briton. With your father, as men know, you vanquished them in battle. You are a terror to the furthest Frisians and the Suebi, who seek your rule rather than prepare to fight you.³⁹

The picture is not unlike we saw Theudebert conjure up for himself in his letter to Justinian, though Chilperic's claims to dominance were probably even less vested in reality than those of his powerful nephew.⁴⁰ That the Saxons make an appearance on the list, may strike us as particularly audacious, seeing as Chilperic's kingdom of Neustria was situated rather further to the west than Sigibert's Austrasia. But judging from the other peoples in Saxon company, Venantius could also have been thinking about the Saxons inhabiting the western coasts of Gaul, or possibly even the Isles.⁴¹

Little has been said so far about the role of religion or Christianity in Venantius' poetry and this is certainly not the place to undertake a full inquiry into the matter.⁴² Judging from the poems we dealt with so far, one could feel justified in concluding that religion was a non-issue where the Saxons were concerned: Venantius characterised them politically as enemies or subjects, but not religiously as pagans or Christians. Upon further investigation, however, such a conclusion holds true only for that section of Venantius' oeuvre that

³⁸ On Clothar's campaigns, also against Saxons, see paragraph 2.2.

³⁹ Venantius, *Carmina*, 9.1., v. 71-76, p. 203: ne ruat armatus per Gallica rura rebellis, / nomine victoris hic es et ampla tegis: / quem Geta, Vasco tremunt, Danus, Euthio, Saxo, Britannus, / cum patre quos acie te domitasse patet. terror [es] extremis Fresonibus atque Suebis, / qui neque bella parant, sed tua frena rogant. Translation, with minor alterations, by George, *Political Poems*, p. 77.

⁴⁰ But see Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum decem*, 5.26, who mentions a campaign against the Bretons in 578.

⁴¹ This would suit another anecdote by Gregory of Tours, in which Chilperic's wife Fredegunde order the Saxons of Bayeux to fight for her, see Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 10.9.

⁴² See M. Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The poetry of Venantius Fortunatus* (Ann Arbor, 2009).

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

focused on the deeds of kings and warriors. When he wrote about men of the Church, be it through poetry or hagiography, different priorities arose, resulting in different Saxons.⁴³

A case in point is one of the poems dedicated to bishop Felix of Nantes (d. 582), yet another prominent Gallo-Roman whom the second Orpheus could count among his close acquaintances.⁴⁴ Venantius composed the poem somewhere between 567 and 573, after (or during) his first visit to Nantes. The poem commences with a colourful description of Spring (v.1-30), followed by the Resurrection of Christ and the Harrowing of Hell (v. 31-88). In the final section of the poem (v.89-110), Christ's exertions on behalf of mankind are mirrored to Felix' pastoral activities as bishop of Nantes and specifically his conversion of a host of pagans. This final segment is replete with allegory and makes for demanding reading.⁴⁵ It starts with a short baptismal scene, in which a white-clad army rises from the waves of the baptismal font, whilst a 'shepherd' rejoices in his snowy-white flock. Only subsequently is it revealed that the shepherd in question is not Christ but Felix, and that the baptized men are his converts: Felix is credited with leading those who wandered in heathen error (*gentili errore vagantes*) towards better things. He also fortified the sheepfold of God (*ovile Dei*) against the beast, cultivated coarse hearts (*agrestia corda*) with kind address, and made a 'crop' (*seges*) grow from a thorn bush. Finally, Venantius raises the curtain of allegory enough for the identity of the converts to be revealed:

A hard nation, the Saxons, living like wild animals
but you heal them, holy one, and the beast restores your sheep.
With a hundredfold return, to stay with you for ever,
you will fill your granaries with the fruit of an abundant harvest.
May this people be invigorated in your embrace to a life free from stain
and may you carry them to God in heaven as a holy pledge.

⁴³ Venantius, *Carmina*, 3.9, v. 103, p. 62 and Venantius, *Vita Germani*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, SS rer. Merov. 7 (Hanover, 1920), p. 415.

⁴⁴ Venantius, *Carmina*, 3.9, pp. 59-62. For Felix, see W.C. McDermott, 'Felix of Nantes: a Merovingian Bishop', *Traditio*, 31 (1975), pp. 1-24 and Martindale, *Prosopography*, pp. 481-82.

⁴⁵ Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, pp. 154-162.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

May you win one crown for yourself from on high
and another crown, spring-fresh, for your service to your people.⁴⁶

The passage is not without complications. The word *Saxo/saxo* in the phrase *aspera gens, Saxo vivens* has been taken to mean ‘stone’ rather than ‘Saxon’. This would result in a translation along the lines of ‘a hard nation living on stone’.⁴⁷ But most commentators agree the ambiguity is intentional, yet another play on the dominant imagery of making things grow under harsh and barren circumstances.⁴⁸ In fact, the etymological connection between *Saxo* and *saxum* is alluded to also by Isidore of Seville (d. 636), who argued that the Saxons derived their name from the fact that they were a ‘hard and strong race of men, that surpasses all other pirates’.⁴⁹ It is very likely, therefore, that Venantius did in fact mean to credit Felix with converting a group of Saxons and allowing them a place among the denizens of heaven. Moreover, judging from the themes addressed in the poem – Christ’s resurrection, the baptismal scene- it is reasonable to assume Venantius was not talking about Felix’ evangelizing efforts at large, but was describing a very specific occasion: Felix baptizing Saxons at the church of Nantes during the Feast of the Resurrection, that is, during Easter.⁵⁰ There is no evidence that Felix crossed either the Channel or the Rhine to do missionary work, so the Saxons in question must have come from the vicinity. Several sixth- and seventh-century sources hint at the presence of a Saxon colony near the mouth of the Loire, which is very close indeed to

⁴⁶ Venantius, *Carmina*, 3.9: *aspera gens, Saxo vivens quasi more ferino: / te medicante, sacer, belua reddit ovem. / centeno reditu tecum mansura per aevum / messis abundantis horrea fruge replens. / immaculata tuis plebs haec vegetetur in ulnis, / atque deo purum pignus ad astra feras. / una corona tibi de te tribuatur ab alto, / altera de populo vernet adepta tuo.* Translation, with some modifications, from Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, p. 158.

⁴⁷ George, *A Latin Poet*, p. 193, but see her note.

⁴⁸ Robert, *The Humblest Sparrow*, p. 161. See also, W. Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus* (Berlin, 1901) p. 82, n. 2, and Reydelle, *Venance Fortunat. Poemes*, I, p. 104. The reference is also accepted by Lammers, ‘Die Stammesbildung bei den Sachsen’, p. 36.

⁴⁹ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911), 9.2.100: *Saxonum gens in Oceani litoribus et paludibus inuisi sita, uirtute atque agilitate habilis. Vnde et appellata, quod sit durum et ualidissimum genus hominum et praestans ceteris piraticis.*

⁵⁰ Thus Robert, *The Humblest Sparrow*, pp. 139, 162 and Meyer, *Der Gelegenheitsdichter Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 81-82. But see McDermott, ‘Felix of Nantes’, p. 6.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

Nantes.⁵¹ Acting as an evangelist to the Loire Saxons certainly suits what we know of Felix' other activities in the area, which included a far from risk-free ambassadorship to the Bretons.⁵² The question remains when Felix would have brought about this development. Presumably, little time elapsed between the baptism itself and Venantius' description of it in his poem. This would place the event somewhere in the period 567-573. Nor should we discount the possibility that the poet was himself present on the occasion. Venantius visited Nantes several times during the late 560s and early 570s. After attending the dedication ceremony of Nantes' new cathedral somewhere in that period, he sent Felix two poems describing the festive occasion.⁵³ It would not have been out of tune, therefore, for Venantius to have drawn literary inspiration from another festive occasion at Nantes he had personally attended.

Like most panegyrists we looked at so far, Venantius modelled the Saxons according to the demands of his audience. Kings like Sigibert and Chilperic earned praise by defeating peripheral peoples and making them part of their realm. Bishops like Felix distinguished themselves by acquainting these peoples with God and ensuring them a place in the heavenly kingdom. Venantius has Saxons appear accordingly as outside enemies, cowering subjects or white-robed converts. But while audience was thus central to his depiction of Saxons, his poems also hint at a 'territorial angle', so to speak. The Saxons vanquished by Sigibert, Lupus and Conda all appear to have resided north-east of Austrasia, in the company of such groups as the Danes and the Thuringians. Conversely, the Saxons converted by Felix came from the vicinity of Nantes. We have here the outlines, however vaguely drawn, of separate Saxon groups, who are inhabiting separate regions and are being dealt with separately by the kings and bishops of the Merovingian realm. To be sure, there is nothing yet in Venantius' terminology that testifies to any such division: they are all *Saxones*.

⁵¹ See for an overview, Lammers, 'Die Stammesbildung', pp. 36-38.

⁵² George, *A Latin Poet*, pp. 114-15. On Felix' forceful dealings with the Bretons, see also McDermott, 'Felix of Nantes', pp. 5-6.

⁵³ Venantius, *Carmina*, 3.6-7, pp. 55-58.

2.2. The limits of continuity: the curious case of Gregory of Tours

There is another witness to sixth-century Gaul, but one who wrote history rather than poetry. The historian in question is Venantius' friend and fellow bishop Gregory of Tours (d. 594), whom we last encountered standing on trial at the synod of Berny-Rivière. Although Gregory described very much the same world as Venantius, he looked at it from a radically different angle, and with a different purpose in mind. As we will see, this is reflected in the way he describes Saxons.

Gregory was born ca. 540, to a rich and influential Gallo-Roman family. His family had long made it its business to fill the episcopal and secular offices of its home-territory of the Auvergne. Indeed, when Gregory rose to the episcopal see of Tours in 573, he could claim family-ties to all but five of his eighteen predecessors.⁵⁴ The diocese of Tours was no mean prize, even to a family of senatorial distinction. In part, the city derived its importance from its strategic position on the Loire, the main intersection between Neustria and Aquitaine. Above all, however, Tours' reputation rested on its hosting of the shrine of St Martin.⁵⁵ The saint's cult, carefully nurtured by local elites like Gregory and his family, guaranteed the city a steady stream of pilgrims. It also attracted a substantial number of high-profile asylum-seekers, the potential dangers of which became only too evident during Gregory's own stint at the office.⁵⁶

It is hardly surprising, considering Tours' standing, that Gregory became more than casually involved in Merovingian politics and the bloody spectacles frequently entailed therein.⁵⁷ Gregory documented many of his experiences in

⁵⁴ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, V, 49, p. 262. On his life, see I. Wood, *Gregory of Tours* (Oxford, 1994) and J. Verdon, *Gregoire de Tours: le père de l'histoire de France* (Le Coteau, 1989). More recently the volume Mitchell and Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours* (2002).

⁵⁵ R. van Dam, *Saints and their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 13-28, 50-81.

⁵⁶ R. Meens, The Sanctity of the Basilica of St Martin. Gregory of Tours and the Practice of Sanctuary in the Merovingian Period, in R. Corradini et al. (eds.), *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages* (Vienna, 2006), pp. 277-288.

⁵⁷ His early loyalty was to the Austrasian king and queen, Sigibert and Brunhild, who had enabled his consecration. Following Sigibert's assassination in 575, Gregory continued to work with

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

his *decem libri historiarum* or ‘ten books of histories’.⁵⁸ He commenced this massive historiographical enterprise soon after his consecration in 573 and finished it almost two decades later, near the time of his death.⁵⁹ The *Histories* cover events from the Creation of the World up to the year 591. But the brunt of the work deals with the reigns of Clovis, his sons, and most prominently, his grandsons. Gregory’s interest in the deeds of the Merovingian kings has long led modern commentators to conclude that he meant to write a History of the Franks, much like Bede and Paul the Deacon came to write histories of the Anglo-Saxons and the Lombards respectively. But recent scholarship tends to underline that the Franks were but one element in Gregory’s world-view, which was characterized above all by the pervasive notion of a divinely upheld moral order.⁶⁰ Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the *Histories* is its patent lack of ethnic bias.⁶¹ Such, in fact, was Gregory’s apparent disregard for ethnicity, that he failed even to unambiguously affiliate himself with a particular group.

Sigibert’s brothers Chilperic (d. 584) and Guntram (d. 593), to varying degrees of personal comfort. See Verdon, *Gregoire de Tours*, pp. 27-38. For the question how such loyalties influenced Gregory’s work, see Halsall, ‘Nero and Herod?’ and I. Wood, ‘The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours’, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, 71 (1993), pp. 253-70.

⁵⁸ Research on Gregory’s *Histories* is somewhat of an industry. The following works study questions of narrative, composition and purpose: H. Reimitz, ‘The Providential Past: Visions of Frankish Identity in the Early Medieval History of Gregory of Tours’ *Historiae (Sixth-Ninth Century)*, in Pohl, Gantner and Payne (eds.), *Visions of Community* (2012), pp. 109-135; S. Collins, ‘The Written World of Gregory of Tours’, in J. Glenn (ed.), *The Middle Ages in Texts and Texture* (Toronto, 2011), pp.45-56; A.C. Murray, ‘Chronology and the Composition of the “Histories” of Gregory of Tours’, *Journal of Late Antiquity* (2008), pp. 157-96; Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, pp. 116-47; Mitchell and Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours* (2002); M. Heinzelmann, ‘Les Histoires de Grégoire de Tours’, *Recherches de science religieuse*, 92.4 (2004), pp. 569-96; M. Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours* (2001); M. Heinzelmann, *Bischof Gregor von Tours (538-594). “Zehn Bücher Geschichte“: Historiographie und Gesellschaftskonzept im 6. Jh* (Darmstadt, 1993); Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History* (1988); G. de Nie, *Views from a Many-windowed Tower: Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam, 1987).

⁵⁹ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 10.31. For the question of composition, Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 119-27.

⁶⁰ Reimitz, ‘The Providential Past’, pp. 112-14; Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, pp. 116-25; Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours: Zehn Bücher Geschichte*, pp. 78-135; Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, 168-74, 227-34, 432-35.

⁶¹ I. Blume, *Das Menschenbild Gregors von Tours in den Historiarum libri decem* (Erlangen, 1970), pp. 41-56 and Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, pp. 121-22.

Judging from the senatorial credentials he so eagerly invoked, the obvious mantle for Gregory to have donned as a writer was a Roman one. Some have indeed argued that Gregory still displays, on occasion, vestiges of a Roman's haughtiness towards the Franks.⁶² But on the whole, the classical opposition between Romans and barbarians seems to have meant little to him.⁶³ Gregory never uses the term *Romanus* in a sixth-century context. There are some fifth-century Gallo-Romans who are made to go by the term, but more often, *Romanus* refers to the city or citizens of Rome.⁶⁴ Barbarians are equally scarce in the *Histories*. *Barbarus* can denote a soldier or fighting man, as well as a Frank, but it is seldom used pejoratively.⁶⁵ Only when employed to indicate uncivilized or pagan behaviour does the term take on negative connotations. For example, Gregory relates how queen Fredegunde poisoned one of her Frankish critics by exploiting the man's liking for a typically 'barbarian' drink: wormwood (*absinthe*) mixed with wine and honey.⁶⁶ Here, as Edward James has rightly pointed out, the term comes with a hint of censure: had the Frank stuck to a less vile concoction, he would no doubt have tasted the poison. But behaviour of this sort was not the sole preserve of Franks. Another episode involves one of Fredegunde's hired cut-throats, who on his way to a particularly sticky job, starts to look for omens (*auguria*), 'in the manner of barbarians'.⁶⁷ This is plain superstition in Gregory's book, and his subsequent handling of the story makes it perfectly clear that nothing good will come of it. What is

⁶² M. Rouche, 'Francs et Gallo-Romains chez Grégoire de Tours', in *Gregorio di Tours: (Todi,) 10-13 ottobre 1971* (Todi, 1977), pp. 143-69.

⁶³ E. James, 'Gregory of Tours and the Franks', in A.C. Murray (ed.), *After Rome's Fall. Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History. Essays presented to Walter Goffart* (Toronto, 1998) pp. 51-66, here 64.

⁶⁴ Yet another meaning of the term appears in Gregory's *Liber in gloria martyrum*, where he claims the Arian Visigoths use the term Romans to refer to 'men of our religion', that is, Catholics. Gregory, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1.2 (Hanover, 1969), c. 24, p. 502.

⁶⁵ Thus James, 'Gregory of Tours and the Franks', pp. 62-65 and W. Goffart, 'Foreigners in the Histories of Gregory of Tours', *Florilegium*, 4 (1982), pp. 80-99, here pp. 82-83.

⁶⁶ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 8.31, p. 399.

⁶⁷ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 7.29, p. 347: Et cum iter ageret, ut consuetudo est barbarorum, auspicia intendere coepit...

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

interesting, is that the superstitious assassin went by the name of Claudius, a Roman rather than a Frankish name.

In light of such evidence, some historians have argued that Gregory thought of himself not as a Roman, but as a member of the Frankish realm and subject of the Merovingian rulers.⁶⁸ This would be consistent, to a degree, with Gregory's own use of the term *Francus*, which, when encountered in a sixth-century context at least, is more often an indication of political status than of birth.⁶⁹ Others have pointed to Gregory's tendency to identify inhabitants of the Frankish realm according to their city or community rather than their Roman or Frankish background. This would suggest a 'regional' outlook. Certainly, Gregory's own (elite) membership of the community of Tours was an important aspect of his identity as a writer.⁷⁰ Still others have stressed that for Gregory, belonging to an ethnic group or local community was of secondary importance to being a Christian and part of the Christian world. This, according to Walter Goffart, is the main reason for Gregory's striking lack of ethnic bias: 'No longer Roman but not yet a Frank, [Gregory] found in his faith and its principles of conduct a position that was adequate for a portrayal of his surroundings – a world in which all men were neither insiders nor outsiders but merely potential citizens in God's kingdom'.⁷¹ With this tantalizing suggestion, we turn from Gregory himself to his approach of 'foreigners' and in particular the Saxons.

The first time *Saxones* appear in the *Histories*, is in a passage relating various events from the period 463-470. Among other things, we read how a certain Odoacer, who is not to be confused with the barbarian general who

⁶⁸ James, 'Gregory of Tours and the Franks'; G. Kurth, '*Francia et francus*', in Kurth (ed.), *Études franques* (Bruxelles, 1919), vol 1, pp. 68-137. See also H-W. Goetz, 'Gens, Kings and Kingdoms: the Franks', in Goetz et al (eds.), *Regna and Gentes* (2003), pp. 307-44.

⁶⁹ Thus M. Heinzelmann, 'Die Franken und die fränkische Geschichte in der Perspektive der Historiographie Gregor von Tours', in A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 1994), pp. 326-344 and Goetz, 'Zur Wandlung des Frankennamen im Frühmittelalter'.

⁷⁰ I. Wood, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', in Mitchell and Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, pp. 29-46.

⁷¹ Goffart, 'Foreigners in the Histories of Gregory of Tours', p. 95.

famously sacked Rome in 476,⁷² moved to the town of Angers, in the company of Saxons (*cum Saxonibus*).⁷³ Odoacer was able to capture the town, only to lose it soon thereafter to the Frankish king Childeric. Sometime later, a battle ensued 'between Saxons and Romans'.⁷⁴ The battle ended in defeat for the Saxons, who fled with heavy losses. Their defeat enabled Franks to capture a number of nearby islands, presumably on the Loire, which had previously belonged to the Saxons. Odoacer himself was not among the casualties, though, as he is next seen entering an agreement with Childeric to subdue the Alemanni, 'who had invaded part of Italy'.

Despite the rather terse and paratactic style of Gregory's prose at this point, two points can be gathered from it.⁷⁵ First, that Saxons once again turn up in Western Gaul, where many Roman authors also located them in the fifth century. Second, that contrary to earlier accounts, Saxons appear no longer just as raiders, but are credited also with actual settlements in the Loire region. Possibly, we have here the precursors of the Saxons converted by Felix of Nantes in the late 560s. As said above, the Loire basin was not the only region that came to be inhabited by Saxons over the course of the fifth century. Twice in the *Histories*, Gregory refers to so-called *Baiocassinus Saxones*, 'Saxons of Bayeux'.⁷⁶ He hints that these Saxons of Bayeux stood under influence of the Merovingians, specifically of the Neustrian queen Fredegunde, who is shown to employ them in one of her many vendettas. We read how in 590, King Guntram of Burgundy dispatched an army against the Bretons.⁷⁷ The army was

⁷² For discussion, see Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 52-55.

⁷³ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 2.18, p. 65: Igitur Childericus Aurilianis pugnas egit, Adovacrius vero cum Saxonibus Andecavo venit.

⁷⁴ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 2.19, p. 65: His ita gestis, inter Saxones atque Romanos bellum gestum est; sed Saxones terga vertentes, multos de suis, Romanis insequentibus, gladio reliquerunt; insolae eorum cum multo populo interempto a Francis captae atque subversi sunt. Eo anno minse nono terra tremuit. Odovacrius cum Childerico foedus iniit, Alamannusque, qui partem Italiae pervaserant, subiugarunt.

⁷⁵ It has been suggested, on the basis of the paratactic style, that Gregory was here excerpting a now lost set of annals from Angers, see A.C. Murray, *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul. A Reader* (Peterborough, 1999), p. 35.

⁷⁶ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 5.26, 10.9.

⁷⁷ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 10.9.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

co-headed by duke Beppolen, who had at an earlier stage incurred Fredegunde's enmity.⁷⁸ Upon hearing of Beppolen's involvement in the Breton campaign, the queen immediately hatched a plan to rid herself of her long-standing enemy. She ordered the Saxons of Bayeux to shave off their hair in Breton fashion, dress up in Breton garb, and thus disguised, join the actual Bretons in halting the duke's advance (the point being that without such a disguise, the Saxons would immediately be linked to her).⁷⁹ Like most of Fredegunde's designs, the plan succeeded: Beppolen was killed on the field, whilst most of the Frankish soldiers who accompanied him perished in the surrounding bogs.

Naturally, the story need not be taken at face value. It is but one of many tales in the *Histories* meant to showcase Fredegunde's extreme vindictiveness and unmatched penchant for cruelty and deceit.⁸⁰ In particular, Gregory's insinuation that sixth-century Bretons and Saxons could be distinguished, or confused, on the basis of their hairstyle and dress, is problematic. On the one hand, most ancient and early medieval authors who list criteria for peoplehood do in fact mention *habitus corporum*, 'outward appearance', in some form or another.⁸¹ Some even list 'clothing' as a separate category, though modern commentators tend to regard this above all as a means of social, rather than ethnic, distinction.⁸² On the other hand, it is not as if we find Gregory addressing any serious concern for ethnic customs here. Rather, the Saxon story allowed him to simultaneously indulge in two of his favourite topics: trickery and Fredegunde.

Other references to Saxons in the *Histories* are less geographically precise. Indications of a Saxon homeland across the Rhine, though provided on occasion, always remain vague and implicit. Unlike Venantius, Gregory never speaks of *Saxonia*. The best evidence derives from a number of campaigns

⁷⁸ For Gregory's preoccupation with trickery, see P. Brown, 'Gregory of Tours: Introduction', in Mitchell and Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, pp. 1-28, here 19-25.

⁷⁹ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 10.9: Fredegundis enim cum audisset, quod in hoc procincto Beppolenus abiret, quia ei iam ex anteriore tempore invisus erat, Baiocassinos Saxones, iuxta ritum Brittanorum tonsos atque cultu vestimenti compositos, in solatium Waroci abire praecepit.

⁸⁰ Goffart, 'Foreigners in the Histories of Gregory of Tours', p. 80.

⁸¹ Pohl, 'Telling the difference', pp. 120-22.

⁸² Pohl, 'Telling the difference'.

undertaken against Saxons by Clothar I (d. 561), Chilperic's father.⁸³ The first of these, according to Gregory, was brought about by a Saxon 'rebellion'. Such language suggests that these Saxons, too, owed some sort of allegiance to the sixth-century Merovingians, though frequent military interventions were apparently needed to maintain it.⁸⁴ That the Saxons in question resided (north-)east of the Frankish realm is never made explicit, but can be deduced from the groups located in their vicinity: after bringing swift ruin on the rebellious Saxons, Clothar unleashed similar destruction on 'the whole of Thuringia' for having aided the insurrection.⁸⁵ A subsequent conflict is said to have ensued through the machinations of Clothar's brother Childebert, who somehow convinced the Saxons to mount an attack on his fellow king and rival. Again, Gregory's language betrays that the geographical peculiarities of the world across the Rhine held no great interest for him: the Saxons moved 'from their own territory' towards Francia, plundering their way up the city of Deutz (near the Rhine) and committing many crimes.⁸⁶ Obviously, they are more likely to have accomplished such a feat setting out from east of the river, than from, say, the coasts of Normandy. But the exact location of their territory is beyond Gregory's scope and concern.

Much the same problem arises in another passage involving Saxons, which serves as the conclusion to a wider exposé on the military achievements of the Gallo-Roman general Mummolus.⁸⁷ Gregory explains how the Saxons 'who had come to Italy with the Lombards' returned to Gaul and started to raid the area around Nice.⁸⁸ Their looting was soon checked by the arrival of Mummolus,

⁸³ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 4.10, 4.14, 4.16.

⁸⁴ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 163-4.

⁸⁵ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 4.10, p. 141: Eo anno rebellantibus Saxonibus, Chlothacharius rex, commoto contra eos exercito, maximam eorum partem delevit, pervagans totam Thoringiam ac devastans, pro eo quod Saxonibus solatium praebuissent.

⁸⁶ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 4.16, p. 150: Fortiter tunc rex Chlotharius contra Saxones decertabat. Saxones enim, ut adserunt, per Childeberthum commoti atque indignantes contra Francos superiore anno, exeuntesque de regione sua in Francia venerant et usque Divitiam civitatem praedas egerunt nimiumque grave scelus perpetrati sunt.

⁸⁷ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 4.42, pp. 175-77.

⁸⁸ W. Pohl, 'Gregory of Tours and Contemporary Perceptions of Lombard Italy', in Mitchell and Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, pp. 131-44.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

who managed to slaughter thousands of Saxons in a surprise attack, before an accord was reached. The Saxons agreed to move back to Italy, but swore that they would return to Gaul 'to subject themselves to the kings and to provide (military) aid to the Franks'.⁸⁹ Thereupon, the Saxons collected their wives and children in Italy and set out towards the realm of King Sigibert, 'so that they might be settled in the region they had migrated from'.⁹⁰ Apparently, then, this was not a settlement, but a *resettlement*. The precise location of their former territory within Sigibert's kingdom remains unspecified. A location near the Rhineland is usually preferred by modern historians, but fits somewhat poorly with the rest of the story, which sees the Saxons move into the direction of Aquitaine rather than Austrasia.⁹¹ According to Gregory, the Saxons first robbed their way along the French Riviera up to the Rhone, where they once again ran into an irate Mummolus. They then crossed the river towards Clermont-Ferrand, all the while ripping off the local population by paying with bronze prepared somehow to look like gold. Finally, they reached King Sigibert and were settled in their former territory, or so it seems. For later on in the *Histories*, we learn that Sigibert had in the meantime seen fit to settle Suebi in the region formerly inhabited by the Saxons, resulting in further tribulations.⁹²

It has been argued that what Gregory is describing here, in between counterfeiting Saxons and Mummolus' justified bloodshed, is something like a Frankish adaptation of the Roman system of *foederati*.⁹³ Saxons and Suebi were allowed to settle within Sigibert's borders, in exchange for military aid and a promise of allegiance. If so, then this was a rather loose agreement: the Saxons

⁸⁹ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 4.42, p. 176: Mane autem facto, statuunt Saxones exercitum, praeparantes se ad bellum; sed, intercurrentibus nuntiis, pacem fecerunt, datisque muneribus Mummolo, relicta universa regionis praeda cum captivis, discesserunt, iurantes prius, quod ad subiectionem regum solaciumque Francorum redire deberent in Galliis.

⁹⁰ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 4.42, p. 176: Igitur regressi Saxones in Italiam, adsumptis secum uxoribus atque parvolis vel omni suppellectile facultatis, redire in Galliis destinant, scilicet ut a Sigybertho rege collecti in loco unde egressi fuerant stabilirentur.

⁹¹ For full discussion with references to earlier literature, Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 100-111.

⁹² Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 5.15, pp. 213-14.

⁹³ Thus B. Bachrach, 'Merovingian Mercenaries and Paid Soldiers in Imperial Perspective', in J. France (ed.), *Mercenaries and Paid Men: The Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 167-92, here 179-80.

could leave Frankish territory to join the Lombard invasion of Italy. Unfortunately, the *Histories* remain silent about the circumstances that led the Saxons to undertake this journey. The eighth-century Lombard historian Paul the Deacon offers additional details, though these could amount to nothing more than an intelligent reworking of Gregory, aimed at boosting the credentials of the legendary Lombard king Alboin.⁹⁴ We read how Alboin, in one of his many exemplary acts of statesmanship, approached ‘his old friends the Saxons’ for aid, ‘so that he could enter and take possession of so vast a region as Italy with more men’.⁹⁵ More than 20.000 Saxons rose to Alboin’s call, a number almost certainly adopted from the *Histories*.⁹⁶ Paul was less pleased about the Saxon return to Gaul, which he insinuates was due to the strictness of later Lombard kings. ‘It is certain’, he says, ‘that these Saxons had come to Italy with their wives and children so that they should dwell there, though as far as can be understood they were unwilling to subject themselves to the commands of the Lombards. But they were not permitted by the Lombards to live under their own law, and for that reason are believed to have returned to their own land’.⁹⁷

Some comfort might be had from the fact that Paul the Deacon, too, seems to have been puzzled by certain aspects of Gregory’s story, in particular the Saxon return to Gaul and their subsequent resettlement in some undisclosed part of Sigibert’s kingdom. Writing in the midst of Charlemagne’s Saxon Wars (772-804), he quite naturally associated *Saxones* either with the Isles or the territories across the Rhine. The latter, indeed, was also where

⁹⁴ For Paul’s use of the *Histories*, W. Pohl, ‘Paulus Diaconus und die “Historia Langobardorum”: Text und Tradition’, in Scharer and Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie* (1994), pp. 375-405, here p. 377, n. 12.

⁹⁵ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH rer. Germ. 48 (Hanover, 1878), 2.6, p. 89: Alboin vero ad Italiam cum Langobardis profecturus ab amicis suis vetulis Saxonibus auxilium petiit, quatenus spatiosam Italiam cum pluribus possessurus intraret.

⁹⁶ The 20.000 Saxons who were killed by the Suebi, Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 5.15, pp. 213-14.

⁹⁷ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, 3.6, p. 115: Certum est autem, hos Saxones ideo ad Italiam cum uxoribus et parvulis advenisse, ut in ea habitare deberent; sed quantum datur intellegi, noluerunt Langobardorum imperiis subiacere. Sed neque eis a Langobardis permissum est in proprio iure subsistere, ideoque aestimantur ad suam patriam repedasse.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

Alboin had first picked up his 'old friends'. Paul solved the matter by yet another ingenious revision: the Saxons did not settle *within* Sigibert's kingdom, but instead enlisted the king's help (*eius adiutorio*) to return to their own homeland (*patriam*).

Gregory's lack of interest in a Saxon homeland did not keep him from using the Saxons to address issues that *were* important to him, like the moral education of his readers. He shows as much in an elaborate report on yet another one of Clothar's Saxon campaigns.⁹⁸ We read how shortly after the death of Clothar's great-nephew Theudebald (d.555), the king was informed by his men that the Saxons, whom previous engagements had reduced to tributary status, had again risen in rebellion and refused to fulfil their annual payment. Clothar immediately marched on the Saxons to set things straight, but contrary to expectations, found them suppliant and ready to treat. Three times, a Saxon envoy visited the king begging for peace, each offering still greater amounts of Saxon property and land in return. While Clothar repeatedly claimed it against God to answer such supplications with violence, his men maintained that the Saxons were liars who would never keep their promises.⁹⁹ The Franks ended up literally beating their king into leading the attack, which in line with Clothar's previous admonitions, saw vast numbers of Franks dead on the field, and, in a final twist of irony, had Clothar suing for peace himself.

The story obviously meant to convey a lesson: peace is to be preferred above war, especially if the war is unjust in the eyes of God.¹⁰⁰ What is most striking, however, is not the meaning of the story, but the division of the roles: it is the Franks rather than the Saxons who act as villains and fall victim to divine displeasure. God's mercy, on the other hand, is with those who act justly, regardless of their ethnic background. Indeed, it is as if to underline this very point, that Gregory comes to repeat the same story later on in his *Histories*, but now with the Saxons in the role of unwarranted aggressors against the Suebi, who had been settled in their lands by King Sigibert.¹⁰¹ The price the Saxons

⁹⁸ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 4.14, pp. 145-47.

⁹⁹ Gregory, *Historiarum libri decem*, 4.14, p. 146.

¹⁰⁰ Goffart, 'Foreigners', p. 90.

¹⁰¹ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 5.15, pp. 213-214.

are shown to pay for their hubris is equally steep: of the 26.000 Saxons who entered the battlefield against the outnumbered Suebi, only 6.000 survived. If one's conduct is no longer just, the reader is led to conclude, God's favour will be lost as swiftly as it was gained.

As a source of information on the Saxons, then, Gregory is not very accessible. The details he provides are casual and stripped of context. As a rule, he is more concerned with the moral order behind events than their geo-political implications. Yes despite, or rather because of, such priorities, Gregory's approach towards Saxons is fundamentally different from that of Roman historiography. For a historian like Ammianus Marcellinus, the Saxon pirates attacking the Roman *limes* were aliens. They represented a world that was distinctly non-Roman, geographically, politically and culturally. Such a world was, by definition, inferior to its Roman counterpart. Gregory's Saxons are of a different sort. While they are not necessarily loyal subjects of the Merovingians, they do have a part, *belong* so to speak, in Gregory's world. This certainly goes for the Saxons in western Gaul, who were enlisted in Fredegunde's schemes. But to a large degree, it also applies to the Saxons across the Rhine. Both are treated not according to some crooked standard of otherness, but as actors within the divinely upheld moral order; the same moral order that harboured Franks and Gallo-Romans like Gregory himself.

In fact, Saxons belonged to Gregory's world also in a more direct sense: they were part of his daily life as bishop of Tours, as can be gathered from several stories in the *Histories*. One is about a well-to-do wine-merchant from Tours called Christopher.¹⁰² Gregory relates how Christopher took to the road after finalizing a deal in Orleans, loaded with gold and accompanied by two Saxon servants (*pueri*). These servants had long hated their master for his frequent use of the whip and thus decided to do away with him at the earliest opportunity: they attacked their master in a forest, cut him to pieces and departed with the money. They were soon hunted by a party led by Christopher's brother, who managed to capture the younger of the two and bring him back to Tours in chains. At Tours, the servant was exposed to

¹⁰² Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 7.46, pp. 365-66.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

prolonged torture and mutilation, and his corpse was eventually hung from a gibbet.

It is hard to deduce a consistent moral from this tale, and perhaps Gregory did not mean to convey one at this point. It seems the main reason the story made the *Histories*, was because it involved prominent members from the community of Tours and because its grisly end also took place in that city. Certainly, this is why Gregory could provide his readers with such an abundance of details, including the fact that the servants in question were Saxons. Note, though, that the ethnicity of the *pueri* never becomes more than a detail. There is no exclaiming here about the ‘impious hands of a desperate nation’,¹⁰³ no insinuating that the servants’ actions had something to do with their being Saxons. For Gregory, they were murderous if ill-treated servants first, and Saxons only as an aside.

A second story in which Gregory was personally involved, is that of Childeric the Saxon (*Chuldericus Saxo*), who appears at several points in the *Histories*.¹⁰⁴ Historians have looked at Childeric’s stormy career in and out of Merovingian service and concluded he was a ‘mercenary’, probably from one of the Saxon colonies on the Loire or the Seine.¹⁰⁵ While the latter is a likely option, I have difficulties embracing the mercenary label.¹⁰⁶ Certainly, Childeric was a non-Frank, who headed a band of fighting men and was rather loose with his loyalties. Yet judging from the handful of details Gregory cares to divulge about him, he was deeply rooted in Merovingian society: he had a wife with property in Aquitaine,¹⁰⁷ held the ducal dignity, knew where to find the shrine of St Martin to escape royal anger, and was eventually condemned under Merovingian justice – though as it turned out, God’s justice found him first.

¹⁰³ Symmachus, *Epistulae*, 2.46.

¹⁰⁴ Martindale, *Prosopography*, vol. 3, p. 291.

¹⁰⁵ B. Bachrach, *The Anatomy of a Little War. A diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald affair (568-586)* (Boulder, 1994), p. 151, G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West* (London, 2003), pp. 111-12. Halsall proposed, on the basis of Childeric’s Frankish name, that the epithet *Saxo* referred to his mercenary status, rather than to him being a Saxon.

¹⁰⁶ See also, K. R. DeVries, ‘Medieval Mercenaries. Methodology, Definitions, and Problems’, in France (ed.), *Mercenaries and Paid Men*, pp. 43-60.

¹⁰⁷ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 10.22.

We first meet Childeric on the road near Poitiers, exchanging insults with a man called Avius. The latter was an acknowledged adulterer and murderer, who had earlier slain two citizens of Tours to marry one of their wives.¹⁰⁸ During the exchange, a member of Childeric's party saw fit to skewer Avius with a spear and beat him to death. Far from denouncing the deed, Gregory judges it a fitting punishment for a life lived in wickedness.¹⁰⁹ When Childeric next appears in the *Histories*, he has gone from administering divine justice, to fleeing before an irate King Guntram, possibly because he had been involved in Gundovald's failed bid for the kingship in 585.¹¹⁰ Like several others who had bet on the pretender and lost, Childeric sought refuge at the shrine of St Martin in Tours.¹¹¹ This is a noteworthy move (though hardly registered as such by Gregory), for it implies Childeric was Christian, or at least familiar enough with Christian custom to know about Church sanctuary. Either way, it brought Childeric into personal contact with the author, who eagerly relates his successful attempt at mediating between Childeric and the king. Guntram forgave the Saxon his indiscretions and allowed him to settle south of the Loire together with his wife, on the one condition that Childeric would not go over to his nephew Childebert II. Of course, Childeric did just that, and was promptly rewarded for his opportunism by being appointed duke of Childebert's *civitates* south of the Garonne. Apparently, being a Saxon did not disqualify one from being enlisted by various Merovingian kings and from reaching high office in their service.

It is not until the end of the *Histories* that Childeric makes his final, and fatal, appearance. The reader is informed that by that time, ca. 590, the Saxon had committed 'various crimes, murders, mutinies and many other wicked deeds'.¹¹² King Childebert II ordered him to be executed for his crimes, but was beaten to it by Childeric's own lack of moderation. Following a night of excessive intake, the Saxon choked on his wine and was later found dead on his

¹⁰⁸ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 6.13, p. 283.

¹⁰⁹ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 7.3, pp. 327-28.

¹¹⁰ Bachrach, *The Anatomy of a Little War*, p. 151.

¹¹¹ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 8.18, p. 385.

¹¹² Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 10.22, p. 514.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

cot. By way of epitaph, Gregory throws in a rumour that Childeric had been the ringleader behind an earlier incident at the Church of St Hilary in Poitiers, where three bishops who had come to deal with run-away nuns, had been manhandled by an anonymous crowd of ruffians. 'If this is true', Gregory concludes, 'then God avenged the injuries perpetrated against his servants'. Interestingly, its veracity could also stand as another testimony to Childeric having been involved in Merovingian church politics.

As with many of the authors dealt with so far, Gregory does not tie Saxons down to a single region, if he fixes them in space at all. Still, over the course of his *Histories*, we encounter *Saxones* in a number of places: along the coasts of Gaul, east of the Frankish kingdoms and on the Italian peninsula. Equally flexible in the *Histories* is the Saxons' status in relation to the Merovingian rulers. Saxons alternately appear as subjects, allies or enemies of the Franks. Remarkably, their fluctuating political status appears not have bothered Gregory. Nor, for that matter, does he show any concern over the fact that many of the Saxons he describes would still have been pagan. In fact, Gregory does not so much as mention Saxon religion, whilst their subjugation to, or independence from, the Franks is cause for neither celebration nor resentment on his part. This is not to say that he does not judge or condemn. When he considers someone to have behaved unjustly or against the divinely ordained moral order, we find in Gregory an eager and uncompromising judge. But such censure is aimed at Romans and Franks as much as at Saxons and other foreign groups.

2.3. Saxons in seventh-century Frankish history-writing

Gregory's *Histories* made for a formidable, if ambivalent inheritance. Judging from the work's extensive manuscript transmission, the *Histories* continued to be read and circulated in the Frankish realm for centuries.¹¹³ Up to the eighth

¹¹³ P. Bourgain and M. Heinzelmann, 'L'oeuvre de Grégoire de Tours: la diffusion des manuscrits', in N. Gauthier, Nancy and H. Galinié (eds.), *Grégoire de Tours et l'espace gaulois. Actes du congrès international, Tours, 3-5 novembre 1994* (Tours, 1997), pp. 273-317.

century, there was not a single Frankish historian who failed to consult and use the *Histories* as a source for early Merovingian history. Yet despite Gregory's explicit request that his work be passed on unaltered, and the dire threats levelled against anyone impudent enough to ignore this petition, the *Histories* were seldom read in their original form.¹¹⁴ The earliest surviving manuscripts, copied ca. 700, contain only the first six books, and then in an abridged form.¹¹⁵ Sixty-eight chapters' worth of miracles, episcopal and local affairs are filtered out, leaving a less 'personalized' history, with a stronger focus on Frankish politics. Thus, what had not been a History of the Franks at first, was arguably made to resemble one by later generations.¹¹⁶ Along with this shift in priorities, we also witness the collapse of Gregory's uniquely unpartisan approach to non-Frankish groups. Gregory's Frankish successors were increasingly ill at ease with a world in which not one, but all peoples, pagans included, were potential recipients of God's justice. Hence, from the seventh century onwards, we witness the gradual emergence of ethnic and political bias in Frankish historiography. The Franks become the main heroes of the story, and non-Frankish groups like the Saxons start to be judged accordingly: they can either behave as dutiful subjects, or be written into the ground as depraved outsiders.

Such themes barely reach the surface in the work of Gregory's only known seventh-century successor: the enigmatic chronicler known as Fredegar. Fredegar's *Chronicle* covers events from Creation up to the year 642.¹¹⁷ The brunt of the work consists of a compilation of earlier chronicles and histories,

¹¹⁴ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 10. 31, p. 536.

¹¹⁵ B. Krusch, 'Die handschriftlichen Grundlagen der Historia Francorum Gregors von Tours. 1. Mit einem Exkurs über die neuen Buchstaben König Chilperichs I.', *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, 27 (1932), pp. 673-757, here 680.

¹¹⁶ W. Goffart, 'From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum* and Back Again: Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours', in T.F.X. Noble and J.J. Contreni (eds.), *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Richard E. Sullivan* (Kalamazoo, 1987) pp. 55-76 and Heinzmann, *Gregor von Tours*, pp. 167-75. But see Reimitz, 'The Providential Past', pp. 118-120.

¹¹⁷ Several manuscripts take the narrative even further, up the year 768. These so-called *Continuations* will be dealt with in chapter 3.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

most notably the first six books of Gregory's *Histories*.¹¹⁸ Only the last section of the *Chronicle*, covering the period 584-642, is so to speak 'original', though its lack of any sort of conclusion suggests it was left unfinished. Much ink has been spilt on the question of authorship. The name Fredegar is not associated with the *Chronicle* before the sixteenth century and is commonly accepted to represent a later attribution.¹¹⁹ Its continued use by historians is thus largely a matter of convenience. No such unanimity exists when it comes to the question of how *many* authors were involved in the work. Perceived shifts in style and perspective within the *Chronicle* have long led scholars to assume the involvement of two or three different contributors, working in various stages between the 610s and 660s.¹²⁰ Over the recent decades, however, scholarship has moved once more towards the idea of a single author – a single 'Fredegar' – who compiled the *Chronicle* ca. 660. Little can be said concerning Fredegar's role or position within the Frankish kingdoms. His detailed knowledge of political affairs indicates he belonged to the highest circles of the realm, and may have served as an administrator at one or several of the Merovingian courts. His obvious interest in Burgundian history favours Burgundy as a place of residence, though it cannot be ruled out that he also spent time in one of the other kingdoms. In particular, he appears interested in the Austrasian city of Metz. Combined with his positive appraisal of the Pippinid mayor of the palace Grimoald, this has led some to presume an 'Austrasian connection' in addition, or instead of, a Burgundian one.¹²¹

Though Fredegar relied heavily on earlier histories, he was by no means a mere copyist. The first part of the *Chronicle* betrays a deliberate strategy of

¹¹⁸ R. Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (Hannover, 2007), pp. 46-55.

¹¹⁹ Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, pp. 16-25.

¹²⁰ For the notion of three authors, B. Krusch, 'Die Chronicae des sogenannten Fredegar', *NA*, 7 (1882), pp. 247-351, 421-516. Critized by F. Lot, 'Encore la Chronique du Pseudo-Frédégaire', *Revue historique*, 115 (1914), pp. 305-37 and M. Baudot, 'La question du Pseudo-Frédégaire', *Le Moyen Âge*, 38 (1928), pp. 129-170. For the notion, posed subsequently, of two authors, S. Hellmann, 'Das Fredegarproblem', *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, 29 (1935), pp. 36-92 and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar, With Its Continuations* (London, 1960), ix-xxviii.

¹²¹ I. Wood, 'Fredegar's Fables', in Anton and Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie*, pp. 358-66, here 360.

selection, modification and addition towards its sources, aimed at showing the gradual, if inevitable, culmination of the past into a Frankish, and Christian, present. Significantly, Saxons are associated with the Franks almost from the beginning of their history.¹²² In one of his most famous (and patently false) additions to his sources, Fredegar traces the origin of the Franks back to Priam of Troy, who, he claims, was their first king.¹²³ Priam was succeeded by a king named Friga, who led part of the people away into Macedonia. Those remaining behind elected another king, Francio, from whom they derived the name Franks. Under Francio, the Franks eventually ended up in the region between the Rhine and the Danube. There, they got into conflict with the Roman consul Pompey, who subjected the Franks and ‘all the other nations living in Germania’ to Roman rule.¹²⁴ Pompey’s victory proved short-lived, for the Franks immediately entered into a bond of friendship (*amicitia*) with the Saxons and thus managed to throw off Roman influence. This victory was a lasting one: ‘from that point onwards, until the present day, no people could defeat the Franks, but rather they were able to subjugate them to their own authority’.¹²⁵

Following this audacious claim, Franks (and Saxons) move to the background of the *Chronicle* for a while, only to re-emerge in the section of the work based on books II-VI of Gregory’s *Histories*. Although Fredegar used a

¹²² Fredegar, *Chronicon*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 2 (Hanover, 1888), 2.4-5, pp. 45-46.

¹²³ Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, pp. 151-55; I. Wood, ‘Defining the Franks: Frankish Origins in Early Medieval Historiography’, in S.N. Forde, L.P. Johnson and A.V. Murray (eds.), *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds, 1995), pp. 47-57; H.H. Anton, ‘Troja-Herkunft, origo gentis und frühe Verfasstheit der Franken in der gallisch-fränkischen Tradition des 5. bis 8. Jahrhunderts’, *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 108 (2000), pp. 1-30, here 15-24.

¹²⁴ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 2.6, p. 46: Attamen semper alterius dicione negantes, multo post tempore cum ducibus transaegerunt usque ad tempore Ponpegi consolis, qui et cum ipsis demicans seo et cum reliquis gentium nationes, quae in Germania habitabant, totasque dicione subdidit Romanam. Sed continuo Franci cum Saxonibus amicicias inientes, adversus Pompegium revellantis, eiusdem rennuerunt potestatem.

¹²⁵ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 2.6, p. 46: Post haec nulla gens usque in presentem diem Francos potuit superare, qui tamen eos suae dicione potuisset subiugare.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

slimmed-down version of these books, and cut out still more himself,¹²⁶ he retained virtually all their references to Saxons, if in a reworked form. Gregory's obscure report on Odoacer's attack on Angers somewhere in the 460s, is streamlined into a tale of Frankish victory: Odoacer, 'king of the Saxons', attacked Angers, but was duly defeated by the Frankish king Childeric.¹²⁷ Likewise, Clothar I's disastrous campaign against the eastern Saxons is no longer due to divine vengeance, but is here presented simply as an 'astonishing' (*mirum*) defeat.¹²⁸ Arguably the most conspicuous intervention has to do with the Saxons who went to Italy. Whereas Gregory reported they accompanied the Lombards and their king Alboin, Fredegar claims they went on the orders of the Frankish king Theudebert I.¹²⁹ Not all of these interventions allow for a ready explanation. Yet the overall impression we get from looking into Fredegar's revisions, is that he went to some lengths to uphold, and where possible even extend, the suggestion that the Saxons had from very early on stood under Frankish influence.

This suggestion is retained in the subsequent section of the work, which relates events between 584 and 642. One significant episode revolves around the brutal conflict between Childebert II's sons, Theudebert II and Theuderic II, who had inherited Austrasia and Burgundy respectively.¹³⁰ Fredegar, whose sympathies are with the Burgundian king Theuderic at this point, relates how in 612, Theudebert suffered a big defeat against his brother at Toul. That same year, however, the Austrasian king decided to risk another confrontation, at Zülpich (near Cologne). He was supported on that occasion by 'Saxons, Thuringians and other peoples from across the Rhine or elsewhere, whom he

¹²⁶ Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 125-26.

¹²⁷ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 3.12, p. 97. Compare Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 2.18-19, p. 65.

¹²⁸ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 3.51, p. 107. Compare Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 4.14, pp. 145-47

¹²⁹ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 3.68, p. 111: Saxones, quos Theudebertus in Aetalia miserat, in Gallies prorumpunt, apud Stuplonem castra ponentes, multae estrages per vicina loca ab ipsis perpetrantur.

¹³⁰ See P.J. Fouracre, 'Francia in the Seventh Century', in Fouracre (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*. 1, pp. 371-96, here 273-4; Wood, *The Merovingians*, p. 162.

had been able to muster'.¹³¹ The ensuing battle lasted for two days, and is judged by Fredegar to have been among the most terrible ever fought: 'Such was the slaughter inflicted there by both armies, that the corpses of the slain had no room to stretch out on the ground, but stood upright, pressed together with adjacent corpses, resembling living men'.¹³² In the end, though, the forces of Burgundy proved too much even for Theudebert's many-peopled army, and through God's grace (*Domino precedente*), Theuderic was victorious once more. Thereupon, the losing brother made a final ignominious attempt to flee beyond the Rhine, but was captured, stripped of his royal dignity, and ultimately murdered on Theuderic's orders.

Not all Saxons in the *Chronicle* are, so to speak, peripheral figures, operating on or beyond the borders of the Merovingian realm. A case in point is the figure of Aeghyna, a Saxon nobleman (*genere Saxonorum optimate*), who served as duke under Clothar II and his son Dagobert I. As duke, Aeghyna was active mostly in Aquitaine and Gascony, and appears to have been specifically related to the Burgundian court.¹³³ His activities in southwestern Gaul have been taken to imply that he himself also came from that area, possibly from a Saxon colony in the Garonne area.¹³⁴ On more than one level, Aeghyna's career in Merovingian service mirrors that of Childeric, the opportunistic Saxon duke whom we met in Gregory's *Histories*. Both were active at the highest level of Merovingian politics and both held the ducal dignity in southern Gaul. Like Childeric, Aeghyna also relied on a band of trigger-happy fighting men. Fredegar relates how ca. 627, Aeghyna's *pueri* killed one Ermarius, mayor of the palace of the Aquitanian king Charibert II.¹³⁵ A dangerous conflict loomed, as

¹³¹ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 4.48, p. 139: Theudebertus cum Saxonis, Thoringus vel ceteras gentes, que de ultra Renum vel undique potuerat adunare, contra Theudericum Tholbiaco perrexit; ibique dinuo commissum est priliium.

¹³² Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 4.48, p. 139: Ibique tantae estrages ab uterque exercitus facta est, ubi falange ingresso certamenis contra se priliabant, cadavera occisorum undique non haberint ubi inclinis iacerint, sed stabant mortui inter citerorum cadavera stricti, quasi viventes.

¹³³ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 4.55, p. 148.

¹³⁴ H. Ebling, *Prosopographie der Amtsträger des Merowingerreiches. Von Chlothar II. (613) bis Karl Martell (741)* (München, 1974), p. 42 and E. Ewig, *Volkstum und Volksbewusstsein im Frankenreich des 7. Jahrhunderts*, (Darmstadt, 2nd edn, 1969), p. 13, n. 37.

¹³⁵ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 4.55, p. 148.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

both Aeghyna and Charibert were able to quickly rally large forces behind them. In the end, Clothar II had to step in as senior king and threaten the quarrelling parties into keeping the peace. Despite this incident, Aeghyna appears to have been rather more steadfast in his loyalties than Childeric. He is listed among the ten dukes¹³⁶ from Burgundy whom Dagobert I, Clothar's son, dispatched against the rebelling Gascons ca. 636. Fredegar takes care to list all the dukes by name, along with their ethnic background: eight were Frankish, one Roman, one Burgundian and one Saxon.¹³⁷ At the very least, such meticulousness testifies to Fredegar's deep knowledge of Burgundian affairs. But it might well be argued that he was personally acquainted with the men involved. Fredegar could for example have met Aeghyna and his fellow dukes at the Burgundian court, or even as part of their army. However this may be, it is clear that Fredegar was not at all conflicted about a (western) Saxon in Merovingian service. For all intents and purposes, Aeghyna was a full member of the Frankish elite.

The majority of Fredegar's Saxons, though, was less firmly integrated into the Merovingian kingdom. Fredegar relates how somewhere early in the 630s, King Dagobert I led an army of Austrasians, Neustrians and Burgundians into Thuringia, to put a stop to incursions by the Wends.¹³⁸ The king had

¹³⁶ He subsequently lists eleven names.

¹³⁷ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 4.78, p. 160: Quod cum decem docis cum exercetibus, id est Arinbertus, Amalgarius, Leudebertus, Wandalmarus, Waldericus, Ermeno, Barontus, Chairardus ex genere Francorum, Chramnelenus ex genere Romano, Willibadus patricius genere Burgundionum, Aigyna genere Saxonom, exceptis comitebus plurimis, qui docem super se non habebant, in Wasconia cum exercito perrixissent, et totam Wasconiae patriam ab exercito Burgundiae fuisset repleta, Wascones deinter moncium rupes aegressi, ad bellum properant.

¹³⁸ Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 4.74, p. 158: Anno decemo regni Dagoberti, cum ei nunciatum fuisset, exercitum Winitorum Toringia fuisse ingressum, cum exercito de regnum Austrasiorum de Mettis urbem promovens, transita Ardinna, Magancia cum exercito adgreditur, disponens Renum transire, scaram de electis viris fortis de Neuster et Burgundia cum ducebus et grafionebus secum habens. Saxones missus ad Dagobertum dirigunt, petentes, ut eis tributa, quas fisci ditionibus dissolvebant, indulgerit; ipse vero eorum studio et utilitate Winidis resistendum spondent et Francorum limete de illis partibus cuAstodire promittent. Quod Dagobertus consilio Neustrasiorum adeptus prestatit; Saxones, qui uius petitionibus suggerendum venerant, sacramentis, ut eorum mus erat, super arma placata pro universis Saxonebus firmant. Sed parum haec promissio sortitur aefectum; tamen tributo Saxones, quem reddere consuaveverant, per

progressed as far as Mainz, when he was suddenly approached by a Saxon embassy. The Saxons boldly requested that Dagobert release them from their annual payments of tribute. In return, they promised to defend their side of the Frankish *limes* against the Wends.¹³⁹ Dagobert accepted the Saxon proposition, though Fredegar casually adds that he reached this decision ‘on Neustrian advice’. It would go too far, perhaps, to read in this subtle addition the complaints of a slighted Burgundian adviser. But the whole deal was clearly not to Fredegar’s liking. ‘The [Saxon] promise sorted but little effect’, he concludes, ‘yet even so, the Saxons were freed on Dagobert’s command from the tribute they had been wont to pay’. It is only at this point, also, that Fredegar reveals that the tribute bartered away by Dagobert and his Neustrians had amounted to 500 cows a year – a considerable sum – and that the Saxons had lived under this obligation ever since it had been imposed by Clothar I (d. 561). We need not take Fredegar entirely at his word at this point. Certainly, his claim suits the evidence provided by Gregory, who indeed mentions a Saxon tribute to Clothar (just before the king’s divinely ordained defeat, that is).¹⁴⁰ Then again, Fredegar was familiar with the *Histories* as well and could have interpreted the work’s casual reference to a tribute under Clothar rather more generously than Gregory ever intended it.¹⁴¹

There is yet another side to Fredegar’s story. He relates how the Saxon envoys sealed their deal with Dagobert by taking an oath on their weapons and beating them together ‘as was their custom’. Oath-swearing with weapons – either by touching the weapon or raising it – is attested in various barbarian law codes.¹⁴² This includes the *Lex Saxonum*, issued by Charlemagne in 802/803.¹⁴³

preceptionem Dagoberti habent indultum. Quincentas vaccas inferendalis annis singolis a Chlothario seniore censiti reddebant, quod a Dagoberto cassatum est.

¹³⁹ We are again reminded of *foederati*.

¹⁴⁰ Gregory, *Libri historiarum decem*, 4.14.

¹⁴¹ Ian Wood also casts doubt on the continued nature of the tribute, but on the basis that Clothar’s sons Sigibert I and Chilperic I are known to have campaigned against the Saxons, see Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, p. 163.

¹⁴² On this practice, with reference to sources, H. Brunner, *Deutsche Rechtsgeschichte*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1892), pp. 428-29.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

The practice is also attested in the (east-) Frankish *Lex Ribuaria*, compiled under Dagobert I.¹⁴⁴ The most striking aspect of the settlement, however, is not that the envoys swore on their weapons, but that in doing so, according to Fredegar, they pledged *pro universis Saxonebus*, ‘for all the Saxons’. Fredegar is here very much on a line with later Carolingian historians, who also liked to pretend the lands beyond the Rhine belonged to one unified Saxon people whom Charlemagne could vanquish by means of a single, brilliant victory, before subjugating them under a collective treaty. Such hopes proved as ill-founded in the late eighth century as they did in the middle of the seventh. Though no written account on Saxon political organisation survives before that of Bede in the early eighth century, it is reasonable to assume that the Saxons of Fredegar’s time were not significantly better organised than those described by the Anglo-Saxon monk; that is, a loose confederacy of smaller Saxons groups, each with their own independent ruling structure.

Despite Fredegar’s overly generous assessment of Saxon political coherence, his views nevertheless represent a new step in Frankish thinking on the Saxons. More than his predecessor Gregory, Fredegar offered a consistent image of who the Saxons were and where they lived. In ancient times, they had been among the nations of Germania, aiding the Franks against the Romans. Little had changed since then, if Fredegar was to be believed, except that the Saxons had been integrated more firmly in the Merovingian sphere of influence. By the seventh century, the Saxons still belonged to the *gentes* beyond the Rhine, whence they alternately acted as tributaries, soldiers or latter-day *foederati* to the Franks.

¹⁴³ *Lex Saxonum*, ed. K. von Richthofen and K.F. von Richthofen, MGH Leges 5 (Hannover, 1875-89), c. 8, p. 49: Quicumque gladio stricto super alterum cucurrerit et retentus ab alio fuerit, solidos componat, vel in manu liti sui vel sua arma iuret.

¹⁴⁴ *Lex Ribuaria*, ed. F. Beyerle and R. Buchner, MGH LL. nat. Germ. 3,2 (Hanover, 1954), c. 69.1, p. 120. See also T.J. Rivers, *Laws of the Salian and Ripuarian Franks* (New York, 1986), pp. 16-17.

2.4. Saxons in early eighth-century Frankish history-writing

The image of the Saxons as a neighbouring people under (nominal) Frankish rule becomes still more pronounced in eighth-century historiography, beginning with the so-called *Liber Historiae Francorum* (LHF). The LHF was composed in Neustria ca. 727, possibly by a female author from Soissons.¹⁴⁵ Unlike Gregory, the author of the LHF was candid from the start that he or she was writing a history of the Franks:¹⁴⁶ ‘Let us set forth the beginning of the kings of the Franks, their origin and that of the peoples, as well as their deeds’.¹⁴⁷ The origins of the Franks are traced back once again to Troy, though the story corresponds to that rehearsed by Fredegar only in its broadest outlines.¹⁴⁸ In the LHF, the Trojans are first led to Pannonia by Priam and Antenor. They are eventually given the name *Franci* (which the author falsely claims means ‘fierce’ in Greek) by the emperor Valentinian, in token of their brutal annihilation of the Alans. Unlike in Fredegar’s version of the story, the Saxons are not present at this early stage of Frankish history to help rid the Franks of Roman hegemony. Instead, the Franks are overpowered by a Roman army and forced to flee to the Rhine area. There, they decide to elect a king ‘like all the other nations’ (1 Samuel 8:20) and to draw up laws.¹⁴⁹

The Frankish origin story flows neatly into an abbreviated version of Gregory’s *Histories*, books II-VI. These books are stripped to the bone of their religious and miraculous content, offering free reign to the author’s patent

¹⁴⁵ For Soissons, Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, p. 17. For the possibility of a female author, M. Hartmann, ‘Die Darstellung der Frauen im Liber Historiae Francorum und die Verfasserfrage’, *Concilium medii aevi*, 7 (2004), pp. 209-37. See furthermore, J.L. Nelson, ‘Gender and Genre in Women Historians of the Early Middle Ages’, in J-P. Genet (ed), *L’historiographie médiévale en Europe* (Paris, 1991), pp. 149-63, reprinted in Nelson (ed.), *The Frankish World 750-900* (London, 1996), pp. 183-98, with 194-98 on the LHF.

¹⁴⁶ Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, p. 175. See now also, P. Dörler, ‘The *Liber Historiae Francorum*: a Model for a New Frankish Self-confidence’, *Networks and Neighbours*, 1 (2013), pp. 23-43.

¹⁴⁷ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 2 (Hanover, 1888), c. 1, p. 241: Principium regum Francorum eorumque origine vel gentium illarum ac gesta proferamus.

¹⁴⁸ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, cc. 1-4, pp. 241-44. For the comparison, see Wood, ‘Defining the Franks’.

¹⁴⁹ Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, p. 179.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

fascination with warfare and plunder.¹⁵⁰ But not even the political sections of the *Histories* are safe from the author's rigorous editing, for it becomes evident at this point that the LHF is concerned not with the Franks in general, but with the Neustrians – the real *Franci*, according to the author.¹⁵¹ The LHF is equally selective when it comes to Gregory's material about Saxons. The story about Odoacer is retained, but in an altered form. In the LHF, Odoacer is a Saxon *dux*, who is seen to attack Angers from the sea, backed by a naval force (*cum navale hoste*). While there is nothing about a naval attack in the *Histories*, the scene does recall the ubiquitous Saxon naval raids from Roman historiography. Interestingly, the LHF remains silent, here as elsewhere, about Saxon settlements on the Loire. Were it solely for this eighth-century history, we would be quite oblivious to the existence of Saxon colonies in western Gaul. It is possible that these western Saxons had become so integrated by the eighth century, that they were no longer distinguished by Frankish commentators.¹⁵² The Saxons north-east of the Frankish border, conversely, are brought into sharper focus through the casual insertion of geographical markers. Following a Saxon 'rebellion', Clothar I is seen to march as far as the river Weser, where he

¹⁵⁰ Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, pp. 31-46 and G. Kurth, 'Études critique sur le Liber *Historiae Francorum*', in Kurth, *Études franques*, vol. 1, pp. 31-65.

¹⁵¹ Plassmann, *Origo Gentis*, pp. 174-75 and P.J. Fouracre and R.A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France. History and Hagiography 640-720* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 79-88.

¹⁵² There is some textual evidence for a continued Saxon presence in western Gaul, though it is controversial. In the 840s, the West-Frankish king Charles the Bald (d. 877) issued two charters referring to a district (*pagus*, *pagellus*) called 'Otlinga Saxonia', in the county of Bayeux, ed. G. Tessier and F. Lot, *Recueil des actes de Charles II le Chauve, roi de France (840-877)*, 1 (Paris, 1943), no. 28, p. 72 and no. 84, p. 234. One of his capitularies, dated to 853, also mentions the district, see *Capitulare Missorum Silvacense* (853), ed. A. Boretius and V. Krause, *MGH Capit.* 2 (1897), no. 260, c. 7, p. 260. Though the precise nature of this *Otlinga Saxonia* has long been debated, it is now commonly assumed, mostly on the basis of study of other place-names in the area, that the name Otlinga was established in the fourth or fifth century, for a Saxon colony. Whether the inhabitants of this area would still have been called Saxons in the ninth century, cannot be established with certainty, see J. Insley, 'Otlinga Saxonia', *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 22 (2002), pp. 387-391; L. Guinet, 'Otlinga Saxonia. Etude philologique', *Annales de Normandie*, 28 (1978), pp. 3-8, here p. 7; F. Lot, 'Les migrations Saxonnes en Gaule et en Grande-Bretagne du IIIe au Ve siècle', in *Revue historique*, 119 (1915), pp. 1-40; H. Prentout, 'Littus Saxonicum, Saxones Bajocassini otlinga Saxonia', *Revue historique*, 107 (1911), pp. 285-309.

routs the entire Saxon army and destroys their land, before moving to the Thuringians to dish out a similar treatment.¹⁵³ Unsurprisingly, the king's subsequent defeat against the Saxons, which Gregory claimed was due to divine vengeance, is passed unnoticed.

The suggestion of Merovingian hegemony over the Saxons is raised once more, and rather more spectacularly, in a subsequent, autonomous section of the LHF. The episode in question is situated early in the shared reign of Clothar II (d.629) and his son Dagobert I (d.639), both known for their strong rule and aggressive foreign policies. Some of Dagobert's exploits against the Saxons had already been documented by Fredegar, whose *Chronicon* the author of the LHF knew and used. However, this particular episode is not attested in the *Chronicon*, nor in any other contemporary source for that matter, which is one of the reasons modern historians tend to doubt its veracity.¹⁵⁴

The story commences with Dagobert being elected king of Austrasia. Soon thereafter, the Saxons rise in rebellion, raising an army of many peoples (*exercitum gentium plurimarum*) against the Merovingian rulers. Ringleader is the Saxon *dux* Bertoald, a figure of whom we know nothing beyond what is said in the course of the story.¹⁵⁵ Faced with the Saxon rebellion, the young king Dagobert I crosses the Rhine with an army, but is injured in the ensuing melee, where he receives a blow to the helmet and loses some of his hair.¹⁵⁶ The fallen locks are collected by Dagobert's standard-bearer, who hastily takes them

¹⁵³ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, c. 27, p. 286. See also Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, p. 34.

¹⁵⁴ S. Lebecq, 'La guerre de Clotaire II et de Dagobert contre les Saxons. Réflexions historiographiques et lexicographiques sur le chapitre 41 du Liber Historiae Francorum', in M. Coumert et al. (eds.), *Rerum gestarum scriptor. Histoire et historiographie au Moyen Âge. Hommage à Michel Sot* (Paris, 2012), pp. 39-48, here 44. See furthermore, Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 113-116, Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, p. 164.

¹⁵⁵ See Ebling, *Prosopographie*, p. 82. Erich Zöllner suggests the figure may have been taken from Fredegar's *Chronicon*, where Theoderic II's mayor of the palace named Bertoald is seen to march against Clothar, E. Zöllner, *Geschichte der Franken bis zur Mitte des sechsten Jahrhunderts* (München, 1970), p. 102.

¹⁵⁶ For the importance of hair for the Merovingian kings, E. Goosmann, 'The Long-haired Kings of the Franks: "Like So Many Samsons?"', *Early Medieval Europe*, 20 (2012), pp. 233-59 and M. Diesenberger, 'Hair, Sacrality and Symbolic Capital in the Frankish Kingdoms', in Corradini et al. (eds.), *Texts and Identities*, pp. 173-212.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

to the king's greying father Clothar II in Neustria. The enraged father immediately comes to his son's rescue and is united with him on the left bank of the Weser. Bertoald, witnessing the reunion on the other side of the river, greets the old king's arrival with scepticism and taunts, whereupon Clothar personally breaches the stream on his steed, in pursuit of his insolent enemy. Unimpressed, Bertoald then treats the king to another round of insults:

Withdraw from me, o king, lest I kill thee. For if thou wilt prevail against me, then all men will say thou hast slain thine foreign servant. Yet if I will kill thee, then the great rumour will be heard among all nations, that the most powerful king of the Franks lies slain by a servant.¹⁵⁷

Bertoald's reasoning is lost upon Clothar, who engages the Saxon duke in a duel and ultimately manages to cut off his head and put it on top of his spear. Unsatisfied with the extent of his revenge, the king then proceeds to enact a similar fate on the rest of the Saxon population, executing every Saxon male who outmeasures his *spata* – a double-edged sword, thought to have measured in at between eighty and ninety centimetres.¹⁵⁸

As said, modern scholarship tends to treat this engaging tale as largely, or entirely, rooted in fiction. Even the basic fact of a Saxon campaign under Clothar II is not beyond dispute. Doubts concerning its veracity have not diminished scholarly interest in this passage, however. Many have underlined its 'epic' character, which is attested on several levels. On the one hand, there are hints of an oral tradition, which the author of the LHF adopted to writing. Indeed, a later ninth-century text mentions the existence of a popular song

¹⁵⁷ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, c. 41, p. 313: Dixitque Bertoaldus: "Recede a me, o rex, ne forte interficiam te; quia si prevalueris adversus me, sic omnes homines dicent, quod servum tuum Bertoaldum gentilem peremisti; si autem ego interficero te, tunc rumor magnus in cunctis gentibus audietur, quod fortissimus rex Francorum a servo sit interfectus".

¹⁵⁸ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, c. 41, p. 314. For the *spata*, see H. Steuer, 'Bewaffnung und Kriegsführung der Sachsen und Franken', in C. Stiegmann and M. Wemhof (eds.), 799. *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit. Karl der Große und Papst Leo III. in Paderborn* (Paderborn, 1999), pp. 310-324 and H. Westphal, 'Zur Bewaffnung and Ausrüstung bei Sachsen und Franken. Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede am Beispiel der Sachcultur', in Stiegmann and Wemhof (eds.), 799. *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit*, pp. 323-27.

about Clothar's victory, which was sung 'in rustic mode', whilst 'women formed circles and danced in rhythm'.¹⁵⁹ By extension, the story, and the figure of Clothar in particular, are often regarded as testimony to the continued currency among the Neustrian elite of the 'Germanic' ideal of the warrior king.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, it has been noted that the LHF avails itself of a distinctly classicizing vocabulary to give shape to the story, including such Vergilian staples as *lurica* ('breastplate') and *galea* ('helmet'), and the more obscure *cacinnus* ('thunderous laughter').¹⁶¹

With regard to the Saxons, we note that Frankish historiography was becoming increasingly specific, geographically as well as politically. Had Gregory of Tours been largely uninterested in a Saxon homeland, the LHF locates them firmly in space: the Saxons are prominent among the *gentes* across the Rhine, and are active near the Weser. The Saxons are also shown to operate under a leader, though *not* a king. Both Bertoald and Odoacer are made to carry the ambiguous title of *dux*. This was a useful term to describe non-Frankish leaders, because it combined a neutral reading, 'leader', with the suggestion of a 'ducal' dignity held under the Merovingian kings.¹⁶² Formal allegiance to the Merovingians is in fact expressed throughout the story: the Saxons are said to 'rebel' against Dagobert; Bertoald refers to himself as Clothar's foreign servant, his *servum gentilem*.¹⁶³ By far the most striking aspect of the story, however, is its utter lack of compassion towards the Saxons. The author expresses not the slightest regret about the massacre staged by Clothar,

¹⁵⁹ *Vita Faronis*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 5 (Hannover and Leipzig, 1910), pp. 192-93; Regino of Prüm, *Chronicon*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. 50 (Hannover, 1890), lib. I, a. 572, pp. 28-29. See also W. Wattenbach, W. Levison and H. Löwe, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter. Vorzeit und Karolinger*, I (Weimar, 1952), pp. 118-19.

¹⁶⁰ Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, 164, B. Bachrach, *Liber Historiae Francorum* (Lawrence, 1973), p. 20. See also M. Innes, 'Teutons or Trojans? The Carolingians and the Germanic past', in Y. Hen and Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 227-49.

¹⁶¹ Lebecq, 'La guerre de Clotaire II', pp. 47-8.

¹⁶² Becher, *Rex*, pp. 10-12.

¹⁶³ Again, the terminology is ambiguous: *gentilis* could mean 'heathen', but late antique authors also used it to denote someone 'foreign' or 'non-Roman'. Judging from the LHF's disregard for (Saxon) religion, it is not most likely that Bertoald emphasises that he is a non-Frank under Merovingian rule.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

in fact positively revels in it. We are hard-pressed to find something of this sort even among the blood-soaked battlefields of Roman panegyric (Claudian's 'Orkneys drenched in Saxon blood' seems a close contender). It is tempting to see in such forbidding imagery a reflection of rising tensions between Franks and Saxons in the early eighth century. According to many of the so-called minor annals, the late 710s and 720s witnessed intense Frankish campaigning against their Saxon neighbours.¹⁶⁴ The *Annales Petaviani* appear particularly familiar, in this regard. They report how in 715 the Saxons destroyed the land of the Hattuarians. In 718, Charles Martel retaliated by entering Saxony and destroying it 'as far as the Weser'.¹⁶⁵ Subsequent campaigns followed in 720, 728, 729 and 738.

Charles Martel, of course, was not a Merovingian, but belonged to the Austrasia-based Carolingians. While this family would soon take over the Frankish kingship and attain hegemony over the entire Frankish realm (and, eventually, also the Saxons), their position was not yet secure in the 720s, when the LHF was composed. In particular, Charles Martel continued to have difficulties with the Neustrians, the LHF's primary focus and audience. Given such tensions at the time of composition, the author's rendition of the Clothar story was perhaps more in tune with contemporary issues than one would at first suspect. After all, what better story to serve a Neustrian elite, under increasing pressure from an up-start family from Austrasia, than a tale about an Austrasian king who fails to put down a Saxon rebellion and has to call in his father from Neustria to save the day?

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter started with the question if, and how, Frankish perceptions of Saxons differed from Roman perceptions. We can conclude that the post-Roman period witnessed both continuity and change. Roman literary traditions did not suddenly disappear following the disintegration of Roman rule in Gaul.

¹⁶⁴ See Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 166-75.

¹⁶⁵ *Annales Petaviani*, ed. G.W. Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hanover, 1826), s.a. 718, p. 7.

Indeed, part of the reason why Venantius Fortunatus was able to build a career in the Merovingian kingdoms, was that he was able to provide his patrons with a literary commodity that confirmed their link to the Roman past. Thus, Venantius' panegyric for Sigibert depicted the king vanquishing Saxons just like a Roman emperor. The Neustrian king Chilperic was hailed as someone who, by sheer reputation, managed to keep in check a host of peripheral peoples, Saxons included. However, when we compare Venantius' royal panegyrics to the work of his contemporary Gregory of Tours, a different world appears. In the *Histories*, Saxons do not feature as static barbarian outsiders, whose sole narrative purpose is to emphasise the military credentials of Frankish patrons. Nor are they cast as noble savages, who act as an indictment of the moral shortcomings of an in-group. Instead, Saxons are made to feature *alongside* Franks and Gallo-Romans as actors in a divinely upheld moral order. Possibly, this inclusive perspective reflected Gregory's personal experience as a bishop in Western Gaul: he knew Saxons and interacted with them. We should also take into account, however, that unlike earlier moralistic historians like Salvian or Gildas, Gregory was not burdened by notions of cataclysmic change and impending demise.¹⁶⁶ His moralism was not geared towards explaining specific historical circumstances, such as the disintegration of Roman rule or the continental migrations to Britain. Freed from such constraints, he could use the horrors and wonders of sixth-century Gaul to convey a very general lesson: everyone was potentially sinful and everyone could potentially be saved.¹⁶⁷ For Gregory, 'everyone' included Saxons.

In the Roman period, the term *Saxones* had been highly fluid. This fluidity was still very much apparent in the sixth-century sources. It was used to denote a variety of groups and communities in- and outside of the Frankish realm, who were treated more or less separately by the Merovingian kings and their representatives. Venantius Fortunatus celebrated Frankish military victories against Saxons beyond the Rhine. He also praised the evangelizing efforts of his friend Felix of Nantes, who had baptized Saxons from the Loire region. In

¹⁶⁶ A point made by Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 168-74.

¹⁶⁷ Reimitz, 'The Providential Past', p. 113.

2. SAXONS FROM A FRANKISH PERSPECTIVE

Gregory's *Histories*, we encounter an even greater territorial variety. The bishop of Tours spoke about Saxons in Bayeux, Saxons on an Island in the Loire, Saxons near the Rhine and Saxons who had accompanied the Lombards to Italy and were subsequently (re-)settled in the Austrasian kingdom of King Sigibert. Gregory also hosted a Saxon in the cathedral church at Tours, who subsequently became a duke in Aquitaine. In the seventh-century work of Fredegar, the term *Saxones* became rather more narrowly defined. Early on in Fredegar's history, 'the Saxons' are introduced as one of the *nationes* of Germania, and this is a role in which they still appear in the seventh century, fighting in the army of the Austrasian king Theudebert II and defending the (eastern) borders of the Frankish realm against the Wends. However, Fredegar's use of the label *Saxo* was not confined to a people beyond the Rhine. He also mentioned the *dux* Aeghyna, 'from noble Saxon birth', who was active in Aquitaine and Gascony, and probably came from western Gaul. The early eighth-century *Liber Historiae Francorum*, finally, tied the Saxons still more firmly to the Rhine-Weser area, where they were repeatedly defeated by Frankish kings.

While the Roman rhetoric of the barbarian outsider was less pronounced in Frankish writing about Saxons, we do witness the rise of another potentially hostile discourse: a rhetoric of allegiance. Gregory already documented how certain Saxons stood under Frankish rule or owed allegiance to the Merovingian kings, though this allegiance appears to have been of little importance to him. He referred to Saxons across the Rhine as 'rebels' on occasion, but never in a pejorative sense. In the histories of Fredegar and the LHF, Frankish dominion over Saxons becomes an increasingly important theme. Fredegar insinuated that the Saxons had belonged to the Frankish sphere of influence ever since their alliance against the Roman general Pompey. He also spoke at length about a Franco-Saxon agreement brokered under Dagobert I, which saw the (eastern) Saxons promise to protect the Frankish borders in return for a cancellation of their annual payments of tribute. The LHF rehearsed an epic story about a conflict between the Neustrian king Clothar II and his 'foreign servant' Bertoald. The Saxon rebellion is said to have ended with the slaughter of the

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

entire Saxon male population. What are we to make of this increased focus on Saxon allegiance in Fredegar and the LHF? Does it signal an actual intensification of Frankish ambition towards Saxon groups east of the Rhine? Or does it mainly reflect a change of perspective in these authors? As we saw above, it is possible that the Bertoald story in the LHF was informed by rising Franco-Saxon tensions in the 710s and 720s. Before the eighth century, however, I think the development is mainly one of perspective. Whereas Gregory wrote moral and ecclesiastical history, Fredegar and the LHF wrote Frankish (or Neustrian) history. This resulted in a more biased view on Franco-Saxon relations. Whereas Gregory could happily remember Clothar I's defeat against the Saxons as divine punishment for unchristian conduct, Fredegar and the LHF preferred to downplay or even forget this episode. Frankish military hegemony was a central feature of their narratives.

CHAPTER THREE

Gens perfida or populus Christianus?

The Saxons and the Saxon Wars in Carolingian historiography

3.1. 'It could certainly have ended sooner'

About a decade or so after the death of the Frankish king Charlemagne (d. 814), his former courtier Einhard completed a biography of the late king.¹ Modelled loosely on Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, the *Vita Karoli* divided Charlemagne's life in three sections: his wars, his personal life and his administration. True to the scope of Charlemagne's military accomplishments, the section dealing with wars and the conquests of peoples covers almost half the work.² Einhard reported on Charles' deeds in the field in consecutive order, dedicating one or two chapters to each war and the people it brought under Frankish dominion. The informed reader will recognize that for much of this section Einhard leaned heavily on earlier Frankish historical texts, particularly the *Annales regni Francorum*.³ Yet the effect of his narrative is markedly different. Whereas annals recounted Frankish exploits across the realm in year-by-year fashion, the ever-repeating annual cycles a sure measure of the

¹ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS rer. Germ. 25 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1911). The exact date of composition is unsure. Einhard must have completed the *Vita Karoli* after 817, the date of the collapse of a porticus at Aachen, which he describes. A *terminus ante quem* can be derived from a letter by Lupus of Ferrières, dated ca. 830, which mentions Einhard's work. For an introduction to this longstanding issue, see T.F.X. Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thégan, and the Astronomer* (University Park, 2009), pp. 9-13.

² Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 5-15, pp. 7-18.

³ L. Halphen, *Études critiques sur l'histoire de Charlemagne* (Paris, 1921), pp. 78-88.

continuity of Frankish power, Einhard led his audience at a different pace, inviting them to take in the spread of Frankish hegemony region by region and people after people. As the reader watches Charles subjugate Aquitanians, Langobards, Saxons, Gascons, Bretons, Bavarians, Slavs and Avars, he is slowly made to conclude that one life-time is apparently the scale on which the foundation of an empire can be measured. And as if to erase any doubt that it was to Charlemagne that this feat be ascribed, Einhard ended this section of his biography with a well-aimed comparison between the king and his predecessors. 'Through such wars', the courtier concluded with measured solemnity, 'the kingdom of the Franks, indeed already extended and powerful when Charles inherited it from his father Pippin, was enlarged so splendidly that he added to it almost double as much again'.⁴

Einhard was well aware that Charlemagne's conquests were neither easy nor self-evident. One war, in particular, stood out as exceedingly bloody and hard-fought: the *bellum Saxonicum*, Charlemagne's war against his north-eastern neighbours, the pagan Saxons. All in all, it had taken the Frankish king more than three decades (772-804) and over fifteen campaigns fully to incorporate the region between the Lower Rhine and Elbe into his realm. 'No war undertaken by the Franks was ever longer, fiercer and more toilsome', was Einhard's solemn conclusion.⁵ Modern scholarship has come to offer various explanations for the protracted nature of Charlemagne's Saxon campaigns. For Martin Lintzel, the key was in the Saxons' rigid class structure. While most of the Saxon aristocracy was quick to side with the Franks, Saxon freemen and freedmen, led by the enigmatic nobleman Widukind, waged a desperate battle to defend ancient customs and prevent further deterioration of their social position.⁶ Hans-Dietrich Kahl proposed a thesis of 'escalation'.⁷ The

⁴ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 15, p. 17: Quibus regnum Francorum, quod post patrem Pippinum magnum quidem et forte susceperat, ita nobiliter ampliavit, ut poene duplum illi adiecerit,

⁵ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 9: Quo nullum neque prolixius neque atrocius Francorumque populo laboriosius susceptum est.

⁶ M. Lintzel, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, (Berlin, 1961), vol. 1, pp. 95-127. For Widukind, see G. Althoff, 'Der Sachsenherzog Widukind als Mönch auf der Reichenau. Ein Beitrag zur Kritik Widukind-Mythos', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 17 (1983), pp. 251-79.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

incorporation and Christianization of Saxony had not been Charlemagne's objective from the start. Rather, an initial Frankish raid into Saxon territory triggered an increasingly high-staked game of reaction and counter-reaction between the two neighbouring forces, which eventually escalated into a full war of conquest and conversion.

More recent scholarly contributions tend to stress that eighth-century Saxony was not inhabited by a politically unified people, but rather by several more or less independent Saxon sub-groups, each of which would have had to be subjugated, and kept subjugated, separately.⁸ The foundation for this hypothesis is provided by the Anglo-Saxon historian Bede. In book 5 of his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, completed in 731, Bede comes to speak about seventh-century Anglo-Saxon missionary efforts towards the 'Old Saxons', as he calls the Saxons on the Continent.⁹ In the course of this section, he credits the Old Saxons with a particular political organisation:

For the Old Saxons do not have kings, but a large number of satraps who are set over the people. When at any time war is about to break out, they cast lots impartially and all follow and obey the one on whom the lot falls, for the duration of the war. When the war is over, they all become satraps of equal rank again.¹⁰

It has long been noted that the term *satrapa* can be traced back to the Old Testament, where we encounter it in two rather distinct contexts. In the Book

⁷ H-D. Kahl, 'Karl der Große und die Sachsen. Stufen und Motive einer historischen "Eskalation"', in R. C. Schwinges (ed.), *Politik, Gesellschaft, Geschichtsschreibung. Giessener Festgabe für Frantiek Graus zum 60. Geburtstag* (Cologne, 1982), pp. 49-130.

⁸ Becher, 'Non enim habent regem', Wood, 'Beyond Satraps'.

⁹ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), 5.10, pp. 480-82; see also, K. Schäferdiek, 'Der Schwarze und der Weiße Heward. Der erste Versuch einer Sachsenmission', *Westfälische Zeitschrift*, 146 (1996) pp. 9-24.

¹⁰ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, 5.10, pp 480-82.: Non enim habent regem idem Antiqui Saxones, sed satrapas plurimos suae genti praepositos, qui ingruente belli articulo mittunt aequaliter sortes, et quemcumque sors ostenderit, hunc tempore belli ducem omnes sequuntur, huic obtemperant; peracto autem bello, rursus aequalis potentiae omnes fiunt satrapae.

of Daniel, *satrapae* are high-ranking Persian administrative officials.¹¹ The Persian king Darius is said to have appointed 120 of them to help govern the realm in his name. The first Book of Samuel, conversely, uses the term satrap for independent Philistine princes.¹² The Philistines had no king, but were governed instead by a number of satraps, each of which ruled independently in his own region. Bede, now, was among the finest exegetes of his generation, and would have been familiar with either section. Matthias Becher has recently argued convincingly that Bede modelled the Saxon *satrapae* on the independent Philistine princes from I Samuel.¹³ In doing so, Bede was crediting the Continental Saxons with a peculiar type of political organisation: rather than being subjected to a single king, the Continental Saxons were ruled by independent 'Kleinkönige'. Each of these 'sub-kings' ruled over his own region. Only when war threatened, one among them would be chosen by lot to act as war-leader for the duration of the conflict.

The notion of Saxon fragmentation is confirmed by the Frankish *Annales regni Francorum* (ARF), which were composed in the late 780s, so during the Saxon Wars. The ARF mention at least four Saxon sub-groups: the Westphalians, Angrarii and Eastphalians, who appear to have inhabited the regions between the Rhine and Elbe, and the Nordliudi, who lived beyond the Elbe.¹⁴ The first three groups also appear in Frankish legislation for Saxony, as well as in a Saxon hostage-list dating from ca. 805.¹⁵ This would suggest that

¹¹ Daniel 6, 1-2.

¹² 1 Samuel, 5.11, 6.16.

¹³ Becher, 'Non enim habent regem idem Antiqui Saxones'. On Bede's commentary on Samuel and his use of exegesis as political commentary, see A. Thacker, 'Bede, the Britons and the Book of Samuel', in S. Baxter et al. (eds), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 129-148 and I. Wood, 'Who Are the Philistines? Bede's Reading of Old Testament Peoples', in C. Gantner, R. McKitterick and S. Meeder (eds.), *The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

¹⁴ *Annales regni Francorum*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6 (Hanover, 1895), s.a. 775, 779, 780, 784, 798, 799, 810.

¹⁵ *Capitulare Saxonicum*, ed. A. Boretius, MGH Capit. 1 (Hanover, 1883), praefatio and c. 9, pp. 70-71; *Lex Saxonum*, ed. C. von Schwerin, MGH Font. iur. Germ. 4 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1918), cc. 47-48, pp. 29-30; *Indiculus obsidum Saxonum Moguntiam deducendorum*, ed. Boretius, MGH Capit. 1, no. 115, pp. 233-34. See also Wood, 'Beyond Satraps', pp. 275-76 and Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 250-57.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

the Franks, at least, considered them significant political units. Because none of these groups were ever mentioned before the Saxon Wars, it remains uncertain whether they represented long-standing Saxon entities. In fact, Matthias Becher has suggested that the Westphalians, Angrarii and Eastphalians were relatively new creations, which had formed out of various smaller Saxon groups in response to the increasing Frankish pressure on the Saxon borders in the course of the eighth century.¹⁶ In any case, it is clear that Charlemagne was not facing a unified enemy in Saxony. Nor was there a clearly defined administrative hierarchy in Saxony, at the top of which he could hope to install himself.¹⁷ A swift dynastic takeover, such as had secured the Lombard kingdom in 774 and Bavaria in 788, was simply not an option among the king-less Saxons.

Taking all this into account, one is inclined to conclude that the incorporation of Saxony was bound to be a difficult and protracted process. This, however, is not how Frankish historians perceived the matter. For Einhard, the prolonged nature of Charlemagne's *bellum Saxonicum* had only one real cause: Saxon infidelity. 'It could certainly have ended sooner', he asserts, 'if not for Saxon *perfidia*'.¹⁸ He continues:

It is difficult to tell how often they surrendered themselves, beaten and suppliant, to the king, promised to fulfil his orders, gave the required hostages without delay and accepted the legates that were sent to them. At several points, they were so tamed and mollified, they even professed themselves willing to abandon their worship of devils and submit willingly to the Christian faith. But as often as they were ready to do these things, so eager they always were to overturn them [...] hardly a single year went by after the war against them had commenced, in which they had no such change of heart.¹⁹

¹⁶ Becher, 'Non enim habent regem', pp. 23-28.

¹⁷ T. Reuter, *Germany in the early Middle Ages. C. 800-1056* (London, 1991) pp. 66-67.

¹⁸ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 10: Poterat siquidem citius finiri, si Saxonum hoc perfidia pateretur.

¹⁹ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 10: Difficile dictu est, quoties superati ac supplices regi se dederunt, imperata facturos polliciti sunt, obsides qui imperabantur absque dilatione dederunt,

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

Einhard is not the only Frankish author to charge the Saxons with collective infidelity. The eighth- and early ninth-century annals that act as early witnesses to Charlemagne's Saxon campaigns, tend to rehearse a similar story: Charlemagne conquered and converted 'the Saxons' rather rapidly, but spent decades crushing down on Saxon rebellion and apostasy.

This chapter looks at eighth- and ninth-century Frankish history-writing about the Saxon Wars. In particular, it seeks to account for the deeply ambiguous portrayal of the Saxons in such history-writing. As indicated in the title of this chapter, Frankish representation of the Saxons in this period fluctuated between two extremes: *gens perfida* and *populus Christianus*, a deceitful and unfaithful enemy, and the newest members of the Christian polity. In order to explain this situation, this chapter proceeds along two lines. A first section views the widespread accusation of Saxon infidelity in the context of a more general Carolingian preoccupation with 'faith' or *fides*. This was a complex and loaded concept, that carried at once political (loyalty, fidelity) and religious (Christian faith) overtones. *Fides* developed into a core elite value under the Carolingians, and a widely advertised norm of conduct. It was a norm of conduct the Carolingians were quick to impose and eager to avenge, even in regions where Frankish dominion was yet to be fully established. One is hard-pressed, indeed, to find a group on the periphery of the Frankish realm, whom Frankish historiography did not, at one point or another, come to brand unfaithful.²⁰ Accusations of rebellion and infidelity belonged to the standard narrative toolset of the Frankish historian, applied wherever Carolingian claims

legatos qui mittebantur susceperunt, aliquoties ita domiti et emolliti, ut etiam cultum daemonum dimittere et Christianae religioni se subdere velle promitterent.

²⁰ The *Annales regni Francorum*, for instance, refer to *perfidia* seventeen times just between 810 and 829, always to incriminate individuals or peoples on the fringes of the Carolingian Empire: the dukes of Venice (810, 811), Sclaomir and Ceadragus of the Abodrites (819, 821, 826), Tunglo of the Sorabs (826), Ljudevit of Pannonia (819, 821), the Gascons (819, 824), Aizo the Saracen (826), Wihomarcus and the Bretons (811, 824, 825), the 'mountain-dwellers' of the Pyrenees (824). *Annales regni Francorum*, pp. 130-78.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

of hegemony were challenged or Frankish aggression stood in need of legitimation.²¹

However, as the second part of this chapter will show, the incorporation of the Saxons presented an exceptional case, in which the Carolingian discourse on (in)fidelity reached an exceptional intensity, as well as longevity. While it is unclear to what extent Charlemagne was aware of circumstances in Saxony when he first crossed the Rhine, neither he nor his advisers seem to have anticipated the degree of resistance they were to meet over the subsequent decades.²² Such resistance challenged not just the ambitions of Charlemagne and his missionary allies, but also the historians tasked with narrating these ambitions. Many of these historians were accustomed to relate the past and present deeds of the Franks in terms of triumph and hegemony.²³ More problematically, as Eric Shuler recently underlined, they had a tendency to treat incorporation and conversion more like 'events assignable to a specific date', than the delicate fruits of long-term processes of acculturation.²⁴ The conquest and Christianization of Saxony, it is fair to say, did not conform to any such expectations. What the Franks got instead was a bloody and drawn-out affair, in which victories and treaties failed to be definitive in the light of Saxon fragmentation, and in which staged mass baptisms were seldom a guarantee for lasting conversion, no matter how loudly one celebrated such events. Charging the Saxons with infidelity, to king as well as to God, was one way for Frankish commentators to negotiate this unsettling reality, and to try and salvage the suggestion, so essential to Frankish cultural memory, of perpetuated triumph. Naturally, blaming a people for resisting its own conquest required a deeply subjective and selective recall of events. But this was very much par for the

²¹ R. Broome, 'Pagans, rebels and Merovingians', in C. Gantner, R. McKitterick en S. Meeder (eds.), *The Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

²² Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 175-78.

²³ R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 113-18.

²⁴ E. Shuler, 'The Saxons within Carolingian Christendom: Post-conquest Identity in the Translations of Vitus, Pusinna and Liborius', *Journal of Medieval History*, 36 (2010), p. 43.

course for those looking at the past in the early Middle Ages, as it still is today, for that matter.²⁵

3.2. The early roots of *fides*

Already in antiquity *fides* had a wide range of meanings. For the period up to 200 AD, the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* provides no less than 13 definitions, including but not limited to: trust or having trust placed in one, a promise or the fulfilment of a promise, proof, credit, honesty, good faith, sincerity, loyalty, trustworthiness and belief.²⁶ *Fides* seems to have found its way into Roman Law from the earliest stages of the Republic, with trust and good faith developing into important legal principles.²⁷ This legal, normative character extended beyond the realms of forensics and commerce, into what we would deem the social realm: the mutual obligations between patron and client. *Fides* also regulated the conduct of soldiers, who swore oaths (*sacramenta*) to obey their commanders, later replaced by an oath of allegiance to the emperor.²⁸ To *fides*' legal credentials were also added religious ones.²⁹ Literary and numismatic evidence testifies to a deity worshipped under the name Fides, her temple located on the Capitol.³⁰ The temple walls are said to have been adorned with copies of international treaties. Indeed, it is in the context of foreign relations that the intricate web of normative, ethical, religious and legal connotations came to bear most heavily on *fides*.³¹ To stand by one's allies and keep to

²⁵ See on the selectivity of recall, A. Rigney, 'Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory', *Journal of European Studies*, 35 (2005), pp. 11-28.

²⁶ This excludes references to the stringed instrument, P.G.W. Glare (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 697-98.

²⁷ S. Gottfried, 'Fides (Recht)', *DnP*, vol. 4, pp. 507-509, C. Becker, 'Fides', in T. Klauser (ed.), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 801-39. See also D. Nörr, *Die Fides im römischen Völkerrecht* (Heidelberg, 1991), pp. 4-12.

²⁸ S.E. Phang, *Roman Military Service. Ideologies of Discipline in the Late Republic and Early Principate* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 117-21.

²⁹ E. Fraenkel, 'Zur Geschichte des Wortes Fides', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie, Neue Folge*, 71 (1916), 187-199, here 189-191 and G. Freyburger, *Fides. Étude sémantique et religieuse depuis les origines jusqu'à l'époque augustéenne* (Paris, 1986), pp. 319-330.

³⁰ F. Prescendi, 'Fides (Religion)', *DnP*, vol. 4, pp. 506-507, Freyburger, *Fides*, pp. 229-317.

³¹ Nörr, *Die Fides*, pp. 4-12.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

agreements with foreign powers was deemed a principal duty and a quintessential Roman quality.³²

One of the preferred opposites of *fides*, was *perfidia* or its adjective *perfidus*. The Oxford Latin Dictionary lists faithlessness, treachery or falsehood.³³ Alternatively, *perfidia* can be defined as a transgression of *fides*, potentially allowing the former to take on as broad a range of meanings as the latter.³⁴ Just as Roman authors held up *fides* as the essence of Romanness, so *perfidia* was an attribute liberally applied to Rome's enemies. And among these enemies, none was accused more often and tenaciously than the Carthaginians or Phoenicians, who were, in the words of Cicero, the most treacherous of all peoples.³⁵ Variations on the theme can be found in Livy, Sallust, Lucan, Horace, Valerius Maximus and Silius Italicus, who refer to Carthaginian *perfidia*, *fraus* and *calliditas*, but also employ the more ironic *Punica fides*, 'Punic faith'.³⁶ Opinions differ on why the Romans chose to depict their ancient enemy in such a manner.³⁷ To some extent, the perfidious Carthaginian acted like the ultimate 'other' to the Roman self-image of loyalty and trustworthiness. Yet Roman authors were not above inverting the picture. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, it is the proto-Roman Aeneas, rather than the Carthaginian princess Dido, who abandons ship (or rather abandons *by* ship), and acts *perfide*.³⁸ On a different level, *Punica fides* allowed Roman historians to rewrite on their own favourable terms a glorious yet troubling episode from their past,

³² We are reminded here of J.H. Thiel's assessment of the Romans as 'great masters both of patriotism and hypocrisy', J.H. Thiel, 'Roman War Guilt', E.S. Gruen (ed.), *Imperialism in the Roman Republic* (New York, 1970), pp. 22-30, here p. 23.

³³ *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 1338.

³⁴ Freyburger, *Fides*, pp. 85-86.

³⁵ Cicero, *Pro Scauro*, 19.42. For an overview, B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 324-351.

³⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 21.4.9, 28.19.6 and 30.42.20, Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.38, Horace, *Carmina*, 4.4, Sallust, *Iugurtha*, 108.3, Lucan, *De bello civili*, 4.736-7, Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 1.5, 2.54, 11.592, Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX*, 3.8.1, 7.4.4 and 9.6.2E.

³⁷ E.S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton/Oxford, 2011), pp. 115-140, Isaac, *The Invention*, pp. 324-351, G.H. Waldherr, 'Punica fides – Das Bild der Karthager in Rom', *Gymnasium*, 107 (2000), 193-222.

³⁸ Starks, 'Fides Aeneia', 255-83.

when Rome had itself repeatedly acted without good faith and with undue severity, epitomized in the utter destruction of Carthage following the Third Punic War. Here, the unfaithful Carthaginian most clearly foreshadows the perfidious Saxon of Frankish historiography.

With the rise and spread of Christianity, *fides*' range expanded further. In the works of the church fathers and the Vulgate, *fides* came to refer to belief in Christ, the (dogmatic) tenets of such belief, and to Christian faith in its totality.³⁹ Though not in the Vulgate, *perfidia* expanded accordingly.⁴⁰ Still a transgression of *fides*, *perfidia* came to denote disbelief, unbelief or heresy, basically anything that deviated from dogmatically sound Christian faith and practice. To be sure, new meanings did not replace old ones.⁴¹ Nor was there a strict semantic divide between loyalty, on the one hand, and Christian faith, on the other.⁴² For many of the early church fathers, loyalty was an inherent part of Christian faith and belief. Tertullian, in particular, liked to present Christians as soldiers of Christ (*milites Christi*).⁴³ Just as a regular soldier owed loyalty to the emperor, so a *miles Christi* owed loyalty to Christ. The sacrament of baptism, through which a catechumen entered the ranks of the faithful, could double as a pledge of loyalty. Conversely, we see that Roman military oaths became more Christianized as well. By the beginning of the fifth century, a soldier would swear by God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the emperor.⁴⁴

In line with such views, those accused of heresy or apostasy, often stood accused not just of having deviant beliefs, but also of betraying God, Christianity, or its representative institutions. *Perfidia* could convey many of these connotations at once. Cyprian of Carthage denounced as *perfidii* those

³⁹ See the lemma 'Fides' in A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-français des Auteurs Chrétiens* (Turnhout, 1954). See also O. Weijers, 'Some Notes on "fides" and Related Words in Medieval Latin', *Archivum latinitatis mediæ ævi*, 40 (1977), pp. 77-102, here 82-3.

⁴⁰ See 'Perfidia', in Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-français*.

⁴¹ Becker, 'Fides', pp. 830-31.

⁴² Weijers, 'Some notes'.

⁴³ M. Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft. Untersuchungen zum Herrscherethos Karls des Großen* (Sigmaringen 1993), pp. 101-104.

⁴⁴ Vegetius, *De re militari*, 2.5. See also Phang, *Roman Military Service*, pp. 119-20.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

Christians who had 'lapsed' from their faith under Decius' persecutions.⁴⁵ Visigothic authors were obsessed with the *perfidia* of the Jews, which referred to Jewish unbelief, as well as their alleged infidelity to the Visigothic kingdom.⁴⁶ The Anglo-Saxon monk Bede liberally applied the epithet *perfidus* to enemies and persecutors of the Church, among which he counted heretics, Jews, apostate kings and the Devil.⁴⁷

The Frankish kingdom under the Carolingians was heir to both Roman and patristic traditions where the use and understanding of *fides* was concerned. Loyalty to the king developed into a key virtue under the Carolingians, widely advertised in both narrative and normative sources. Assemblies and armies we find regularly portrayed as gatherings of *fideles*, 'the faithful men' of the ruler.⁴⁸ Such faith was vested in oaths of loyalty, which the king's magnates, and from 789 onwards, all inhabitants of the realm were required to swear.⁴⁹ Yet (sworn) loyalty to the Carolingians was but one obligation of 'the faithful'. Faith in Christ was another. Over the course of the eighth century, the Frankish kingdom was increasingly conceptualized as a Christian polity, in which Carolingian kings wielded divinely ordained authority over, and carried responsibility for, the Christian people, referred to alternatively as *populus*

⁴⁵ Cyprian, *De Lapsis*, 14.20. I was first made aware of Cyprian's use of the term *perfidia* through Alan Thacker's study on Bede's use of the term, Thacker, 'Bede, the Britons and the Book of Samuel', p. 135.

⁴⁶ R. González-Salineró, 'Catholic anti-Judaism in Visigothic Spain', in A. Ferreiro (ed.), *The Visigoths. Studies in Culture and Society* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 123-150, here pp. 136-37. For the claim of Jewish *perfidia* by patristic and medieval authors in general, see A.A.R. Bastiaensen, 'Les vocables "perfidus" et "perfidia" et leur application aux juifs dans la chrétienté latine des premiers siècles', *The journal of Eastern Christian studies*, 60 (2008), pp. 215-229 and B. Blumenkranz, 'Perfidia', in Blumenkranz (ed.), *Juifs et Chrétiens, patristique et Moyen Âge. Collected Essays* (London, 1977), pp. 157-170.

⁴⁷ Thacker, 'Bede, the Britons and the Book of Samuel', pp. 129-148

⁴⁸ C.E. Odegaard, *Vassi and Fideles in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. 1945).

⁴⁹ See on oaths, S. Esders, 'Treueleistung und Rechtsveränderung im frühen Mittelalter', in Esders and C. Reinle (eds.), *Rechtsveränderung im politischen und sozialen Kontext mittelalterlicher Rechtsvielfalt* (Münster (2005), pp. 25-61, Becher, *Eid*, pp. 88-194 and C.E. Odegaard, 'Carolingian Oaths of Fidelity', *Speculum*, 16 (1941), 284-296. For Carolingian use of oaths to create social cohesion, see also M. Innes, 'Charlemagne's Government', in J. Story (ed.), *Charlemagne: Empire and Society* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 71-89, here 80-81.

Christianus, populus Dei or *ecclesia*.⁵⁰ In such a polity, the lines between acting according to royal command, and acting according to God's command, were vague, if they existed at all.⁵¹ Both Pippin III and Charlemagne convoluted their faithful with those of God, by referring to them on occasion as *fideles Dei ac nostri*.⁵² The chanceries of Louis the Pious and his sons issued documents addressed to 'all who are faithful to ourselves and to the Holy Church of God' (*omnes fideles sanctae Dei ecclesiae et nostri*).⁵³

That infidelity could be perceived as an equally convoluted crime is perhaps not really surprising when it comes to the Saxons. Charlemagne sought both to conquer and convert his north-eastern neighbours. By extension, Saxon resistance to this ambition was measured also along two lines: the Saxons opposed Charlemagne and they opposed God. But even in cases where the religious dimension seems less evident, the boundaries between political and religious infidelity could be porous. A good example is the 792 conspiracy of Pippin the Hunchback. A royal charter issued in 797 recalls how 'our son Pippin and others unfaithful to God and to ourselves (*dei infidelibus ac nostris*), impiously tried to lay hands on the life and the realm granted to us by God'.⁵⁴ The suggestion is clear: by acting against Charlemagne and his God-given kingdom, the conspirators had been unfaithful to God.

The Carolingians demanded *fides* not just from their 'own' people of the Franks, but also from the other peoples under their dominion. Such dominion

⁵⁰ M. de Jong, '“Ecclesia” and the Early Medieval Polity', in S. Airlie, W. Pohl, and R. Reimitz (eds.), *Staat im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 2006), pp. 113-126, Y. Hen, 'The Christianisation of Kingship', in M. Becher and J. Jarnut (eds.), *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung* (Münster, 2004), pp. 163-178 and M. Garrison, 'The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne', in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 114-161.

⁵¹ See also J.L. Nelson, 'Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 52-87, here p. 61 and H. Helbig, 'Fideles Dei et regis. Zur Bedeutungsentwicklung von Glaube und Treue im hohen Mittelalter', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 33 (1951), pp. 275-306.

⁵² See for instance, MGH Epp. 4, no. 20, p. 528.

⁵³ Helbig, 'Fideles dei et regis', p. 290. For *fides* under Louis the Pious, M. de Jong, *The Penitential State* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 62-63.

⁵⁴ MGH DD Kar. 1, no. 181, p. 244. On this, C. Hammer, "Pipinus rex" Pippin's Plot of 792 and Bavaria', *Traditio*, 63 (2008), pp. 235-276, here pp. 239-40.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

need not necessarily have been real or secure for the norm of *fides* to be imposed, or the accusation of infidelity to surface. In fact, claiming rebellion or perfidy was a convenient way to explain and legitimate Carolingian aggression, something Frankish historians appear to have understood very well. The so-called *Continuations of Fredegar*, composed at some stage between 751 and 786 under the patronage of a cadet branch of the Carolingian family, are careful to underline the ‘reactionary’ character of the military efforts of Charles Martel and his warlike progeny.⁵⁵ Campaigns against the Bavarians, Alemanni and Saxons are shown to ensue only after these peoples have betrayed their *fides*, justifying the inevitable Frankish response.⁵⁶ Infidelity is even more ubiquitous in the early ninth-century Annals of Metz.⁵⁷ Here, eighth-century Carolingian expansion is made to appear more like an extended string of punitive expeditions against unfaithful subjects, among which we find the Aquitanian dukes Hunald and Waifar, count Blandinus of Auvergne, Maurontus the duke of Provence, the Lombard king Aistulf and the Saxon leaders Theoderic and Widukind.⁵⁸ It is problematic to uncover the ‘reality’ underlying such claims of infidelity in Frankish historiography. Certainly, Frankish authority was frequently contested in the eighth century, especially in times of crisis. When an opportunity for greater autonomy presented itself following the death of Charles Martel in 741, powerful dukes like Hunald and Odilo did not hesitate to seize it, no doubt renegeing on earlier agreements. On the other hand, Frankish historians tended greatly to overestimate the degree of Frankish authority over peripheral regions. Moreover, as Matthias Becher showed in his exhaustive analysis of the political demise of the ‘unfaithful’ Bavarian duke

⁵⁵ R. Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*. MGH Studien und Texte 44 (Hannover, 2007), p. 92 and R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 36-9.

⁵⁶ Fredegar, ‘Continuations’, ed. and trans. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations* (London, 1960), cc. 29, 31-32, 35, pp. 181-82.

⁵⁷ On the date, H. Hoffmann, H., *Untersuchungen zur karolingischen Annalistik* (Bonn 1958), pp. 10-12, 41-51, I. Haselbach, I., *Aufstieg und Herrschaft der Karolinger in der Darstellung der sogenannten Annales Mettenses priores. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Ideen im Reich Karls des Großen* (Lübeck, Hamburg, 1970), pp. 9-21.

⁵⁸ *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. B. von Simson, MGH SRG 10 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1905), s.a. 737, 739, 742, 743, 744, 754, 761-3, 768, 769, 778, 782.

Tassilo, they were adept at tampering with the evidence and retrospectively altering it in their favour.⁵⁹

3.3. Narrating the Saxon Wars

When it came to the eighth-century Saxons, there was a large discrepancy between Carolingian ambition and reality. Over the course of the eighth century, the regions north-east of the Rhine became the object of increasing military and missionary attention, but before 772, the effects were largely superficial.⁶⁰ As we saw above, this did not prevent the *Continuations of Fredegar*, a text that possibly predated Charlemagne's reign, from making far-reaching claims of authority over the Saxons, whom we already find credited with an inherent proclivity (*more consueto, solito more*) towards rebellion.⁶¹ Possibly, however, the fact that the Saxons stand out in such a way could be used to argue for a later dating of the *Continuations*.

Under Charlemagne, Frankish ambitions towards the Saxons were realized, but slowly and erratically. The unpredictable character of the process, in particular, deserves to be underlined, as this was what most confounded contemporaries.⁶² Hostilities commenced with a Frankish raid on the Irminsul, a Saxon place of worship rumoured to house vast amounts of treasure.⁶³ This raid provoked a Saxon counter-attack, which in turn prompted a second Frankish foray into Saxon territory. By 775, back-and-forth raiding had

⁵⁹ Becher, *Eid*, passim.

⁶⁰ Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 166-74, I. Wood, 'An Absence of Saints? The Evidence for the Christianisation of Saxony', in P. Godman, J. Jarnut and P. Johanek (eds.), *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung. Das Epos "Karolus Magnus et Leo papa" under der Papstbesuch in Paderborn 799* (Berlin, 2002), pp. 335-52, here pp. 335-40.

⁶¹ Fredegar, 'Continuations', cc. 32, 35, pp. 181-82: Eodem anno Saxones more consueto fidem, quam germano suo promiserant, mentire conati sunt [...] His transactis, sequente anno iterum Saxones eorum fidem, quod praefato rege dudum promiserant, solito more iterum rebelles contra ipso existunt.

⁶² For a comprehensive overview of the Saxon Wars, A. Lampen, 'Sachsenkriege, sächsischer Widerstand und Kooperation', in C. Stiegemann and M. Wemhoff (eds.), *799. Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit* (Mainz, 1999), pp. 264-72.

⁶³ *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 772, pp. 32-34, *Annales Laureshamenses* (= *Annals of Lorsch*), ed. E. Katz (St Paul, 1889), s.a. 772, p. 31.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

escalated into something approximating a war of conquest, with Charlemagne subduing various Saxon groups west of the Weser.⁶⁴ In 776, the Frankish king oversaw the first Saxon mass baptism at an assembly at the Lippspringe, followed by another mass baptism at Paderborn in 777.⁶⁵ This initial string of Frankish victories was broken in 778, by a devastating Saxon attack on the Rhineland. This 'Rhineland-raid' ushered in a second and more violent phase of hostilities (778-785), during which the Franks moved deeper into Saxony, sometimes as far as the Elbe. This phase also witnessed more concerted attempts by Charlemagne to establish an administrative and ecclesiastical organisation in Saxony.⁶⁶ Saxon resistance at this point was spearheaded by the elusive Saxon nobleman Widukind.⁶⁷ His negotiated surrender in 785, followed by his public baptism at Attigny that same year, was acclaimed as the end of the war by many contemporaries, Charlemagne included.⁶⁸ As it turned out, celebrations were once again premature. In 792, a renewed Saxon uprising led to another decade of Frankish campaigning in Saxony (794-804). The region's subjugation was finalized only in 804, with the forced deportation of large groups of Elbe Saxons to Francia and Bavaria.⁶⁹

Whereas Einhard and other ninth-century historians could look back at Charlemagne's Saxon campaigns as a thirty-three-year war with a clearly demarcated beginning (772) and end (804), those involved in the events could not, at least not whilst these events were still playing out. It is important for us to realize, that this 'lack of foresight', as we might call it, also applied to the earliest accounts of Charlemagne's Saxon campaigns. To an extent, eighth-

⁶⁴ *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 775, pp. 40-42.

⁶⁵ *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 776, 777, pp. 46-48.

⁶⁶ *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 780, 782, pp. 32-33. See P. Johanek, 'Der Ausbau der sächsischen Kirchenorganisation', in Stiegmann and Wemhof (eds.), 799. *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit*, pp. 494-506.

⁶⁷ *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a., 777, 778, 782, 785, pp. 48, 52, 62, 70; *Chronicon Laurissense breve* (=Annales Laurissenses minores), ed. H. Schnorr von Carolsfeld (Berlin, 1911), s.a. 778, 785, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁸ *ANNALES REGNI FRANCORUM*, s.a. 785, p. 70: tunc tota Saxoniam subiugata est. See also Hadrian's congratulatory letter to Charlemagne in the *Codex Carolinus*, ed. W. Gundlach MGH Epp. 3 (Berlin, 1892), no. 76, pp. 607-608.

⁶⁹ *Annales regni Francorum*, s.a. 804, p. 118, Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 10.

century historians too were unaware of how things were going to turn out in Saxony, and they too could be taken aback by unforeseen developments and set-backs. I say to an extent, because many of the Frankish histories that report on the Saxon campaigns, were composed after 772. The three eighth-century histories covered in the next two paragraphs are all annals. They report on events in a year-by-year fashion, each year receiving its own entry. This does not necessarily imply, however, that they were also compiled on a year-by-year basis. Of the three annals dealt with below, only the *Annales Petaviani* (henceforth AP) may have been updated annually from 772 onwards, though it is unclear whether this was indeed the case.⁷⁰ The *Annals of Lorsch* (AL) run from 703 to 803, but the entries up till 785 – the year the Saxon leader Widukind finally surrendered – were put down retrospectively, in a single effort.⁷¹ This is evinced by the fact that the entry of 785 concludes with a reference to the 180 years which have passed between the death of Gregory the Great and ‘the present day’.⁷² These circumstances of composition inevitably affected the kind of story the *Annals of Lorsch* could and would tell about the Saxon campaigns. Hindsight allowed the compiler to report on the period 772-785 as a bitter struggle against Saxon infidelity, but a struggle that was eventually won with the baptism of Widukind. He did not anticipate that Widukind’s surrender too provided only temporary relief, shattered in 792 by renewed Saxon insurrections. Something similar is going on with the so-called *Annales regni Francorum* (ARF), the third set of annals to be dealt with below. This compilation circulated in various versions, the most extensive of which spanned the period 741-829.⁷³ It is now commonly accepted that work on this compilation began ca. 788-93, at which point the entire section from 741 to ca. 788 was written down.⁷⁴ Possibly, the project began in response to

⁷⁰ For discussion, Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, vol. 2, pp. 186-87.

⁷¹ R. Collins, ‘Charlemagne’s Imperial Coronation and the Annals of Lorsch’, in Story (ed.), *Charlemagne*, pp. 52-70, here 55-57 and Halphen, *Études*, pp. 31-36.

⁷² *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 785, p. 34: A transitu Gregorii papae usque praesentem fiunt anni centum octoginta.

⁷³ On these versions, McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 27-43.

⁷⁴ R. Collins, ‘The “Reviser” Revisited: Another Look at the Alternative Version of the *Annales regni Francorum*’, in A.C. Murray (ed.), *After Rome’s Fall. Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval*

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

Charlemagne's takeover of Bavaria in 788, which the ARF go out of their way to justify.⁷⁵ Though it remains unclear how soon after 788 work on the annals started, it should be noted that, like the *Annals of Lorsch*, the ARF appear to treat the year 785 as the end of the Saxon Wars.⁷⁶ Moreover, we will see that from 785 onwards, the ARF start to treat the Saxons as insiders and allies. Such confidence would have been out of place had the compiler known from the start that the Franco-Saxon conflict would continue once more in 792.⁷⁷ It is likely, therefore, that the pre-790 section of the ARF was composed without prior knowledge of the renewed Saxon rebellion, so before the fall of 792.

3.4. From gens perfida to populus Christianus

All three annals report on Charlemagne's early campaigns with great optimism. The Frankish king is seen to enter Saxony in 772 with a spectacular assault on the Irminsul, a pagan site of worship, which the Franks destroy amidst divine support and biblical miracles.⁷⁸ Over the subsequent years, Franks and Saxons come to meet several times in battle, but by the end of 776 the Saxons seem to get the point and are ready to surrender themselves to Charlemagne and to Christ. The AP put things confidently: 'when the pagans had seen that they could not resist the Franks, their leading men, struck with fear, came to King Charles suing for peace, and a large multitude of the people was baptized'.⁷⁹ But

History (Toronto, 1998), pp. 191-21, here 193 and R. McKitterick, 'Constructing the Past in the Early Middle Ages: the Case of the Royal Frankish Annals', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 7 (1997), pp. 101-129, here 116. For scholarship up to 1953, see Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, vol. 2, pp. 246-54

⁷⁵ Thus, W. von Giesebrecht 'Die fränkischen Königsannalen und ihr Ursprung', *Münchener historisches Jahrbuch*, (1865), pp. 186-238. The Bavaria link was recently accepted by Becher, *Eid*.

⁷⁶ ARF, s.a. 785, p. 70. See also below, paragraph 3.4.

⁷⁷ As noted by Giesebrecht, 'Die fränkischen Königsannalen', p. 194.

⁷⁸ ARF, s.a. 772, p. 34: tunc subito divina largiente gratia media die cuncto exercitu quiescente in quodam torrente omnibus hominibus ignorantibus aquae effusae sunt largissimae, ita ut cunctus exercitus sufficienter haberet. Compare Numeri 20:9: cum que elevasset Moses manum percutiens virga bis silicem egressae sunt aquae largissimae ita ut et populus biberet et iumenta.

⁷⁹ AP, s.a. 776, p. 16: cum vidissent pagani, quod non poterant Francis resistere, timore perculsi venerunt maiores natu ad domnum regem Karolum postulantes pacem, et baptizata multa turba populi, aedificaverunt Franci in finibus Saxanorum civitatem quae vocatur Urbs Karoli.

this is nothing compared to the ARF, which go to considerable lengths to prove that by 777, the majority of the Saxons had utterly and undeniably committed themselves to Charlemagne and Christianity. Already in 775, Charlemagne is shown to accept into submission three major Saxon groups: the Eastphalians, the Angrarii and the Westphalians.⁸⁰ The first two are headed by a leader: Hessi for the Eastphalians and Bruno for the Angrarii. References to specific Saxon sub-groups are abandoned in favour of collective Saxon activity in the entry of 776, when Saxons come ‘from all corners’ to the Lippespringe, to surrender their land (*reddiderunt patriam*), pledge to be Christians, and place themselves under the authority of Charlemagne and the Franks.⁸¹ At the Paderborn assembly of 777, the deal was purportedly sealed for good:

There a multitude of Saxons was baptized, and according to their custom pledged their whole freedom and property if they should once again change their mind following that evil custom of theirs, and not keep the Christian faith and their fidelity to the Lord King Charles, his sons, and the Franks.⁸²

There is reason to believe that the Franks genuinely considered the assembly at Paderborn an important step towards the Christianization of Saxony. A poem, composed for the occasion by Paulinus of Aquila, celebrates 777 as the year ‘the Saxon nation, sprung from evil blood, deserved to get acquainted with the high king of heaven’.⁸³ Charlemagne fulfilled this lofty enterprise ‘through a

⁸⁰ ARF, s.a. 775, p. 42. See Becher, ‘Non enim habent regem’ and Wood, ‘Beyond Satraps’.

⁸¹ ARF s.a. 776, p. 46: Et tunc domnus Carolus rex una cum Francis reaedificavit Eresburgum castrum denuo et alium castrum super Lippiam, ibique venientes Saxones una cum uxoribus et infantibus innumerabilis multitudo baptizati sunt et obsides, quanto iamdictus domnus rex eis quaesivit, dederunt.

⁸² ARF, s.a. 777, p. 48: Ibique multitudo Saxonum baptizati sunt et secundum morem illorum omnem ingenuitatem et alodem manibus dulgtum fecerunt, si amplius inmutassent secundum malam consuetudinem eorum, nisi conservarent in omnibus christianitatem vel fidelitatem supradicti domni Caroli regis et filiorum eius vel Francorum. I follow here, with some alterations, the translation by Bernhard Scholz, *Carolingian Chronicles*, p. 56.

⁸³ *Carmen de conversione Saxonum*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Poetae 1 (Berlin, 1881), pp. 380-81, v. 28-29: In quo Saxonum pravo da sanguine creta / Gens meruit regem summum cognoscere caeli. For Paulinus’ authorship, see the convincing linguistic evidence presented by D. Schaller, ‘Der Dichter des “Carmen de conversione Saxonum”’, in G. Bernt, Günter, F. Rädle and G. Silagi (eds.), *Tradition und Wertung. Festschrift für Franz Brunhölzl zum 65. Geburtstag*

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

thousand triumphs' and 'the dew of the salvation-bringing font'. In the end, 'he led a new progeny of Christ into the [heavenly] hall'.⁸⁴

What the compiler of the poem did not anticipate, but the compilers of the AL and ARF did, was that the new progeny of Christ was soon to make a spectacular exit from the heavenly hall. In 778, while Charlemagne was away to settle matter on the Spanish border, a Saxon host fell on the Rhineland. The effects were devastating, physically as well as symbolically: the Saxon force razed Paderborn to the ground, pillaged the right bank of the Rhine, and dissolved whatever ecclesiastical organisation had been established so far.⁸⁵ The ARF hedge their bets where Saxon motives are concerned: the Saxons 'rebelled' because they had heard that Charlemagne was away in Spain, because Widukind had persuaded them, and because 'evil custom' drove them towards such behaviour.⁸⁶ The AL stress collective Saxon infidelity: 'because the lord king stayed in these parts [Spain], the Saxons, that perfidious people (*gens perfida*), betraying their faith (*mentientes fidem*), came forth from their own borders and moved violently up to the Rhine, burning and destroying everything, leaving nothing unharmed'.⁸⁷ Note that the AL refrain from specifying *fides* either politically or religiously. Both are implied.⁸⁸

The setback of 778 did not put a stop to Frankish ambitions in Saxony, nor to Saxon resistance against these ambitions. Hence, the annals treat us to another string of 'conquests' and 'conversions', interrupted by inevitable acts of

(Sigmaringen, 1989), pp. 27-46. But see S.A. Rabe, *Faith, Art, and Politics at Saint-Riquier: The Symbolic Vision of Angilbert* (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 54-74, who defends the traditional notion that the poem was composed by Angilbert of St Riquier.

⁸⁴ *Carmen se conversione Saxonum*, p. 381, v. 62: Progeniemque novam Christi perduxit in aulam.

⁸⁵ See Johanek, 'Die Ausbau', pp. 295-96 and Lampen, 'Sachsenkriege', p. 267.

⁸⁶ ARF, s.a. 778, p. 52. Note that this is the same *consuetudinem malam* which the Saxons had purportedly sworn to keep in check in 777.

⁸⁷ AL, s.a. 778, p. 32: Et interim quod domnus rex illis partibus fuit, Saxones gens perfida mentientes fidem, egressi de finibus suis venerunt hostiliter usque ad Renum fluvium, succendendo omnia et vastando, nihil penitus relinquentes.

⁸⁸ Note also that the *Annales Mosellani*, which are closely related to the *Annals of Lorsch* at this point, have the Saxons betray not *fides*, but *fides Christi*, see *Annales Mosellani*, ed. I.M. Lappenberg, MGH SS 16 (Hanover, 1859), s.a. 778, p. 496: Et interim, quod domnus rex illis partibus fuit, Saxones, gens perfida, mentientes fidem Christi, egressi de finibus suis venerunt hostiliter ad Rhenum fluvium, succendendo omnia et vastando, nihil penitus relinquentes.

Saxon infidelity. The AP report how in 780 ‘the most illustrious king Charles once again moved into Saxony with an army of Franks, as far as the river Elbe; and he acquired the entire region under his powerful arm’.⁸⁹ That same year, the annals suggest, the region was thoroughly Christianized: ‘the Saxons left their idols, worshipped the true God, and believed in his works; at this time they also built churches’. Yet 782 witnessed another 180-degree turn: ‘the Saxons rebelled and were reduced to their former path, forsaking God and the faith (*fidem*) they had promised’.⁹⁰ The AL and ARF report on the period 778-785 in a similar fashion, but stress the involvement of Widukind, the elusive Saxon leader, who is said to have been hiding with the Northmen at this point. Both have him involved in 782, when a Frankish army was annihilated near the Süntel Range and Charlemagne retaliated by staging a massacre at Verden. The ARF rehearse the standard double motive: ‘the Saxons rebelled in their usual fashion, because Widukind persuaded them’.⁹¹ The AL put things similarly: ‘when [Charlemagne] heard they had again fallen from their faith and joined Widukind in rebellion, he re-entered Saxony and destroyed the land and an immense crowd of Saxons with a cruel sword’.⁹²

By 785 Widukind and his allies were ready to throw in the towel. The precise circumstances of his surrender are difficult to reconstruct, as this was the sort of highly symbolic occasion that early medieval authors tended to reshape according to their audiences’ expectations.⁹³ The ARF report that the surrender

⁸⁹ AP, s.a. 780, p. 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 gentilium Winethorum hominum.

⁹⁰ AP, s.a. 782, p. 17: Idipsum annum Saxones rebellantes, et reducti ad priore tramite, Deum abnegantes et fidem quam promiserant.

⁹¹ ARF, s.a. 782, p. 60: Et cum reversus fuisset, statim iterum Saxones solito more rebellati sunt, suadente Widochindo.

⁹² AL, s.a. 782, p. 33: Et cum eos iterum cognovisset a fide dilapsos et cum Widuchindo ad rebellandum esse adunatos, rursus abiit in Saxoniam, et vastavit eam, et ingentem Saxonum turbam atroci confodit gladio.

⁹³ On this, P. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual. Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, 2001).

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

was prearranged between Charlemagne and his Saxon adversary.⁹⁴ After he had been given guarantees for his safety, Widukind, in the company of other supporters, came to Attigny, the heart of the Frankish realm, to publicly submit himself to Charlemagne and receive the sacrament of baptism. The ARF leave little doubt about the significance of the event: *tunc tota Saxonia subiugata est*. The AL have the proceedings of 785 unfold in even more triumphant fashion. First, the Saxons surrendered themselves to Charlemagne and ‘again accepted the Christian faith which they had earlier spit out’.⁹⁵ Then Widukind, ‘the source of many evil deeds and instigator of *perfidia*’, came to Attigny, where he was received from the baptismal font by Charlemagne himself. The AL conclude the entry of 785 with the observation that 180 years have passed since the death of Gregory the Great, the pontiff who famously initiated the conversion of the (Anglo-) Saxons on the Isles.⁹⁶ The point is obvious: with the baptism of Widukind, Gregory’s pious endeavour was finally brought to conclusion.

The triumphant tone of the annals is mirrored in several letters composed in the wake of Widukind’s surrender. Soon after the events, Charlemagne wrote to Rome to notify the pope of his victory and ask for liturgical celebrations to be held in honour thereof.⁹⁷ Hadrian was only too happy to oblige. In his reply, dated to 786, the pontiff confessed himself ecstatic that ‘in our times and yours, a nation of pagans is led to a true and great religion and a perfect faith, and is subjugated to your royal authority’.⁹⁸ He went on to promise celebrations ‘for the stability of your victory’ and urged Charlemagne to order similar

⁹⁴ ARF, s.a. 785, pp. 68-70.

⁹⁵ AL, s.a. 785, p. 34: *Cumque Saxones se illi dedissent, christianitatem quam pridem respuerant, iterum recipiunt. Pace patrata nulloque rebellante, postea rex rediit domum suam. Widuchind tot malorum auctor ac perfidie incensor, venit cum sociis suis ad Attinacho palacio, et ibi baptizatus est, et dominus rex suscepit eum a fonte ac donis magnificis honoravit. A transitu Gregorii papae usque praesentem fiunt anni centum octaginta.*

⁹⁶ For connections between the continental Saxons and the Saxons on the Isles at this point, see J. Story, ‘Charlemagne and the Anglo-Saxons’, Story (ed.), *Charlemagne*, pp. 195-210, here 196-98.

⁹⁷ Charlemagne’s request does not survive, we know of it through Hadrian’s response.

⁹⁸ MGH Epp. 3, no. 76, pp. 607-608: *unde nimis amplius divinae clementiae referuimus laudes, quia nostris vestrisque temporibus gens paganorum in vera et magna deducens religionem atque perfectam fidem vestrisque regalibus substernuntur ditionibus.*

celebrations throughout his realm, as well as overseas. As late as 790, the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin wrote to his good friend and teacher Colcus, informing him that through Charlemagne's efforts, the Saxons and Frisians had been converted to the Christian faith.⁹⁹ Alcuin, incidentally, expressed no misgiving over the fact that conversion had been achieved through a combination of rewards (*premiis*) and threats (*minis*).¹⁰⁰

3.5. 'Like a dog returning to its vomit': the insurrection of 792

It seems, then, that following the events of 785, the Franks, as well as their historians, liked to think they had completed their work in Saxony. For the subsequent years, the ARF can be seen to integrate the Saxons into their 'triumphant narrative' as yet another people marching under the divinely raised banner of the Franks.¹⁰¹ Saxons are part of the Ingelheim assembly of 788, passing judgement on the Bavarian duke Tassilo for his supposed infidelity.¹⁰² A year later, Saxons are shown to support and advise Charlemagne on his campaign against the Slavs.¹⁰³ Finally, when Charlemagne launches a campaign against the Avars in 791, Saxons are part of the attacking force. The ARF relate how Franks, Frisians and Saxons collectively decided to march on Pannonia, 'because of the intolerable outrage committed by the Avars against the Holy Church and the Christian people'.¹⁰⁴ Christian victory is secured by three days

⁹⁹ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ed. E. Dümmmler, MGH Epp. 4 (Berlin, 1895), no. 7, p. 32: Nam antiqui Saxones et omnes Frisonum populi, instante rege Karolo, alios premiis et alios minis sollicitante, ad fidem Christi conversi sunt.

¹⁰⁰ See on Alcuin's views towards the (Saxon) mission, I. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 86-88.

¹⁰¹ McKitterick, *History and Memory*.

¹⁰² ARF, s.a. 788, p. 80.

¹⁰³ ARF, s.a. 789, p. 84.

¹⁰⁴ ARF, s.a. 791, p. 88: Ibiq[ue] consilio peracto Francorum, Saxonum, Frisonum, disposuerunt propter nimiam malitiam et intollerabilem, quam fecerunt Avari contra sanctam ecclesiam vel populum christianum, unde iustitias per missos impetrare non valuerunt, iter peragendi. On this entry, M. de Jong, 'Het woord en het zwaard. Aan de grenzen van het vroegmiddeleeuwse christendom', *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis*, 118 (2005), pp. 464-82, here 476-80.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

of praying and fasting on the Avar border.¹⁰⁵ The Saxons, the reader is slowly led to conclude, have become part of the *populus Christianus* not just in name, but also in deed.

Contrary to Frankish expectations, however, Saxon membership of the *populus Christianus* was anything but secure. Following his victory against the Avars in 791, Charlemagne returned to Regensburg in Bavaria, presumably to prepare for another campaign in Pannonia. As it turned out, he stayed in or around Regensburg for the greater part of two years, until the autumn of 793. Campaigns against the Avars were not resumed until 795, and then from Italy. The delay was the result of several unanticipated events, which together initiated what François Louis Ganshof has dubbed the ‘second great crisis of [Charlemagne’s] reign’.¹⁰⁶ The first disaster struck already on the return journey from Pannonia late in 791, in the form of an equine epidemic, which must have seriously compromised Frankish military mobility for the subsequent years.¹⁰⁷ The summer of 792 added failed harvests. The result was a realm-wide famine in 793, so dire, according to one vehement report, that ‘brothers were forced to eat brothers, and mothers [to eat] sons’.¹⁰⁸ As often in Frankish political narratives, natural disasters heralded domestic upheaval. Late in 792, a sworn association (*coniuratio*) was uncovered, involving Charles’ oldest son Pippin the

¹⁰⁵ ARF, s.a. 791, p. 88: Ad Anisam vero fluvium properantes ibi constituerunt laetantias faciendi per triduo missarumque sollempnia celebrandi; Dei solatium postulerunt 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 navigia per medium fluvium venientes, a Domino eis terror pervenit: dereliquerunt eorum loca munita, quae supra nominata sunt, firmitatesque eorum vel machinationes dimiserunt fuga lapsi; Christo perducente populo suo utrosque exercitus sine laesione introduxit.

¹⁰⁶ F.L. Ganshof, ‘Charlemagne’, in Ganshof (ed.), *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy: Studies in Carolingian History* (London, 1971), pp. 17-27, here p. 20.

¹⁰⁷ Thus the ‘Revised’ version of the *Annales regni Francorum* (Revised for short), ed. F. Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6 (Hanover, 1895), s.a. 791, p. 90. See also, C. Gillmor, ‘The 791 Equine Epidemic and its Impact on Charlemagne’s Army’, *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, 3 (2005), pp. 23-45.

¹⁰⁸ *Annales Mosellani*, s.a. 792, p. 498: Famis vero, quae anno priori caepit, in tantum excrevit, ut non solum alias immundicias, verum etiam, peccatis nostris exigentibus, ut homines homines, fratres fratres ac matres filios comedere coegit. On the famine, A.E. Verhulst, ‘Karolingische Agrarpolitik: Das Capitulare de Villis und die Hungersnote von 792/93 und 805/06’, *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie*, 13 (1965), pp. 175-189.

Hunchback, as well as magnates from Neustria, Austrasia, and in all likelihood, Bavaria.¹⁰⁹ The culprits had only barely been dealt with, when news began to arrive of a renewed Saxon rebellion. The insurrection started with an unanticipated Saxon attack on a Frankish force moving along the Weser, which may have taken place as early as July 792.¹¹⁰ The successful attack seems to have initiated a larger uprising, which by the end of 793 had turned into a ‘full-scale rebellion’ (*omnimoda defectio*).¹¹¹ Charlemagne did not respond until late in 794. But when he did, it was with utmost severity. Between 794 and 804, Saxony was systematically beaten into submission through near-annual campaigns, focused mainly on the Weser-Elbe region.¹¹² Those who resisted were taken from their homesteads and resettled in Francia and Bavaria.

It is hardly surprising that in the wake of the renewed Saxon rebellions of 792, anti-Saxon rhetoric went into overdrive, with the accusation of infidelity once more taking central stage. The AP create a contrast between the norm of *fides* and Saxon betrayal of this norm: while Charlemagne was residing in Bavaria in the company of his *fideles*, the Saxons ‘betrayed the faith, which they had pledged so long ago to King Charles; they strayed, deviated and were overtaken by darkness’.¹¹³ The reader is then reminded of another conspicuous betrayal of *fides*: Pippin’s ‘evil plot’. The ARF seem intent at first at covering up the various disasters of 792. The majority of the manuscripts leaves out Pippin’s rebellion altogether.¹¹⁴ The news that ‘the Saxons had again betrayed their faith’ is made to reach Charlemagne only at the end of 793; an attempt, it seems, to shorten the gap between the insurrection of 792 and Charlemagne’s belated response in 794.¹¹⁵ Yet the ARF leave little doubt where they stand with regard

¹⁰⁹ C.I. Hammer, ‘“Pipinus rex”: Pipin’s plot of 792 and Bavaria’, *Traditio*, 63 (2008), pp. 235-272, J. Nelson, *Opposition to Charlemagne* (London, 2009), pp. 5-26 and R. McKitterick, *Perceptions of the past in the Early Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 2006), pp. 68-79.

¹¹⁰ *Annals of St Amand*, ed. G.H. Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hanover, 1826), s.a. 792, p. 14 and *Annales Guelferbytani*, ed. Pertz MGH SS 1, s.a. 792, p. 45, *Annales Mosellani*, s.a. 791 (which is 792), p. 497.

¹¹¹ Reviser, s.a. 793, p. 95

¹¹² Lampen, ‘Sachsenkriege’, pp. 269-70.

¹¹³ AP, s.a. 792, p. 18.

¹¹⁴ ARF, s.a. 792, p. 90.

¹¹⁵ ARF, s.a. 793, p. 94.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

to the Saxons. When Charlemagne eventually sets out with two armies to quell the Saxon insurrection, the Saxons are shown to take refuge in cowardly deceit: ‘when they had heard they were surrounded from two sides, God dissolved their plans, and they promised, albeit fraudulently, that they would be Christians and faithful to the lord king’.¹¹⁶

On the whole, these are relatively moderate reactions. The *Annals of Lorsch*, which had celebrated Widukind’s baptism as the triumphant conclusion to 180 years of Saxon mission, reacted in a considerably less even-tempered manner. ‘The Saxons’, we are told, ‘exposed what long since lurked in their hearts. Like a dog returning to its vomit, they returned to the paganism they had earlier spit out, again abandoning Christianity, and betraying both God and the king who offered them so many benefactions, to side with the pagan nations in their vicinity’.¹¹⁷ The image, first posed in Proverbs 26:10, of a dog returning to its vomit, was something of a trope in relation to (Saxon) apostasy.¹¹⁸ Here, it allowed the annalist to castigate in the most graphic of terms, the Saxons once again abandoning Charlemagne and his Christian polity in favour of ‘the pagan nations’; an act that could not but combine political and religious betrayal. As the annalist underlines once more when reporting how the Saxons tried to join forces with the pagan Avars: ‘they first tried to rebel against God, and then against the king and the Christians’.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ ARF, s.a. 794, p. 96: Saxones autem congregantes se in campo, qui dicitur Sinistfelt, praeparantes se quasi ad pugnam; cum vero audissent se ex duabus partibus esse circumdatos, dissipavit Deus consilia eorum, et quamvis fraudulenter et christianos se et fideles domno regi fore promiserunt.

¹¹⁷ AL, s.a. 792, p. 35: Sed et propinquante aestivo tempore Saxones, aestimantes quod Avarorum gens se vindicare super christianos debuisset, hoc quod in corde eorum dudum iam antea latebat, manifestissime ostenderunt: quasi canis qui revertit ad vomitum suum, sic reversi sunt ad paganismum quem pridem respuerant, iterum relinquentes christianitatem, mentientes tam Deo quam domno rege, qui eis multa beneficia prestatet, coniungentes se cum paganas gentes, qui in circuitu eorum erant.

¹¹⁸ Y. Hen, ‘Charlemagne’s Jihad’, *Viator*, 37 (2006), pp. 33-51, here p. 43, n. 60. See also Hadrian, *Epistolae*, no. 77, p. 608 and Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 110, p. 157.

¹¹⁹ AL, s.a. 792, p. 35: Sed et missos suos ad Avaros transmittentes conati sunt in primis rebellare contra Deum, deinde contra regem et christianos.

3.6. The benefits of hindsight: remembering the Saxon Wars after 804

The almost tangible indignation encountered in the *Annals of Lorsch* in relation to the events of 792, is the indignation of a narrator caught by surprise. Working in a year-by-year fashion, from 785 onwards, the compiler of the *Annals of Lorsch* seems not to have known beforehand that 792 would witness another Saxon rebellion. Obviously, to those writing in the ninth century, this lack of foresight no longer applied. They knew the conquest of Saxony had been a bloody and protracted experience, which continued for over three decades amidst many an unanticipated set back. On the other hand, ninth-century authors were increasingly confident that 804 had really been the end of it and that Saxony was now part of the Carolingian empire. How, we might ask, did such knowledge effect their views on the Saxon campaigns?

It should be underlined from the start that hindsight did not necessarily result in a more forgiving stance towards Saxon opposition. Nor was it easy to clean the slate of the, by now, well-entrenched notion of Saxon infidelity. One notorious example of this is the so-called Revised Version of the *Annales regni Francorum*, or ‘the Reviser’ for short.¹²⁰ As the name suggests, the Reviser offers a rewritten version of the ARF for the period 741-801, with minor revisions continuing up to 811. It is unclear when the Reviser commenced this enterprise: between 814-17, or as late as 829. The Reviser wrote in a sophisticated, almost classical style, to the extent that Frankish campaigns in Saxony seem at times to recall martial episodes from Tacitus or Livy, a resemblance furthered by the Reviser’s frequent citations from these authors.¹²¹ He appears, moreover, to have been particularly well informed about events in Saxony, invoking eye-witnesses¹²² and complementing the narrative of the ARF with details and stories found nowhere else (Widukind being a Westphalian

¹²⁰ Collins, ‘The “Reviser”’, pp. 191-213, McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 27-31, S. Kaschke, *Die karolingischen Reichsteilungen bis 831: Herrschaftspraxis und Normvorstellungen in zeitgenössischer Sicht* (Hamburg, 2006), pp. 283-90.

¹²¹ On classical style, Collins, ‘The “Reviser”’, pp. 203-205.

¹²² Reviser, s.a. 798, p. 105: narravit legatus regis Eburis nomine.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

noble, for instance).¹²³ Yet the annalist's apparent familiarity with the Saxons did not translate to sympathy towards them. On the contrary: hindsight, coupled with an ethnocentricity to match that of his Roman examples, induced the Reviser to direct a narrative onslaught against the Saxons, whose perfidy he presents as the indisputable *Leitmotif* of the Saxon Wars.

The effect is instantly recognizable if we return once more to Widukind's baptism in 785, an event, we remember, that provoked contemporary commentators into triumphant statements about the end of the war. Not so the Reviser, who instead draws his readers' attention to things to come: 'that obstinate Saxon infidelity (*illa Saxonicae perfidiae pervicacitas*) came to rest for a number of years, for that reason mainly, that they could not find opportunities to revolt'.¹²⁴ The 785 entry is characteristic of the Reviser's approach. As a rule, he refers to Saxon *perfidia* not just when reporting on actual Saxon transgressions, but also, and far more intently, when reporting on agreements and (baptismal) oaths he knows are going to be broken in the future.¹²⁵ For the Reviser, the hallmarks of Saxon perfidy are not the rebellions of 778 or 792. They are the mass baptisms of 776 and 777, when large hosts of that 'unfaithful people' (*populus perfidus, gens perfida*) offered 'deceitful promises concerning the preservation of their faith'.¹²⁶ The Reviser's assessment goes beyond anything we have seen so far: the Saxons are no longer just a people committing acts of infidelity; they are an inherently deceitful people.

Casting the Saxons in such a light may have appealed to Frankish audiences in the wake of Charlemagne's Saxon campaigns, as it allowed them to embrace Saxon infidelity as the driving force behind three vexing decades. Yet it also raised an uncomfortable question: if the Saxons had been such a perfidious bunch, why had Charlemagne ever trusted their insincere promises? Had not the Franks, on more than one occasion, been taken in by Saxon 'deceit',

¹²³ Reviser, s.a. 777, p. 49.

¹²⁴ Reviser, s.a. 785, p. 71: *Nam rex, postquam ad eos accersiendos memoratum Amalwinum direxit, in Franciam reversus est; quievit que illa Saxonicae perfidiae pervicacitas per annos aliquot, ob hoc maxime, quoniam occasiones deficiendi ad rem pertinentes invenire non potuerunt.*

¹²⁵ Reviser, s.a. 775, 776, 777, 785, 795, 796 and 797.

¹²⁶ Reviser, s.a. 776, 777, pp. 47-49.

believing a conclusion had been reached when it had not? The Reviser offered a bold solution: Charlemagne and the Franks had accepted from the start that they were in for the long haul. In fact, already in 775, at a spring assembly at Quierzy, the Frankish king allegedly resolved ‘that he would go to war against the perfidious and treaty-breaking people of the Saxons, and would persevere up till the point that they were either defeated and subjected to the Christian religion, or entirely destroyed’.¹²⁷ Modern scholars are generally inclined to accept this ‘resolution of Quierzy’, which is attested nowhere else, as genuine.¹²⁸ Already in 775, Charlemagne and his advisers prepared for an all-out war of conquest and conversion. But perhaps we should allow for the possibility that this particular episode was of the Reviser’s own invention; a skilful and retrospective attempt to reduce three decades of frustrating and bloody conflict to a story of cathartic simplicity: Charlemagne ‘persevering’ against Saxon *perfidia*. Certainly, the introduction of the Saxons as a ‘perfidious and treaty-breaking people’, when their actual track-record at this point listed a single and failed attack on Hesse in 774,¹²⁹ testifies to a ninth-century perspective. For the Reviser, as for his readers, Saxon infidelity was not something that had to be proven by events. With hindsight, it was a given.

We commenced this chapter with Einhard and his *Vita Karoli*. It is suitable that we conclude with him as well. Widely read and copied, the *Vita Karoli* carried the final responsibility for fixing the notion of Saxon infidelity into the minds of posterity. Charlemagne’s courtier composed his famous biography ca. 817-830. His indebtedness to earlier annalistic reports, possibly even the Reviser, has long been noted.¹³⁰ It is not altogether surprising, in this

¹²⁷ Reviser, s.a. 775, p. 41: Cum rex in villa Carisiaco hiemaret, consilium iniit, ut perfidam ac foedifragam Saxonum gentem bello adgrederetur et eo usque perseveraret, dum aut victi christianae religioni subicerentur aut omnino tollerentur. Note that one of the few occasions the extremely rare term *foedifragus* (treaty-breaking) is attested with classical authors, is when Cicero uses it against the Carthaginians, Cicero, *De officiis*, 1.12.38.

¹²⁸ Johaneck, ‘Der Ausbau’, pp. 494-95, Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 181-82.

¹²⁹ Reviser, s.a. 774, pp. 39-41.

¹³⁰ Halphen, *Études* pp. 78-88 and F.L. Ganshof, ‘Einhard, Biographer of Charlemagne’, in Ganshof, *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy: Studies in Carolingian History* (London, 1971), pp. 1-16, here 2-3.

3. SAXONS AND THE SAXON WARS

light, that Einhard too came to play the *perfidia* card. As we saw above, Einhard explicitly blamed Saxon infidelity for the protracted nature of the Saxon War. But far from turning his account into an all-out attack on the Saxons, as the Reviser had done, Einhard used the Saxon case to bring out several of Charlemagne's key qualities. Confronted with near-annual Saxon *perfidia*, the Frankish king had showed both magnanimity (*magnanimitas*) and steadfastness (*constantia*).¹³¹ He had neither abandoned his enterprise, nor suffered Saxon infidelity without exacting swift revenge and due punishments (*perfidiam ulcisceretur et dignam ab eis poenam exigeret*). Such perseverance was all the more impressive, because Charlemagne confronted a people fundamentally opposed to his ambitions: 'the Saxons, like nearly all the nations of Germania, were violent by nature, given to the worship of devils and adverse to our religion, and deemed the violation and transgression of neither human nor divine law dishonourable'.¹³²

In the end, therefore, what Einhard stressed was not Saxon infidelity, but Charlemagne's victory over Saxon infidelity. This victory he celebrated in a highly suggestive passage:

It is evident that the war waged for so many years was brought to an end on these conditions, proposed by the king and accepted by the Saxons: that having abandoned their worship of devils and ancestral customs, they would accept the sacraments of Christian faith and religion, and be united with the Franks into a single people.¹³³

¹³¹ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 10. On these and other qualities attributed to Charlemagne, D. Ganz, 'Einhard's Charlemagne: the Characterization of Greatness', in Story (ed.), *Charlemagne*, pp. 38-51, here p. 45.

¹³² Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 9: quia Saxones, sicut omnes fere Germaniam incolentes nationes, et natura feroces et cultui daemonum dediti nostraeque religioni contrarii neque divina neque humana iura vel polluere vel transgredi inhonestum arbitrabantur.

¹³³ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 10: Eaque conditione a rege proposita et ab illis suscepta tractum per tot annos bellum constat esse finitum, ut, abiecto daemonum cultu et relictis patriis caerimoniis, Christianae fidei atque religionis sacramenta susciperent et Francis adunati unus cum eis populus efficerentur.

It is unlikely that Einhard referred here to an actual peace agreement between Charlemagne and the Saxons.¹³⁴ Rather, the courtier seems to describe what he himself conceived to be the end results of three decades of Franco-Saxon conflict: the Saxons abandoned their pagan rites in favour of Christianity and were incorporated into the Frankish realm. We should not fail to notice his choice of terminology: the Saxons are said to have become a single people (*unus populus*) with the Franks. We remember how in Roman historiography, the term *populus* typically referred to a community based on a shared law and political system. When used in opposition to *gens* or *natio*, *populus*' already positive connotations became still more pronounced: *populus* as the 'in-group' or 'us'.¹³⁵ As shown by Fritz Lošek, Einhard wrote about ethnic groups with this classical dichotomy in mind.¹³⁶ The term *populus* he reserved for his own in-group, the Franks. Non-Franks, on the other hand, he consistently described as *gentes* or *nationes*. Such, indeed, was also the status of the Saxons before Charlemagne subjugated them: they belonged to the lawless, devil-worshipping *nationes* of Germania. With the end of the war, however, the Saxons are shown to have switched sides; they became part of the *populus*. True to his classical style, Einhard did not explicitly Christianise the term through an adjective (i.e. *populus Christianus*, *populus Dei*), but such an understanding of the term is certainly implied.¹³⁷ Only after abandoning their devil-worship and accepting Christianity, could one of the *nationes* of Germania become part of the Frankish *populus*. With the end of the Saxon Wars, so Einhard seems to suggest, the Saxons had transformed from pagan outsiders to Christian insiders.

¹³⁴ On this long-standing issue, B. Bischoff, 'Das Thema des Poeta Saxo', in Bischoff (ed.), *Mittelalterliche Studien. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte*, 3 (Stuttgart, 1981), pp. 253-59, here 255; M. Lintzel, 'Der Sachsenfrieden Karls des Großen', in Lintzel (ed.), *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 2, p. 175; B.E. von Simson, 'Der Poeta Saxo und der angebliche Friedensschluß Karls des Großen mit den Sachsen', *NA*, 32 (1907), pp. 27-50. But see McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 105.

¹³⁵ Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, 41-56.

¹³⁶ F. Lošek, 'Ethnische und politische Terminologie bei Iordanes und Einhard', in H. Wolfram and W. Pohl (eds.), *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern*, 1 (Vienna, 1990), pp. 147-52, here 151-52.

¹³⁷ For such use of the term, see for instance the 791 entry of the ARF.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter looked at changing perceptions of the Saxons in Frankish historical writing about the Saxon Wars. Of all the wars waged by Charlemagne, his Saxon campaigns were the most protracted and violent. As such, this episode posed a number of challenges to the Frankish historians writing about it. For one, they had to explain and legitimize Frankish aggression. At the same time, they had to account for the fact that Charlemagne and the Franks had needed over three decades to subjugate their Saxon neighbours, in the course of which they had suffered various unanticipated defeats and set-backs. On yet another level, they had to come to terms with Saxon membership of the realm. Old and comfortable distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ had to be rethought in the face of political unity, even while this unity was still being contested by the Saxons.

A recurring theme in Frankish writing about the Saxons was the tension between *fides* and *perfidia*, faith and infidelity. Carolingian understanding of the concept of *fides* was deeply indebted to Roman and patristic discourses. But as the Saxon case showed, Carolingian historians used this cultural inheritance creatively and for their own specific purposes. Roman historians had already recognized that the accusation of infidelity was a convenient narrative device to (retrospectively) exculpate oneself in matters of war. The narrators of Carolingian expansion, whose need for justification matched if not outstripped that of their Roman predecessors, developed this stratagem further. In texts like the ARF and the Annals of Metz, infidelity became more or less synonymous with resistance to Carolingian interests and ambitions. Thus, the story of Carolingian expansion was refashioned into a tale of just retribution: Frankish kings setting straight the infidelity of subjected peoples. Carolingian failure and defeat could be refurbished in similar fashion. The Rhineland Raid of 778, to invoke but one military catastrophe at the Saxon front, was the result not of miscalculation on Charlemagne’s part, but of Saxon perfidy.

Another key aspect of the accusation of Saxon *perfidia* was its semantic ambiguity. In patristic times, *fides*’ already impressive semantic range had extended further. *Fides* came to combine connotations of loyalty, belief and

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

(Christian) faith. Carolingian historians were well aware of the term's patristic heritage, but rather than problematizing this heritage and its potential ambiguity, they capitalized on it. The Carolingian realm under Charlemagne and Louis the Pious lacked solid boundaries between political and religious allegiance: its inhabitants were due fidelity to king *and* to God, with the implicit understanding that these things were two sides of the same coin. *Fides* adequately expressed this fluidity, and so did its counterpart, *perfidia*.

While many Frankish historians railed feverishly against Saxon infidelity, there was usually a more inclusive undercurrent to their writing about the Saxons. For all their talk about evil custom, 'Germanic' lawlessness and an irredeemable Saxon proclivity towards rebellion, the Franks were quite willing to accept the Saxons as Christian members of the Frankish realm. If anything, it was Frankish impatience to claim the Saxons as insiders and *fideles*, that allowed the charge of *perfidia* to thrive as it did. Though Frankish historiography engaged in a good deal of misrepresentation and vilification towards the Saxons, few of the texts dealt with above 'exclude' or 'other' the Saxons. Infidelity was a damnable Saxon trait, that conveniently allowed the Franks to shift the blame for a lengthy war from the aggressors to the victims. But it was also an erasable trait: the Saxons could, and did, become part of the Christian people.

CHAPTER FOUR

Offering God's Law to God's People

Saxons in the Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae

4.1. Unexpected advice

Ca. 775 a curious letter arrived at the Carolingian court, addressed to the young king Charlemagne.¹ Of its author we know naught but that he was called Cathwulf, an Anglo-Saxon name, that he was steeped in insular scholarship, and that he referred to his addressee as 'my king' and 'my Charles'.² Whether the letter was dispatched from the safety of the Isles, which would have been prudent considering its brazen content, or whether it was sent from the proximity of the court, remains uncertain.³

As well it should, the letter commenced on a careful note of flattery. God, Cathwulf avowed, had seen fit to honour Charles above all his contemporaries and predecessors. Recent events showed as much: the death of Charles' brother and rival Carloman in 771, his defeat of the Lombard host in 774, and his glorious reception in Rome by the pope that same year. Cathwulf, however, did

¹ Cathwulf, *Letter to Charlemagne*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Epp. 4, pp. 501-5. On this letter, see C. Veyrard-Cosme, 'De Cathwulf à Charlemagne. Traduction d'une lettre d'admonition carolingienne', in J. Elfassi et al. (eds.), *Amicorum societas: mélanges offerts à François Dolbeau pour son 65e anniversaire* (Firenze, 2013), pp. 887-894; J. Story, 'Cathwulf, Kingship and the Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis', in *Speculum*, 74 (1999), pp. 1-21; M. Garrison, 'Letters to a king and biblical exempla: the examples of Cathuulf and Clemens Peregrinus', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (1998), pp. 305-328.

² On his scholarship, H.H. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit* (Bonn, 1968), pp. 75-79.

³ Story, 'Cathwulf', p. 3.

not write merely to offer his congratulations. There was work to be done. ‘Always, my king, be mindful of God with love and fear, for you are to guard and rule over all His members in His place [...] Even a bishop comes second to you, for he but holds the position of Christ. Therefore, take care between the two of you, to establish with diligence God’s law (*legem Dei*) over God’s people (*populum Dei*).’⁴ Cathwulf continued: ‘May you take in your hands as your *enchiridion*, that is a guidebook, the written law of your God; so that you may read it every day of your life, and be clad in divine wisdom and worldly learning, like David and Solomon and other kings were once. For God said the same onto Moses about kings: “when he shall sit on the throne of his kingdom, the book of law shall never recede from his hands” [Deut. 17:18].’⁵

Cathwulf went on to explain what it meant for Charles to follow these exalted examples. On the one hand, he was to bring his own behaviour in line with the ‘eighth column characteristic of a just king’.⁶ Not to do so, was to end up like his unfortunate contemporaries Waifar and Desiderius, or those Old Testament kings ‘who committed evil in the face of God and walked not in line with God’s mandates’.⁷ On the other hand, Charles was to convene with wise advisers, through whom he should ‘renew the laws and destroy the injustices’ throughout his kingdom.⁸ Only then could he hope to extirpate from his

⁴ Cathwulf, *Letter*, p. 503. The thought goes back to the Ambrosiaster, W. Ullmann, *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship* (London, 1969), pp. 49-50.

⁵ Cathwulf, *Letter*, p. 503. For Cathwulf’s use of the Old Testament, Garrison, ‘Letters to a King’, pp. 507-11. About the use and influence of the Old Testament in the Carolingian realm, see A. Firey, ‘The Letter of the Law: Carolingian Exegesis and the Old Testament’, in J.D. McAuliffe (ed.), *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York, NY, 2003), pp. 204-224; Garrison, ‘The Franks as the New Israel’; M. de Jong, ‘Old Law and New-Found Power: Hrabanus Maurus and the Old Testament’, in J.W. Drijvers and A.A. MacDonald (eds.), *Centres of Learning* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 161-176, R. Kottje, *Studien zum Einfluss des Alten Testaments auf Recht und Liturgie des frühen Mittelalters (6.-8. Jahrhundert)* (1970).

⁶ Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, p. 76.

⁷ Cathwulf, *Letter*, p. 503: et reliqui reges Iudeorum, qui fecerunt malum in conspectu Domini et non ambulaverunt in mandatis Dei.

⁸ Cathwulf, *Letter*, p. 504: et per omne regnum tuum leges renovare et iniusta destruere.

kingdom ‘the thorns, thistles and scandals of vices’.⁹ What sort of vices, we can almost hear the king inquire. Cathwulf was happy to provide a list:

magicians, poisoners, storm mages, witches, possessed women, thieves, murderers (above all in the churches of God), [idol]worshippers, adulterers, plunderers, those who speak falsely in public or break liturgical feasts; those who sell Christians into heathendom; perjurers (especially in church), counterfeiterers, those who do not pay tithes; despoilers and robbers of churches; those who injure widows, children or strangers; abductors of widows and virgins; ravishers of nuns; and all other unchaste acts.¹⁰

‘These and similar things’ Charles was to correct and punish, ‘because you are a servant of God (*minister Dei*) in all this, and an avenger (*vindex*)’.¹¹

It is difficult to measure the effect, if any, Cathwulf’s unsolicited encouragements had on the young Charlemagne. Though not the sort of the letter one could easily forget, its message was not a new one in continental circles. Frankish kings had long since become aware that as Christian rulers, they were facing challenges and responsibilities similar to those faced by the kings of Old Israel.¹² The insular *peregrinus* was but one in a long train of councillors who came to reiterate this information to Charlemagne.¹³ Some of these councillors, like Alcuin of York and Theodulf of Orleans, became deeply involved in the realm’s governmental and theological policies.¹⁴ But Cathwulf appears not to have been among them.

⁹ Cathwulf, *Letter*, p. 504: ut spinas et tribulas et scandala vitiorum possis (e regn]o tuo extirpare...

¹⁰ Cathwulf, *Letter*, p. 504: Maleficos, [vene]ficos, tempestarios, strigas, phitonissas, fures, homicidas, maxime in ecclesiis Dei, ..latrias, adulteros, rapaces, falsidicos in publico vel qui fariatos frangunt, vel qui vendunt christianos in gentilitatem, periuratos maxime in ecclesia Dei et falsa moneta, decimas non reddentes, ecclesiarum spoliatores vel raptos; viduarum, pupillarum, peregrinorum iniuria fatientes et raptos viduarum vel virginum et sanctaemonialium stupra et omnia incesta. Compare Hellmann, *Pseudo-Cyprianus*, p. 51.

¹¹ Cathwulf, *Letter*, p. 504: Haec et his similia corrigere vel damnare pro vindicte legis .. recte iudicare, quod minister Dei es in his omnibus et vindex, et reliqua.

¹² Hen, ‘The Christianisation of Kingship’.

¹³ Anton, *Fürstenspiegel*, pp. 80-131.

¹⁴ On Alcuin, see D.A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden, 2002). On Theodulf, A. Freeman and P. Meyvaert (ed.), *Theodulf of Orleans: Charlemagne’s Spokesman*

In 775, at any rate, Charlemagne may not have been in the best of positions to explore the legislative dimensions of royal office. Martial duties were requiring his full attention. When Cathwulf's letter reached the royal court, the king was either about to embark on, or had just returned from, an extensive campaign across the Rhine into Saxony, which took most of the spring and summer.¹⁵ Campaigns against the Saxons continued annually up to 780, and would not cease until 785. To be sure, the demands of war did not keep Charlemagne from his legislative duties for ever. In 779, when the Saxon Wars were still in full swing, the king issued his first 'programmatic' capitulary at Herstal.¹⁶ Ten years later in 789, the Carolingian court issued its most famous administrative document: the *Admonitio generalis*.¹⁷ Introducing himself as the 'rector of the Frankish kingdom and devoted defender of the Holy Church', Charlemagne appealed to all the ecclesiastical and secular orders of the realm to help him 'lead the people of God to the pastures of eternal life'.¹⁸ He went on to invoke the example of the Old Testament king Josiah: 'For we read in the books of Kings, how the holy Josiah strove to recall the kingdom entrusted to him by God to the worship of the true God, by going around the kingdom, correcting and admonishing'.¹⁹ In emulation of this lofty precedent, the *Admonitio* set down 80 regulations, through which Carolingian society, and

Against the Second Council of Nicaea (Aldershot, 2003). See furthermore, J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 205-25, with 430-2 for a bibliography.

¹⁵ ARF, s.a. 775, p. 40-42. On Charlemagne's itinerary in this particular year, McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 188-94.

¹⁶ *Capitulary of Herstal*, ed. Boretius, MGH Capit. 1, no. 20, pp. 46-51. See also, McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 233-262 and H. Mordek, 'Karls des Großen zweites Kapitular von Herstal und die Hungersnot der Jahre 778/779', *DA*, 61 (2005), pp. 1-52.

¹⁷ *Admonitio generalis*, ed. and trans. H. Mordek, K. Zechiel-Eckes, M. Glatthaar, *Die Admonitio generalis Karls des Großen*, MGH Font. iur. Germ. 16 (Wiesbaden, 2012).

¹⁸ *Admonitio generalis*, praefatio, p. 180: quapropter placuit nobis vestram rogare solertiam, o pastores ecclesiarum Christi et ductores gregis eius et clarissima mundi luminaria, ut vigili cura et sedula ammonitione populum Dei ad pascua vitae aeternae ducere studeatis...

¹⁹ *Admonitio generalis*, praefatio, pp. 182-84: Nam legimus in regnorum libris, quomodo sanctus Iosias regnum sibi a Deo datum circumeundo, corrigendo, ammonendo ad cultum veri Dei studuit revocare. As related in 4 Kings 22-23, Josiah's approach to reform was in fact extremely violent. See also M. de Jong, 'Charlemagne's Church', in J. Story (ed.), *Charlemagne: Empire and Society* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 115-16.

in particular the Carolingian Church, was to be restored to a pristine state of sanctity. The first 60 chapters were drawn from the acts of ancient Church Councils. The last 20 derived *ex lege*, that is, from Mosaic Law. Among the issued dealt with in this latter section were bribery, perjury, divination, storm-mages, pagan worship, revenge killings, thievery, and the Sabbath. Whether any of this was indeed to Cathwulf's influence is not entirely relevant in this context.²⁰ It is the development that concerns us here. By 789, the Carolingian court was making serious work of 'renewing the laws and destroying the injustices' in the realm. And the *Lex Dei*, and in particular the Old Testament, were indeed in Charlemagne's hands as his *enchiridion*.

4.2. The *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*

Sometime between 782 and 795, Charlemagne issued another piece of legislation, concerned specifically with the newest members of his realm: the Saxons. This document, known today as the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, sought to compel Saxons to a strict norm of Christianity and obedience.²¹ Saxons were to pay tithes, go to church, bury their dead in church graveyards and offer their children up for baptism. Deviation was met with an uncommon device in eighth-century Frankish legislation: capital punishment.²² This forbidding sentence the *Capitulatio* prescribed against a variety of offences, ranging from infidelity to the king, to cremation of the dead. Some of the capital offences listed were outlandish (cannibalism, human sacrifice), others minor even by the standards of the day (eating meat during Lent). Most strikingly, the *Capitulatio* rendered Christianity mandatory: 'If anyone among

²⁰ Most agree now that the *Admonitio* was strongly influenced by Alcuin, see F-C. Scheibe, 'Alcuin und die Admonitio generalis', *DA*, 14 (1958), pp. 221-229, W. Hartmann, 'Alcuin und die Gesetzgebung Karls des Großen', in E. Tremp and K. Schmuki (eds.), *Alcuin von York und die geistige Grundlegung Europas* (St. Gallen, 2010), pp. 33-48 and Mordek, Zechiel-Eckes and Glatthaar, *Die Admonitio generalis Karls des Großen* (2013), pp. 47-63.

²¹ On the date, see paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6.

²² H. Brunner, *Deutsche Rechtsgeschichte*, 2 (Leipzig, 1892), p. 599, P. Savey-Casard, *La Peine de Mort: Esquisse Historique et Juridique* (Geneva, 1968), p. 32. For capital punishment on the Isles, A. Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 251-61.

the Saxon people shall henceforth continue to hide unbaptized and disdain to come to baptism and want to remain pagan, he shall certainly die'.²³

Not surprisingly, the *Capitulatio* has received ample attention from modern historians, who have consistently interpreted it as evidence for a brutal policy of forced conversion and acculturation.²⁴ Some have tried to explain this brutality in very functional terms. By attacking Saxon burial customs, Charlemagne tried at once to root out pre-Christian Saxon identity and to inhibit public displays of Saxon resistance.²⁵ Saxon religious conformity was secured through a chilling maxim: *Taufe oder Tod*, baptism or death.²⁶ Yet the *Capitulatio*'s compilers cleverly mitigated this severity by giving the Church and its representatives unprecedented prerogatives in Saxony, including the right of church asylum and the authority to absolve criminals from death. In this manner, the Saxons were quite literally put at the mercy of the Church.²⁷

At the same time, many modern commentators have implicitly or explicitly questioned the *Capitulatio*'s practicality, and indeed, its rationality. The text's 'feverish' denouncements of pagan customs have been interpreted not so much as practical regulations against actual Saxon practices, as attempts to demarcate the parameters of acceptable Christian behaviour.²⁸ Its numerous references to Saxon churches, administered by (Frankish) clergy and frequented

²³ *Capitulatio*, c. 8, p. 69.

²⁴ M. Becher, 'Gewaltsmission. Karl der Grosse und die Sachsen', in C. Stiegemann, M. Kroker and W. Walter (eds.), *Credo – Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, 1, pp. 325-26 and U. Nonn, 'Zwangsmision mit Feuer und Schwert?: Zur Sachsenmission Karls des Großen', in F.J. Felten (ed.), *Bonifatius – Apostel der Deutschen. Mission und Christianisierung vom 8. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, pp. 63-65.

²⁵ B. Effros, 'De partibus Saxoniae and the Regulation of Mortuary Custom: A Carolingian Campaign of Christianization or the Suppression of Saxon Identity?', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 75 (1997), pp. 267-286.

²⁶ C. Stiegemann, M. Kroker and W. Walter (eds.), *Credo – Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, 2, p. 395.

²⁷ E. Schubert, 'Die Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae', in D. Brosius and C. van den Heuvel (eds.), *Geschichte in der Region. Zum 65. Geburtstag von Heinrich Schmidt* (Hanover, 1993), pp. 11-12.

²⁸ J. Palmer, 'Defining Paganism in the Carolingian World', *Early Medieval Europe*, 15:4 (2007), p. 414. See also, R. McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 254.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

by tithe-paying Saxons, have been taken as more than a little premature.²⁹ Finally, the use of capital punishment to enforce religious conversion has struck some as so out of tune with contemporary Carolingian ideas about correct belief and Christian worship, that it has been hypothesized that the *Capitulatio* was influenced by a non-Christian tradition: this was not Charlemagne preaching like an iron-tongued apostle, this was Charlemagne's *jihad*.³⁰

Modern reservations concerning the *Capitulatio*'s practicality are well justified. The *Capitulatio* was first and foremost a statement of royal intent towards the Saxons.³¹ Its implementation would have been difficult in the Frankish heartlands, let alone in a partly conquered region like Saxony. I am less convinced, however, by the notion that the *Capitulatio* was somehow an aberration, that saw Charlemagne venturing outside the parameters of Christian and Carolingian discourse. This notion, I would argue, is based on a misinterpretation of what the compilers of the *Capitulatio* tried to do. We are inclined to think that because Charlemagne outlawed pagan custom and refusal to come to baptism, he must have been trying to convert pagan Saxons. However, by the time the *Capitulatio* was drawn-up – the 780s, or more likely the early 790s – the Carolingian court had already ceased thinking about the Saxons as pagan outsiders. From a Carolingian perspective, the Saxons were Christian members of the realm, if notoriously untrustworthy and unfaithful ones. The *Capitulatio*, then, was not advocating a policy of sword-point conversion. It was cracking down on Saxon infidelity. Such a reading not only brings the *Capitulatio* in line with Carolingian ideology, it also explains why the compilers felt justified in issuing capital sentences: under Charlemagne,

²⁹ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 254, Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 229-30 and H.M. Weikmann, 'Hoheitliche Strafbestimmungen als Instrument fränkischer Eroberungs- und Missionspolitik', in J. Weitzel (ed.), *Hoheitliches Strafen in der Spätantike und im frühen Mittelalter* (Cologne, 2002), pp. 170-73.

³⁰ Y. Hen, 'Charlemagne's Jihad', *Viator*, 37 (2006), pp. 33-51.

³¹ For general discussion on the nature and purpose of capitularies, C. U. Pössel, 'Authors and Recipients of Carolingian Capitularies, 779-829', in R. Corradini et al. (eds.), *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages* (Vienna, 2006), 253-276 and T.M. Buck, *Admonitio und Praedicatio. Zur religiös-pastoralen Dimension von Kapitularien und kapitulariennahen Texten (507-814)* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997).

infidelity could and was punished with death. This reading also accounts for another curious feature of the *Capitulatio* that has so far escaped scholarly notice: the fact that the text repeatedly employs the language of the Old Testament when demanding capital punishment. The *Capitulatio* thus sentenced Saxons not unlike God had sentenced the people of Israel in the Mosaic Covenant, and for similar transgressions. A third theme to be addressed in this chapter concerns the *Capitulatio*'s date of composition. It will be argued that, looking at the *Capitulatio*'s preoccupation with infidelity, there is reason to follow a recent suggestion by Yitzhak Hen, to locate the text *after* the Saxon rebellions of 792. But where Hen argued for the involvement of the courtier Theodulf of Orleans, we will look at the involvement of another prominent figure at the Carolingian court: Richulf, Archbishop of Mainz from 787 till 813.

4.3. Paganism and infidelity

Despite its notoriety, much remains uncertain about the *Capitulatio*. At the heart of these uncertainties stands its problematic transmission. The text survives in a single early ninth-century manuscript, a suspiciously low number for an administrative document.³² Moreover, in its current form, the *Capitulatio* offers no details regarding its circumstances of composition: by whom it was composed, when and where it was issued, and to whom it was addressed. Its relation to Charlemagne's court has to be deduced from its language (*interdiximus, iubemus, missus noster*) and legal penalties (death penalty, royal *bannum*).³³ Phrases like *hoc placuit omnibus* and *consensuerunt omnes* strongly suggest that the *Capitulatio* was issued in the presence and with

³² Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 289, fols. 59v-62r. The manuscript was probably compiled at Mainz, ca. 825, see H. Mordek, *Biblioteca capitularium regum Francorum: Überlieferung und Traditionszusammenhang der fränkischen Herrschererlasse* (München, 1995), pp. 769-71 and J.F. Hanselmann, 'Der Codex Vat. Pal. Lat. 289: Ein Beitrag zum Mainzer Skriptorium im 9. Jahrhundert', *Scriptorium*, 41 (1987), pp. 78-87.

³³ Schubert, 'Die Capitulatio', pp. 5-11.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

the backing of a larger audience, such as an assembly, but this cannot be established with absolute certainty.³⁴

In many quarters, the implicit assumption is still to regard the *Capitulatio* as a capitulary in the traditional sense, along the lines famously set out by Ganshof: an administrative document, publicly issued by Charlemagne, subsequently taken to Saxony by (Saxon) counts, who saw to its (oral) presentation and implementation on the ground.³⁵ Such a reading fits our modern understanding of the act of ‘legislating’, which we feel must in the first place be about practical application. However, as Matthew Innes has rightly pointed out, Ganshof’s approach to Carolingian capitularies relied on an anachronistic view of the Carolingian ‘state’. It is based on a modern ideal of institutionalized government, with top-down implementation through functional hierarchies of administrative officials.³⁶ In fact, Carolingian power in localities was often more fluid and vested primarily in social networks and local landholdings. Innes’ critique amounts to more than an acknowledgment of the gap between ‘ambition’ and ‘implementation’, which most scholars agree must have been very considerable for the *Capitulatio*.³⁷ It implies that the whole notion of a capitulary as an instrument of administration is too limited. Most Carolingian capitularies combined specific stipulations with moral discourse and exhortative rhetoric.³⁸ In other words, there was a strong ideological dimension to them. We will see that this also applies to the *Capitulatio*. It contains many specific regulations, which presumably were intended to be enforced (whether they *could* be enforced is a different matter altogether). Yet underlying these regulations, we also encounter a more general and familiar discourse: the *Capitulatio* seeks to present the Saxons as Christian members of

³⁴ Pössel, ‘Authors and Recipients’, p. 258, n. 83.

³⁵ F.L. Ganshof, *Wat waren de Capitularia?* (Brussel, 1955), pp. 44-50. See furthermore, Schubert, ‘Die Capitulatio’, pp. 9-10, McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, pp. 251-56.

³⁶ M. Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages. The Middle Rhine Valley, 400-1000* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1-12.

³⁷ See for instance Hen, ‘Charlemagne’s Jihad’, p. 41: ‘a capitulary, which obviously could not have been implemented, and in fact was never implemented’.

³⁸ See M. Costambeys, M. Innes, S. Maclean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 182-89.

the realm, but with a penchant for infidelity. It further frames this discourse with biblical references to divinely ordained death and priestly responsibility. This, of course, raises the question of audience. For whom was this being done? Without an introductory statement, we can only make assumptions with regard to the *Capitulatio*'s intended public. Based on its contents, I would presume there to have been two, somewhat overlapping, audiences. First, Charlemagne's royal court, in the broadest sense of the word. By publicly issuing the *Capitulatio*, Charlemagne would have shown his leading secular and ecclesiastical magnates that he considered Saxony part of his realm. It would also have served to explain and legitimize his brutal conduct in Saxony. A second audience would have been the capitulary's 'recipients', i.e. everyone whose roles, duties and goals were being defined in the *Capitulatio*.³⁹ This included Charlemagne's Saxon subjects, whose primary duty is shown to be obedience. But it also covered certain royal 'representatives', for whom the *Capitulatio* envisioned a more active role in Saxony. The most prominent representatives addressed in the *Capitulatio* are not the Saxon counts, as Ganshof presumed. Rather, they are a group which the *Capitulatio* denotes with the biblical term *sacerdotes*.⁴⁰ In the context of the *Capitulatio*, the term probably covered members of all ordained orders of the clergy (deacons, priests, bishops).⁴¹ At the time the *Capitulatio* was composed, the clergymen active in Saxony were nearly all Franks and Anglo-Saxons related to bishoprics and missionary centres in Hesse and the Rhineland. But as we will see in chapter 5, it did not take long before Saxons entered the priesthood and episcopate as well.

In its current state, the *Capitulatio* contains an introductory statement followed by 33 chapters. Modern editors take the introductory statement for a chapter, thus arriving at a total of 34 chapters, a system we will follow as well.⁴² The *Capitulatio* is divided in two parts. Chapters 1 to 14 deal with major issues (*de maioribus capitulis*). With the exception of chapters 1, 2 and 14, these are exclusively concerned with crimes. All progress according to the same ominous

³⁹ Pössel, 'Authors and Recipients', p. 268.

⁴⁰ The term was often used in Carolingian capitularies, see de Jong, 'Ecclesia', p. 122.

⁴¹ All three are mentioned in cap. 5, which regulates against killing clergy, *Capitulatio*, c. 5, p. 68.

⁴² *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, Boretius (ed.), MGH Capit. 1 (Hannover, 1883), pp. 68-70.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

pattern: they start with the phrase *si quis* ('if anyone...'), continue with a transgression, and culminate in punishment, which is always death. While the nature of these 'mortal crimes' is diverse, they do seem to address a specific set of concerns. Chapters 3-5 deal with acts against the Church: assaulting churches (cap. 3), eating meat during the Lenten fast (cap. 4) and killing clergy (cap. 5). Chapter 6-9 legislate against Saxons acting 'in the manner of pagans': witchcraft and cannibalism (cap. 6), cremation of the dead (cap. 7), hiding from baptism (cap. 8) and human sacrifice (cap. 9). Chapters 10-13 deal with infidelity in various guises: siding with pagans against the king and the Christian people (cap. 10), infidelity to the king (cap. 11), killing one's lord or lady (cap. 12) and abducting the daughter of one's lord (cap. 13).⁴³ Chapter 14 signals a belated, but not quite token return to Christian moderation: if anyone committed any of the above crimes in secret, and has, out of his own accord, gone to a *sacerdos* to confess and accept penance, he will be absolved from death. Chapters 15 to 34, which cover minor issues (*de minoribus capitulis*), are of a lesser severity. They are less concerned with what Saxons should not do, and more with what they *should* do. Saxons have to come to church on Sundays (cap. 18), offer their children up for baptism (cap. 19), bury their dead in church graveyards (cap. 22) and pay various sorts of church tithes (cap. 15-17). Comital conduct is regulated (cap. 24, 28-31), mostly along the lines applied elsewhere in the realm, with the notable exception that Saxon counts are under the supervision of *sacerdotes* (cap. 34). Modern commentators have rightly underlined the premature character of many of the regulations found in this section.⁴⁴ How, for instance, were Saxons to spend their Sundays in church or bury their dead in church graveyards, if, as the *Capitulatio* itself concedes in its openings statement, churches were only gradually starting to appear in the Saxon landscape?⁴⁵ That said, these chapters testify to a Frankish ambition that

⁴³ On this last chapter, see M. Elsackers, 'Raptus Ultra Rhenum: Early Ninth-Century Saxon Laws on Abduction and Rape', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, 52 (1999), pp. 27-53.

⁴⁴ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 254, Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 229-30 and Weikmann, 'Hoheitliche Strafbestimmungen', pp. 170-73.

⁴⁵ *Capitulatio*, c. 1, p. 68.

went beyond mere brutality: Saxons were to be part of the Church and to live under a Frankish system of government.

Like most Carolingian capitularies, the *Capitulatio* addresses a diverse set of issues. As a result, modern historians have often come to study specific chapters, rather than the entire text.⁴⁶ This, in turn, has often resulted in diverging evaluations of the text's purpose and practicality. Ernst Schubert, for example, has argued that the overruling theme of the text was the establishment of an ecclesiastical organisation in Saxony, which was to function as the main instrument of Carolingian rule in the region.⁴⁷ The *Capitulatio* loses no time, indeed, in stressing the superior honour of churches in comparison to unchristian places of worship (cap. 1). In subsequent chapters, the Church is repeatedly singled out for special protection: capital punishment is demanded for attacking, burning or plundering a church (cap. 3), as well as for killing a deacon, priest or bishop (cap. 4). To compare: killing a count merely results in loss of freedom and possessions (cap. 30). The Church is also put forward as a counterweight, of sorts, to the otherwise harsh measures advocated in the *Capitulatio*. Contrary to other Carolingian legislation, the *Capitulatio* guarantees an unrestricted right of church asylum (cap. 2).⁴⁸ In addition, *sacerdotes* are given far-reaching responsibilities over their Saxon flock. When someone breaks the Lenten fast, it is up to a *sacerdos* to establish whether the crime was committed *pro despectu christianitatis* or *causa necessitatis*; only the former results in death (cap. 4). Likewise, those who come to confess mortal crimes and do penance (cap. 14) can be absolved from death only on the explicit testimony of a *sacerdos*.

Others have focused on the *Capitulatio*'s pronouncements against paganism, though few have tried to address this topic as a whole. Particular attention has been paid to chapters 7, 9 and 22, which deal with 'mortuary'

⁴⁶ But see Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 221-30.

⁴⁷ Schubert, 'Die Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae', pp. 11-18.

⁴⁸ D. Fruscione, *Das Asyl bei den germanischen Stämmen im frühen Mittelalter* (Cologne, 2002), pp. 94-129 and H. Siems, 'Zur Entwicklung des Kirchenasyls zwischen Spätantike und Mittelalter', in O. Behrends and M. Diesselhorst (eds.), *Libertas: grundrechtliche und rechtsstaatliche Gewährungen in Antike und Gegenwart. Symposium aus Anlass des 80. Geburtstages von Franz Wieacker* (Ebelsbach, 1991) pp. 139-187. See also below, paragraph 4.7.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

customs.⁴⁹ Chapter 7 puts a ban on cremation of the dead.⁵⁰ Chapter 9 outlaws the sacrifice of humans to the devil and to demons.⁵¹ Chapter 22 orders ‘Christian Saxons’ to inter their dead in church cemeteries instead of ‘pagan mounts’ (*tumulus paganorum*).⁵² The extent to which these customs reflected actual Saxon practice is disputed. Archaeological research confirms that both cremation and inhumation in mounts were among the means through which groups north-east of the Rhine disposed of their dead in the early Middle Ages.⁵³ That said, by the middle of the eighth century, inhumation in row graves already appears to have become the dominant form in these regions.⁵⁴ Human sacrifice is quite frequently attested in eighth- and ninth-century legal and hagiographical texts, especially in relation to the Frisians.⁵⁵ In the face of this evidence, it is typically assumed that human sacrifice was indeed practiced in some form in the regions across the Rhine in the eighth century.⁵⁶ Bonnie Effros has suggested that the reason why the *Capitulatio* banned these particular

⁴⁹ Effros, ‘*De partibus Saxoniae*’ and R. von Uslar, ‘Zu den tumuli paganorum und corpora flamma consumpta’, in E. Ennen and G. Wiegelmann (eds.), *Festschrift Matthias Zender. Studien zur Volkskultur, Sprache und Landesgeschichte* (Bonn, 1972), pp. 481-489.

⁵⁰ *Capitulatio*, c. 7, p. 69: Si quis corpus defuncti hominis secundum ritum paganorum flamma consumi fecerit et ossa eius ad cinerem redierit, capitae punietur. As noted by Bonnie Effros, the *Capitulatio* was in fact the first legal text to formally outlaw cremation as pagan custom, Effros, ‘*De partibus Saxoniae*’, p. 279.

⁵¹ *Capitulatio*, c. 9, p. 69: Si quis hominem diabulo sacrificaverit et in hostiam more paganorum daemonibus obtulerit, morte moriatur.

⁵² *Capitulatio*, c. 22, p. 69: Iubemus ut corpora christianorum Saxanorum ad cimiteria ecclesiae deferantur et non ad tumulus paganorum.

⁵³ Uslar, ‘Zu den tumuli paganorum’.

⁵⁴ F. Laux, ‘Sächsische Gräberfelder zwischen Weser, Aller und Elbe. Aussagen zur Bestattungssitte und religiösem Verhalten’, in Jarnut et al., *Sachsen und Franken in Westfalen* (1999), pp. 143-171; T. Capelle, *Die Sachsen des frühen Mittelalters* (Darmstadt, 1998), pp. 118-19.

⁵⁵ See for an overview the critical apparatus in the *Leges Saxonum*, ed. K. von Richthofen and K.F. von Richthofen, MGH Leges 5 (Hannover, 1875-89), p. 38, n. 18.

⁵⁶ S. Lebecq, ‘Paganisme et rites sacrificiels chez les Frisons des VIIe-VIIIe siècles’, in F.J. Felten, J. Jarnut and L.E. von Padberg (eds.), *Bonifatius – Leben und Nachwirken. Die Gestaltung des christlichen Europa im Frühmittelalter* (Mainz, 2007), pp. 111-120 and I. Wood, ‘Pagan Religions and Superstitions East of the Rhine from the Fifth to the Ninth Century’, in G. Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire. Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 253-279, here 259-60.

practices was that they all constituted highly visible mortuary rites. To a people under threat of conquest, like the Saxons, such rites would have constituted powerful ‘avenues of expression’.⁵⁷ Banning them would thus have served as a means to deprive Saxon elites of a potential instrument of resistance. At the same time, it was a way to replace Saxon cultural identity with a Christian one. Hence, also, the stipulation that Christian Saxons were to bury their dead in church graveyards. This argument neatly ties in with a suggestion put forward by Ian Wood on several occasions, that pagan practice would have become a central rallying point for Saxon resistance to Frankish attempts at incorporation and conversion.⁵⁸ In the face of Frankish military pressure, pagan practice may even have intensified and taken on new forms in certain Saxon circles. This is a likely scenario, especially when we consider what was said in chapter 3 about Charlemagne demanding both political and religious allegiance from the Saxons. As the war progressed, Charlemagne came to make Christianity synonymous with Frankish rule. Saxons who resisted Frankish rule, would in all likelihood also have resisted Christianity. This is evinced in Frankish reports on the renewed Saxon rebellions of 792, which state that the insurgents attacked churches, killed clergy and effected a return to idol-worship.⁵⁹ Of course, if Saxon pagan practice had become so politicized in the context of the Saxon Wars, then this probably had direct implications for the *Capitulatio*’s use and understanding of the label ‘pagan’; that is to say, it denoted political as well religious defiance. We will return to this point shortly.

Not all scholars subscribe to Effros’ practical reading of the *Capitulatio*. A different interpretation can be found in a recent article by James Palmer, which deals with the ‘constructed’ nature of Carolingian descriptions of paganism.⁶⁰ Palmer raises two important points in this contribution. First, that Frankish descriptions of pagan customs were frequently influenced by literary traditions:

⁵⁷ Effros, ‘*De partibus Saxoniae*’, and Wood, ‘Pagan Religion and Superstitions’, p. 263.

⁵⁸ I. Wood, ‘The Pagan and the Other: Varying Presentations in the Early Middle Ages’, *Networks and Neighbours*, 1 (2013), pp. 1-22, here 7 and Wood, ‘Pagan Religions and Superstitions’, p. 263. See also de Jong, ‘Charlemagne’s Church’, pp. 125-26.

⁵⁹ *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 792, p. 35. See also below, paragraph 4.5.

⁶⁰ Palmer, ‘Defining Paganism in the Carolingian World’.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

they were not exclusively based on observation and experience, but relied also on the information provided by earlier ‘authorities’ (church fathers, synods, missionaries), even if such information derived from a different time or place. Indeed, we saw in the introduction how Rudolf of Fulda based his account on pre-conquest Saxon customs on the first-century Roman historian Tacitus. Second, Palmer emphasised that Frankish authors often used the term ‘pagan’ as a blanket term for everything that fell outside their own subjective norm of Christianity. It was a constructed opposite, which could also include alternative Christianities and superstitions.⁶¹ By extension, Frankish descriptions of paganism, especially in normative texts, were seldom exclusively descriptive. They were active attempts to demarcate the parameters of orthodox Christian behaviour and practice. Palmer cited the *Capitulatio* as an example of such an attempt. Its main goal, according to Palmer, was to contrast outrageous, and to a large extent, imagined pagan behaviour with a Frankish norm of Christianity.⁶² In support of this argument, he referred to chapter 6, which legislates against cannibalistic witches (*strigae*).⁶³ This is indeed a striking chapter, though it has received little scholarly attention so far.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Thus also S. Patzold, ‘Wahrnehmen und Wissen: Christen und “Heiden” an den Grenzen des Frankenreiches im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert’, *Das Mittelalter*, 8.2 (2003) pp. 83-106 and R. Markus, ‘From Caesarius to Boniface: Christianity and Paganism in Gaul’, in J. Fontaine and J. Hillgarth (eds.), *Le septième siècle. Changements et continuités* (London, 1992), pp. 154-172. See furthermore, M. Innes ‘“Immune from heresy”: Defining the boundaries of Carolingian Christianity’, in P. Fouracre and D. Ganz (eds.), *Frankland: the Franks and the World of the Early Middle Ages. Essays in Honour of Dame Jinty Nelson* (Manchester, 2008), pp. 101-125.

⁶² Palmer, ‘Defining Paganism in the Carolingian World’, p. 414. See furthermore, McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 254: ‘Emphasizing or even exaggerating the paganism of the Saxons possibly reflects an underlying Frankish strategy of defining Saxons as pagan enemies in order to justify the Franks’ treatment of them’.

⁶³ *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, cap. 6, pp. 68-9: Si quis a diabulo deceptus crediderit secundum morem paganorum, virum aliquem aut feminam strigam esse et homines comedere, et propter hoc ipsam incenderit vel carnem eius ad comedendum dederit vel ipsam comederit, capitali sententiae punietur.

⁶⁴ The only extended analysis I was able to find is H. Jankuhn, ‘Spuren von Anthropophagie in der Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae?’, *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Phil-Hist. Kl.*, 3 (1968), pp. 57-72, who argues for the possibility that Saxons indeed ate human flesh (based on findings of human bones amidst animal bones at certain ‘cultic’ sites). See also Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 160-61, who dismisses this possibility.

Witches or *strigae* appear in several insular and continental texts prior to the *Capitulatio*, mostly of a normative or legal nature.⁶⁵ Interestingly, these texts can be divided into two categories: texts that legislate against actual witches, and texts that legislate against false belief in witches. An example of the former can be found in Frankish legislation. In the earliest recension of the *Lex Salica*, laid down before Clovis converted to Christianity, we read how a *stria* who consumes a man faces a steep penalty of 200 solidos, granted there is evidence to prove the crime has indeed taken place.⁶⁶ Apparently, belief in witches also persisted in certain Christian circles. Cathwulf, for example, listed *strigae* among the vices Charlemagne should extirpate from his realm.⁶⁷ Other Christian authors, conversely, denounced belief in witches as superstition.⁶⁸ One example of this is the seventh-century *Edictus Rothari*, a Lombard piece of legislation which may have inspired the compilers of the *Capitulatio*: ‘Let nobody presume to kill a foreign female slave or slave as a witch (*strigam*), [...] for it is not to be believed by Christian minds, nor is it possible, that a woman can eat a living man from within’.⁶⁹ Such sentiments are echoed in the fifteenth sermon of pseudo-Boniface, a late eighth- or ninth-century text, which like the

⁶⁵ ‘Witch’ is only a rough translation of *striga* and a loaded one at that. Though the term *striga* (or *stria*) goes back to antiquity (Petronius, *Satyricon*, 63.3-8), it is rarely attested in either the antique or early medieval record. It is not fully clear what sort of figure or entity was denoted by the term, nor did the term *striga* necessarily remain consistent over time, see E.M. Peters, ‘Superstition and Magic in the Germanic Law Collections’, in K.L. Jolly, C. Raudvere and E.M. Peters, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: the Middle Ages* (London, 2002), pp. 190-92. We will see that several medieval authors linked *strigae* to the consumption of human flesh and blood. Others linked them to shapeshifting, see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 11. 4.

⁶⁶ *Pactus legis Salicae*, ed. K. A. Eckhardt, MGH LL nat. Germ. 4.1 (Hannover, 1962), c. 64.3, p. 231: Si stria hominem comederit et ei fuerit adprobatum, mallobergo grandberga, sunt denarii VIIIIM qui faciunt solidos CC culpabilis iudicetur. It should be underlined that the two paragraphs directly preceding this one, deal with accusations of sorcery and witchcraft that cannot be proven.

⁶⁷ Cathwulf, *Letter*, p. 504.

⁶⁸ This thought goes back to Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, II., cc. 20-23. See also V.I.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1991), pp. 18-20.

⁶⁹ *Edictus Rothari*, ed. G.H. Pertz, MGH LL 4 (Hannover, 1868), c. 376, p. 87: Nullus presumat haldiam alienam aut ancillam quasi strigam, quem dicunt mascam, occidere; quod christianis mentibus nullatenus credendum est, nec possibilem ut mulier hominem vivum intrinsecus possit comedere.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

Capitulatio, addressed a group of recent converts.⁷⁰ Here, ‘believing in witches and imagined wolves’ (*strigas et fictos lupos credere*) is listed among the evil works of the devil (*mala opera sunt diaboli*).⁷¹ If we look at the *Capitulatio*, we come across vestiges of both lines of thinking:

If anyone deceived by the Devil shall have believed, after the manner of pagans, that any man or woman is a witch and eats men, and on this account shall have burned the person, or shall have given the person’s flesh to others to eat, or shall have eaten it himself, he shall be punished by a capital sentence.⁷²

The chapter appears to combine two sentiments. It first and foremost outlaws as deception and pagan superstition the belief in cannibal witches. In this regard, it seem to follow the line of the *Edictus Rothari* rather than the *Lex Salica*. But it also considers the possibility that if someone actually believes in cannibalistic witches, he or she might be tempted to emulate this cannibalistic behaviour. Was this second part intended as a practical provision? Did the compilers actually expect Saxons to engage in cannibalism – yet another violent and highly visible act of un-Christian behaviour which needed to be curtailed? Or was this mostly an ideological statement, part of an ongoing discourse on normative Christian behaviour, which relied on far-fetched examples of ‘pagan’ excesses?

We have seen above that these two angles – practical and ideological – were not mutually exclusive in a document like the *Capitulatio*. In this sense, we should not expect its regulations on pagan behaviour to express strictly one purpose either. On the whole, I find it difficult to believe that the compilers simply invented ‘pagan’ customs. They must have listed practices which they

⁷⁰ R. Meens, ‘Christianization and the Spoken Word: The Sermons Attributed to St Boniface’, in R. Corradini (ed.), *Zwischen Niederschrift und Wiederschrift: Hagiographie und Historiographie im Spannungsfeld von Kompendienüberlieferung und Editionstechnik* (Vienna, 2010), pp. 211-222.

⁷¹ Pseudo-Boniface, *Sermones*, ed. J-P. Migne, *PL* 89 (Paris, 1863), no. 15, c. 1, col 870 B.

⁷² *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, c. 6, pp. 68-9: Si quis a diabulo deceptus crediderit secundum morem paganorum, virum aliquem aut feminam strigam esse et homines commedere, et propter hoc ipsam incenderit vel carnem eius ad commedendum dederit vel ipsam commederit, capitali sententiae punietur.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

assumed or feared must take place in Saxony. That said, the compilers were probably less concerned with the implementation of individual regulations than with the overall statement which such regulations conveyed: there was no longer room for un-Christian behaviour in Carolingian Saxony. It is significant, in this regard, that the compilers never miss an opportunity to underline that it is indeed 'pagan' behaviour they are legislating against: cannibalism (cap. 6), cremation (cap. 7) and human sacrifice (cap. 9) all receive epithets like *mos paganorum* and *ritus paganorum*. Likewise, Saxons who continue to hide unbaptized and disdain to come to baptism, are explicitly accused of 'wanting to remain pagan' (cap. 8). The significance of this litany of labels becomes evident when we understand that for the compilers, 'paganism' was not an exclusively religious category. In the course of the Saxon Wars, it had become distinctly politicized. On the one hand, Saxons actually turned to paganism as a form of resistance. On the other hand, the Franks made religious fidelity synonymous to political fidelity. In the face of Carolingian ambitions in Saxony, paganism thus meant resistance, infidelity even, to the Carolingian ruler; that is, the pagan was a political as well as a religious enemy. This is duly reflected in chapters 10 and 11, which deal with various forms of infidelity:

10. If anyone shall have joined pagans in a plot against Christians, or shall have wished to join with them in opposition to Christians, he shall certainly die. And whoever shall have agreed to do this same thing deceitfully against the king or the Christian people, he shall certainly die.⁷³

11. If anyone shall have shown himself unfaithful to the king, he shall be punished with a capital sentence.⁷⁴

It is not quite clear whether the pagans in question are to be found within Saxony, or whether they represent the 'pagan peoples' in the vicinity, like the Avars or Northmen. There is no doubt, however, that they stand at the wrong end of a strict politico-religious dichotomy, with Charlemagne and his *gens*

⁷³ *Capitulatio*, c. 10, p. 69: Si quis cum paganis consilium adversus christianos inierit vel cum illis in adversitate christianorum perdurare voluerit, morte moriatur; et quicumque hoc idem fraude contra regem vel gentem christianorum consenserit, morte moriatur.

⁷⁴ *Capitulatio*, c. 11, p. 69: Si quis domino regi infidelis apparuerit, capitali sententia punietur.

Christianorum on one side, and the *pagani* on the other. The Saxons belonged, or should belong, to the former camp. This is further underlined by the language used: it is the terminology that Carolingian authors tended to employ in matters of allegiance and (in)fidelity. This obviously goes for the term *infidelis* ('unfaithful') in chapter 11. But it also covers the terms *consilium* ('plot') and *fraus* ('deceit') found in chapter 10. The two major revolts of Charlemagne's reign – by Hardrad in 786 and Pippin the Hunchback in 792 – were both described as a *consilium* by contemporary authors.⁷⁵ Another annalist reported that Pippin had sought to kill his father and brother in order to 'deceitfully appropriate' (*fraude subripere*) his father's kingdom.⁷⁶ The general oath of 789, which was introduced by Charlemagne in response to the 786 revolt, required every free man of the realm to swear that he would be faithful (*fidelis*) to the king and his sons, without deceit and evil intent (*sine fraude et malo ingenio*).⁷⁷

The *Capitulatio* employed this very language of infidelity, but in a context that conflated political with religious allegiance: joining a pagan plot against Christians or engaging in deceitful opposition against the king and the Christian people. On the one hand, such language says something about the time the text was composed, i.e. after the introduction of the general oath in 789, whose language the *Capitulatio* clearly adopted. On the other, it underlines that the *Capitulatio* approached the Saxons not as a people that needed to be converted and brought under Carolingian control, but as a people that had already been brought into the Franco-Christian fold and should be kept there by whatever means available. This, above all, was what informed and legitimized the document's excessive severity against Saxons who scorned the Lenten fast 'out of contempt for Christianity', who cremated their dead 'according

⁷⁵ *Annales Nazariani*, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hanover, 1826), s.a. 786, p. 41: Thuringi autem consilium fecerunt; *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 792, p. 35: consilium Pipinni; *Annales Petaviani*, ed. Pertz (Hanover, 1826), s.a. 792, p. 18: consilium iniquum, quem consiliauerunt cum Pipino.

⁷⁶ *Annales Mosellani*, s.a. 791, p. 498.

⁷⁷ MGH Capit 1, no. 23, c. 18, p. 63. See on this oath, S. Esders, *Sacramentum fidelitatis. Treueidleistung, Militärorganisation und Formierung mittelalterlicher Staatlichkeit* (Berlin, forthcoming), pp. 306-22, Becher, *Eid*, pp. 145-63 and Odegaard, 'Carolingian Oaths of Fidelity', pp. 284-296.

to *pagan rites*’, who hid among their countrymen unbaptized because they wanted ‘to remain *pagan*’, or who entered pagan plots ‘*against the king and Christian people*’ (my italics).⁷⁸ Such acts went against the Carolingian norm of faith and fidelity. To punish such acts with death was brutal, no doubt about it. But as we will see below, it was not out of tune with the sentences levelled against the Frankish and Bavarian rebels of 792, who were hung, beheaded, flogged and exiled.⁷⁹

4.4. Biblical punishment and sacerdotal ministry

With capital punishment, we arrive at another conspicuous feature of the *Capitulatio*: its unparalleled use of the phrase *morte moriatur*.⁸⁰ The expression is employed seven times to order the death penalty, blazing a sinister trail through the first part of the *Capitulatio*.⁸¹ Its use far outweighs that of alternative phrases like *capit(a)e punietur* and *capitali sententia(e) punietur*.⁸² In contrast to such customary expressions, the phrase *morte moriatur* has only one real precedent: the Old Testament. In particular, we encounter the phrase in two of the Old Testament law codes, known today as the Covenant Code (Exodus 21:1-23:19) and the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26).⁸³ In the Carolingian period, these codes were seen as part of one and the same legal tradition, known as the ‘Old Law’ (*Vetus Lex*) or simply ‘Law’ (*Lex*).⁸⁴ The origins of the Old Law were venerable and divine. This was the law code Moses had received from God on Mount Sinai as part of the Covenant between God and the people of Israel. The Law had offered the ancient Israelites detailed regulations bearing on many aspects of life. Regulations were voiced as positive as well as negative commands (thou shalt not..), and could come with dire

⁷⁸ *Capitulatio*, cc. 4, 7, 8, 10, pp. 68-69.

⁷⁹ *Annales Mosellani*, s.a. 791 (which is 792), p. 497.

⁸⁰ Noted by Hanselmann, ‘Der Codex’, p. 79.

⁸¹ *Capitulatio*, cc. 3, 4, 8, 9, 10 (twice), 12, pp. 68-69.

⁸² *Capitulatio*, cc. 5, 6, 7, 11, pp. 68-69.

⁸³ Ex 21:12, Ex 21:15-17, Ex 22:19, Ex 31:14, Lv 20:2, Lv 20:9-11, Lv 20:13, Lv 20:15, Lv 20:27, Lv 24:16-17. On the definition and development of these codes, D.A. Knight, *Law, Power and Justice in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, 2011), pp. 9-29.

⁸⁴ De Jong, ‘Old Law’.

punishments attached. Capital sentences were demanded for such crimes as murder, kidnapping, incest and adultery.⁸⁵ Many also involved deviation from God: idolatry, blasphemy, human sacrifice, sorcery and breaking the Sabbath; similar crimes, indeed, to those addressed in the *Capitulatio*. The phrase *morte moriatur* was used on such occasions to express the certainty of death as demanded by God. It derived from the Hebrew *môt jûmât*, a combination of the infinitive *môt* (to die) and its third person singular *jûmât* (he shall die).⁸⁶ When combined in such a manner, the infinitive conveys emphasis: ‘he shall *surely* be put to death’.

It is beyond the confines of this study to undertake a full inquiry into the reception and use of Old Testament law in the early Middle Ages.⁸⁷ Variety appears to have been the key word: the extent to which Christians adhered to ‘the Law’ varied considerably with time and place.⁸⁸ But even those who inclined towards a literal approach, seem to have drawn the line at capital punishment.⁸⁹ It was one thing to defend observance of the Sunday by invoking Old Testament regulations regarding the Sabbath.⁹⁰ It was something else altogether to follow to the letter the example of Numbers 15:32-36, in which

⁸⁵ For an overview T. Hieke, ‘Das Alte Testament und die Todesstrafe’, *Biblica*, 85 (2004), pp. 353-58. More generally, B. Schulz, *Das Todesrecht im Alten Testament: Studien zur Rechtsreform der Mot-Jumat-*

Sätze (Berlin, 1969), A. Büchler, ‘Die Todesstrafen der Bibel und der jüdisch-nachbiblischen Zeit’ *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 50.9/10 (1906), pp. 539-562 and *ibid*, ‘Die Todesstrafen der Bibel und der jüdisch-nachbiblischen Zeit (Schluß)’, *Monatsschrift*, 50.11/12 (1906), pp. 664-706.

⁸⁶ K.-J. Illman, *Old Testament Formulas About Death* (Åbo, 1979), pp. 119-27 and H. Schüngel-Straumann, *Tod und Leben in der Gesetzesliteratur des Pentateuch* (Bonn, 1969), pp. 96-111.

⁸⁷ The standard work is still R. Kottje, *Studien zum Einfluss des Alten Testaments auf Recht und Liturgie des frühen Mittelalters (6.-8. Jahrhundert)* (1970).

⁸⁸ M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: the History of its Interpretation. Vol. I: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300)* (Göttingen, 1996).

⁸⁹ Irish legal traditions law, in particular, were characterized not only by extensive reliance on Old Testament Law, but also by their penchant towards literal interpretation, M.W. Herren, ‘The “Judaizing Tendencies” of the early Irish Church’, *Filologia Mediolatina*, 3 (1996), pp. 73-80 and S. Meeder, ‘The “Liber ex lege Moysi”: Notes and Text’, *The journal of Medieval Latin*, 19 (2009), pp. 173-218.

⁹⁰ Kottje, *Studien zum Einfluss*.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

the man found gathering wood on the Sabbath is stoned to death on God's orders.⁹¹ As Gregory the Great put it in his highly influential *Moralia in Job*:

In the Law, God had been holding a birch-rod when he said: 'if anyone shall have done this or that, he shall surely die (*morte moriatur*)'. But Christ did away with the birch-rod, because he showed the paths of life through compassion.⁹²

Such, in general, was also the line adopted in Carolingian legislation.⁹³ The *Admonitio generalis*, a document more or less contemporary to the *Capitulatio*, frequently invoked the 'mandates' found in the 'the Law' regarding such issues as the Sunday rest, bribery, perjury, false testimony, augury, theft and the honour of parents.⁹⁴ Likewise, the synod of Friuli of 796/797 defended the Sunday rest by offering its own take on Leviticus 23:25: 'he who has done servile work on this day, which is a sin, shall surely die'.⁹⁵ But their use of Mosaic Law did not extend to matters of punishment; they did not call for the divinely ordained execution of sinners. In this, the *Capitulatio* was almost unique in the early Middle Ages.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Nu 15:35: dixitque Dominus ad Mosen morte moriatur homo iste obruat eum lapidibus omnis turba extra castra.

⁹² Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, ed. M. Adriaen, *CCSL* 143 (Turnhout, 1979), lib. 9, c. 62, p. 501: Per legem quippe virgam Deus tenuerat, cum dicebat: si quis haec vel illa fecerit, morte moriatur. Sed incarnatus virgam abstulit, quia vias vitae per mansuetudinem ostendit.

⁹³ W. Hartmann, 'Die karolingische Reform und die Bibel', *Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum*, 18 (1986), pp. 58-74. See also A. Firey, 'The Letter of the Law: Carolingian Exegetes and the Old Testament', in J.D. McAuliffe (ed.), *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York, NY, 2003), pp. 204-224 and R. Meens, 'The Uses of the Old Testament in Early Medieval Canon Law. The Collectio Vetus Gallica and the Collectio Hibernensis', in Y. Hen and M.J. Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 67-77.

⁹⁴ *Admonitio generalis*, cc. 61-80, pp. 210-38. See also Hartmann, 'Die karolingische Reform', p. 62.

⁹⁵ *Concilium Foroiuliense (796/797)*, ed. A. Werminghoff (Hanover and Leipzig, 1906), c 11, p. 194: Ipsum est enim sabbatum Domini delicatum, de quo scriptura dicit: Qui fecerit in eo opus servile, id est peccati, morte moriatur.

⁹⁶ The only early medieval parallel I was able to find was a sixth-century legal compilation from sub-Roman Britany, edited under the deceptive title *Canones Wallici* (Welsh Canons). The phrase *morte moriatur* surfaces twice in this compilation, in chapters dealing with adultery and theft

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

It would go too far, I think, to conclude that the compilers of the *Capitulatio* tried to literally implement Mosaic Law in Saxony. There are, after all, almost no direct citations.⁹⁷ But the Old Testament was certainly on the compilers' mind when they drew up the *Capitulatio*. No legislator at the Carolingian court in the 780s or 790s, when the Old Law was eagerly scrutinized for rules of conduct, would have failed to recognize *morte moriatur* as the signature phrase for divinely ordained death under Mosaic Law. Obviously, by using such a phrase, the compilers suggested that their sentences, too, were divinely ordained: it was not Charlemagne who outlawed human sacrifice and cannibalism in Saxony, it was God. But the significance of the phrase probably went beyond expressing divine sanction. With the *Capitulatio*, Charlemagne sought to lay down the rules for Christian subjects whom he knew to be of unstable faith. Harsh penalties were due, even for transgressions that did not normally merit such an approach. A phrase like *morte moriatur* signalled that such severity was not without precedent: God had been equally strict with his own Chosen People! The link was all the more conspicuous, because like Mosaic Law, the *Capitulatio* was concerned with enforcing religious allegiance and rooting out unorthodox, or pagan, behaviour.

There is yet another angle that the compilers of the *Capitulatio* might have pursued. The phrase *morte moriatur* does not always have the same implications in the Old Testament.⁹⁸ When used in a legal context, *morte moriatur* appears to denote an actual death sentence: i.e. God bestows on the community the responsibility for executing the transgressor. In other contexts, however, the phrase can also mark an individual as worthy of death in God's eyes, but with

respectively. *Canones Wallici*, ed. and trans. L Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963), cc. 17, 45. See S. Kerneis, 'Morte moriatur. La Peine Capitale chez les Bretons d'Armorique à la fin de l'Antiquité', in *Revue Historique de Droit Français et Étranger*, 79 (2001), pp. 331-346.

⁹⁷ But compare *Capitulatio*, c. 9: Si quis hominem diabulo sacrificaverit et in hostiam more paganorum daemonibus obtulerit, morte moriatur, with Lv 17:7 et nequaquam ultra immolabunt hostias suas daemonibus cum quibus fornicati sunt legitimum sempnitum erit illis et posteris eorum; Lv 20:9 si quis dederit de semine suo idolo Moloch morte moriatur populus terrae lapidabit eum.

⁹⁸ See Hieke, 'Das Alte Testament', pp. 368-74 and Illman, *Old Testament Formulas about Death*, pp. 119-27.

room for atonement. Examples of the latter can be found above all in the book of Ezekiel. In Ez. 3:17-21, the prophet Ezekiel famously recounts a dream, in which God installed him as a watchman (*speculator*) over the House of Israel:

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel: and thou shalt hear the word out of my mouth, and shalt tell it them from me. If, when I say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die (*morte morieris*), thou declare it not to him, nor speak to him, that he may be converted from his wicked way and live: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but I will require his blood at thy hand. But if thou give warning to the wicked, and he be not converted from his wickedness, and from his evil way: he indeed shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.⁹⁹

The passage famously laid down the doctrine of surrogate responsibility.¹⁰⁰ As a watchman, Ezekiel was made responsible for the behaviour of the people of Israel. He was to actively warn the Israelites of the dangers of sinning. If he failed to do so, Ezekiel would share in their downfall. If, on the other hand, Ezekiel would take up this divinely ordained responsibility, and a sinner would mend his ways because of it, the sinner would live.

The idea of the *speculator* surfaces regularly in eighth- and ninth-century texts, usually to describe the ministry of priests and bishops (*sacerdotes*), the Christian equivalent to Israel's watchmen.¹⁰¹ The Anglo-Saxon church reformer Boniface, a hardliner by any standards, confessed himself truly terrified by God's admonitions to Ezekiel.¹⁰² Nor did he have any doubts about their

⁹⁹ I follow the Douay-Rheims translation. Ezekiel 3:17-19: *fili hominis speculatorem dedi te domui Israhel et audies de ore meo verbum et adnuntiabis eis ex me. si dicente me ad impium morte morieris non adnuntiaveris ei neque locutus fueris ut avertatur a via sua impia et vivat ipse impius in iniquitate sua morietur sanguinem autem eius de manu tua requiram. si autem tu adnuntiaveris impio et ille non fuerit conversus ab impietate sua et via sua impia ipse quidem in iniquitate sua morietur tu autem animam tuam liberasti.*

¹⁰⁰ W.H. Brownlee, 'Ezekiel's Parable of the Watchman and the Editing of Ezekiel', *Vetus Testamentum*, 28:4 (1978), pp. 392-408, B. Lindars, 'Ezekiel and Individual Responsibility', *Vetus Testamentum*, 15:4 (1965), pp. 452-467.

¹⁰¹ See M. de Jong, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 114-15.

¹⁰² Boniface, *Epistolae*, ed. M. Tangl (Berlin, 1916), no. 78, p. 166.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

continued relevance: Christian *sacerdotes* who failed to reprimand sinners for their sins could look forward to accompanying the offenders to the ‘eternal flames’. Charlemagne’s courtier Alcuin of York expressed similar awe in his correspondence: ‘how terrible were the threats which the Lord levelled against Ezekiel, when he imposed on him the duties of preaching’.¹⁰³ The letter’s recipient, Arn of Salzburg, seems to have taken the warning to heart as well. Alcuin’s reference to Ezekiel reappears almost word for word in a synodal *ordo* commonly attributed to Arn, where it is used to underline the pastoral responsibilities of bishops.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, Ezekiel was known even to the scribe(s) who copied Vat Pal Lat 289, the collection of capitularies that contains the *Capitulatio*. A citation of Ezekiel 3:17 appears on the second folio of the ms., directly after a schedule for a provincial synod.¹⁰⁵ That Ezekiel 3:17 surfaces in the same manuscript as the *Capitulatio* is no guarantee, of course, that the capitulary’s original compilers were familiar with the passage as well. But it does signal that the image of the ‘watchman’ was widely recognized in Carolingian society and that the watchman’s responsibilities could be made to extend even into a legislative context.

As it turns out, the idea of sacerdotal ministry is deeply embedded in the *Capitulatio*. More than once, *sacerdotes* are ordered to monitor Saxon behaviour and to stand judge in matters of life and death.¹⁰⁶ Chapter 4 demands the death penalty for eating meat during the Lenten fast; ‘but let a *sacerdos* take care to establish, whether the transgressor was perchance led to consume meat out of necessity’.¹⁰⁷ Chapter 34 orders every Saxon count to uphold justice in his area of jurisdiction; ‘and the *sacerdotes* should take care, that he (i.e. the count) does not do otherwise’.¹⁰⁸ Arguably the most elaborate statement of sacerdotal

¹⁰³Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ed. Dümmler, no. 267, p. 425.

¹⁰⁴ *Die Konzilsordines des Früh- und Hochmittelalters*, ed. H. Schneider, MGH Ordines de celebrando Concilio (Hannover, 1996), Ordo 7B, pp. 339 (55-57 for attribution to Arn).

¹⁰⁵ Vat. Pal. Lat. 289, 2r: Fili hominis speculatorem posui te / in populo meo audiens verba ex ori / meo ex me non ex te. See also Mordek, *Biblioteca capitularium*, pp. 769-70.

¹⁰⁶ As noted by Schubert, ‘Die Capitulatio’, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ *Capitulatio*, c. 4, p. 68.

¹⁰⁸ *Capitulatio*, c. 34, p. 70.

responsibility is given in chapter 14, the chapter that concludes the section dealing with capital sentences:

But if someone who committed these mortal crimes in secret shall turn to a *sacerdos* out of his own accord and, having made a confession, shall be willing to do penance, let him be excused from death on the testimony of the priest.¹⁰⁹

This chapter presents more than a faint echo of Ezekiel 33:14-15:

But if I shall say to the wicked: Thou shalt surely die, and he do penance for his sin, and do judgment and justice...he shall surely live, and shall not die.¹¹⁰

The *Capitulatio*, then, did not just issue divinely ordained capital sentences like the Old Testament. It appears also to have followed the Old Testament in charging deacons, priest and bishops – *sacerdotes* – with saving sinful Saxons from death. No other Carolingian capitulary offered clergy such far-reaching responsibilities. But then again, there was no region under Carolingian control that needed to be watched as strictly at this point as Saxony.

4.5. Contextualizing the *Capitulatio*

As already noted, the *Capitulatio* survives without an introductory statement, tying the text to a specific date or assembly. This absence has turned dating the *Capitulatio* into a challenging endeavour. A possible *terminus post quem* can be drawn from the text itself. The *Capitulatio* refers on several occasions to the responsibilities of (Saxon) counts. This is generally taken to imply that the

¹⁰⁹ *Capitulatio*, c. 14, p. 69: Si vero pro his mortalibus criminibus latenter commissis aliquis sponte ad sacerdotem confugerit et confessione data ageri poenitentiam voluerit, testimonio sacerdotis de morte excusetur.

¹¹⁰ Ez. 33:14-15: sin autem dixero impio morte morieris et egerit poenitentiam a peccato suo feceritque iudicium et iustitiam pignus restituerit ille impius rapinamque reddiderit in mandatis vitae ambulaverit nec fecerit quicquam iniustum vita vivet et non morietur

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

capitulary was not issued before 782,¹¹¹ the year Charlemagne first appointed counts from among the ‘noblest Saxons’.¹¹² A probable *terminus ante quem* is 28 October 797, when the other Saxon capitulary, the *Capitulare Saxonicum*, was issued at Aachen.¹¹³ The *Capitulare* is shorter and more gentle in tone than the *Capitulatio*. Moreover, unlike the *Capitulatio*, the *Capitulare* explicitly claims the involvement of Saxon elites. It is often assumed, therefore, that the *Capitulatio* must have preceded the *Capitulare* of 797 by at least some years.¹¹⁴ Within these chronological boundaries, two dates have courted particular favour among modern scholars. First, the Lippespringe assembly of 782, which probably coincided with the installation of Saxon counts.¹¹⁵ Second, the Paderborn assembly of 785, preceding the baptism of Widukind.¹¹⁶

Recently, however, Yitzhak Hen has made a challenging case for a considerably later date, ca. 795.¹¹⁷ He argued that the readiness to accept either 782 or 785 as the date of composition is vested above all in the proximity of these dates to the ‘bloodbath’ at Verden, which, though harsh, he did not think implied a fundamental shift in Charlemagne’s Saxon policy. Rather, it was in the years following the renewed Saxon rebellions of 792 that the conflict entered its most brutal stage and that Charlemagne’s policies came to mirror most closely the dread pronouncements found in the *Capitulatio*. He also pointed at two famous letters of Alcuin of York, in which the retired courtier lamented the premature imposition of church tithes in Saxony and the overly stringent enforcement of ‘legal penalties for the smallest of crimes’.¹¹⁸ Knowing Alcuin’s admonishments to have reached the Carolingian court ca. 796, they

¹¹¹ M. Lintzel, ‘Die Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae’, Lintzel (ed.), *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 1 (Berlin, 1961), p. 385. Though see Richthofen and Richthofen (eds.), MGH Leges 5, p. 21, who argued for either 775 or 777.

¹¹² *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 782, p. 33.

¹¹³ *Capitulare Saxonicum*, pp. 71-72.

¹¹⁴ But see Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 222.

¹¹⁵ R. McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 253, Schubert, ‘Die Capitulatio’, pp. 9-10, Lintzel, ‘Die Capitulatio’, pp. 380-89.

¹¹⁶ Halphen, *Études critiques*, pp. 171-79.

¹¹⁷ Hen, ‘Charlemagne’s Jihad’. See also A. Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* 2 (1912), p. 396.

¹¹⁸ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin, 1895), no. 110 and 111, pp. 157-162.

would have been long overdue if the *Capitulatio* had already initiated such practices in the early 780s.¹¹⁹ This later date also allowed Hen to put forward two additional suggestions. First, that the *Capitulatio* was composed by Theodulf of Orleans, who, he argued, had replaced Alcuin as the primary policy-maker at Charlemagne's court by that year.¹²⁰ Second, that in establishing the *Capitulatio*'s unusually aggressive policy, Theodulf was influenced by his youth in Spain, where he lived under Muslim rule. The notion of forced conversion Theodulf based on the Islamic principle of jihad, church tithes were inspired by the poll tax, and the *Capitulatio*'s crackdown on pagan rituals had a parallel in the Covenant of Umar I.

While the possibility of Islamic influence on the *Capitulatio* makes for an engaging hypothesis, we have seen that such influence is not really necessary to account for the *Capitulatio*'s harsh character. There were plenty of precedents closer to home, such as the legal tradition of the Old Testament and the Carolingian discourse on infidelity. There is much to say, however, for Hen's suggestion that the *Capitulatio* was issued only in the final stage of the Saxon Wars. The key, I would argue, is the year 792, when the Frankish realm was shaken to the core by internal and external adversities. Before this date, there are no signs that Charlemagne was willing to punish religious defiance with death. In fact, there is evidence that he was not prepared to do so. The various disasters of 792, however, put the Carolingian court into a grim and unforgiving mood. Infidelity, in particular, became an intolerable transgression, to be punished with utmost severity. This is the context which provoked Charlemagne's court into issuing its most brutal capitulary.

Let us start with Charlemagne's pre-792 policy. Besides the *Capitulatio*, there are but a few documents that provide direct access to Charlemagne's views on the Saxon mission. Among the most important are two letters dispatched to

¹¹⁹ Note, though, that the main reason Alcuin brought up the Saxon case to Charlemagne was to argue for a different approach to the Avar mission, which was starting to pick up steam by 796. See I. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 85-6.

¹²⁰ Hen, 'Charlemagne's Jihad', pp. 44-7. For Theodulf, see Freeman and Meyvaert (ed.), *Theodulf of Orleans*.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

the Carolingian court by Pope Hadrian I, which survive today as part of the *Codex Carolinus*.¹²¹ Both letters belonged to the year 786, so shortly after the surrender and baptism of Widukind. The first of these letters has already been dealt with in the previous chapter. It saw Hadrian congratulate Charlemagne on his victory in Saxony and agree to host several services for its longevity – in vain, as it turned out. Still in 786, Hadrian dispatched another letter across the Alps. It was delivered to the court by the abbots of two royal monasteries, Itherius of Tours and Maginarius of St Denis.¹²² According to the letter, the Frankish king had sent the abbots to Rome as *missi*.¹²³ Among other things, they had been charged with inquiring ‘about Saxons who were Christians but returned to paganism, what sort of penance *sacerdotes* should impose on them’.¹²⁴ Hadrian answered by quoting from predecessors as well as scripture: penance should be lengthy, it should be genuine, and priests should investigate whether those ‘reverting to their vomit’ (Proverbs 26:11) did so voluntarily or because they were forced to. Furthermore, those who were accepted back into the fold should be made to swear oaths that they would henceforth keep to Christianity.

On one level, such correspondence suggests that apostasy continued to be an issue in Saxony in the period following Widukind’s baptism. This is not really surprising. For contrary to what Frankish historians liked to believe or project, the surrender and baptism of Saxony’s foremost rebel leader did not mean that the whole region was now suddenly Christianized. The opposite was rather the case: with the elimination of political resistance in Saxony the process

¹²¹ MGH Epp. 3, no. 76, 77, pp. 607-609. On the *Codex Carolinus*, A.T. Hack, *Codex Carolinus: päpstliche Epistolographie im 8. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 2006-2007).

¹²² MGH Epp. 3, no. 77, pp. 608-609. For the date of this letter, see the commentary in P. Jaffé, *Bibliotheca rerum Germanicarum*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1867), p. 248, n. 2.

¹²³ On these two *missi* and their relation to Rome, G. Thoma, ‘Papst Hadrian I. und Karl der Große. Beobachtungen zur Kommunikation zwischen Papst und König nach den Briefen des *Codex Carolinus*’, in K. Schnith, and R. Pauler (eds.), *Festschrift für Eduard Hlawitschka zum 65. Geburtstag* (Kallmünz, 1993), pp. 42-43 and T.F.X. Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State, 680-825* (Philadelphia, 1984), pp. 153-56.

¹²⁴ MGH Epp. 3, no. 77, p. 609: *sciscitati sunt nos interrogantes de Saxonibus, qui christiani fuerunt et ad paganissimum reversi sunt, qualem penitentiam eis sacerdotes iudicare debeant.*

of Christianization could now truly get on its way.¹²⁵ On a different level, Hadrian's letter suggests that Charlemagne was trying to formulate a policy towards Saxon apostasy, and that he was eager at this point to remain within the boundaries of Christian teaching. As such, the letter begs an obvious question: why bother asking the pope for advice about the treatment of apostate Saxons, if you have just issued a document that punishes relapse into paganism with death? A document, moreover, that offers elaborate instructions on the role of *sacerdotes* in Saxony and the possibility of penance?

Several answers come to mind. One, that Widukind's surrender led Charlemagne's court to suddenly rethink its aggressive policy. Two, that one of the parties involved was trying to hoodwink the other: Charlemagne by communicating one thing to Rome but doing things quite differently at home; the royal *missi* and/or Hadrian by writing Charlemagne a 'response' to a question that was never asked, hoping to circumspectly intervene in a policy they considered too harsh.¹²⁶ The final option, and arguably the most logical one, is that the *Capitulatio* was yet to be issued at this point, and its merciless policy yet to be established. The key factor in establishing it, were the events of 792, when Charlemagne's prestigious victory over the Saxons unexpectedly dissolved and the ranks of the *populus Christianus* were beset by unwelcome defections.

As we have seen in chapter 3, the Carolingian court faced a large number of unanticipated set-backs in the period 792-93: an equine epidemic, severe famine, a Saracen attack on Gaul, an uprising in Benevento, and perhaps most alarmingly, a revolt by Charlemagne's eldest son, Pippin the Hunchback.¹²⁷ Pippin's sworn association was uncovered in August 792, while Charlemagne was still residing at Regensburg following his 791 campaign against the Avars.¹²⁸ The precise motives underlying this 'most wicked plot' are beyond the

¹²⁵ Wood, 'An Absence of Saints?' and Johanek, 'Der Ausbau'.

¹²⁶ Alcuin's letter to Charlemagne's chamberlain Meginfrid constitutes another example of such circumspect intervention, Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 111, p. 159-162.

¹²⁷ Gillmor, 'The 791 Equine Epidemic'; Verhulst, 'Karolingische Agrarpolitik'; Hammer, "Pipinus rex".

¹²⁸ Hammer, 'Pippinus rex'.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

remit of this chapter.¹²⁹ What should concern us is Charlemagne's response, which can best be characterized as calculated brutality. His son Pippin he allowed to retire to the monastery of Prüm. Several other high-profile magnates whom it was expedient to pardon also got away with their lives, though they were made to pay with their possessions and offices. With others, however, Charlemagne did not refrain from shedding blood. 'Some were hung, some beheaded, others were flogged and exiled' the *Annales Mosellani* summarize.¹³⁰ The Revised version of the *Annales Regni Francorum* offers a similar choice of punishments: 'of the authors of the conspiracy some were executed by the sword for high treason and others hanged on the gallows, being punished with such deaths because of the crime they had planned'.¹³¹ Through such executions, Charlemagne issued a fearful example to all present at his Regensburg court in 792: infidelity would be punished with utmost severity.

This, now, was the grim message circulating around Charlemagne's Regensburg court, when somewhere at the end of 792 or the beginning of 793, news began to arrive of a renewed Saxon rebellion. After an already disastrous year, Charlemagne's most prestigious and hard-fought triumph was also contested once more. The contemporary *Annals of Lorsch* offer a reasonable example of how this unhappy news was received by the Franks:

But while the summer was approaching, the Saxons...openly showed what long since hid in their hearts: like a dog returning to its vomit, they returned to the paganism which they had earlier spit out, again leaving Christianity, and betraying both God and the king who offered them so many benefactions, to side with the pagan nations in their vicinity. And sending their messengers to the Avars, they tried to rebel first against God, and then against the king and the Christians; all the churches within their borders they brought down in fire and destruction, throwing out the bishops and priests who stood over them, some of whom they took into

¹²⁹ For an overview, Nelson, *Opposition to Charlemagne*, pp. 5-26.

¹³⁰ *Annales Mosellani*, s.a. 791 (which is 792), p. 497.

¹³¹ Reviser, s.a. 792, p. 93.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

custody, others among which they killed. And they openly turned to the worship of idols.¹³²

Yitzhak Hen has rightly called attention to the remarkable similarity between the acts described in this passage and the crimes denounced in the *Capitulatio*.¹³³ Burning churches, killing clergy, idol-worship, joining pagans, and infidelity to the king are all 'crimes' listed in the *Capitulatio*, which can thus be seen to react to the events of 792.¹³⁴ But perhaps the most striking feature of the above passage, as has already been noted in chapter 3, is its complete conflation of political and religious allegiance. In forsaking Christianity, the Saxons betrayed both God and the king. By siding with pagans, they rebelled against God, Charlemagne and the Christians. It is this very conflation of political and religious infidelity that also stands at the heart of the *Capitulatio*. Let us look once more at chapters 10 and 11 in the *Capitulatio*:

10. If anyone shall have joined pagans in a plot against Christians, or shall have wished to join with them in opposition to Christians, he shall certainly die. And whoever shall have agreed to do this same thing deceitfully against the king or the Christian people, he shall certainly die.¹³⁵

¹³² *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 792, p. 35: Sed et propinquante aestivo tempore Saxones, aestimantes quod Avarorum gens se vindicare super christianos debuisset, hoc quod in corde eorum dudum iam antea latebat, manifestissime ostenderunt: quasi canis qui revertit ad vomitum suum, sic reversi sunt ad paganismum quem pridem respuerant, iterum relinquentes christianitatem, mentientes tam Deo quam domno rege, qui eis multa beneficia prestatit, coniungentes se cum paganas gentes, qui in circuitu eorum erant. Sed et missos suos ad Avaros transmittentes conati sunt in primis rebellare contra Deum, deinde contra regem et christianos; omnes ecclesias que in finibus eorum erant, cum destructione et incendio vastabant, reiicientes episcopos et presbyteros qui super eos erant, et aliquos comprehenderunt, nec non et alios occiderunt, et plenissime se ad culturam idolorum converterunt.

¹³³ Hen, 'Charlemagne's Jihad', pp. 38-39.

¹³⁴ *Capitulatio*, cc. 1, 3, 5, 10 and 11, pp. 68-69.

¹³⁵ *Capitulatio*, c. 10, p. 69: Si quis cum paganis consilium adversus christianos inierit vel cum illis in adversitate christianorum perdurare voluerit, morte moriatur; et quicumque hoc idem fraude contra regem vel gentem christianorum consenserit, morte moriatur.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

11. If anyone shall have shown himself unfaithful to the king, he shall be punished with a capital sentence.¹³⁶

Together, these two chapters offer a rather precise synopsis of the two disasters that pressed most heavily on Charlemagne's mind after 792-93. First, Frankish and Bavarian magnates had broken their oaths of fidelity to the king. More specifically, Charlemagne's own son had been involved in a plot against his person. Second, the Saxons had forsaken their newfound membership of the Christian realm. They had sided with pagans against Christians.

How soon after the disasters of 792 would the *Capitulatio* have been composed and issued? Can we tie the text to a specific year or assembly? And who could have been involved in its composition? Yitzhak Hen argued that the *Capitulatio* was issued 'ca. 795', mainly for two reasons. One, it would have allowed the *Capitulatio*'s main composer, Theodulf of Orleans, a reasonable time to prepare. Two, it would explain Alcuin's critical letters a year later, in 796. In what follows, ca. 795 will be retained as the most likely period in which the *Capitulatio* was composed, but other features of the picture will be redrawn differently. Most importantly, it will be argued that the compilation of the *Capitulatio* was initiated not by Theodulf of Orleans, but by another member of Charlemagne's court-circle: Richulf of Mainz.¹³⁷ As archbishop of the metropolitan see of Mainz from 787 till his death in 813, Richulf was among the main figures responsible for the Saxon mission. Moreover, he was a prominent member of Charlemagne's court and directly involved in Saxon policy in the years 794-96. Before moving to Richulf's impressive career in Carolingian service, however, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the physical context in which the *Capitulatio* is transmitted, for this too, points in the direction of the archdiocese of Mainz.

¹³⁶ *Capitulatio*, c. 11, p. 69: Si quis domino regi infidelis apparuerit, capitali sententia punietur.

¹³⁷ T. Schieffer, 'Erzbischof Richulf, 787-813', *Jahrbuch für das Bistum Mainz*, 5 (1950), pp. 329-342.

4.6. Mission from Mainz

As said, the *Capitulatio* survives in a single manuscript currently in the Vatican, dated to the first third of the ninth century.¹³⁸ Palaeographical analysis points to Mainz as the most likely centre of production.¹³⁹ Apart from the *Capitulatio* (59^v-62^v), the ms. contains three other capitularies, concerned either with the (ecclesiastical) organisation of Saxony or with ecclesiastical organisation in general: the 803 *Capitula ecclesiastica ad Salz data* (1^{r-v}); the 813 *Capitula e canonibus excerpta* (58^r-59^v); and the *Capitulare Saxonum* (62^v-64^v), the second and milder Saxon capitulary that I referred to above and that was issued at Aachen in October 797.¹⁴⁰ The ms. does not just contain legislation, however. Separating the Capitulary of Salz from the other three capitularies, is a hefty piece of exegesis: Alcuin of York's *Quaestiones in Genesim* (2^v-57^v), dedicated to his pupil Sichulf ca. 796.¹⁴¹ One of the earliest examples of Carolingian exegesis, the *Questiones* was among the most widely read commentaries of the period. The main reason for this was probably its accessibility: Alcuin's commentary was closer to a handbook for the novice than to a learned treatise on the profundities of patristic scholarship.¹⁴² That a work of Alcuin's found its way into the same ms. as the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* is not a little ironic, considering that the Anglo-Saxon was among the most vocal criticasters of Charlemagne's Saxon policies.¹⁴³ Then again, an accessible commentary on

¹³⁸ Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 289, fols. 59v-62r. See Mordek, *Biblioteca*, pp. 769-71 and Hanselmann, 'Der Codex Vat. Pal. Lat. 289', pp. 78-86.

¹³⁹ Mordek ascribes fols. 2-57 to Mainz ca. 825, while fols. 1 and 58-64, he suggests, belong to the region of Mainz and the first third of the ninth century, Mordek, *Biblioteca*, p. 769. Hanselmann suggests the entire ms. was copied at Mainz, though some of the hands involved must have been trained elsewhere, 'Der Codex', pp. 85-6. On the ninth-century Mainz scriptorium, see W.M. Lindsay and P. Lehmann, 'The Early Mayence Scriptorium', *Palaeographia latina*, 4 (1925), pp. 15-39 and F. Falk, *Die ehemalige Dombibliothek zu Mainz, ihre Entstehung, Verschleppung und Vernichtung nach gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen* (Leipzig, 1897), pp. 158-63.

¹⁴⁰ MGH Capit. 1, no. 42, pp. 119-20; no. 78, pp. 173-75; no. 27, pp. 71-2.

¹⁴¹ Alcuin, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, ed. J-P. Migne, *PL* 100 (Paris, 1863), pp. 516C-564D. For the letter, Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 80, pp. 122-23.

¹⁴² M. Fox, 'Alcuin the Exegete: The Evidence of the "Quaestiones in Genesim"', in Chazelle and Edwards (eds.), *The Study of the Bible*, pp. 39-60, here 42.

¹⁴³ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, n. 110, 111, pp. 156-62.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

the first book of the Bible suits the manuscript's overall concern with religious instruction.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, Alcuin had a specific connection to Mainz through his pupil Richulf, archbishop between 786 and 813, with whom Alcuin was in regular correspondence in the early 790s.¹⁴⁵

Apart from the above works, the ms. contains three unique fragments. All are found on the same page (2^r) in the ms., which separates the Capitulary of Salz from Alcuin's *Quaestiones*.¹⁴⁶ First comes a short and seemingly incomplete schedule for a provincial synod.¹⁴⁷ Judging from its contents, the synod was to be held under the auspices of an archbishop, possibly the archbishop of Mainz. Next, but in a different hand, is a citation from Ezekiel 3:17, the very passage indeed, in which God installs the prophet Ezekiel as a watchman over the House of Israel.¹⁴⁸ Finally, the page offers three short segments of Psalms for use in the liturgy, introduced under the header *AN.(= ANTIPHONA) AD INTROITUM*.

Looking at the ms. in its entirety, there is something to say for Jan Hanselmann's suggestion that it was a compilation of instructive and legislative material, brought together for use in a missionary context.¹⁴⁹ Hanselmann pointed specifically at the on-going Saxon mission, which obviously suits the Saxon capitularies in the ms. Another option would be the mission of the Danes. After all, it was precisely in the 820s – when Vat Pal. Lat. 289 was compiled – that the Christianization of Scandinavia was put on the Carolingian agenda.¹⁵⁰ Interestingly, Mainz played a central role in these developments: in

¹⁴⁴ Hanselmann, 'Der Codex', p. 82.

¹⁴⁵ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 4, pp. 29-30; no. 25, pp. 66-7; no. 26, pp. 67-8; no. 35, p. 77; no. 212, pp. 352-3.

¹⁴⁶ For a transcription, G.H. Pertz, *Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere Deutsche Geschichtskunde zur Beförderung einer Gesamtausgabe der Quellenschriften deutscher Geschichten des Mittelalters*, vol. 5 (Hanover, 1824), p. 305.

¹⁴⁷ *Quibus de rebus in synodo quadam provinciali tractandum*, MGH Capit. 1, n. 118, p. 236.

¹⁴⁸ Vat. Pal. Lat. 289, 2r: *Fili hominis speculatorem posui te / in populo meo audiens verba ex ori / meo ex me non ex te*. Compare Ezekiel 3:17, *Fili hominis speculatorem dedi te domui Israhel et audies de ore meo verbum et adnuntiabis eis ex me*.

¹⁴⁹ Hanselmann, 'Der Codex', p. 82

¹⁵⁰ E. Knibbs, *Ansgar, Rimbert, and the Forged Foundations of Hamburg-Bremen* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 66-69; Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 125-27; J. Palmer, 'Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* and the

June 826, the ousted Danish king Harald Klak submitted to baptism at the church of St Albans in Mainz, in the company of Louis the Pious.¹⁵¹ Harald was subsequently given a fief in the east-Frisian region of Rürstringen. On his own request, he was accompanied to Rürstringen by Ansgar, the later bishop of Bremen, and several other monks from Corvey, who were to further spread the faith among Harald's retinue.¹⁵² All this allows for a tantalizing, if by no means definite, suggestion regarding the purpose of Vat Pal. Lat. 289: that it was compiled in the Mainz scriptorium in the specific context of Harald's baptism in that same city in 826. The manuscript would have offered the monks who accompanied Harald to Rürstringen a set of useful texts for their missionary work among the Danes, including instruction on the first book of the Bible and regulations for a recently converted society (i.e. Saxony).

Vat Pal. Lat. 289 was not the only manuscript of its sort to be produced in the vicinity of Mainz. A parallel can be drawn to another ms. currently in the Vatican Library: Vat. Pal. Lat. 577.¹⁵³ This ms. was composed in the late eighth century, either in Mainz or the affiliated monasteries of Fulda or Hersfeld.¹⁵⁴ Pal. Lat. 577 also brought together various instructive and legislative texts for use in a missionary context. Among other things, it contains the only extant

Scandinavian Mission in the Ninth Century', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55 (2004), pp. 235-256, here 250-54.

¹⁵¹ ARF, s.a. 826, pp. 169-70: Eodem tempore Herioldus cum uxore et magna Danorum multitudine veniens Mogontiaci apud sanctum Albanum cum his, quos secum adduxit, baptizatus est; multisque muneribus ab imperatore donatus per Frisiam, qua venerat via, reversus est. In qua provincia unus comitatus, qui Hriustri vocatur, eidem datus est, ut in eum se cum rebus suis, si necessitas exigeret, recipere potuisset.

¹⁵² Rimbart, *Vita Anskarii*, cc. 7-8, pp. 26, 30.

¹⁵³ On this manuscript, Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium regum*, pp. 776-777. As noted by Georg Heinrich Pertz, Vat. Pal. Lat. 577, too, mentions Ezekiel's dream, and in a more extensive form (Ez. 3:17-21), see Pertz, *Archiv* 5, pp. 304-305.

¹⁵⁴ For Mainz or Fulda, B. Bischoff, 'Paläographische Fragen deutscher Denkmäler der Karolingerzeit', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 5 (1971), pp. 101-134, here 109-11 and M. Mostert, 'Utrecht zwischen York und Fulda: Anfänge niederländischer Schriftlichkeit im Frühmittelalter', in U. Zellmann, A. Lehmann-Benz and U. Küsters (eds.), "*Wider den Müßiggang...*": *Niederländisches Mittelalter im Spiegel von Kunst, Kult und Politik* (Düsseldorf, 2004), pp. 21-37, here 32-35. For Hersfeld being preferable to Mainz, Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium regum*, pp. 776-7.

copy of a baptismal vow in Old Saxon (7^r).¹⁵⁵ The vow has the form of a short Q&A: a baptismal candidate would be asked several questions, presumably by a priest, to which he was to give fixed answers (the ‘vows’). In this fashion, the potential convert would first promise to renounce ‘all the words and deeds of the Devil, Thunar, Woden and Saxnot, and all those evil spirits that are their companions’.¹⁵⁶ He would conclude his vows by promising to believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Directly after the baptismal vow in the ms. (7^{r-v}) we find another unique text with a missionary character: the so-called *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum*, an index of thirty religious (mal)practices.¹⁵⁷ The *Indiculus* has been linked to the Anglo-Saxon missionary and reformer Boniface.¹⁵⁸ Possibly, it was drawn up during one of the Frankish ‘reform councils’ of the early 740s, which Boniface hosted under the aegis of the Carolingian mayor of the palace Carloman.¹⁵⁹ The acts of these councils are also included in the manuscript (4-5^{r-v}). It should be underlined that the title

¹⁵⁵ *Interrogationes et Responsiones Baptismales*, MGH Capit. 1, p. 222. See C. Staiti, “Indiculus” und “Gelöbnis”. Altsächsisches im Kontext der Überlieferung. Nebst einer Edition einiger Texte des Cod. Vat. Pal. lat. 577’, in R. Bergmann (ed.), *Volkssprachig-lateinische Mischtexte und Textensembles in der althochdeutschen, altsächsischen und altenglischen Überlieferung: Mediävistisches Kolloquium des Zentrums für Mittelalterstudien der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg am 16. und 17. November 2001* (Heidelberg, 2003), pp. 331-84; D.L. Machielsen, ‘De Angelsaksische herkomst van de zogenaamde Oudsaksische doopbelofte’, *Lewense Bijdragen*, 50 (1961), pp. 97-124; A. Lasch, ‘Das altsächsische Taufgelöbnis’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 36 (1935), pp. 92-133.

¹⁵⁶ *Interrogationes et Responsiones Baptismales*, p. 222: End ec forsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum thunaer ende woden ende saxnote ende allum them unholdem the hira genotas sint.

¹⁵⁷ *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum*, MGH Capit. 1, p. 222-3.

¹⁵⁸ For the link to Boniface and composition ca. 740s, M. Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg. Zur politischen Dimension eines Rechtsbegriffs* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), pp. 117-63, 239-307, 435-599 and A. Dierkens, ‘Superstitions, christianisme et paganisme à la fin de l’époque mérovingienne. A propos de l’Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum’, in H. Hasquin, *Magie, sorcellerie, parapsychologie* (Bruxelles, 1984), pp. 9-26. For a date closer to the end of the eighth century, H. Homann, ‘Der Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum und verwandte Denkmäler’, doctoral thesis, Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, 1965. See also H. Homann, ‘Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum’ in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 15 (2000), pp. 369-379.

¹⁵⁹ The acts of these councils can also be found in the ms (4-5^{r-v}). See also MGH Conc. 2.1, pp. 2-7.

Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum is a modern invention. The compiler of the text, therefore, did not necessarily refer to pagan customs. At best we can say that the 30 religious practices listed are considered of disputable orthodoxy.¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, there is considerable overlap between the practises listed in the *Indiculus* and those denounced in the *Capitulatio*. The latter puts a steep fine on making offerings to springs (*fontes*), trees (*arbores*) and groves (*lucos*).¹⁶¹ It also orders that diviners (*divinos*) and soothsayers (*sortilegos*) are to be handed over to priests.¹⁶² Nearly all of these practices feature in the *Indiculus*.¹⁶³ Significantly, this overlap applies only to the practices found under the header ‘minor issues’ in the *Capitulatio*, i.e. practices which the *Capitulatio* does not punish with death and which in fact do not receive the label *mos paganorum*.¹⁶⁴ None of the actual ‘pagan’ acts listed in the *Capitulatio* – human sacrifice, cannibalism, cremation of the dead, refusal to come to baptism, plotting against Christians – can be found in the *Indiculus*. On the one hand, this could be taken to confirm that the *Indiculus* was concerned more with ‘heresies’ or alternative christianities than with actual paganism. On the other hand, it can also be seen as confirmation of the fact that the compilers of the *Capitulatio* employed a very specific and politicised definition of ‘pagan’ behaviour: practices that posed a direct threat to the Carolingian and Christian order, be it through their violent character (cannibalism, human sacrifice), their public character (cremation) or their inherently defiant nature (refusing baptism, plotting against Christians).

That manuscripts such as Vat Pal. Lat. 289 and Vat. Pal. Lat. 577 were copied in the Mainz area in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, corroborates the long-held scholarly assumption that Mainz played a prominent role in the Saxon mission.¹⁶⁵ The full extent of this role has yet to be explored,

¹⁶⁰ R. Meens, ‘Aspekte der Christianisierung des Volkes’, in *Bonifatius – Leben und Nachwirken* (2007), pp. 211-230, here 215.

¹⁶¹ *Capitulatio*, c. 21, p. 69.

¹⁶² *Capitulatio*, c. 23, p. 69.

¹⁶³ *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum*, cc. 6, 11, 14, p. 223.

¹⁶⁴ Chapter 21 does use the label *mos gentilium*, *Capitulatio*, c. 21, p. 69.

¹⁶⁵ H. Büttner, ‘Das Erzstift Mainz und die Sachsenmission’, *Jahrbuch für das Bistum Mainz*, 5 (1950), pp. 314-328

however. Heinrich Büttner, one of the few scholar to study Mainz's participation in the Saxon mission, thought it self-evident that such a prominent bishopric would have been given a 'special task' in Saxony. Yet he also remarked on the 'nearly complete silence of the sources', preventing a detailed scholarly understanding of Mainz's role in the Saxon mission.¹⁶⁶ For the period up to ca. 790, specific evidence is indeed scarce, if by no means absent. Like the conquest of Saxony, its conversion was a protracted and hard-fought affair, which came to involve various individuals and centres, whose efforts were far from universally successful.¹⁶⁷ Evangelization of the Continental Saxons had already been on the agenda of Anglo-Saxon missionaries long before Charlemagne's Saxon Wars. Boniface, in particular, was candid about his ambitions towards the Saxons, whom he claimed were of the same blood and bone as his compatriots on the Isles.¹⁶⁸ Such ambitions were ultimately doomed to fail without the active and sustained support of Carolingian armies.¹⁶⁹ More favourable circumstances presented themselves under Lull (d. 786), Boniface's apprentice and successor to the see of Mainz.¹⁷⁰ In 773, a year after Charlemagne's first foray into Saxony, Lull received a missive from his Anglo-Saxon friend Eanwulf, congratulating him on Mainz' missionary efforts in 'foreign lands'.¹⁷¹ Eanwulf knew about the Saxon campaign the previous year,

¹⁶⁶ Büttner, 'Das Erzstift Mainz', p. 321.

¹⁶⁷ Wood, 'An Absence of Saints'; Johaneck, 'Der Ausbau'; L.E. von Padberg, 'Karl der Große, die Sachsen und die Mission', in H.-J. Häßler (ed.), *Neue Forschungsergebnisse zur nordwesteuropäischen Frühgeschichte* (Oldenburg, 2005), pp. 365-376; H. Büttner, 'Mission und Kirchenorganisation des Frankenreiches bis zum Tode Karls des Großen', in H. Beumann and W. Braunfels (eds.), *Karl der Grosse. Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, 1 (Düsseldorf, 1965), pp. 454-487.

¹⁶⁸ Boniface, *Epistolae*, no. 46, pp. 74-75.

¹⁶⁹ L.E. von Padberg, *Bonifatius: Missionar und Reformator* (München, 2003), pp. 58-60.

¹⁷⁰ On Lull, see above all T. Schieffer, 'Angelsachsen und Franken. Zwei Studien zur Kirchengeschichte des 8. Jahrhunderts', *Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz*, 20 (1950), pp. 1471-1539. More recently, J.T. Palmer, 'The Vigorous Rule of Bishop Lull: Between Bonifatian Mission and Carolingian Church Control', *Early Medieval Europe*, 13 (2005), pp. 249-276.

¹⁷¹ *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius and Lullus*, ed. Tangl, no. 119, p. 255: Quantum enim de omni vestro propectu gavisus sumus quantamque super his, quae in peregrinis locis vobis prospera cesserunt, laetitiam haberemus.

for he also directed a frenzied letter of encouragement to Charlemagne himself: ‘make haste to extend the Christian faith over the peoples subjected to you! Augment your righteous zeal towards their conversion! Persecute the worship of idols! Overthrow the shrines!’¹⁷² As it turned out, Charlemagne did extend his zeal in this direction. In 776, Charlemagne oversaw the first mass baptism at the Lippespringe.¹⁷³ It has been suggested that the year 777 already witnessed the installation of a provisional ecclesiastical organisation in Saxony, in which Fulda and Mainz, together with Paderborn, were to be the leading centres.¹⁷⁴ Reconstruction of any such initiative is problematic, however, as most of what was achieved in Saxony prior to 778 was destroyed with the Saxon raid on the Rhineland, Paderborn included. Charlemagne made another, more lasting, attempt at a Saxon church organisation in 780. According to the *Annals of Lorsch*, ‘he divided that land among bishops, priests and abbots, so that they would preach and baptize in that region’.¹⁷⁵ It is commonly assumed that the ecclesiastical division established in 780 was more comprehensive than that of 777, involving such centres as Fulda, Hersfeld, Echternach, Würzburg, Cologne, Utrecht and Mainz. Ca 787, the first Saxon bishopric was founded in Bremen.¹⁷⁶ New dioceses were founded in Saxony well into the ninth century,

¹⁷² *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius and Lullus*, no. 120, p. 256: Christianam fidem in populis tibi subditis extendere festina; zelum rectitudinis tuae in eorum conversione multiplica; idolorum cultus insequere; fanorum aedificia everte; subditorum mores et magna vitae munditia exhortando, terrendo, blandiando, corrigendo et boni operis exemplo monstrando aedifica, ut illum retributorem invenias in caelo, cuius nomen atque cognitionem dilataveris in terra.

¹⁷³ ARF, s.a. 776-777.

¹⁷⁴ The main source for this is Eigil, *Vita Sturmi*, ed. P. Engelbert (Marburg, 1968), c. 22: Totam provinciam illam in parochias episcopales divisit et servis Domini ad docendum et baptizandum potestatem dedit. This passage is not without problems, however, for it closely mirrors the 780 entry of the *Annals of Lorsch*, a text which the ninth-century author of the *Vita Sturmi* appears to have known. See also, Johanek, ‘Der Ausbau der Sächsischen Kirchenorganisation’ and K. Hauck, ‘Paderborn: Das Zentrum von Karls Sachsen-Mission 777’, in J. Fleckenstein, and K. Schmid (eds.), *Adel und Kirche. Gerd Tellenbach zum 65. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern* (Freiburg, 1968), pp. 91-140.

¹⁷⁵ *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 780, p. 32: divisitque ipsam patriam inter episcopos et presbyteros seu et abbates, ut in ea baptizarent er predicarent.

¹⁷⁶ The most comprehensive account is still E. Müller, *Die Entstehungsgeschichte der sächsischen Bistümer unter Karl dem Großen* (Hildesheim, 1938). For an overview of more recent literature,

with Mainz and Cologne acting as metropolitan sees. By then, however, Lull had already passed away. His responsibilities for the archdiocese of Mainz, as well as for the Saxon mission, had been transferred to another bishop: Richulf (787-813). As we will see below, there is plenty of evidence for Mainz' involvement in Saxony during Richulf's episcopate. Richulf was also closer to Charlemagne and the Carolingian court than Lull. His was an ideal position, therefore, to help draft a legislative response to the renewed Saxon rebellions of 792.

4.7. Richulf, Saxony and the Capitulatio

Unlike Lull, Richulf came from a Frankish family, with lands in the Main region.¹⁷⁷ He began his career among the clergy of Mainz, before moving to the Carolingian court, where he became a palace chaplain. His main teacher at court appears to have been Alcuin, who came to refer to him as 'Damoetas', a shepherd from Virgil's third eclogue.¹⁷⁸ Alcuin also addressed at least five letters to Richulf, which we will come to look at below.¹⁷⁹ Another close relation at court was queen Fastrada, Charlemagne's third wife, with whom Richulf may have shared a family connection.¹⁸⁰ In fact, Janet Nelson has suggested that Richulf owed his consecration as archbishop in 787 to Fastrada's influence.¹⁸¹

C.J. Carroll, 'The Bishoprics of Saxony in the First Century After Christianization', *Early Medieval Europe*, 8 (1999), pp. 219-245, here 220, n. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Schieffer, 'Ertzbischof Richulf (787-813)', p. 332.

¹⁷⁸ On these nicknames at court, M. Garrison, 'The Emergence of Carolingian Latin Literature and the Court of Charlemagne (780-814)', R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 111-140, here 129.

¹⁷⁹ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 4, pp. 29-30; no. 25, pp. 66-7; no. 26, pp. 67-8; no. 35, p. 77; no. 212, pp. 352-3.

¹⁸⁰ F. Staab, 'Die Königin Fastrada', in R. Berndt (ed.), *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794. Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur* (Mainz, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 183-217, here 186-7, 201-213.

¹⁸¹ Marianus Scotus, an eleventh-century Irish chronicler who worked in Mainz, offers a precise date and place for Richulf's consecration: the 4th of March, in the monastery of St Peter in Fritzlar, see Marianus Scotus, *Chronicon*, ed. G.H. Pertz, MGH SS 5 (Hanover, 1844) p. 548. At this time, Charlemagne would still have been in Italy; another hint that Richulf's consecration could have been initiated by Fastrada, J.L. Nelson, 'The Sitting of the Council at Frankfurt', in Berndt (ed.), *Das Frankfurter Konzil*, 1, pp. 158-59.

Significantly, Richulf's archiepiscopate coincided with an increased royal presence in Mainz. Charlemagne had called on the town only once during Lull's episcopate, in 770.¹⁸² Under Richulf, Charlemagne came to Mainz (or Mainz-Kostheim) at least five times within a fifteen-year period: in 790, 794, 795, 800 and 803. The archiepiscopal dignity did not keep Richulf away from court. In Theodulf of Orleans' celebrated poem *On the court*,¹⁸³ composed early in 796, Richulf is introduced directly after Alcuin, as a man of 'powerful voice, alert intelligence and polished speech, noble in his accomplishments and in his faith'.¹⁸⁴ To this, Theodulf added a rather more enigmatic characterization: 'even if he dallies long in a distant region, he does not return from there with empty hands'. Theodulf's generous characterisation of Richulf had an acerbic subtext. Both contemporary and later sources allude with some frequency to Richulf's acquisitiveness and unbishoplike love for earthly goods. Theodulf's reference to Richulf's 'empty hands' was probably a play on this theme.¹⁸⁵ The reference to 'distant regions' was equally spot on, for Richulf did his fair share of travelling for the Carolingian cause. Already in 781, he had been part of an embassy dispatched to Bavaria to remind the Bavarian duke Tassilo of his loyalties.¹⁸⁶ In 796, he joined Charlemagne on campaign against the Saxons.¹⁸⁷ This may well have been the 'distant region' mentioned by Theodulf. Richulf was one of the few magnates, also, whom we know to have accompanied Charlemagne to Rome in 800, to deal with the insalubrious charges levelled

¹⁸² ARF, s.a. 770, p. 30: Et domnus Carolus rex celebravit natalem Domini in Mogontiam civitatem et pascha in Haristallo.

¹⁸³ Theodulf, *Carmina*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Poetae 1 (Berlin, 1881), no. 25, pp. 483-489. Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, p. 68. For a thorough introduction to the poem, with running commentary, see C. J. Blakeman, 'Commentary, with Introduction, Text and Translation, on Selected Poems of Theodulf of Orleans (Sirmond III. 1-6)', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of St Andrews, 1991, pp. 84-173.

¹⁸⁴ Theodulf, *Carmina*, no. 25, pp. 486-7: Voce valens, sensuque vigil, sermone politus / Adsit Riculfus, nobilis arte, fide/ Qui et si longinqua fuerit regione moratus, non manibus vacuis iam tamen inde redit

¹⁸⁵ I am grateful to Mayke de Jong for suggesting this possible subtext to Theodulf's characterisation.

¹⁸⁶ ARF, s.a. 781, p. 58. Note that Regino of Prüm refers to Richulf as a 'capellanus', *Chronicon*, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SS rer. Germ. 50 (Hanover, 1890), lib. 2, s.a. 781, p. 53.

¹⁸⁷ This we know from one of Alcuin's *Epistolae*, no. 25, p. 66-7. On the date, see below.

against Pope Leo III. Richulf seems to have played an active role on the occasion, speaking out in favour of the pope.¹⁸⁸ He continued to maintain cordial relations with Rome over the following decade. In 809, he dispatched ‘a gift and a letter’ to Leo through his suffragan bishop Bernhard of Worms, asking, and receiving, relics of St Caesarius of Terracina in return.¹⁸⁹ In 811, Richulf was among the metropolitans standing witness to Charlemagne’s will.¹⁹⁰ He died in August 813 and was buried in Mainz in his own foundation of St Albans. His epitaph pronounced him a ‘famous bishop, renowned for his office in the king’s palace’.¹⁹¹

What can we say about Richulf’s movements in the period after the renewed Saxon rebellion of 792? The news of the Saxon uprising must have reached the Carolingian court shortly before or after Pippin’s rebellion, so late in 792 or early in 793. At that point, the court was still at Regensburg. Whether Richulf was also in Bavaria at the moment cannot be established with certainty. The *Annals of Lorsch* report how in 792, Charlemagne offered gifts to ‘the bishops, abbots and counts who were there with him [...] who were not involved in Pippin’s evil plot’.¹⁹² This suggests a large retinue. On the other hand, there survive several amusing anecdotes by Charlemagne’s late ninth-century biographer Notker the Stammerer about a prideful and avaricious bishop who happened to hold the ‘primary see of Germania’, that is Mainz.¹⁹³ One of these stories relates how the bishop was left behind when Charlemagne went off to fight the Huns (in 791), to act as a guardian to queen Hildegard. Puffed up with pride, the prelate subsequently asked the queen to borrow the king’s golden sceptre, resulting in his public humiliation in front of the entire court. The story is obviously flawed: Hildegard had already passed away by 791

¹⁸⁸ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 212, pp. 252-53.

¹⁸⁹ Only Leo’s reply survives, MGH Epp. 5, no. 9, pp. 67-8.

¹⁹⁰ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 33, pp. 38-9. See also, M. Innes, ‘Charlemagne’s Will: Piety, Politics and the Imperial Succession’, *The English Historical Review*, 112 (1997), pp. 833-55.

¹⁹¹ For his epitaph, MGH Poetae 1, p. 432: Antistes fueram famosus nomine Richulf, / inclitus officio regis in aede fui.

¹⁹² *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 792, p. 38.

¹⁹³ Notker the Stammerer, *Gesta Karoli*, ed. H.F. Haefele, MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S. 12 (Berlin, 1959), cc. 16-19, pp. 19-25.

and Charles had remarried Fastrada. It has been suggested, moreover, that Notker's stories about the primary see of Germania were meant as a veiled criticism on the contemporary archbishop of Mainz, Liutbert (d. 889).¹⁹⁴ This would severely limit their reliability as sources for late eighth-century politics. Then again, it is noteworthy that the underlying themes of Notker's stories about the bishop – pride, greed and unclerical love for riches – are also themes that pop up repeatedly in contemporary material relating to Richulf.¹⁹⁵ Possibly, then, Richulf's reputation had stuck. More importantly, we know that Notker's story holds up on at least one point: queen Fastrada did not accompany Charlemagne on his Avar campaign and spend the winter of 792/93 away from Regensburg in Frankfurt.¹⁹⁶ It is not impossible that Richulf, her kinsman, accompanied her at that point on Charlemagne's request.¹⁹⁷ Such a return to his own diocese – and library – would also have allowed him to start laying the foundations for a Saxon capitulary.

By 794, the court was back in Frankfurt. In June of that year, there convened in Frankfurt a large church synod, involving bishops from Francia, Germania and Italy. There is no doubt that Richulf was among them.¹⁹⁸ It should be underlined that Charlemagne had still not responded to the Saxon rebellion at this point, at least not with military force. The reason for this delay is contested. One ninth-century annalist reports that Charlemagne 'concealed the extent of the disaster' (*magnitudinam damni dissimulans*) for some reason.¹⁹⁹ Modern commentators tend to point at the unfavourable circumstances: the

¹⁹⁴ Thus S. Maclean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (New York, 2003), pp. 205-208.

¹⁹⁵ Chapter 16 relates how a clever Jewish merchant tricked the bishop into buying an ordinary mouse for an extravagant amount of silver. The money was originally intended for the poor. In chapter 18, the bishop tries to hide his lack of learning from the king by bribing royal *missi* with a lavish banquet. Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, cc. 16, 18, pp. 19-24.

¹⁹⁶ We know from a charter that she presided over a trial by combat in Frankfurt, which ended in the death and disownment of one of the aristocratic participants. See Staab, 'Fastrada', p. 195, n. 66.

¹⁹⁷ Staab, 'Fastrada', pp. 198-9.

¹⁹⁸ Schieffer, 'Ertzbischof Richulf (787-813)', p. 333.

¹⁹⁹ Reviser, s.a. 793, p. 93.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

equine epidemic of 791 would have seriously hampered mobility,²⁰⁰ while the failed harvests of 792 resulted in an immense food shortage.²⁰¹ Whatever Charlemagne's reasons for postponing a military intervention in Saxony, one would have expected the Saxon insurrection to have been addressed at Frankfurt. But if the congregation did debate the topic, their findings did not make it into the synodal acts.²⁰²

It was only after the synod of Frankfurt that Charlemagne turned his full attention towards Saxony, but not before settling one final matter: the burial of his wife Fastrada, who had died on 10 August 794 after a long sickbed.²⁰³ The place of her interment is significant. She was buried not at St Denis or some other royal monastery, but at the church of St Albans in Mainz.²⁰⁴ This was Richulf's personal foundation, though it was not yet finished at the time.²⁰⁵ Fastrada's interment at St Albans was fitting for a number of reasons. For Fastrada, as Janet Nelson has pointed out, it meant a return to the region of her birth.²⁰⁶ For Richulf, it meant the confirmation of his close relationship to the queen and the royal family, as well as a lasting honour to his new church. Undoubtedly, practical considerations also played a role. Mainz was a leisurely boat ride away from Frankfurt, no small advantage when one is trying to transport a body in the middle of August. Equally important, Mainz was on the way towards Saxony, Charlemagne's main destination for the remainder of the year, and indeed, the decade.

²⁰⁰ Gillmor, 'The 791 Equine Epidemic'.

²⁰¹ H.H. Hofmann, 'Fossa Carolina', in H. Beumann, Helmut and W. Braunfels, *Karl der Grosse. Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, vol. 1 (Düsseldorf, 1965), pp. 437-53.

²⁰² Synod of Frankfurt, MGH Capit. 1, pp. 73-78. See also the collection of essays in Rainer (ed.), *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794*.

²⁰³ For the date, *Annales Fuldenses Antiquissimi*, s.a. 794, p. 138. Fastrada is also listed in the *Annales Necrologici Fuldenses*, but under the year 791, p. 168.

²⁰⁴ For the place, ARF, s.a. 794, p. 94.

²⁰⁵ See, with references to earlier literature, M. Schulze-Dörrlamm, 'Die karolingische Chorschranke und die 'Porta Aurea' der Klosterkirche St. Alban (787-805) bei Mainz', *Jahrbuch des Römisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz*, 54 (2007), pp. 629-661; W. Selzer, 'St. Alban', *Führer zu vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Denkmälern*, 11 (1971), pp. 147-154, in particular, 150-53.

²⁰⁶ Nelson, 'The Sitting of the Council at Frankfurt', p. 162.

Charlemagne took no risks with his first Saxon campaign since 785. His son Charles he ordered to lead an army from Cologne, while he himself crossed the Rhine from Mainz.²⁰⁷ The annals are in agreement as to the results of this Frankish show of muscle: all the Saxons encountered during the campaign surrendered without resistance. The ARF have the main surrender take place at the Sinisfelt above Paderborn, where the convened Saxons ‘deceitfully promised that they would be Christians and faithful to the king’. The *Annals of Lorsch* offer a similar scenario, but at Eresburg.²⁰⁸ They also state that Charlemagne installed priests among the Saxons. Yet another set of annals mentions a treaty (*foedus*) between the Saxons, and Charlemagne and his ‘magnates’.²⁰⁹ Clearly, then, the king lost no time trying to reinstate Carolingian and Christian hegemony in Saxony.

Charlemagne spent the winter of 794/795 at Aachen, before he once again led an army into Saxony. Significantly, he did not pick the nearby city of Cologne to launch his campaign from. Rather, the army was made to assemble more than 200 km to the south-east at the royal villa of Kostheim, located directly opposite Mainz on the banks of the Main river. Here, in Richulf’s backyard, Charlemagne convened his spring assembly.²¹⁰ Saxony would have been the obvious destination after the assembly, though contemporary annals tell a different story.²¹¹ The *Annals of Lorsch* report that, after settling with the

²⁰⁷ ARF, s.a. 794, p. 94: Inde motus est exercitus partibus Saxoniae per duas turmas: in unam fuit domnus Carolus gloriosissimus rex; in aliam misit domnum Carolum nobilissimum filium suum per Coloniam. Saxones autem congregantes se in campo, qui dicitur Sinistfelt, praeparantes se quasi ad pugnam; cum vero audissent se ex duabus partibus esse circumdatos, dissipavit Deus consilia eorum, et quamvis fraudulenter et christianos se et fideles domno regi fore promiserunt.

²⁰⁸ *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 794, pp. 39-40: Et rex inde iterum perexit in Saxoniam et Saxones venerunt ei obviam ad Heresburg, iterum promittentes christianitatem et iurantes, quod sepe fecerunt et tunc rex credidit eis et dedit eis presbiteros et rex rediit in Francia et resedit apud Aquis palacium.

²⁰⁹ *Annales Petaviani*, s.a. 794, p. 18: Hoc anno domnus rex Karolus commoto exercitu venit in Saxoniam, et Saxones polliciti sunt emendari, foedusque pepigerunt domno regi Karolo una cum suis sodalibus.

²¹⁰ ARF, s.a. 795, p. 96: Cuffinstang, in suburbium Mogontiacensis urbis. Reviser, s.a. 795, p. 97: trans Rhenum in villa Cuffesstein, quae super Moenum contra Mogontiacum urbem sita est.

²¹¹ Only the ninth-century Reviser puts the initiative for the 795 campaign with the king: Charlemagne ‘had not forgotten their perfidy’ and thus entered Saxony to lay waste to the area.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

Saxons in 794, Charlemagne had planned to march against ‘other peoples’ (*alias gentes*) in 795.²¹² To this end, he had ordered the Saxons to meet him at Mainz, to provide support (*solatium*). But the Saxons, in line with their ‘customary infidelity’, failed to show up. Only then did Charlemagne decide to lead his army into Saxony, moving as far as the Elbe. The *Annals of Lorsch* take care to underline the king’s continued lenience during this campaign: after most of the Saxons had ‘come to him peacefully and promised to fulfil his orders’, the king ‘once more believed them and killed no one on purpose, preserving his faith’.²¹³

Where was the archbishop of Mainz during all this campaigning? Did he simply see off the Frankish army in 794 and 795 and then return to other duties, leaving others to settle matters in the region that was partly his responsibility? Or was he also contributing to the war effort somehow, either by taking to the field with the king²¹⁴ or by helping prepare the legislative counterpart to Charlemagne’s military onslaught? Why, at any rate, did Charlemagne pick Kostheim, *in suburbium Mogontiacensis urbis*, to hold a public assembly in 795, possibly even ordering the Saxons to meet him there? Was it because his deceased wife had been buried there the previous year? Was it a convenient location to launch a campaign from? Or was it because he planned to publicly issue a capitulary prepared at Mainz – the ‘orders’ which Saxons promised to fulfil later that year?

There he heard that the Saxons had killed his ally Witzin, the Abodrite king. This further intensified his ‘hate for that perfidious people’ and hardened his resolve to ‘speedily subdue the Saxons’. Reviser, s.a. 795, p. 97.

²¹² *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 795, p. 40: Sed ut etiam tunc apud Aquis palatio domnus rex celebravit pascha, et infidelitas, unde consueverat, a parte Saxanorum exorta est. Quia cum domnus rex super alias gentes venire voluisset, nec ipsi ad eum pleniter venerunt, nec ei solatium, ut ipse iusserat, transmisserunt, tunc iterum cogniat infidelitate eorum, rex cum exercito suo super eos veniens, alii ei pacifice obviam venientes ex parte Saxonorum et cumeo in solatio ipsum iter expleverunt.

²¹³ *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 795, p. 40: Ceteri autem ad eum omnes pacifice venerunt et iussionem suam promittentes implere. Et ita domnus rex iterum credens eis, nullum voluntate interficiens, fidem suam servando.

²¹⁴ For the military duties of bishops in the Carolingian period, F. Prinz, *Klerus und Krieg im frühen Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur Rolle der Kirche beim Aufbau der Königsherrschaft* (Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 73-145.

Few of these questions can be answered with certainty. But there are several other signs that further tie Richulf to Saxony, and more specifically, to the *Capitulatio*. For one, we know from Alcuin's correspondence, that Richulf accompanied 'David' into Saxony at least once. In a letter best dated to the spring of 796, we find a worried Alcuin asking his 'dearest son' Damoetas to take care whilst moving 'against the enemy'.²¹⁵ Apparently, Alcuin had seen the army off from Aachen, where Alcuin still resided early in 796, for he mentions Richulf's departure (*te abeunte*).²¹⁶ Damoetas had left in good company. We read in the annals that Charlemagne took his sons Charles and Louis to Saxony with him that year, though they say comparatively little about their efforts in the region.²¹⁷ The *Annals of Lorsch* once again offer the most comprehensive report: 'In this year King Charles dwelled in Saxony with his two sons, Charles and Louis. He went around the land of the Saxons, and wherever he found rebels, he burned and destroyed [the land]; and he led away captives from there, men, women and children, and an enormous bounty'.²¹⁸ Perhaps it was from this bounty that Richulf took the ivory comb in the form of an elephant, which he famously sent Alcuin as a gift somewhere in the 790s.²¹⁹

The 796 campaign was not the last time Richulf had to deal with Saxon captives. This we gather from a curious text known today as the *Indiculus*

²¹⁵ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 25, pp. 66-67. Dümmler dated the letter to 'ca. 794', but Donald Bullough has rightly pointed out that Dümmler based this estimate on Alcuin's reference to Angilbert's (second) embassy to Rome, which he thought had taken place in 794. In fact, Angilbert did not visit Rome in 794. His second embassy took place only in 796. See Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation*, pp. 438, 452, 469-70.

²¹⁶ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 25, pp. 66-7.

²¹⁷ ARF, s.a. 796, pp. 98-100.

²¹⁸ *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 796, p. 41: Et ipso anno ipse rex Carolus demoratus est in Saxoniam cum duobus filiis suis, id est Carolo et Clodoveo, circumivit terram Saxanorum, ubi rebelles fuerunt, incendio et vastando eam et captivos inde ducebat, viros et mulieres et parvulos et preda innumerabilem multitudinem.

²¹⁹ We know of this gift through another of Alcuin's letters to Richulf, in which he thanked him for the comb and offered him a riddle in return. For this letter, which contains part of the riddle, Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 26, p. 67-8. For the remainder of the riddle, MGH Poetae 1, p. 223. See also, P. Sorrel, 'Alcuin's "Comb" Riddle', *Neophilologus*, 80.2 (1996), pp. 311-18. Of course, the comb could also have come from the Avar treasure collected in 795-96, see Blakeman, 'Selected Poems of Theodulf of Orleans', p. 152.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

obsidum Saxonum Moguntiam deducendorum ('List of Saxon hostages to be led to Mainz'). The list consists of a single folio in an early ninth-century hand, inserted in a collection of canon law.²²⁰ It was probably drawn up just after the end of the Saxon Wars, ca. 805. The *Indiculus* contains the names of 37 Saxons, divided in the three familiar sub-groups: Westphalians, Eastphalians and Angrarii.²²¹ Each Saxon is listed together with the name of his father, plus the name of the count, abbot or bishop tasked with guarding him, i.e. 'Adalrad, son of Marcrad, [whom] bishop Aino held'.²²² The majority of the guardians can be identified as Alemannian magnates.²²³ The document concludes with the order that the Saxons are to be brought to Mainz during Lent, where some or all of them are to be handed over to bishop Haito (of Basel) and count Hitto (possibly in Alemannia).²²⁴ It was an established Carolingian strategy to take Saxon hostages at an early age, place them in Carolingian households and monasteries to receive training, and then send them back to Saxony to take up ecclesiastical or administrative positions. Among the most well-known examples of this policy was Hathumar of Paderborn, the first Saxon bishop: he was taken hostage early in the Saxon Wars, brought up at Würzburg, and finally raised to the see of Paderborn in 806.²²⁵ It is possible that the hostages listed in the *Indiculus* were ordered to convene at Mainz for a similar reason: they had been trained in Alemannian households and were now being sent back to Saxony.²²⁶

²²⁰ MGH Capit. 1, no. 115, pp. 233-34. On the manuscript, H. Tiefenbach, 'Sprachliches zum Namenverzeichnis in der Handschrift St. Paul 6/1', in U. Ludwig (ed.), *Nomen et fraternitas: Festschrift für Dieter Geuenich zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 115-130.

²²¹ None of the hostages has been identified, R. Wenskus, *Sächsischer Stammesadel und fränkischer Reichsadel* (Göttingen, 1976), pp. 47-8.

²²² MGH Capit. 1, no. 115, p. 233.

²²³ J.L. Nelson, 'Charlemagne and Empire', in J.R. Davis and M. McCormick (eds.), *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 223-234, here 225-26, with further references to M. Borgolte, *Die Grafen Alemanniens in merowingischer und karolingischer Zeit: Eine Prosopographie* (Sigmaringen, 1986).

²²⁴ MGH Capit. 1, n. 115, pp. 233-34: *Isti veniant ad Mogontiam media quadragesima*. On Heito of Basel, P. Depreux, *Prosopographie de l'Entourage de Louis le Pieux (781-840)* (Sigmaringen, 1997), pp. 234-35. On Hitto, Borgolte, *Die Grafen Alemanniens*, pp. 144-45.

²²⁵ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 5, p. 50. See also chapter 5.

²²⁶ For this suggestion, A. Kosto, 'Hostages in the Carolingian World (714-840)', *Early Medieval Europe*, 11 (2002), pp. 123-47, here 142-45.

Of course, this would not really explain why the hostages were to be handed over to a Bavarian bishop and Alemannian count. Another option is that they were simply being relocated.²²⁷ Either way, the Saxon hostages were to convene at Mainz. This is yet another indication of the town's strategic and administrative importance during and after the Saxon Wars.

A final piece of evidence that links Richulf to the *Capitulatio* comes from the text itself. As we saw earlier, the *Capitulatio* offered more than just draconic punishments; it also offered Saxons several ways to *elude* draconic punishment. Not surprisingly, all these escape routes involved the Church.²²⁸ Arguably the most striking of these was that of church asylum: anyone who fled into a church was not to be expelled by force. Instead, the refugee should be allowed to safely await a judicial assembly, where life and limbs were to be conceded to him.²²⁹ This is a remarkable regulation, because the *Capitulatio* here offered Saxons an escape route that was not offered elsewhere in the realm, at least not so liberally.²³⁰ Already in 779 at Herstal, Charlemagne had been clear in this respect: murderers or others guilty of a capital crime who fled into a church, were not to be excused.²³¹ Significantly, this sentiment resurfaced also in the *Lex Saxonum*, the Saxon law code issued by Charlemagne in 802: 'he who is condemned to death is *never* to have peace; if he shall have fled into a church, let him be returned'.²³² Looking at Carolingian legislation in general, there is

²²⁷ Thus Nelson, 'Charlemagne and Empire', pp. 226-27.

²²⁸ See above, paragraph 4.2.

²²⁹ *Capitulatio*, c. 2, p. 68: *Capitulatio*, c. 2: Si quis confugiam fecerit in ecclesiam, nullus eum de ecclesia per violentiam expellere praesumat, sed pacem habeat usque dum ad placitum praesentetur, et propter honorem Dei sanctorumque ecclesiae ipsius reverentiam concedatur ei vita et omnia membra. Emendet autem causam in quantum potuerit et ei fuerit iudicatum; et sic ducatur ad praesentiam domni regis, et ipse eum mittat ubi clementiae ipsius placuerit.

²³⁰ See Fruscione, *Das Asyl bei den germanischen Stämmen im frühen Mittelalter*, pp. 94-129 and Siems, *Zur Entwicklung des Kirchenasyls zwischen Spätantike und Mittelalter*, pp. 139-187.

²³¹ *Capitulary of Herstal*, MGH Capit. 1, no. 20, c. 8, p. 48: 8. Ut homicidas aut caeteros reos qui legibus mori debent, si ad ecclesiam confugerint, non excusentur, neque eis ibidem victus detur.

²³² *Lex Saxonum*, c. 28, p. 64: Capitis damnatus nusquam habeat pacem; si in ecclesiam confugerit, reddatur. This regulation is not as completely at odds with the *Capitulatio* as it appears at first. For strictly speaking, the *Capitulatio* provides for those who have not yet been judged, whereas the *Lex Saxonum* is concerned with criminals who have already been condemned to death. Still, there is an unmistakable difference in approach between the texts: one goes out of

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

only one other text that defends church asylum in quite so explicit terms as the *Capitulatio*: the acts of the reform council of Mainz in 813.²³³ The Mainz synod was one of five episcopal gatherings that were held simultaneously in various corners of the Carolingian realm, to investigate the state of the Church in the empire and to offer suggestions regarding its restoration.²³⁴ The Mainz synod convened in the atrium of St Albans, and was headed by none other than Richulf, in cooperation with his fellow archbishops Hildebald of Cologne and Arn of Salzburg. Comparing the *Capitulatio*'s regulation on church asylum with that of the Mainz synod results in some striking parallels. Both texts lay down essentially the same regulation, using the same language: if someone flees into a church (*quis confugiam fecerit in ecclesiam / reum confugientem ad ecclesiam*) no one should presume to expel him from it (*nullus... expellere praesumat / nemo abstrahere praesumat*). In both cases, also, the honour of God and the saints (*honorem Dei sanctorumque / honor Dei et sanctorum*) is invoked to prohibit violence against the refugee. With some points, the different character of the texts required different formulations. As a royal capitulary, the *Capitulatio* could simply order that a refugee was to have peace (*pacem habeat*) and that life and limbs should be conceded to him (*concedatur ei vita et omnia membra*). The bishops convened at Mainz proposed much the same, but had to take care to remain within the boundaries of episcopal authority.²³⁵ They felt justified to speak out on the peace of churches (*ecclesiae pacem habeant*), but not, it appears, on the fate of church refugees. However, the synod did urge church leaders to intercede on refugees' behalf, so that they *might* obtain peace and life and limbs (*rectores ecclesiarum pacem et vitam ac membra eis obtinere studeant*).

it its way to confirm church asylum, the other merely tries to restrict it. See von Richthofen, MGH Leges. 5, pp. 64-5, n. 77-8. More generally, Siems, *Zur Entwicklung*, pp. 139-187.

²³³ Concilium Moguntinense, p. 271: Concilium Moguntinense, c. 39: Ut ecclesiae pacem habeant. XXXVIII. Reum confugientem ad ecclesiam nemo abstrahere praesumat neque inde donare ad poenam vel ad mortem, ut honor Dei et sanctorum eius conservetur. Sed et rectores ecclesiarum pacem et vitam ac membra eis obtinere studeant; tamen legitime componant quod inique fecerunt. See also, *Chronicon Laurissense breve*, IV. 45, p. 38.

²³⁴ McKitterick, *The Frankish Church*, pp. 12-15.

²³⁵ This was indeed one of the spear points of the Mainz synod, and in fact the synods in general, see S. Patzold, *Episcopus: Wissen über Bischöfe im Frankreich des späten 8. bis frühen 10. Jahrhunderts* (Ostfildern, 2008) pp. 76-78.

Regardless of such minor differences in approach, we are dealing with two remarkably similar regulations; so similar, in fact, that there is little doubt that the bishops assembled in the atrium of St Alban's in 813 were inspired by the ideas outlined in the *Capitulatio*. They may even have used the document. This raises another question: who among the 30 attending prelates would have been responsible for bringing a highly specific capitulary on Saxony to an episcopal council dealing with the restoration of the Church? Considering that the synod convened in Mainz and that the only extant copy of the *Capitulatio* was also compiled there, the obvious candidate is Richulf. How, we might then ask, would he have known that the *Capitulatio* was relevant to what he and his colleagues set out to do in 813? Of course, he could just have ordered the shelves of the Mainz library to be emptied of anything that looked remotely useful for the synod. But for someone who had been, and continued to be, involved in Saxon affairs, this seems unlikely. Richulf knew the *Capitulatio* for he had been involved in drafting the document. This is why the *Capitulatio* was present in Mainz in 813, and also why it was included in Vat. Pal. Lat 289 in the 820s.

4.8. Richulf and Alcuin

There is one complication to the suggestion that Richulf was involved in the composition of the *Capitulatio*: Alcuin. In the autumn of 796, shortly after his retreat to Tours, the Anglo-Saxon scholar dispatched two spectacular letters to the Carolingian court, one to the king himself and one to his chamberlain Meginfrid. Both letters touched on the same two issues. The first was the mission of the Avars, which was picking up steam in the wake of the Avar campaigns of 791-96. The second was the continued difficulties encountered with 'that unlucky people of the Saxons'. These difficulties, Alcuin professed, were due to a flawed approach to the Saxon mission.²³⁶ The two issues were clearly related for Alcuin: he wrote because he did not want the mistakes made with the Saxons to be repeated with the Avars. It should be underlined that

²³⁶ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 85-6.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

Alcuin did not fully abjure the use of external ‘incentives’ as a means of conversion.²³⁷ Indeed, he had at an early stage expressed his delight at the fact that Charlemagne had converted Saxons and Frisians through a combination of rewards (*premiis*) and threats (*minis*).²³⁸ What troubled Alcuin was that those responsible for the Christianization of Saxony went at it with the wrong priorities. A people new to the faith, he explained to Charlemagne, is similar to an infant: just like a new-born craves milk rather than solid food (I Cor. 3:2), a recently converted people should first be treated with mildness, before one introduces it to the sterner dictates of the faith.²³⁹ Particular restraint was due with the imposition of church tithes, ‘for even we, who were born, fed and educated in the Christian faith, barely agree to fully part with one tenth of our possessions’.²⁴⁰ Alcuin conveyed the same message to Charlemagne’s chamberlain Meginfrid, but here he spoke rather more candidly: ‘if the light yoke and sweet burden of Christ were preached to that hardest of nations, the Saxons, with as strong perseverance as was applied to the levying of tithes and the enforcement of legal penalties for the smallest of crimes, then perhaps they would not have shrunk back from the sacraments of baptism’.²⁴¹ Preaching and instruction, not tithes and penalties, were in Alcuin’s view to be the first steps of Christianization. ‘*Sint praedicatores, non praedatores*’ was his final verdict on the matter.²⁴²

Yitzhak Hen interpreted Alcuin’s letters as a response to a sudden change in Saxon policy initiated by the *Capitulatio*.²⁴³ This, however, cannot have been

²³⁷ Beumann, ‘Die Hagiographie “bewältigt”’, pp. 154-55.

²³⁸ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 7, p. 32.

²³⁹ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 110, p. 157. For Alcuin’s views on baptism and mission, see D. Dales, *Alcuin: Theology and Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 112-122, B. Dumont, ‘Alcuin et les missions’, *Annales de Bretagne*, 111.3 (2004), pp. 417-430, Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 79-90 and J-P. Bouhot, ‘Alcuin et le “De catechizandis rudibus” de saint Augustin’, *Recherches augustiniennes*, 15 (1980), pp. 176-240.

²⁴⁰ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 110, p. 158.

²⁴¹ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 111, p. 161: Si tanta instantia leve Christe iugum et onus suave durissimo Saxonum populo praedicaretur, quanta decimarum redditio vel legalis pro parvissimis quibuslibet culpis edicti necessitas exigebatur, forte baptismatis sacramenta non abhorrerent.

²⁴² Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 111, p. 161.

²⁴³ Hen, ‘Charlemagne’s Jihad’, pp. 40, 42-44.

Alcuin's only motive. The timing of his letters too obviously matches the successful Avar campaign of 796. Clearly, as Ian Wood suggested, Alcuin raised the Saxon case to argue for a different approach towards the Avar mission.²⁴⁴ But even if Alcuin's letters were not the direct attack on the *Capitulatio* which Hen suggests they were, Alcuin's complaints about Saxon policy were no less real. And as such, these complaints beg several questions. Richulf was Alcuin's student. How could he have been involved in the compilation of a document that was at least partly at odds with his master's teaching? Or to turn things around, how could Alcuin criticize a policy in which he knew his pupil Richulf was involved? What, at any rate, do we know about Richulf's relationship to Alcuin?

Nearly everything we know about their connection, comes from Alcuin's correspondence. As said, five of Alcuin's letters to Richulf survive.²⁴⁵ The first appears to have been composed shortly after Richulf was raised to the *pallium*, ca. 787.²⁴⁶ Alcuin urges 'Damoetas' to live up to his noble predecessors. He also admonishes him not to get too involved with worldly splendour and luxury, sentiments that resurface throughout Alcuin's correspondence with Richulf, and which we also encountered in Theodulf's poetry and Notker's *Gesta*. Three subsequent letters have been linked to Alcuin's second Aachen period, ca. 793-96, though only the letter written whilst Richulf was in Saxony can be dated with any certainty.²⁴⁷ These letters responded to diverse occasions: one is a letter of thanks for a present Alcuin received from Richulf; another addressed Richulf on campaign; yet another was a reminder that Alcuin had not heard from Richulf in a long time. But they also share common features. In every letter, Alcuin laments Richulf's absence. 'I remain at home almost bereft of sons' is his desolate plea in the spring of 796, when Richulf is in Saxony, Agilbert in Rome and Candidus on the Isles. All the while, he continues to underline the dangers of secular affairs. 'Dearest son', he says at one point, 'do not forget yourself

²⁴⁴ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 85-6. See also Dumont, 'Alcuin et les missions', p. 422.

²⁴⁵ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 4, pp. 29-30; no. 25, pp. 66-7; no. 26, pp. 67-8; no. 35, p. 77; no. 212, pp. 352-3

²⁴⁶ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 4, p. 29.

²⁴⁷ Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation*, pp. 438, 452, 469-70.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

amidst the occupations of the world'.²⁴⁸ And in another letter: 'let us love eternal, rather than temporal things'.²⁴⁹

These are not, I would say, letters addressed to someone who is firmly under Alcuin's thumb. On the contrary: Alcuin's constant admonishing signals that he knew full well that Richulf's worldly duties led him outside Alcuin's orbit. That is not to say that Alcuin did not try to assert his influence. A particularly striking example of Alcuin's fatherly interference are the opening lines to the letter written in the spring of 796, when Richulf was in Saxony:

I rejoice in your love and your fidelity, for always and everywhere have I found you faithful and benevolent towards me, like a son towards a father. I have not encountered you differently, than that your will always followed my will.²⁵⁰

These lines could of course be read as a confident claim on Richulf's filial fidelity. But considering that Alcuin had just seen half the court depart for Saxony, with the remainder having gone off towards Pannonia, Italy or Britain, there is also something of a plea to them: Alcuin urging his 'son' to *stay* faithful, perhaps even to represent Alcuin's *voluntas* in Saxony. That said, there is not a word in this or any other letter to Richulf, of Alcuin's objections to Saxon missionary policy. Nor did he take issue with Richulf's participation in the Saxon campaign of 796. On the contrary: Alcuin was confident that someone who went off to fight for God's cause, would find God on his side.²⁵¹

Alcuin's fifth and final letter to Richulf was composed in 800 or 801. Interestingly, there are signs that Alcuin's close relationship with Richulf did not make it into the ninth century.²⁵² Whereas his first four letters were playful and affectionate, the fifth was rather more stiff and formal. For the first time,

²⁴⁸ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 26, p. 67.

²⁴⁹ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 35, p. 77.

²⁵⁰ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 25, p. 66: Tuae congaudeo dilectioni et praefatae fidei congratulor, quia semper ubique te fidelem inveni, et benivolum erga me agnovi sicut filium in patrem. Nec aliter inveni, nisi ut voluntas tua semper meam subsequuta est voluntatem.

²⁵¹ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 25, p. 66: Tamen, qui iustitiam habet eundi et pro Deo decertandi, fiduciam potest habere de auxilio illius, pro cuius amore tantum subire laborem non formidat.

²⁵² Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 212, pp. 352-53.

Richulf is addressed with his full archiepiscopal title: ‘to the venerable father the magnificent archbishop Damoetas’.²⁵³ More importantly, the letter is written as if Alcuin and Richulf are no longer in frequent correspondence. Alcuin wants Richulf to know that ‘the flame of old love is unchanged and still burns within our chest’.²⁵⁴ He has, he continues, not stopped to care for Richulf, whom he has always considered loyal, ‘because affection which can be forsaken, was never true affection to begin with’.²⁵⁵ In fact, Alcuin soon asserts that the reason behind this letter is that he has heard, presumably through a third party, that Richulf supported the pope at Rome, in line with Alcuin’s ‘petition’ (*meae petitionis cartulam*). No such letter to Richulf survives.²⁵⁶ In all likelihood, Alcuin is referring here to one of his letters to Arn of Salzburg, also present at Rome in 800, in which Alcuin asked his friend Arn to gather support for the pope.²⁵⁷

It seems, then, that somewhere between 796 and 800, Alcuin and Richulf stopped being master and pupil. Possibly, they stopped corresponding altogether. We can only speculate as to the reason of their apparent distance. The mere fact of Alcuin’s absence from court does not really suffice as an explanation. For it was *after* his retreat to Tours in 796 that Alcuin entered his

²⁵³ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 212, p. 352: venerando patri et in Christi membris magnifico Damoete archisacerdoti humilis magister Albinus salutem. Compare for instance *Epistolae*, no. 25, p. 66: Flaccus Albinus Flavio Damoetae filio carissimo salutem.

²⁵⁴ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 212, p. 352: Secundum oportunitatem portitoris cognita mentibus nostris caritas meam inpellit linguam aliquid paternae salutationis vestrae dictare dilectioni, ut sciatis integram antiqui amoris flammam nostro splendescere in pectore; et quem semper fidelem probavi, semper amare non desistam, quia caritas iuxta vetus proverbium, quae deserri potest, numquam vera fuit.

²⁵⁵ The phrase derived from Jerome’s letter to Rufinus, see Jerome, *Epistulae*, ed. I. Hilberg (Vienna, 1910), no. 3, p. 18: amicitia, quae desinere potest, uera numquam fuit. As noted by Ernst Dümmler, this was a recurring saying in Alcuin’s correspondence. See also M. Garrison, “Praesagum nomen tibi”: The Significance of Name-wordplay in Alcuin’s Letters to Arn’, in M. Niederkorn-Bruck, Meta and A. Scharer (eds.), *Erzbischof Arn von Salzburg* (Vienna, 2004), pp. 107-27, here 221. But Alcuin did not use the phrase at random. It appears above all when Alcuin was writing difficult letters or letters to people he had not spoken to for a while, see Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 18, p. 49; no. 28, p. 70; no. 79, p. 120; no. 204, p. 337; no. 250, p. 404.

²⁵⁶ For the transmission of Alcuin’s letters, Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation*, pp. 43-109.

²⁵⁷ Alcuin, *Epistolae*, no. 179, pp. 296-97.

most prolific epistolary phase. It is not unlikely, therefore, that the two men had a falling out on matters of missionary policy. After all, Richulf, as archbishop of Mainz, was partly responsible for the ecclesiastical organisation of Saxony. And it was precisely this organisation that became the object of Alcuin's public denunciation near the end of 796, when he accused Saxony's preachers (*praedicatores*) of behaving like robbers (*praedatores*). By addressing such grievances to Charlemagne and his chamberlain Meginfrid, Alcuin effectively addressed them to the entire court.²⁵⁸ And the archbishop of Mainz cannot but have felt among its main targets. Evidently, it is not sure that Alcuin was the first to put the axe to his friendship with Richulf. If the latter had indeed been involved in the compilation of the *Capitulatio* during the period 792-95, then there was reason for Alcuin to feel betrayed.

4.9. Conclusion

It is tempting to look at the *Capitulatio* as an aberration of sorts: a text that was firmly out of tune with reality and Christian teaching; the dubious result of an irate Charlemagne getting carried away in legislative zeal against a people that continued to frustrate his attempts at incorporation and Christianization. That the *Capitulatio* was an unusually harsh text that was born, to an extent, out of Carolingian frustration with their eastern neighbours, need not be laboured. But it was not an aberration. In fact, as we have seen in this chapter, the compilers of the *Capitulatio* engaged with a number of established Carolingian discourses. For one, there is the text's preoccupation with allegiance and (in)fidelity. This preoccupation is evinced clearly in chapters prohibiting acts of infidelity against the king and the Christian people, but it can also be witnessed in the way the *Capitulatio* legislates against unchristian behaviour. The *Capitulatio* did not approach the Saxons as pagans who needed to be converted, but as Christian members of the Frankish realm. From such a viewpoint, hostility to Christianity and acting *more paganorum* were viewed not merely as

²⁵⁸ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, pp. 85-86.

religious misdemeanours; they were acts of infidelity, to be punished accordingly.

Second, we have seen that in issuing its capital sentences, the compilers of the *Capitulatio* appealed rather conspicuously to an established and authoritative legal tradition: that of the Old Testament. They made this appeal through liberal application of the phrase *morte moriatur*, which denoted divinely ordained death under Mosaic Law. In line with the example of Ezekiel, furthermore, the *Capitulatio* offered Christian *sacerdotes* far-reaching prerogatives in Saxony, including the right of church asylum and the right to absolve criminals from death. The *Capitulatio*, therefore, was not fundamentally different from the *Admonitio generalis* of 789. In both capitularies, Charlemagne was following his responsibilities as a Christian ruler by offering God's Law to God's people. In both capitularies, also, he was explicitly calling on the elite of the clergy – *sacerdotes* – to share this ministry. In both capitularies, also, Charlemagne was drawing on the Old Testament. That the character of these two legislative enterprises ultimately turned out differently is not really surprising. The Saxons were a new people under God, and of dubious fidelity besides. Such a people called for the severity, rather than the mildness, of the Law, at least according to those involved in the *Capitulatio's* compilation.

It has been argued in this chapter that the *Capitulatio's* harsh character and preoccupation with (in)fidelity are best understood against the background of the events of 792-793, when the Carolingian court faced several unexpected set-backs. Two of these set-backs, in particular, pressed heavily on Charlemagne's mind. First, the attempted Franco-Bavarian revolt spearheaded by Pippin the Hunchback in 792. Second, the renewed Saxon rebellions of 792/793, which saw Saxons rise once more against Frankish rule and its Christian representatives. The former event was painful because it involved Frankish magnates, including Charlemagne's own son. The latter event was painful because it called into question Charlemagne's most prestigious military and religious victory. These were probably the circumstances out of which the *Capitulatio* was born. It was an unforgiving document, which sought to lay down the rules for new subjects who were known to be of questionable fidelity.

4. SAXONS IN THE CAPITULATIO

It also conveyed a clear ideological statement: the Saxons were, or should be, Christian subjects of the Carolingian rulers. Defiance against this norm, whether by attacking churches or clergy, by refusing to comply with Christian regulations, by engaging in unchristian behaviour, or by siding with pagans against the Christian people, was equivalent to infidelity. Like the plot of 792, it would be punished with death.

It has been suggested, finally, that if the *Capitulatio* was indeed drafted in the period 792-95, then Mainz and its Frankish archbishop Richulf must have been closely involved in its compilation. We have reviewed various pieces of evidence that imply that Mainz held administrative and missionary responsibilities in Saxony in the 790s and 800s. Moreover, it has become clear that archbishop Richulf was among Charlemagne's closest advisers in this period, and that he also accompanied the king on at least one Saxon campaign (that of 796). Richulf's involvement with the *Capitulatio* seems confirmed by two additional points. First, that the text's only surviving copy is from Mainz. Second, that one of the *Capitulatio*'s most unusual regulations – on church asylum – resurfaced in almost similar wording in the 813 reform council of Mainz, which was co-headed by Richulf.

CHAPTER FIVE

From defeat to salvation

Remembering the Saxon Wars in Carolingian Saxony

5.1. A brave new world

On 29 April 836, a delegation of Saxons from the diocese of Paderborn arrived at the Frankish town of Le Mans, in search of a saintly protector. They were honourably received by the local bishop, Aldrich of Le Mans, who was accompanied for the occasion by his own entourage of ecclesiastical and secular dignitaries. Following a formal welcome ceremony, the two parties set out together for the town's suburban district. Their destination was the Church of the Apostles, the traditional resting place of Le Mans' bishops. After entering the church, the company proceeded to the tomb of Liborius (d. 397), second bishop of Le Mans and disciple of St Martin of Tours.¹ Witness-reports mention a sweet and pleasant smell pervading the church, the first of many 'signs' sanctioning the company's subsequent course of action.² They opened Liborius' tomb, took out his remains and placed them on a litter, which they carried back to Le Mans' cathedral church, where an anxious crowd was already forming at the rumours of Liborius' upcoming departure. By the next day, the populace of Le Mans had turned riotous and bishop Aldrich was forced to step

¹ V. de Vry, *Liborius, Brückenbauer Europas. Die mittelalterlichen Viten und Translationsberichte. Mit einem Anhang der Manuscripta Liboriana* (Paderborn, 1997).

² See the three accounts edited in ed. A. Cohausz, *Erconrads Translatio S. Liborii. Eine wiederentdeckte Geschichtsquelle der Karolingerzeit und die schon bekannten Übertragungsberichte mit einer Einführung, Erläuterungen und deutscher Übersetzung des Erconrad* (Paderborn, 1966), pp. 56-59.

in. In a highly charged public address, he appealed first to the populace's Christian charity, then invoked Saxony's great need for a saint, and finally hinted at the dangers of defying an imperial order. Then, having appeased his congregation, he officially entrusted the relics to his Saxon visitors. During the subsequent month, the Saxons carried the holy corpse ca. 800 km. north-eastwards towards Saxony, visiting many villages and towns on their way.³ Finally, on 28 May, during the feast of Pentecost, the company arrived at Paderborn. They were met by a crowd of Saxon clergy and people, who accompanied them to the town's cathedral church. There, following various services and celebrations, the saint from Le Mans was solemnly reinterred.

Liborius was not the first saint whose remains were reinterred on Saxon soil. In a ground-breaking study on the transfer of relics to Carolingian Saxony, Hedwig Röckelein lists over fifty such *translationes* for the period 777-900.⁴ The Saxon beneficiaries were mostly (royal) monasteries and bishoprics, but also included several proprietary churches founded by Saxon aristocratic families. Significantly, this sacralisation of the Saxon landscape was not enforced from the outside, at least not from the early ninth century onwards. Saxon centres actively petitioned for relics, making full use of their new-found access to the political, religious and social networks that spanned the Carolingian realm.⁵ Liborius' *translatio* is a case in point. The initiative had come from Paderborn's second bishop, Badurad (d. 862).⁶ He was a typical, if exceptionally prominent, member of the post-conquest Saxon elite: Christian, loyal to the Carolingians, and with connections and ambitions that reached beyond the confines of his diocese. Born during the Saxon Wars, Badurad had

³ For their itinerary, Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 280-304.

⁴ See the table in Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 374-76.

⁵ Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 260-64.

⁶ On Badurad, see S. Käuper, 'Bischof Badurad von Paderborn (815-862)', in L. Fenske (ed.), *Deutsche Königspfalzen. Beiträge zu ihrer historischen und archäologischen Erforschung*, V. (Göttingen, 2001), pp. 123-154 and P. Depreux, *Prosopographie de l'Entourage de Louis le Pieux (781-840)* (Sigmaringen, 1997), pp. 116-18. See furthermore, F. Tenckhoff, *Die Paderborner Bischöfe. Von Hathumar bis Rethar (806 oder 807 bis 1009). Eine biographische Studie* (Paderborn (1900), pp. 6-19 and idem, 'Die Beziehungen des Bischofs Badurad von Paderborn zu Kaiser Ludwig dem Frommen und seinen Söhnen', *Zeitschrift für vaterländische Geschichte und Altertumskunde (Westfalen)*, 56:2 (1898), pp. 89-97.

spent his youth at the cathedral church of Würzburg, where he had been prepared for an ecclesiastical career in Saxony. After succeeding Hathumar, another Saxon trained at Würzburg, to the see of Paderborn, he had quickly established himself as a realm-wide presence, zealously attending Carolingian synods and assemblies, and acting as a royal *missus* on several occasions. During the tempestuous early 830s, he had been among the steadfast supporters of Louis the Pious.⁷ In return, the emperor had backed Badurad's desire to obtain for his diocese the prestige and protection of a Gallo-Roman saint. Presumably, Aldrich of Le Mans, whose catacombs were to accommodate this pious desire, had required little convincing in the face of an imperial command. But Aldrich's willingness to assist Badurad may well have preceded the emperor's involvement, as the two men already shared common ground. Like Badurad, Aldrich had risen to high office from a Saxon background.⁸ And he, too, had consistently sided with Louis the Pious against his ambitious sons.⁹

Liborius' *translatio* and the circumstances in which it came about show how profoundly Saxony had changed in the decades following the Saxon Wars. By the middle of the ninth century, the Saxons were no longer pagan outsiders living on or beyond the periphery of Frankish rule. They were Christian members of the Carolingian realm, who actively participated in the government of the Carolingian 'province' of Saxony.¹⁰ Saxons fought in Carolingian armies, attended assemblies, held secular and ecclesiastical office, donated land to religious houses, founded churches of their own, and went to great lengths to secure the bones and blessings of Christian saints. They also married into the Frankish aristocracy. Reinhard Wenkus's monumental onomastic study of the leading families of Carolingian and Ottonian Saxony revealed an intricate network of family-connections that spanned most of the Frankish realm, and

⁷ Käuper, 'Bischof Badurad', pp. 132-37.

⁸ Aldrich's father Sion had a Frankish and Saxon background. His mother was of Alemannian and Bavarian descent, see M. Heinzelmann, 'Aldrich. Bischof von Le Mans, hl. (800-857)', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart, 1980), 1, col. 349.

⁹ Depreux, *Prosopographie*, pp. 97-99.

¹⁰ Key publications on the Saxon integration into the empire are C. Ehlers, *Die Integration Sachsens in das fränkische Reich: 751-1024* (Göttingen, 2007) and Becher, *Rex, Dux und Gens*.

extended even into the royal family.¹¹ One of Charlemagne's concubines was from Saxony.¹² His uncle Wala had a Saxon mother; presumably one of the reasons Wala found himself appointed count, or possibly even duke, in the newly acquired regions.¹³ Subsequent generations of Carolingians continued to maintain ties to the Saxon aristocracy. The second wife of Louis the Pious (d. 840), Judith, was of Saxon descent through her mother.¹⁴ One of Louis' sons from an earlier marriage, Louis the German (d. 876), subsequently married Judith's sister Emma. Louis the Younger's (d. 882) wife Liutgard belonged to the Liudolfings, the Saxon family that would eventually succeed the Carolingians to the throne of East-Francia.¹⁵

Yet another symptom of the Saxon elite's rapid assimilation into Carolingian and Christian culture was their growing familiarity with, and use of, the written word.¹⁶ As a result, we possess in some quantity for the ninth century what we lack utterly for the previous seven centuries: Saxon writing, and by extension, an inside perspective. So what did ninth-century Saxons write about? The texts surviving from Carolingian Saxony make for a diverse corpus: it includes hagiography, poetry, charters, letters, *libri memoriales*, and even the

¹¹ R. Wenskus, *Sächsischer Stammesadel und fränkischer Reichsadel* (Göttingen, 1976).

¹² Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 18, p. 23: Gersuindam, Saxonici generis.

¹³ ARF, s.a. 811, p. 134: Walach comes filius Bernhardi. For the possibility of a ducal appointment, see L. Weinrich, *Wala, Graf, Mönch und Rebell: Die Biographie eines Karolingers* (Lübeck, Hamburg, 1963), pp. 21-22. The question whether Carolingian Saxony was ever governed by a duke remains controversial. See for discussion and relevant sources, Becher, *Rex, Dux und Gens*, pp. 66-109 and 119-22.

¹⁴ Thegan, *Vita Hludowici*, ed. E. Tremp, MGH SS rer. Germ. 64 (Hanover, 1995), c. 26, p. 214: Sequenti vero anno accepit filiam Huuelfi ducis sui, qui erat de nobilissima progenie Baioariorum, et nomen virginis Iudith, quae erat ex parte matris, cuius nomen Eigiluii, nobilissimi generis Saxonici...

¹⁵ On this family, Becher, *Rex, Dux und Gens*, pp. 66-108 and Wenskus, *Sächsischer Stammesadel*, pp. 66-114.

¹⁶ B.U. Hucker, 'Das Eindringen der lateinischen Schriftkultur bei den Sachsen zwischen Weser und Ems im 9. Jahrhundert', in F. Both and H. Aouni (eds.), *Über allen Fronten. Nordwestdeutschland zwischen Augustus und Karl dem Großen* (Oldenburg, 1999), pp. 273-92, H. Röckelein, 'Miracle Collections of Carolingian Saxony: Literary Tradition Versus Original Creation', *Hagiographica*, 3 (1996) pp. 267-275 and H. Löwe, 'Lateinisch-christliche Kultur im karolingischen Sachsen', in *Angli e Sassoni al di qua e al di là del mare*. Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 32 (Spoleto, 1985), pp. 491-536.

odd theological treatise.¹⁷ Notably absent from the corpus are annals and chronicles, the typical staples of Frankish historiography.¹⁸ Yet we should not take this absence to mean that the post-conquest Saxon elite cared little for the past or was hesitant to engage with it. On the contrary, the past loomed large in post-conquest Saxon writing. One episode, in particular, was revisited over and over again by the hagiographers and poets of Carolingian Saxony: their subjugation and conversion by Charlemagne.

At first glance, such a preoccupation might strike us as odd. Why would a conquered people feel the need to commemorate its own conquest? Yet as will become clear in the course of this chapter, there was hardly an episode in the Saxon past that was more relevant to remember for the elites of ninth-century Saxony. For one, the period had introduced the Saxons to Christianity and secured them a place among the denizens of heaven. Second, it had transformed Saxony into a Carolingian 'province', whose administration Charlemagne had prudently allotted to a number of loyal Saxon families, thus crafting a deeply invested Saxon ruling elite.¹⁹ On yet another level, the Saxon Wars had wrought profound changes in Saxon group-identity: years of shared resistance to Frankish aggression, followed by the administrative and military demands of Carolingian rule, enabled a fragmented people to think of itself in more unified terms. For better or for worse, then, the ninth-century Saxons 'owed' their current circumstances to the events of 772-804. In such a context, the question was not whether to remember the Saxon Wars, but *how* to remember them.

In the previous two chapters we have looked at the conquest of Saxony through contemporary eyes. In practice, this meant following the narrow, ethnocentric and biblically oriented gaze of Frankish historiography. This chapter pursues a different perspective. Its focus is still on the Saxon Wars and their portrayal in narrative writing, but the writing in question no longer reflects the viewpoint of the Carolingian conqueror. Rather, this chapter looks

¹⁷ For an overview, H. Löwe, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter. Vorzeit und Karolinger VI: Die Karolinger vom Vertrag von Verdun bis zum Herrschaftsantritt der Herrscher aus dem sächsischen Hause – Das ostfränkische Reich* (Weimar, 1990), pp. 820-78.

¹⁸ McKitterick, *History and Memory*.

¹⁹ Becher, *Rex, Dux und Gens*, pp. 110-24.

at texts written by or on the behest of ‘the conquered’, that is to say, the ninth-century Saxons. How were Charlemagne’s endeavours in Saxony remembered by those who lived with their immediate political, social and religious repercussions? How did the post-conquest Saxon elite look back at the thirty years of violence and bloodshed that had brought the Saxons under Carolingian and Christian rule? In short, how does a conquered and converted people remember its own conquest and conversion?

5.2. Towards a Saxon past

This is not the first study to inquire after Saxon perspectives on the Saxon Wars. In 1982, the late Helmut Beumann published a seminal article on the topic, entitled ‘Die Hagiographie “bewältigt”: Unterwerfung und Christianisierung der Sachsen durch Karl den Großen’.²⁰ Beumann’s aim was not unlike our own: to establish how Charlemagne’s protracted and violent efforts in Saxony were remembered by subsequent generations, in particular by Saxon authors and audiences. In practice, this meant looking predominantly at hagiography, hence the title of his article. Beumann argued that one way for Saxon authors to ‘come to terms’ (*bewältigen*) with a troubling past, was by re-writing it in their own fashion. Such re-writing meant challenging and subverting the dominant imagery of Frankish historiography. One recurring area of Saxon *re-écriture* were the motives that had led Charlemagne to undertake his conquest of Saxony. For Einhard and the Frankish annalists, so Beumann argued, these motives had been primarily political: Charlemagne’s primary goal had been the subjugation of a troublesome neighbour; conversion had been undertaken merely as a fortuitous aside. Saxon authors and audiences, on the other hand, felt more comfortable the other way around: conversion had been the dominant if not sole purpose of Charlemagne’s efforts, replacing memories of defeat with memories of being won for Christianity. Other points

²⁰ H. Beumann, ‘Die Hagiographie “bewältigt”: Unterwerfung und Christianisierung der Sachsen durch Karl den Große’, in *Christianizzazione ed Organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell’alto medioevo*, Settimane di Studio del centro Italiano di Studi sull’alto medioevo 28.1 (Spoleto, 1982), pp. 129-163.

of contention highlighted by Beumann included the widespread claim in Frankish historiography of Saxon infidelity, as well as the emphasis on violence as a means of persuasion. These, too, solicited a Saxon literary ‘response’, aimed at neutralizing a painful past and making it more acceptable to subsequent generations.

In a 2010 article on ninth-century Saxon hagiography, Eric Shuler offered additional insights into Saxon (re)shaping of the past.²¹ One important issue highlighted by Shuler was the matter of agency. Frankish historiography tended to portray Charlemagne, the Franks, and to a lesser extent, their missionary allies, as the main agents behind Saxon conquest and conversion. The Saxons had had little to say in the matter: they had been ‘acted upon’, in Shuler’s words, by outside forces.²² Looking at the expanding corpus of ninth-century Saxon hagiography, conversely, Shuler discerned an increasing emphasis on Saxon self-determination, especially with regard to Christianity. Passive verbs were quite literally replaced by active ones. The Franks were written out of the story, as were the Anglo-Saxon missionaries. Charlemagne remained a key figure, but his role moved from that of an enforcer to that of an enabler.²³ The Saxons, in short, were retrospectively shown to have been, if not the driving force behind their own conversion, than certainly active contributors to it. More explicitly than Beumann, Shuler also came up with a motive for the Saxon preoccupation with the past: it was a way for the post-conquest Saxon elite to debate and define Saxon identity. By (re-)claiming agency in a defining moment in the past, the Saxon elite also claimed agency in the present, as Christian members of the Carolingian realm. Rather than subscribing to the identity imposed on them in Frankish historiography – untrustworthy subjects of the superior *gens Francorum* – the ninth-century Saxons tried to assert themselves as a noble and loyal people, who were subject to none but God and the Carolingian family.

²¹ E. Shuler, ‘The Saxons within Carolingian Christendom: Post-Conquest Identity in the Translationes of Vitus, Pusinna and Liborius’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 36 (2010), pp. 39-54.

²² Shuler, ‘The Saxons’, p. 44.

²³ A exception to this is the *Translatio s. Liborii*, which emphasises Charlemagne’s ministry as ‘apostle of the Saxons’. See paragraph 5.4.

For Beumann and Shuler, the Saxon preoccupation with their own conquest and conversion was very much self-evident. It was necessary for the Saxon people, and in particular the self-conscious post-conquest elite, to deal with a traumatic and humiliating episode in the Saxon past. Hence, they set out to rewrite it. In line with this view, Beumann and Shuler focused almost exclusively on the 'collective' aspect of Saxon writing about the past. They treated the variety encountered in the Saxon textual record as different strategies by which one and the same Saxon elite tried to come to terms with a collective trauma.

In my opinion, this is too limited an interpretation of the motives and ambitions underlying Saxon writing about the Saxon Wars. It fails to fully take into account several aspects of ninth-century Saxon society and its relation to the past. First, for many in post-conquest Saxony, and in particular the Saxon elite, the Saxon Wars were not exclusively traumatic. On the contrary: those who held positions of power in post-conquest Saxony were uniquely 'biased' to appreciate the benefits of conversion and integration into the Carolingian empire. Second, Saxon authors and audiences did not usually remember their conquest and conversion in an isolated context. Nearly all Saxon stories about the Saxon Wars were integrated in larger narratives about the lives of saints, the foundation of monasteries or the translation of relics. This wider narrative context, too, affected Saxon war memories. Finally, the Saxon Wars were not exclusively remembered as a collective Saxon experience. Many Saxons also approached the period with more specific associations: the rise to power of their family, the history of their bishopric, the foundation of their monastery. In other words, Saxon war memory often had a local as well as a collective dimension.

This chapter, then, is not just about how ninth-century Saxons remembered the Saxon Wars. It asks also who was involved in such recollection and for what reasons. We will see that Saxon writing about the past took place mainly in three contexts: bishoprics, royal monasteries and aristocratic religious foundations. Each of these groups approached the past with its own motives and ambitions. Yet when it came to Saxony's conquest and conversion, they

also shared common ground. Monks, bishops and aristocrats were precisely the members of Saxon society who had the biggest stake in the changes wrought during the Saxon Wars: the spread of Christianity, access to royal patronage and redistribution of lands and offices. This inevitably affected how they remembered this period. In order to fully comprehend the nature and extent of their privileged position, we will start with a short overview of Saxony's integration into the Carolingian realm. Charlemagne and his successors sought in the first place to secure the loyalty and participation of a select group of leading Saxon families, whose integration into the realm, as a result, was swift and thorough. The rest of Saxony followed suit, but at a considerably slower pace and under less favourable circumstances.

5.3. Winners and losers

The key to Carolingian rule in Saxony was the exploitation of pre-existing power-structures: the same families who had ruled in pre-conquest Saxony were enlisted to govern post-conquest Saxony, with that difference that they now acted as Carolingian officials, who owed their position to Carolingian generosity. Cooperation was enforced through a ruthless system of reward and punishment.²⁴ Saxon nobles who showed themselves faithful to the Carolingians could expect to maintain or even extend their lands and influence. They were installed as counts in Saxony, and were given far-reaching authority in their home territory. Those who continued to resist, conversely, ran the risk of losing their property to the royal fisc and seeing it reallocated to their more cooperative compatriots. The 790s and 800s, in particular, witnessed large-scale dispossessions and deportations, mostly in the Elbe region.²⁵

Royal charters from Charlemagne and Louis the Pious serve to illustrate how this policy was implemented on the ground. A royal diploma issued by

²⁴ Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 66-67, H.K. Schulze, *Die Grafschaftsverfassung der Karolingerzeit in den Gebieten östlich des Rheins* (Berlin, 1973), pp. 274-95, S. Krüger, *Studien zur sächsischen Grafschaftsverfassung im 9. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1950), pp. 24-44.

²⁵ *Annals of Lorsch*, ed. Katz, s.a. 799, p. 42; ARF, s.a. 804, p. 118; Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 10. See also Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 200-211.

Charlemagne in 813 offered the Saxon count Bennit perpetual rights to a forest in Hesse, which had been acquired by his father Amalungus. The charter leaves no doubt that the confirmation was due to the family's services during the Saxon Wars: 'while the other Saxons in his district had acted unfaithfully towards us, the before-said Amalungus preferred to keep his faith rather than persist with the other unfaithful ones, and left his birth-place and came to us'.²⁶ A charter issued by Louis the Pious in 819 addressed three Saxons from the Sturmigau, in Wigmodia, who had found themselves disowned during the final stage of the Saxon Wars; as it turned out, 'unlawfully'.²⁷ The charter elucidates: 'When the property of the unfaithful inhabitants of Wigmodia had been recalled to the fisc, the property of these men, who were faithful to the Franks at that time, had been wrongfully appropriated together with that of the others'.²⁸ The aggrieved Saxons had brought the case before Louis' *missi*, who had looked into the matter and had eventually ruled in the Saxons' favour: 'it was found that they had lost their lands unlawfully, for they had not forfeited these lands, nor had they been unfaithful'.²⁹ Hence, the emperor returned the appropriated lands to their Saxon owners.

According to the Astronomer, the emperor's anonymous biographer, Louis' restitution policy did not stop at returning property that had been confiscated unlawfully. Soon after succeeding Charles in 814, the new emperor

²⁶ DD Kar. 1, no. 213, pp. 284-5. *dum ceteri Saxones pagenses illius contra nos infideliter egissent, praefatus Amalungus mallens fidem suam servare quam cum ceteris infidelibus perseverare, relinquens locum nativitatis suae veniens ad nos...* For a similar charter, DD Kar. 1, no. 218, pp. 290-92.

²⁷ Louis' charters have yet to be edited in a comprehensive edition. The cited charter can be found in R. Wilmans (ed.), *Die Kaiserurkunden der Provinz Westfalen: 777-1313*, I (Münster, 1867), no. 4 (BM² 696), pp. 9-11. See also, W. Metz, 'Probleme der fränkischen Reichsgutforschung im sächsischen Stammesgebiet', *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 31 (1959), pp. 77-126, here pp. 97-8. On Louis' charters, see T. Kölzer, *Kaiser Ludwig der Fromme (814-840) im Spiegel seiner Urkunden* (Paderborn, 2005) and the essays in T. Kölzer (ed.), *Zwischen Tradition und Innovation: Die Urkunden Kaiser Ludwigs des Frommen (814-840)* (Paderborn, 2014).

²⁸ Wilmans (ed.), *Die Kaiserurkunden*, no. 4 (BM² 696), p. 10: *quando res infidelium Wigmodorum ad partem dominicam revocatae fuerunt, res eorum, qui tum infideles Francis erant, pariter cum ipsis iniuste sociatae fuissent.*

²⁹ Wilmans (ed.), *Die Kaiserurkunden*, no. 4 (BM² 696), p. 10: *inventum est, illos res eorum iniuste amisisse, eo quod illas forfactas non habuerunt nec infideles fuerunt.*

had allegedly decided to ‘restore to Saxons and Frisians their paternal heritage, which they had rightfully lost under his father on account of their infidelity’.³⁰ The Astronomer explains Louis’ ‘imperial clemency’ as a controversial but ultimately successful stratagem to bind these peoples to his person. ‘And he was not deceived in this hope’, the author concludes, ‘for after these restitutions he always found these peoples to be most faithful to him’. Indeed, when in 830 Louis had been ousted from power by a faction of discontented Frankish nobles led by his own sons, the emperor regained the upper hand by strategically organising a diplomatic showdown at Nijmegen in the vicinity of Germania, so that ‘the Saxons and Eastern Franks would be able to attend’.³¹ During subsequent altercations with his sons in the 830s, Louis continued to find support among the Saxons.³²

Though Carolingian patronage helped cement the loyalty of powerful Saxon families, it also had a polarizing effect on Saxon society. There are various examples of ‘faithful’ Saxons who were made to pay dearly for their fidelity by their less-compliant countrymen. The *Vita Willehadi*, composed around the middle of the ninth century, reported how in 782 Saxon rebels ‘exercised their cruelty’ not only on Willehad’s missionary disciples, but also on the Saxon count hosting them: all were put to the sword.³³ Other instances of internecine conflict among the Saxons can be found in a letter of supplication addressed to Louis the Pious by an anonymous Saxon layman.³⁴ The letter,

³⁰ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*, ed. E. Tremp, MGH SS rer. Germ 64 (Hanover, 1995), c. 24, p. 356: Quo etiam tempore Saxonibus atque Frisonibus ius paterne hereditatis, quod sub patre ob perfidiam legaliter perdiderant, imperatoria restituit clementia.

³¹ *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 830, p. 2, Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*, c. 45, p. 460.

³² *Annales Bertiniani*, s.a. 832, 834, 839, pp. 4-17. See also, Krüger, ‘Die älteren Sachsen als Franken’, pp. 228-30.

³³ *Vita Willehadi*, ed. A. Poncelet, AASS, Nov. III (Brussels, 1910), p. 844D, Porro Saxones crudelitatem, quam circa magistrum nequiverant, in discipulos ipsius, exardescente ira, ferventius exercuerunt. Siquidem Folcardum presbiterum cum Emmiggo comite in pago denominato Leri, Beniamin autem in Ubhriustri, Atrebanum vero clericum in Thiatmaresgaho, Gerwalum quoque cum sociis suis in Brema, odio nominis christiani, gladio peremerunt.

³⁴ MGH Epp. 5, pp. 300-301. The author does mention the names of his father (Richard) and uncle (Richulf). See for this family, Wenskus, *Sächsischer Stammesadel*, p. 179, Krüger, *Studien zur Sächsischen Grafschaftsverfassung*, p. 86.

which appears to have been written early in Louis' reign, is probably the earliest example of Saxon writing to survive, although its evident Latinity would suggest the Saxon layman commissioned it from a scribe. The letter is also a rare firsthand testimony of a Saxon who had lost out during the Saxon Wars.

The author explains how during the Saxon Wars, his family had been Christian and loyal to Charlemagne. Yet the family had suffered various adversities because of this loyalty: they had been harassed and robbed by their less devote neighbours; the author's uncle had been killed whilst on a royal mission to the trans-Elbe region;³⁵ and when the author's father had gone to relay this sad news to the court, his mother had been kidnapped by the same men who had previously killed his uncle. Though his mother had eventually been rescued, the family had been forced to flee their paternal lands and move to another region in Saxony. Unfortunately, this had not been the end of the family's tribulations. Shortly after their flight, Charlemagne had ordered the deportation of all the inhabitants of this region, forcing the family to leave Saxony altogether, without any means to recover their paternal lands. The letter ends on a plea for restitution: 'Therefore, most pious emperor, who has never refused to mercifully offer stable refuge to the poor and the needy out of love for God...may you see fit to have your *fideles* investigate, whether [the inheritance] rightfully pertains to us or not'.³⁶ We have seen above that pleas of this sort did not necessarily fall on deaf ears. Louis the Pious did make strategic restitutions to disowned Saxons. Still, the letter stands as a sobering reminder of the disrupting effect Charlemagne's pacifying strategies could and did have on the ground.

Tensions in Saxon society must have persisted long after the Saxon Wars, though most remained below the radar of contemporary historians. One

³⁵ Possibly, this refers to the events of 798, when trans-Elbe Saxons rose in rebellion and killed several royal legates. See ARF, s.a. 798, pp. 102-104.

³⁶ MGH Epp. 5, p. 301: Ideoque, piissime imperator, qui omnibus pauperibus, etiam cunctis indigentibus stabile refugium pro Dei amore misericorditer impendere non cessatis, nobis quoque paterna hereditate despoliatis, pro vestra elymosina auxiliari sub hac reclamazione nostra utcumque faciatis, et per fideles vestros idipsum investigare dignemini, utrum iuste ad nos pertinere debeat an non, si tamen apud vestram sanctissimam decretum fuerit excellentiam.

outburst of Saxon discontent that did receive widespread exposure was the so-called Stellinga Revolt of 841-43. While this revolt was fuelled by discontented groups among the Saxon population, it was ignited by the civil war of 840-843. Following the death of Louis the Pious on 20 June 840, his three surviving sons engaged in a protracted struggle for power, which saw most of the realm up in arms. At the devastating Battle of Fontenoy (25 June, 841), Lothar I suffered a critical defeat against his two younger brothers, Louis the German and Charles the Bald. In a strategic bid to regain the upper hand, Lothar sought help among the 'lower classes' of Saxon society. This endeavour is narrated most fully by the West-Frankish historian Nithard:

That nation (i.e. the Saxons) is divided in three groups: there are those among them who are called in their tongue 'edhilingui', those who are called 'frilingi', and those who are called 'lazzi'; in the Latin tongue these are nobles, freemen and serves. But in the conflict between Lothar and his brothers, the nobles of this people were divided in two factions: one part followed Lothar, the other part followed Louis [the German]. With this being the state of affairs, Lothar, who felt that his supporters wanted to desert him following the victory of his brothers, and who was bound by various needs, sought assistance wherever and by whatever means he could. [...] hence he also approached the frilingi and lazzi in Saxony, who were countless in number, and he promised that if they would side with him, he would allow them to live once again under the law which their ancestors had observed in the time they worshipped idols. They, being exceedingly eager for this, adopted a new name for themselves – Stellinga – and banded together as one: after they had almost driven their lords from the kingdom, everyone lived under whatever law he wanted in accordance with ancient custom.³⁷

³⁷ Nithard, *Historiarum libri quattuor*, ed. E. Müller, MGH SS rer. Germ. 44 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1907), 4.2, pp. 41-42: Que gens omnis in tribus ordinibus divisa consistit: sunt etenim inter illos qui edhilingui, sunt qui frilingi, sunt qui lazzi illorum lingua dicuntur; Latina vero lingua hoc sunt: nobiles, ingenuiles atque serviles. Sed pars illorum, quae nobilis inter illos habetur, in duabus partibus in dissensione Lodharii ac fratrum suorum divisa, unaque eorum Lodharium, altera vero Lodhuvicum secuta est. His ita se habentibus, cernens Lodharius, quod

The revolt of the Stellinga – Old Saxon for ‘companions’- did not last long.³⁸ Within a year, Louis the German marched into Saxony with an army and ‘destroyed the insurgents who called themselves Stellinga with a lawful massacre’.³⁹ Another uprising followed in 843 but was put down for good that same year, probably by the Saxon *nobiles* themselves.⁴⁰

Based on Nithard’s account, modern scholars typically interpret the uprising of the Stellinga as a rare medieval example of a ‘peasant revolt’.⁴¹ According to this interpretational framework, pre-conquest Saxon society was characterized by a strict division in three classes: the ‘nobles’ (*edhilingi*) ‘free peasants’ (*frilingi*) and ‘serfs’ (*lazzi*).⁴² During the Saxon Wars, the nobles were quick to side with Charlemagne and accept Christianity, whereas the lower classes continued to resist Carolingian efforts at conquest and conversion. As a result, Charlemagne’s organisation of Carolingian Saxony heavily privileged the nobles, who were thus able to further tighten their grip on the lower classes. Moreover, Charlemagne also disbanded the Marklo assembly

post victoriam fratrum populus, qui cum illo fuerat, deficere vellet, variis necessitatibus astrictus, quocumque et quomodocumque poterat, subsidium quaerebat. Hinc rem publicam in propriis usibus tribuebat, hinc quibusdam libertatem dabat, quibusdam autem post victoriam se daturum promittebat, hinc etiam in Saxoniam misit frilingis lazzibusque, quorum infinita multitudo est, promittens, si secum sentirent, ut legem, quam antecessores sui tempore, quo idolorum cultores erant, habuerant, eandem illis deinceps habendam concederet. Qua supra modum cupidi nomen novum sibi, id est Stellinga, imposuerunt et in unum conglobati dominis e regno poene pulsus more antiquo qua quisque volebat lege vivebat.

³⁸ N. Wagner, ‘Der Name der Stellinga’, *Beiträge zur Namenforschung*, n.s. 15 (1980), pp. 128-133.

³⁹ Nithard, *Historiarum libri quattuor*, 4.4, p. 45: Lodhuvicus etenim in Saxonia seditiosos, qui se, uti praefatum est, Stellinga nominaverant, nobiliter, legali tamen cede compescuit.

⁴⁰ Nithard, *Historiarum libri quattuor*, 4.6, p. 48: Eodem etiam tempore Stellinga in Saxonia contra dominos suos iterum_rebellarunt, sed praelio commisso nimia cede prostrati sunt; ac sic auctoritate interiit, quod sine auctoritate surgere praesumpsit.

⁴¹ C. Wickham, ‘Space and Society in Early Medieval Peasant Conflicts’, in *Uomo e spazio nell’alto Medioevo* (Spoleto, 2003), pp. 551-85, here 569-71; E.J. Goldberg, ‘Popular Revolt, Dynastic Politics and Aristocratic Factionalism in the Early Middle Ages: The Saxon “Stellinga” Reconsidered’, *Speculum*, 70 (1995), pp. 467-501; Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 66-67. But see Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 269-70, who argues that the notion of a peasant revolt is anachronistic.

⁴² M. Lintzel, *Die Stände der deutschen Volksrechte, hauptsächlich der Lex Saxonum* (Halle a. d. Saale, 1933), pp. 309-79.

referred to in the *Vita Lebuini antiqua*, depriving the *frilingi* and *lazzi* of their most important avenue of political participation. So deplorable was their situation in post-conquest Saxony, that when the opportunity presented itself in 841, the *frilingi* and *lazzi* rose against the *edhilingui*, hoping to effect a return to the pre-conquest state of affairs; in vain, as it turned out.

Within this interpretational framework, discussion has focused mainly on the circumstances that enabled and incited the Saxon lower classes to revolt. For Marxist historians this rise was self-evident and logical: popular resentment simply reached a boiling point in 841, inciting the Saxon peasants to rebel collectively against their feudal oppressors.⁴³ In an elegant response to this line of thinking, Eric Goldberg questioned the mechanics of such an uprising: how can geographically fragmented peasants suddenly decide to act collectively? His own theory held that the Stellinga revolt was unwittingly facilitated by the Saxon elite, who used the lower classes in their armies, enabling them to become aware of their own numbers and strength.⁴⁴ The fact that the elite was itself divided in two camps during the civil wars, precluded an apt aristocratic response to the nascent uprising. Another point of discussion is the role played by Lothar I in the affair. None of the four surviving reports on the Stellinga uprising was written from his perspective.⁴⁵ In fact, the two most extensive accounts, by Nithard and the Annals of St Bertin, were composed under Lothar's adversary Charles the Bald. They obviously tried to show the elder brother in the most damning of lights. This holds particularly true for the insinuation – found only in these two sources – that Lothar allowed the

⁴³ H-J. Bartmuß, 'Einige Bemerkungen zum Stellingaaufstand und zum Stand der sozialökonomischen Entwicklung in Sachsen im 9. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 24 (1976), pp. 919-926, W. Eggert, 'Rebelliones servorum. Bewaffnete Klassenkämpfe im Früh- und Hochmittelalter und ihre Darstellung in zeitgenössischen erzählenden Quellen', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 23 (1975), pp. 1147-1264, here 1154-60; E. Müller-Mertens, 'Der Stellingaaufstand (841-843). Seine Träger und die Frage der politischen Macht', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 20 (1972), pp. 818-842

⁴⁴ Goldberg, 'Popular Revolt', pp. 492-94.

⁴⁵ Apart from Nithard, there are three other accounts: *Annales Xantenses*, ed. B. von Simson, MGH SS rer. Germ. 12 (Hannover, Leipzig, 1909), s.a. 841, p. 12; *Annals of Fulda*, ed. F. Kürze (Hanover, 1891), s.a. 842, p. 33; *Annals of St Bertin*, s.a. 841, pp. 25-26, s.a. 842, p. 28. For a short analysis of these reports, Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 262-67.

Stellinga to readopt pagan customs in return for their support. This was almost certainly a literary invention, meant to render Lothar into an anti-Charlemagne of sorts, an unworthy emperor who had singlehandedly imperilled and disgraced his grandfather's greatest achievement.⁴⁶ Following this line of reasoning, some have even doubted whether Lothar had a hand in the revolt at all.⁴⁷

On a more fundamental level, one might question whether modern scholarship on the Stellinga Revolt has not overstressed the rigidity and functionality of 'class' divisions among the Saxons. In the above scenario, class is treated as something primordial, fixed and self-evident. Indeed, belonging to one and the same class is tantamount to a shared sense of identity, shared ambitions and collective action. In fact, social status in the early Middle Ages was constructed, malleable and in constant need of reconfirmation.⁴⁸ It is unlikely, therefore, that pre-conquest social divisions survived unaltered into post-conquest Saxony. To be sure, pre-existing power-structures were taken into consideration when Saxony was integrated into the Carolingian empire and transformed into a Carolingian province. But the benchmark of Charlemagne's integration policy, as we have seen again and again over the course of this study, was *fidelity*. He invested those Saxons with power who were willing to cooperate with the new regime and embrace its religious and military values. Those who did not, found themselves marginalized, regardless of their previous status in Saxon society. The point of Charlemagne's Saxon policy, in other words, was not so much to privilege a pre-existing nobility, as to craft a nobility of the privileged. To a considerable extent, the ninth-century Saxon elite was a Carolingian creation.

This is confirmed by the fact that it is only *after* the Saxon Wars and *after* the Stellinga Revolt, that narrative sources suddenly start to allude to class-

⁴⁶ I. Rembold, 'The Politics of Christianization in Carolingian Saxony', unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2014, pp. 76-116.

⁴⁷ Bartmuß, 'Einige Bemerkungen'.

⁴⁸ See for instance M. Costambeys, M. Innes, S. Maclean (eds.), *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 271-75.

division as something inherently and particularly Saxon.⁴⁹ Indeed, Saxon classes play no role whatsoever in Frankish reports on the Saxon Wars.⁵⁰ Nor are they ever mentioned in pre-conquest sources. The notion of different orders among the Saxons appear first in Carolingian legal texts – the *Capitulatio*, the *Capitulare* and the *Lex Saxonum* – which set different wergilds and fines for different legal categories, referred to as *nobilis*, *ingenuus*, *litus* and *servus*.⁵¹ These are not inherently Saxon, but standard Latin categories, which can be encountered in most barbarian law codes. Their use seems to reflect Carolingian attempts to impose Frankish legal norms on Saxon society. It is not until after the Stellinga Revolt, that Saxon class divisions are mentioned outside a legal context. The first to do so was Nithard, who wrote ca. 844, a year or two after the events.⁵² He was followed by Rudolf of Fulda ca. 860, who not only claimed that the Saxons had as of old been divided in four separate social groups (he included slaves), but also that intermarriage between these groups had been punishable by death.⁵³ Arguably the most famous reference can be found in the *Vita Lebuini antiqua*, which was composed at some point after 864, by an anonymous author who may or may not have been a Saxon.⁵⁴ His account relied strongly on Bede, from whom he adopted the notion that the ‘Old Saxons’ had not been ruled by a king but by ‘satraps’. To this, he added a unique Saxon custom of his own: that once a year, these satraps were wont to come together at a place called Marklo, near the Weser, each in the company of

⁴⁹ For this observation, Rembold, ‘The Politics of Christianization’.

⁵⁰ In a rare exception, the *Annals of Lorsch* make a distinction between Saxon hostages who are ‘freemen’ (*ingenui*) and who are ‘freedmen’ (*lidi*), *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 780, p. 32: *Saxones omnes tradiderunt se illi et omnes accepit obsides, tam ingenuos quam et lidos...*

⁵¹ *Capitulatio*, cc. 15, 17, 19-21, p. 69; *Capitulare*, cc. 3, 5, pp. 71-72. *Lex Saxonum*, cc. 8, 16-18, 36, 50-53, 56, 64.

⁵² On Nithard, J.L. Nelson, ‘Public “Histories” and Private History in the Work of Nithard’, *Speculum*, 60 (1985), pp. 251-293.

⁵³ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 1, p. 424.

⁵⁴ For the date, M. Springer, ‘Was Lebuins Lebensbeschreibung über die Verfassung Sachsens wirklich sagt oder warum man sich mit einzelnen Wörter beschäftigen muß’, *Westfälische Zeitschrift*, 148 (1998), pp. 241-259. For a date ca. 840-64, H. Löwe, ‘Entstehungszeit und Quellenwert der Vita Lebuini’, *DA*, 21 (1965), pp. 345-370, in particular pp. 355-362.

twelve nobles, freemen and serves.⁵⁵ There, at Marklo, they would renew the laws, judge important cases and debate policy for the upcoming year.

As stressed by Ingrid Rembold, this sudden class-consciousness in the years following the Stellinga Revolt was no coincidence.⁵⁶ The Stellinga had put class on the agenda, made it into an issue, so to speak. Shaken and shamed by this unexpected uprising, Frankish and Saxon authors began to emphasise the importance of rigid class divisions among the Saxons and stress its historical roots. It is telling, though, that there survives no Saxon report on the Stellinga Revolt itself. Apparently, this was not something Saxon (elite) authors and audiences felt comfortable remembering. This is understandable. Being conquered and converted by Charlemagne, the greatest Carolingian ruler ever to live, was one thing. Being defeated by one's social inferiors was something else altogether.

The Stellinga Revolt stands as a final example to the profound effects of Saxony's integration into the empire. In a way, Carolingian pacifying strategies ensured that post-conquest Saxony society was divided into winners and losers; i.e. those who had done well out of the war in terms of influence and property, and those who had faced marginalization and confiscation, if not death. In this paragraph, we have, with difficulty, tried to shed some light on the position of the losers. That relatively little could be said on their position, is because the textual record is dominated by winners. This is important to keep in mind in the subsequent paragraphs on episcopal, monastic and aristocratic memory. Though all Saxon authors studied below offer their own readings of the past, these readings were sustained by the same overall impression: that they had somehow benefited from incorporation into the Carolingian realm.

⁵⁵ *Vita sancti Lebuini antiqua*, ed. A. Hofmeister, MGH SS 30.2 (Hanover, 1895), c. 4, p. 792: Regem antiqui Saxones non habebant, sed per pagos satrapas constitutos; morisque erat, ut semel in anno generale consilium agerent in media Saxonia iuxta fluvium Wisuram ad locum qui dicitur Marklo. Solebant ibi omnes in unum satrapae convenire, ex pagis quoque singulis duodecim electi nobiles totidemque liberi totidemque lati. Renovabant ibi leges, praecipuas causas adiudicabant et, quid per annum essent acturi sive in bello sive in pace, communi consilio statuebant.

⁵⁶ Rembold, 'The Politics of Christianization'.

5.4. An episcopal past: Paderborn

Long before the Franks had finalized the conquest of their north-eastern neighbours, Charlemagne and his advisers started drawing the outlines of a Saxon church-organisation. Naturally, the erratic progress of conquest meant that these outlines needed to be redrawn repeatedly over the course of the Saxon Wars and beyond.⁵⁷ The royal palace of Paderborn, for example, was first erected on Saxon soil in 777, to serve as an administrative and missionary outpost in the newly acquired regions.⁵⁸ Such ambitions were cut short by its destruction the following year during the Saxon raid on the Rhineland. The site was not fully restored until 799, the year Charlemagne received Pope Leo III at Paderborn.⁵⁹ Only some years thereafter, ca. 806/807, the Saxon Hathumar was installed as Paderborn's first bishop.⁶⁰ In total, Charlemagne founded six bishoprics in Saxony during his reign, mostly on, or west of, the Weser. These were, in random order, Paderborn, Bremen, Verden, Minden, Münster and Osnabrück. Two more followed under Louis the Pious: Halberstadt and Hildesheim, which were both located between the Weser and its right tributary, the Aller.⁶¹ The exact circumstances in which these Saxon dioceses were established are notoriously difficult to reconstruct.⁶² Contemporary evidence is virtually non-existent, while most later accounts originated in the bishoprics themselves. Such 'institutional' accounts incline towards embellishment: they

⁵⁷ Johaneck, 'Der Ausbau'.

⁵⁸ K. Hauck, 'Paderborn: Das Zentrum von Karls Sachsen-Mission 777', in J. Fleckenstein, and K. Schmid (eds.), *Adel und Kirche. Gerd Tellenbach zum 65. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern* (Freiburg, 1968), pp. 91-140.

⁵⁹ A.S. Gai, 'Die karolingische Pfalzanlage: Von der Dokumentation zur Rekonstruktion', in Fenske (ed.), *Deutsche Königspfalzen*, 5, pp. 71-100, here 77-80.

⁶⁰ On Hathumar, H.J. Brandt and K. Hengst, *Die Bischöfe und Erzbischöfe von Paderborn* (Paderborn, 1984), pp. 38-40.

⁶¹ See the excellent map in C. Ehlers, 'Totam provinciam illam in parochias episcopales divisit: Erschließung des Raumes durch die Kirche am Beispiel Sachsens', in *Credo – Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, 1 (Petersberg, 2013), pp. 330-340, here p. 335.

⁶² K. Honselmann, 'Die Bistumsgründungen in Sachsen unter Karl dem Großen, mit einem Ausblick auf spätere Bistumsgründungen und einem Exkurs zur Übernahme der christlichen Zeitrechnung im frühmittelalterlichen Sachsen', *Archiv für Diplomatik*, 30 (1984), pp. 1-50 and E. Müller, *Die Entstehungsgeschichte der sächsischen Bistümer unter Karl dem Großen* (Hildesheim, 1938).

claim special pre-eminence in the Saxon mission and move back their foundation date. Some even fabricate foundation charters.⁶³ We will come to acquaint ourselves with this tendency shortly.

For obvious reasons, the Saxon episcopate was not from the start dominated by locals, and in fact would continue to accommodate a significant percentage of non-Saxons well into the eleventh century.⁶⁴ The earliest bishops in Saxony were nearly all missionaries, either from the Isles or from one of the Carolingian missionary centres in Hesse or the Rhineland. Liudger of Münster (d. 809) was born to a Frisian aristocratic family and educated at Utrecht. His teacher at Utrecht, Gregory, was a former disciple of Boniface.⁶⁵ Ercanbert of Minden (d. 830), who was installed ca. 792, was a Frankish aristocrat trained at Fulda, where his brother Baugulf (d. 815) was abbot.⁶⁶ His family enjoyed extensive property in Saxony, probably obtained during the Saxon Wars. The Anglo-Saxon Willehad (d. 789) began his missionary career among the Frisians without Carolingian authorisation or support.⁶⁷ But when word of his activities reached Charlemagne's court ca. 785, the Anglo-Saxon was made to continue his evangelizing efforts in Wigmodia, between the Weser and the Elbe, which eventually became part of the diocese of Bremen.

Over the course of the ninth century, Saxon aristocrats increasingly found their way into the Saxon episcopate as well.⁶⁸ The first Saxon to rise to the episcopal dignity was the above-mentioned Hathumar of Paderborn (d. 815), a Saxon noble who had been educated at the cathedral school of Würzburg prior

⁶³ Knibbs, *Ansgar, Rimbart, and the Forged Foundations of Hamburg-Bremen*, pp. 49-70, 175-208; M. Tangl, 'Forschungen zur Karolinger Diplomen', *Archiv für Urkundenforschung*, 2 (1909), pp. 193-4.

⁶⁴ For exact figures and percentages, C. Ehlers, 'Sachsen als sächsische Bischöfe. Die Kirchenpolitik der karolingischen und ottonischen Könige in einem neuen Licht', in M. Becher and A. Plassmann (eds.), *Streit am Hof im frühen Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 2011), pp. 95-120.

⁶⁵ On Liudger, see the essays in R. L. Schütz (ed.), *Heiliger Liudger: Zeuge des Glaubens, 742 – 809. Gedenkschrift zum 1200. Todestag* (Essen, 2009).

⁶⁶ E. Freise, 'Die Sachsenmission Karls des Großen und die Anfänge des Bistums Minden', in H. Nordsiek (ed.), *An Weser und Wiehen. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Kultur einer Landschaft. Festschrift für Wilhelm Brepohl* (Minden, 1983), pp. 57-100, here 71-75.

⁶⁷ Wood, *The Missionary Life*, p. 89.

⁶⁸ See for a list of known Saxon bishops between 815 and 911, Carroll, 'The Bishopsrics of Saxony', p. 233.

to his investiture. His ninth-century successors Badurad (d. 862), Liuthard (d. 887) and Biso (d. 909) were all Saxons.⁶⁹ It was under the aegis of the latter, Biso, that Paderborn's scriptorium came to produce a number of notable works of hagiography.⁷⁰ The most well-known of these is the *Translatio s. Liborii*, a written account of the *translatio* of saint Liborius from Le Mans to Paderborn in 836.⁷¹ It was composed by an anonymous Saxon cleric from Paderborn, who had earlier written a *vita* of the saint.⁷² This 'Paderborner Anonymus', as he is known today, knew of the events only indirectly. Yet he claims to have had access to the oral and written testimony of the leader of the Saxon company that transported Liborius' remains to Paderborn in 836, a Saxon priest named Ido.⁷³

Now a good *Translationsbericht* was more than a mere recording of the proceedings.⁷⁴ At the very least, it should testify to the saint's holiness and convince its audience of the legitimacy of the saint's transfer. Where possible, royal patrons, founding families and other aristocratic stake-holders should be brought into the picture as well. It was not atypical, furthermore, for the account of the actual *translatio* to be preceded by a short history of the communities involved, in particular that of the saint's new home. A truly skilled author might even try to integrate the story into the larger narrative of Christian history: the *translatio* of the saint as a significant event, a turning point even, in the ongoing struggle for the salvation of mankind, or in this case, the salvation of the Saxons. The *Translationsbericht*, in short, made for a dynamic genre, which ostensibly focused on a single event – the transportation

⁶⁹ Brandt and Hengst, *Die Bischöfe und Erzbischöfe von Paderborn*, pp. 42-53.

⁷⁰ I. Rembold, 'The Poeta Saxo at Paderborn: Episcopal Authority and Carolingian Rule in Late Ninth-Century Saxony', *Early Medieval Europe*, 21 (2013), pp. 169-196.

⁷¹ On the date, de Vry, *Liborius*, p. 67.

⁷² *Vita Liborii*, ed. V. de Vry (Paderborn, 1997), pp. 177-86.

⁷³ *Translatio s. Liborii*, ed. Cohausz, c. 8, pp. 53-55: Clericorum vero, quibus id negotii commendatum est, praecipuus erat quidam presbyter, Ido cognomine, qui omnem suae professionis historiam, et signa quae in ea divinitus ostensa perspexerat, partim viva voce intimata, partim litteris breviter annotata, ad nostram fecit noticiam pervenire. On Ido, see K. Honselmann, 'Der Bericht des Klerikers Ido von der Übertragung der Gebeine des hl. Liborius', *Westfälische Zeitschrift*, 119 (1969), pp. 189-265

⁷⁴ M. Heinzlmann, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes* (Turnhout, 1979).

of the saint – but was at the same time expected to contextualize this event into a wider narrative of local, family and/or universal history.⁷⁵

The Paderborner Anonymus was well aware of the possibilities and demands of the genre, as is evident from the prologue of his work:

Having described in my previous booklet the life and passing of Christ's dearest confessor and bishop Liborius, we turn now – on your orders, o eminent bishop Bisio – to the story of the translatio of his holy corpse [...] But before we move to the actual sequence of events, we deem it proper to shortly outline the cause of the before-mentioned translatio and the foundation and construction of the church (i.e. Paderborn) which heaven deemed worthy to be illuminated by such a treasure.⁷⁶

Writing an early history of Paderborn meant writing about the Saxon Wars. But the prospect appears not to have daunted the Paderborner Anonymus. Following the prologue, he launched straight into a summary of the events of 772-804: 'Emperor Charles, having gone through a long strife and the varying fortunes of battle with the Saxon people, tamed them with iron, made them take on the Christian faith, and added them to his rule'.⁷⁷ The author took note of the protracted nature of Charlemagne's war against the Saxons, even referring to the 'booklet on his life' (i.e. Einhard's *Vita Karoli*) for corroboration. On the whole, however, the author's interest in conquest and

⁷⁵ Compare H. Röcklein, 'Das Gewebe der Schriften: Historiographische Aspekte der karolingerzeitlichen Hagiographie Sachsens', in D.R. Bauer, and K. Herbers (eds.), *Hagiographie im Kontext. Wirkungsweisen und Möglichkeiten historischer Auswertung* (Stuttgart, 2000), pp. 1-25, here pp. 8-9.

⁷⁶ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 1, p. 48: Descriptis superiori libello vita et transitu preciosissimi confessoris Christi atque pontificis Liborii, nunc secundum tuam, Bisio, praesul egregie, iussionem, ad exponendam seriem translationis eius sacratissimi corporis, et ostensa per eius merita virtutum signa, pro concessa divinitus facultate, stilum mentemque convertimus [...] Sed antequam ad rei gestae ordinem veniamus, causam translationis memoratae, atque exordium constructionis aeccliesiae, quae tanto caelitus illustrari meruit thesauro, referre breviter congruum arbitramur.

⁷⁷ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 2, pp. 48-49: Igitur ubi primum gloriosae memoriae Karolus imperator, concertatione longissima et variis praeliorum eventibus cum gente Saxonum exactis, illos ferro edomitos Christi fidem suscipere fecit suoque addidit imperio...

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

subjugation was limited. For these, he professed, had not been the main objectives of Charlemagne's efforts in Saxony:

After he finally subjugated that people...he next applied himself fully to this task: that by saving the souls of that people, which after so many centuries was abandoning the worship of daemons, he would obtain a divine reward as the fruit of his labour. And to show that he had taken on the trouble of such a great task more for the Christian faith than for the expansion of his kingdom, he arranged for churches to be constructed throughout the entire region as fast as he could, where the populace, still unformed in the faith, was to be taught to convene and to be acquainted with receiving the holy sacraments...⁷⁸

Conversion, not conquest, had been Charlemagne's ultimate goal according to the Paderborner Anonymus. That said, the author was careful to underline that Saxony's conversion did not happen overnight. Christian faith was not something that could be acquired solely through force or arms. It required care and instruction. It required churches and priests. Above all, it required bishops. Yet here, as the author pointed out, Charlemagne faced two complications. First, that Saxony lacked any prior ecclesiastical organisation. In fact, it even lacked cities, the traditional seats of bishops.⁷⁹ Second, that even if Charlemagne managed to divide Saxony into dioceses and establish episcopal seats, there were no bishops to man them: 'Hardly anyone could be found who would be ordained bishop over that barbarous and semi-pagan people; for their

⁷⁸ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 2, p. 49: Qua ... superata, totum exinde suum ad hoc contulit studium, ut pro tantarum salvatione animarum populi, post tot secula cultum daemonum relinquentis, fructum sui laboris ex Dei remuneratione consequeretur. Et ut se magis christianae religionis quam regni sui dilatandi causa tantae rei difficultatem aggressum ostenderet, aecclesias per omnem regionem illam, ad quas rudis in fide populus confluere doceretur et sacramentis caelestibus initiari consuesceret, sub quanta potuit celeritate construi fecit...

⁷⁹ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 2, p. 49: civitates, in quibus more antiquo sedes episcopales constituerentur, illi penitus provinciae deerant...

occasional lapses into perfidy made none among the clergy deem it safe to live among them'.⁸⁰

This candid assessment of the state of affairs in newly conquered Saxony seems hardly laudatory. Even when stripped of political connotations, the claim of *perfidia* must have sat awkwardly with a Saxon audience. Yet the effect was very much deliberate. By presenting the eighth- and early ninth-century Saxons as a people of unstable faith, in sore need of confirmation and episcopal guidance, the Paderborner Anonymus was setting the stage for the rise of his own bishopric, whose foundation he could now present as a crucial step towards the salvation of his people. He explained how Charlemagne, after carefully deliberating on the best sites for Saxon bishoprics, eventually selected 'those places ... that appeared most suitable on account of their natural excellence and number of inhabitants'. Paderborn, being 'not dissimilar to what the Sacred Scriptures call the land of milk and honey', was one of the places to solicit the Carolingian's interest.⁸¹ As if to confirm the appropriateness of Charlemagne's choice, the Paderborner Anonymus went on to draw an impressive canvas of Paderborn's environmental blessings: it was surrounded by wide plains, lush forests and bountiful fields; its lands were as suitable for raising cattle as for keeping bees; the settlement itself was served by wholesome springs and readily accessible through nearby rivers; even the district's inhabitants were 'famous for their complete nobility of birth and mind'.⁸²

As the narrative progresses, the Paderborner Anonymus continues to underline Paderborn's 'special merit', in particular with regard to Saxony's Christianization. One important indication of its growing status was the visit of Pope Leo III in 799, who came to Paderborn to solicit Charlemagne's help

⁸⁰ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 2, p. 49: Tum vero vix repperiebantur, qui barbarae et semipaganae nationi praesules ordinarentur; cuius interdum ad perfidiam relabentis cohabitatio nulli clericorum tuta videbatur...

⁸¹ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 3, p. 49: Inter omnia vero loca, constituendis principalibus aeclesiis in hac de qua loquimur provincia designata, Patherbrunnensis sedes speciali quadam dignitate praecellit [...] ut illi non dissimilis videatur regioni, quam sacrae litterae vocant terram lacte et maele manantem...

⁸² *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 3, pp. 49-50: Praeterea pagus ipse...viris omni nobilitate generis animique semper insignibus abundabat...

against his Roman detractors.⁸³ During his visit, the pontiff not only offered Paderborn his ‘apostolic blessing’, but also consecrated an altar in its new church and endowed it with relics of the protomartyr Stephen.⁸⁴ The text is clear about the purpose of this pontifical endowment: Leo had been informed that Paderborn had been repeatedly put to the torch ‘by the infidelity of its inhabitants and their hate against the Christian religion’.⁸⁵ The bones of the martyr, the pope promised, were to project the site from further ‘injury’. And they did, as the author signals with understandable satisfaction. Another important development was the appointment of Paderborn’s first Saxon bishops: Hathumar and Badurad. Charlemagne had initially entrusted the diocese to the pastoral care of the Frankish bishops of Würzburg. Yet the arrangement had been of little use, as Würzburg was too far away and its bishops had neither the time nor the inclination to visit Paderborn, leaving the Saxons to fend for themselves. Charlemagne’s appointment of Hathumar, ‘a man born of *our* people’ (my italics) was a step in the right direction.⁸⁶ Yet it was under Hathumar’s successor Badurad, another Saxon, that the Christianization of Saxony truly got on its way. Badurad built churches, expanded the clergy and initiated the monastic life in his diocese. He also organised schools where ‘boys of noble as well as lower condition’ were educated in the ‘divine law’.⁸⁷ But most importantly, Badurad, arranged the *translatio* of Liborius.

Liborius’ *translatio* is presented by the author as the definite cure for Saxon unbelief. Badarud was aware that the people, and especially the commons, remained of unstable faith and could easily fall back into their gentile ways. Relics and miracles were needed to attract the masses, for although

⁸³ On the politics behind this visit, P. Johanek, ‘Die Sachsenkriege Karls des Großen und der Besuch Papst Leos III. in Paderborn 799 im Gedächtnis der Nachwelt’, *Westfälische Zeitschrift*, 150 (2000), pp. 211-233, H. Mayr-Harting, ‘Warum 799 in Paderborn?’, Stiegemann and Wemhoff (eds.), *799-Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit*, pp. 1-6.

⁸⁴ It has been argued that it was during this visit that Paderborn was officially consecrated as a bishopric, Honselmann, ‘Bistumsgründungen’, pp. 1-11.

⁸⁵ This is probably a covert reference to the Rhineland raid of 778.

⁸⁶ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 5, p. 50.

⁸⁷ See Löwe, ‘Lateinisch-christliche Kultur im karolingischen Sachsen’, p. 495.

they were ever hesitant to heed the words of preachers, they would certainly give credence to ‘things they would see with their eyes, and feel through its beneficial effects’.⁸⁸ For this reason, Badurad sent an embassy to Le Mans to obtain the relics of Liborius. The blessings of the saints were not late in coming. The return journey witnessed an extended string of miracles: in the presence of the saint, the blind regained their sight, the crippled were made to walk and the possessed were freed from their demonic tormenters. When the company was itself endangered by a collapsing bridge, the litter bearing the holy corpse remained miraculously afloat mid-air, whilst its carriers suffered no harm.⁸⁹ Well before Liborius’ body reached Saxony, rumours of the miracles wrought on the way had already reached its inhabitants. When the party transporting the relics finally reached the Rhine, they encountered an unusual spectacle:

When they had reached the Rhine, there was among that sacred company an immense multitude of people from the western provinces who had followed thither from distant places, yet whom necessity now forced to return home. Coming to meet them, however, was an equally large crowd made up of the nations that dwelled on the eastern banks of the river, above all our own Saxons, whose borders are not far away from the stream in question. For even they, who had only recently been called to the faith, flocked together at that place from all corners, after hearing the rumours of such great miracles. Vast crowds thus stood on both sides of the river, beholding each other with conflicting emotions. For who could ever cast in words the joy and delight felt at this hour by those about to receive that precious treasure, yet the grief and sorrow felt by those about to lose it? In the end, the carriers of the sacred corpse entered a ship; and immediately all those who were unable to follow any longer collectively threw themselves on the ground and entrusted themselves to the protection of the blessed Liborius with loud wails and intense prayers, pouring heavy showers of tears in testimony to their sorrow. Those who stood waiting on the opposite bank likewise prostrated themselves on the ground, and, upon receiving the

⁸⁸ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 7, p. 51.

⁸⁹ *Translatio s. Liborii*, cc. 20-28, pp. 87-101.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

sacred relics with all possible honour, led them away amidst praise and happiness, all the while offering thanks to God.⁹⁰

The Paderborner Anonymus evidently knew how to exploit dramatic potential. The Saxon author could hardly have crafted a more symbolic scene to illustrate the spiritual progress of his people than the one above: the banks of the Rhine filled with weeping Franks and celebrating Saxons. The Franks, so the author seems to imply, were no longer the only people who knew how to behave properly in the presence of the Holy. With the transportation of Liborius to Paderborn the world beyond the Rhine had definitely embraced the cult of God.

It has been argued that the Paderborner Anonymus used his narrative about the early history of Paderborn to offer a more acceptable and less traumatic account of the Saxon conversion.⁹¹ This is certainly one aspect of what the Saxon author tried to do. But the opposite is also true: he used the conversion of the Saxons, whom he consciously styled a *rudis in fide populus* in need of protracted pastoral care, to underline the importance of Paderborn, its bishops and its miracle-inducing saint Liborius. This constant overlap between collective (i.e. Saxon) and local concerns is evident also in the way the Paderborner Anonymus remembered the Saxon Wars. On the one hand, the author approached the Saxon Wars as a crucial episode in the history of his

⁹⁰ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 29, pp. 101-103: Cum ad Hrenum fluvium pervenissent, erant in sancto illo comitatu provinciarum occidentalium populi multitudinis infinitae, qui de longinquis locis illuc secuti, iam necessario reverti ad propria debuerunt. Occurrit vero non minor mortalium numerus ex nationibus orientalem eiusdem fluminis ripam incolentibus, et maxime Saxones nostri, quorum confinia non longe ab amne memorato distant. Ipsi enim nuper ad fidem vocati, audita tantorum fama signorum, gregatim ex suis undique locis eo confluxere. Stabant igitur in utroque littore turbae innumerabiles, diverso nimis affectu sese invicem contemplantes. Siquidem susceptoris preciosum illum thesaurum quantum gratulationis et gaudii, dimissuris vero quantum meroris et gemitus hora illa attulerit, quis umquam exprimere poterit? Denique statim ut sancti corporis baiuli navem introierunt, universa plebs, quae diutius sequi non valebat, unanimiter sese in terram prosternens, cum ingenti gemitu et intenta supplicatione beati Liborii se patrocinio commendabat, testes quodammodo affectus sui largos lacrimarum ymbres effundens. Pari modo et hi, qui in citeriori littore expectabant, terrae advoluti, sacra pignera cum omni quo poterant honore suscipientes, et gratias agentes Deo, laeti cum laudibus deduxere.

⁹¹ Shuler, 'The Saxons Within Carolingian Christendom', p. 52, Beumann, 'Die Hagiographie "bewältigt"', pp. 142-44.

people (*nostra gens*). Significantly, he remembered both the war itself and the Carolingian king responsible for unleashing it on the Saxons in decidedly positive terms. He even deemed it necessary to write Charlemagne a eulogy, so as to properly convey ‘the magnitude of his benefaction towards us’:

I believe that he is rightfully called our apostle, who preached, as it were, with an iron tongue, so that he might open to us the gate of faith. And though he was victorious as often as he entered battle, and subjected to his person many nations and kingdoms, it is evident that his most glorious triumph was over the devil: by converting our nation, he freed thousands upon thousands of souls, previously held captive under the devil’s tyranny, and acquired them for the Lord Christ. It is our wish, and we are confident of its fulfilment, that he receive from Him this reward: that he enjoys in heaven the company of the apostles, whose role he fulfilled on earth.⁹²

Yet for the Paderborner Anonymus, Charlemagne was more than the iron-tongued apostle of the Saxons. He was also the founder of his bishopric, a man who, rather than appropriate the land for himself, had decided to have Paderborn consecrated for the divine.⁹³ Like many other ninth-century Saxons, the Paderborner Anonymus thus felt doubly beholden to the Carolingian king.

5.5. Monastic memory: Herford and Corvey

Like the origins of Saxony’s bishoprics, the early history of Saxon monasticism remains elusive, and for much the same reasons. It is often believed that the groundwork for Saxon monasticism was laid by Charlemagne, who ca. 780

⁹² *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 5, p. 51: Quem arbitror nostrum iure apostolum nominari; quibus ut ianuam fidei aperiret, ferrea quodammodo lingua praedicavit. Qui cum tociens victoria potitus, quotiens in procinctu positus, multas sibi gentes, multa regna subiecerit, constat tamen eum gloriosissime etiam de diabolo triumphasse, cui tot animarum milia, prius sub eius tyrannide captiva, in conversione nostrae gentis eripuit, et Christo domino adquisivit. A quo illum recipere praemium et confidimus et optamus, ut fruatur in caelis apostolorum consortio, quorum functus est in terris officio.

⁹³ *Translatio s. Liborii*, c. 3, p. 50.

founded the monastic cells of Meppen and Visbek in Westphalia.⁹⁴ At this point, such cells would have been manned exclusively by outside missionaries. But there are indications that Charlemagne also actively contributed to the training of Saxon monks, by sending young Saxon hostages to Frankish monasteries such as Corbie.⁹⁵ The first female religious community on Saxon soil was probably Herford, which is said to have been founded ca. 800 by the Saxon nobleman Waltger.⁹⁶ The story is not without controversy, however, as its only source is a thirteenth-century hagiographical text.⁹⁷ We are on somewhat surer footing with the reign of Louis the Pious, who is known through his charters to have bestowed lands, immunities and royal protection on various Saxon communities.⁹⁸ By far the greatest beneficiary of Louis' munificence was the Benedictine monastery of Corvey, in the diocese of Paderborn. Corvey was founded in 822 by (Saxon) monks from Corbie, led by Louis' great-uncles Adalhard and Wala.⁹⁹ Only a year later, in 823, Louis put the monastery under royal protection and endowed it with relics from the protomartyr Stephen in token of its new status.¹⁰⁰ Over the subsequent decades,

⁹⁴ Ehlers, *Die Integration Sachsens*, p. 281, U. Faust, *Die Benediktinerklöster in Niedersachsen, Schleswig-Holstein und Bremen*, *Germania Benedictina* 6 (St Ottilien, 1979), pp. 358-60, 485-87, T. Vogtherr, 'Visbek, Münster, Halberstadt: Neue Überlegungen zu Mission und Kirchenorganisation im karolingischen Sachsen', in *Archiv für Diplomatik*, 58 (2012), pp. 125-146.

⁹⁵ *Translatio s. Viti*, ed. I. Schmale-Ott (Münster, 1979), c. 3, p. 6: Sed cum omnem ordinem ecclesiasticum in illa regione tradidisset, qualiter ibidem monasticam religionem instituere potuisset, invenire nequivit; nisi tantum quod illius gentis homines quos obsides et captivos tempore conflictionis adduxerat, per monasteria Francorum distribuit, legem quoque sanctam atque monasticam institui praecepit. Denique, quia in Corbeia monasterio laudabilis eo tempore religio monachorum habebatur, multos inibi eiusmodi viros fore constituit.

⁹⁶ J. Semmler, 'Corvey und Herford in der benediktinischen Reformbewegung des 9. Jahrhunderts', in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 4 (1970), pp. 289-319, here 292.

⁹⁷ *Vita sancti Waltgeri*, ed. C.M. Raddatz (Münster, 1994), c. 17-26, pp. 70-78. On its reliability, Knibbs, *Ansgar*, pp. 64-65 and A. Cohausz, 'Der heilige Walther von Herford: ein Beitrag zur Heiligengeschichte Westfalens', in W. Tack (ed.), *Festgabe für Alois Fuchs zum 70. Geburtstage*, pp. 389-420.

⁹⁸ For a list, Ehlers, *Die Integration Sachsens*, pp. 464-65.

⁹⁹ Semmler, 'Corvey und Herford', pp. 289-319. See also Weinrich, *Wala*, and B. Kasten, *Adalhard von Corbie. Die Biographie eines karolingischen Politikers und Kloostervorstehers* (Düsseldorf, 1986).

¹⁰⁰ Wilmans (ed.), *Die Kaiserurkunden*, I, no. 7 (BM² 779), pp. 18-22.

Corvey developed into one of the most powerful and affluent monastic institutions of the realm. Following Louis' death and the division of the realm in 843, Corvey came under the protection of the East Frankish kings, who continued to heap donations, immunities and privileges on the Saxon monastery.¹⁰¹ This included the right to elect its own abbots, the right to strike its own coins, exemption from military duties and, most controversially, the right to retain the tithes from its widespread properties in Saxony, rather than surrender these to the appropriate bishoprics.¹⁰² This last privilege was partially revoked after a heated conflict with the diocese of Osnabrück in the early 890s.¹⁰³

Corvey also came to be affluent in terms of learning.¹⁰⁴ The earliest foundations for Corvey's library and school were laid by its mother-house Corbie.¹⁰⁵ Among the West-Frankish monks to move to Corvey as a teacher was Ansgar, the famous missionary of the Swedes who would later become bishop of Bremen.¹⁰⁶ By the time of his first missionary expedition ca. 830, Corvey's library must already have been considerable, for Ansgar is said to have taken 'almost forty books' with him (an unfortunate decision, as it turned out, for the entire collection was lost to pirates).¹⁰⁷ Corvey's library was further enlarged by the Saxon nobleman Gerold, who, upon retiring to the monastery after serving as palace chaplain under Louis the Pious, is said to have donated a

¹⁰¹ There survive 25 Carolingian charters for Corvey, by far the largest number of any Saxon centre. Ehlers, *Die Integration Sachsens*, p. 121.

¹⁰² Thus *Arnolphi Diplomata*, ed. P. Kehr (Berlin, 1940), no. 3, p. 7.

¹⁰³ A. Spicker-Wendt, *Die Querimonia Egilmari episcopi und die Responsio Stephani papae. Studien zu den Osnabrücker Quellen der Karolingerzeit* (Cologne, 1980) and M. Tangl, 'Forschungen zu Karolinger-Diplomen II. Die Osnabrücker Fälschungen', *Archiv für Urkundenforschung*, 2 (1909), pp. 186-326, here 218-50.

¹⁰⁴ P. Lehmann, *Corveyer Studien* (Paderborn, 1919).

¹⁰⁵ H. Wiesemeyer, 'Corbie und die Entwicklung der Corveyer Klosterschule vom 9. bis 12. Jahrhundert', *Westfälische Zeitschrift*, 113 (1963), pp. 271-282.

¹⁰⁶ Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH SS rer. Germ. 55 (Hannover, 1884), c. 6, p. 26. On Ansgar and the Swedish mission, see Knibbs, *Ansgar*, pp. 71-100 and Palmer, 'Rimbert's "Vita Anskarii"'

¹⁰⁷ Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii*, c. 10, p. 32.

magnam copiam librorum.¹⁰⁸ Gerold's substantial donation presumably included a commentary on Maccabees, personally sent to him by his friend Hrabanus Maurus,¹⁰⁹ as well as works by the ancient authors Vegetius and Aurelius Victor.¹¹⁰ Yet the Saxon monastery did not just copy and receive books. Its scriptorium also produced several notable works of its own. For the ninth century, these include at least three hagiographies (*Translatio s. Viti, Vita et Obitu Hathumodae, Translatio s. Justinii*), a short set of annals (the so-called *Annales Corbienses*), a commentary on Boethius' *De consolatione Philosophiae* and several poems in hexameter composed by Agius of Corvey.¹¹¹ It is a matter of ongoing debate whether or not Corvey was home to the Poeta Saxo, an anonymous Saxon poet who composed a five-book poem on the life and deeds of Charlemagne.¹¹² We will return to this issue in paragraph 6.7.

For now, we turn to one of the earliest texts produced at Corvey: the *Translatio s. Viti*, an account of the *translatio* of the Roman boy-martyr Vitus in 836. In fact, Vitus' remains were moved twice between 750 and 850: first from Rome to St Denis in 756, and then in 836 from St Denis to Corvey.¹¹³ This second *translatio* came about largely through the diplomatic dexterity of Corvey's abbot, Warin (r. 833-856).¹¹⁴ Warin belonged to the so-called

¹⁰⁸ K. Honselmann, *Die alten Mönchslisten und die Traditionen von Corvey*, 1 (Paderborn, 1982), p. 25, no. 50.

¹⁰⁹ Hrabanus Maurus, *Epistolae*, MGH Epistolae 5, no. 19, pp. 425-25.

¹¹⁰ Other classical authors that found their way to Corvey's library over the course of the ninth century were Tacitus, Plinius, Vergil, Martianus Capella, Orosius and Boethius. See Löwe, 'Lateinisch-christliche Kultur im karolingischen Sachsen', pp. 501-503.

¹¹¹ For an overview, Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, VI, pp. 852-874.

¹¹² G. Hüffer, *Korveier Studien: quellenkritische Untersuchung zur Karolinger-Geschichte* (Münster, 1898), pp. 19-21 and Rembold, 'The Poeta at Paderborn'.

¹¹³ For a detailed reconstruction of the *translatio*, Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 266-80.

¹¹⁴ Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 174-76. On Warin, Depreux, *Prosopographie*, pp. 394-96. The date of Warin's installation as abbot remains controversial. Following the *Translatio s. Viti*, it has often been assumed that Warin was appointed abbot of Corvey directly after the death of abbot Adalhard, so in 826. However, Karl Heinz Krüger has argued that Adalhard was first succeeded by his brother Wala, who thus came to serve as abbot of both Corbie and Corvey, see K.H. Krüger, 'Zur Nachfolgeregelung von 826 in den Klöstern Corbie und Corvey', in N. Kamp and J. Wollasch (eds.), *Tradition als historische Kraft. Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zur Geschichte des früheren Mittelalters. Festschrift Karl Hauck* (Berlin,

Ecbertiner, a powerful Franco-Saxon family that was related to the Carolingians.¹¹⁵ Much of Westphalia fell under their influence in the middle of the ninth century: his brothers Cobbo and Liudolf served as counts in the region, whilst his niece Haduwi was abbess of Herford between 858-887. As a loyal supporter of Louis the Pious, Warin had been charged in 831 with guarding the disgraced abbot Hilduin of St Denis (d. 840), who had been exiled to Corvey as a result of his involvement in the rebellion of 830.¹¹⁶ Sensing an opportunity, Warin had received the exiled abbot warmly and had gone on to intercede on his behalf with the emperor. His diplomacy had paid off, for by May 831 Hilduin had been allowed to return to his former post. With Hilduin, a notorious collector of relics, indebted to him, Warin had faced few obstacles in obtaining the bones of St Vitus, which he personally came to collect in the spring of 836.¹¹⁷

It remains unclear how long after these events the *Translatio s. Viti* was composed or by whom it was commissioned.¹¹⁸ The only certainty to be had is that its author was a monk from Corvey who had witnessed the *translatio* first hand.¹¹⁹ Irene Schmale-Ott, the most recent editor of the text, has argued that the author must have been a senior monk in 836 for him to have accompanied

1982), pp. 181-196. According to Krüger, it was only after Wala's fall from grace in 830 and Corbie and Corvey's split in 833, that Warin was appointed abbot by Louis the Pious. At that point, Warin must already have served as *magister monasticae disciplinae* in Corvey for some years, in which capacity he presumably also carried responsibility for Hilduin during his exile.

¹¹⁵ J. Fried, 'Der lange Schatten eines schwachen Herrschers: Ludwig der Fromme, die Kaiserin Judith, Pseudoisidor und andere Personen in der Perspektive neuer Fragen, Methoden und Erkenntnisse', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 284 (2007), pp. 103-138, specifically pp. 116-124 and Krüger, *Studien zur sächsischen Grafschaftsverfassung*, pp. 71-79.

¹¹⁶ Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 45, p. 462. On Hilduin, F. Lot, 'De quelques personnages du IXe siècle qui ont porté le nom de Hilduin', in Lot, *Recueil des travaux historiques*, vol. 2 (Genève, 1970), pp. 461-495 and Depreux, *Prosopographie*, pp. 250-56.

¹¹⁷ On his itinerary, Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 266-80.

¹¹⁸ On the date, Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, 6, p. 855 and I. Schmale-Ott, *Übertragung des hl. Martyrers Vitus* (Münster, 1979), pp. 20-27.

¹¹⁹ As is gathered from the following passage, *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 26, p. 60: Hactenus quae narrantur, et alia quamplurima, quae oculis perspeximus, et probatis testibus affirmantibus requisivimus, per spatium itineris, dierum scilicet viginti, per beatissimum martyrem Vitum in via gesta sunt.

Warin to St Denis.¹²⁰ She also noted his personal acquaintance with Corvey's founders Adalhard and Wala, whose chequered careers under Louis the Pious receive considerable attention in the *Translatio s. Viti*.¹²¹ This led her to conjecture that the author had been trained at Corbie as a Saxon hostage, before accompanying Adalhard and Wala to Saxony in 822. This is an enticing hypothesis, though it must be underlined that the ethnic identity of the author cannot be established with absolute certainty.¹²² He refers on several occasions to the *gens Saxonum* and goes to some lengths to paint a positive picture of this people. But he never explicitly claims membership of it. This lack of unambiguous ethnic affiliation may in itself represent a conscious literary choice. His primary audience was the community of Corvey, which was located in Saxony, but had a realm-wide outlook. The monastery's roots lay in West-Francia, its co-founder Wala was of Franco-Saxon descent, and its current abbot Warin also claimed ties to both peoples. This was the sort of audience, in other words, that would have identified with the Saxons, but not exclusively so.

While we lack a strict *terminus ante quem* for the text, it seems unlikely that it was composed after the death of abbot Warin in 856. As the man who was responsible for the *translatio*, the Ecbertiner abbot stood most to gain from commissioning a report detailing the events. Moreover, he would have known which of his companions from 836 was best qualified for the job. Warin's successor Adalgar (856-76), on the contrary, hailed from a different Saxon family. Certainly, he would have had little reason to commission a text celebrating his predecessor's greatest achievement.

The narrative structure of the *Translatio s. Viti* is not unlike that of the *Translatio s. Liborii*. It begins with the conversion of the Saxons, zooms in on the foundation of Corvey, and culminates in the transportation of the relics of St Vitus in 836. The benefits of such a narrative structure are evident by now: the local event (the *translatio*) assumes additional weight because it is presented

¹²⁰ Schmale-Ott, *Übertragung des hl. Martyrers Vitus*, pp. 11-12.

¹²¹ See also, H. Wiesemeyer, 'Die Gründung der Abtei Corvey im Lichte der *Translatio Sancti Viti*', *Westfälische Zeitschrift*, 112 (1962), pp. 245-74, here 256-60.

¹²² K. Honselmann, 'Die Annahme des Christentums durch die Sachsen im Lichte sächsischer Quellen des 9. Jahrhunderts', *Westfälische Zeitschrift*, 108 (1958), pp. 201-220, here 208.

as the culmination and fulfilment of a long-term process (i.e. the conversion of the Saxons). The *Translatio s. Viti* adds yet another layer to this Russian doll-like narrative, however. Rather than commence with the Saxon Wars, the monk from Corvey decided to start his story with the passion of Christ and the subsequent spread of Christianity. The language used to describe this development is triumphant and almost martial. The resurrection of Christ was followed by the 'triumphs of the apostles' and the 'victories of the martyrs', after which the 'enemies of peace were vanquished' and peace was restored to the Church. Thereafter, Christ's victory is said to have 'penetrated', 'seized' and 'enclosed' the peoples of the West.¹²³ First in line were the Romans. They were succeeded in due course by Langobards, Franks, Spanish, Britons and Angles. The latest people to submit to the faith, 'though compelled to do so', were the Saxons.¹²⁴

The introductory scene served a clear purpose.¹²⁵ The author integrated the Saxons, and by extension Corvey, into the venerable and ongoing narrative of Christian salvation. By doing so, he offered an explanatory framework for the Saxon conversion. The glorious spread of Christianity 'to all the corners of the earth' was not just a possibility; it was inevitable.¹²⁶ The Saxons were only the last in a long line of peoples to be triumphed over by Christ. This explanatory framework resurfaces in subsequent sections of the work. Following a digression on Vitus' first *translatio* to St Denis in 756, the narrative moves to the reign of Charlemagne.¹²⁷ His spectacular military career is attributed to divine favour:

On him the Lord bestowed such virtue and power, that he not just governed the kingdom of the Franks with vigour, but also governed many

¹²³ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 1, p. 32.

¹²⁴ See Schmale-Ott, *Übertragung des hl. Martyrers Vitus*, p. 14, n. 47, who argues that this introductory scene was inspired by the Frankish theologian and hagiographer Paschasius Radbertus (d. 865), who used similar imagery to frame his account of the passion of the martyrs Rufinus and Valerius, Paschasius Radbertus, *De passione ss. Rufini et Valerii*, ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 120 (Paris, 1852), col. 1491C-1492A.

¹²⁵ D. F. Appleby, 'Spiritual Progress in Carolingian Saxony: a Case from ninth-century Corvey', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 82 (1996), pp. 599-613, here p. 605.

¹²⁶ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 1, p. 32.

¹²⁷ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 2, pp. 32-34.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

of the barbarian nations surrounding it. Hence it came about that he not just subjugated the Saxon people, which formerly rebelled against the Franks, but that he also deserved to consecrate that people to the salutary name of Christ. For we believe that he surpassed all other Christian kings in battle for this reason, that he consecrated to Christ all those he subjugated to his rule.¹²⁸

In other words, the reason Charlemagne had been so successful on the battlefield, was because he had pursued religious goals. God had enabled his victories in order to spread Christianity among the peoples he subjugated.

In a way, the author was pursuing a similar angle here to that of the Frankish annals, which also tended to remember the Frankish wars of expansion in terms of divinely ordained triumph.¹²⁹ But the annals and Einhard had gone on to underline the exceptional nature of Charlemagne's Saxon Wars – the longest and fiercest war ever fought by the Franks. The *Translatio s. Viti*, on the other hand, downplayed this exceptionality, preferring instead to stress that the Saxons were but one of many peoples conquered and converted by Charlemagne. Even the implementation of an ecclesiastical structure in Saxony was part of a wider development.¹³⁰ After 'God had given him respite from his many enemies', Charlemagne and the magnates of his realm began to investigate 'how he could strengthen the true faith and cult *throughout his whole kingdom*' (my italics).¹³¹ It was as part of these realm-wide reforms that Charlemagne came to appoint priests and bishops in Saxony, and also sent

¹²⁸ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 3, p. 34: Cui Dominus tantam contulit virtutem atque potentiam, ut non solum Francorum regnum strenue gubernaret, sed etiam multas barbarorum gentes circumquaque subiugaret. Unde factum est, ut gentem Saxoniam quae olim contra Francos rebellabat, non solum suo dominio subegisset, sed et mellifluis Christi nomini dicare meruisset. Nam et hunc ideo prae omnibus christianis regibus potentissimum in bellis fuisse credimus, quia quos suo dominio subiugabat, Christi nomini dedicabat.

¹²⁹ See, McKitterick, *History and Memory*.

¹³⁰ Shuler, 'The Saxons Within Carolingian Christendom', p. 46.

¹³¹ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 3, pp. 34-36: convocavit omnes qui sub ditione sua erant, maiores, sacerdotes et principes, atque studiosissime quaesivit, quomodo veram fidem veramque religionem in universo regno suo firmaret.

Saxon captives and hostages to Frankish monasteries, to be educated in ‘the sacred law and monastic discipline’.¹³²

Following the reign of Charlemagne, the narrative turns to the foundation of Corvey. We remember how the Paderborner Anonymus depicted the foundation of his bishopric as a remedy against the unstable faith of his people. The *Translatio s. Viti* tells a different story: the foundation of Corvey did not bring about Saxon faith; Saxon faith helped bring about the foundation of Corvey.¹³³ This is evinced clearly by the fact that Christian Saxons are from the start involved in the monastery’s foundation. When the abbot of Corbie, Adalhard, first approached the Saxon monks in his community with the idea to build a monastery in their *patria*, they responded eagerly: one of them immediately set out for Saxony to scout for a place and secure his family’s support for the plan.¹³⁴ That the plan did not come to fruition immediately was due not to Saxon unwillingness, but to the intransigence of Carolingian politics: abbot Adalhard found himself accused by ‘pernicious men’, who temporarily ‘deprived him of office without (his) guilt and exiled him without cause’.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, a cell was constructed in 815 at a place called Hethis.¹³⁶ The circumstances of living at that place were distinctly unfavourable, ‘yet the

¹³² *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 3, p. 36.

¹³³ In emphasising the Saxon participation in the foundation of Corvey, the *Translatio s. Viti* may have tried to offer an alternative reading to that provided by Paschasius Radbertus, Warin’s former teacher at Corbie, in his *Epitaphium Arsenii*. The first part of his work is thought to have been published soon after Wala’s death in 836 and to have been addressed also to the community of Corvey. In this part of the text, Paschasius showed Corvey’s foundation to have been brought about by the pious endeavours of Adalhard and especially Wala. See Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, ed. E. Dümmmler, *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin*, 2 (1899/1900), pp. 1-98, here c. 16, pp. 44-45. I am grateful to Mayke de Jong for pointing out this passage. See furthermore on Paschasius Radbertus and his *Epitaphium Arsenii*, M. de Jong, ‘Becoming Jeremiah: Paschasius Radbertus on Wala, Himself and Others’ in R. Corradini et al. (eds.), *Ego Trouble. Authors and their Identities in the Early Middle Ages* (Vienna, 2010), pp. 185-196 and D. Ganz, ‘The “Epitaphium Arsenii” and the Opposition to Louis the Pious’, in P. Godman and R. Collins (eds.), *Charlemagne’s Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 537-550.

¹³⁴ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 3, p. 36.

¹³⁵ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 3, p. 38.

¹³⁶ On the location of Hethis, U. Kahrstedt, ‘Kloster Hethis’, *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 29 (1957), pp. 196-205.

number of monks from the noble stock of the Saxons grew daily'.¹³⁷ When Adalhard and his brother Wala eventually decided to move the community to Hörter, near the Weser (in 822), they did so with local support: 'they agreed with the bishops, counts and most noble men of that people (i.e. the Saxons) that they would tirelessly cultivate that place and construct a monastery there'.¹³⁸

The *translatio* of Vitus under abbot Warin, finally, was greeted with similar enthusiasm by the Saxon population. As soon as the saintly remains were carried into Saxony at Soest, 'a great phalanx of Saxons' rushed out to meet the holy corpse, 'appearing like an incredible army of both sexes'.¹³⁹ An even more spectacular welcome awaited the company at Corvey. The fields surrounding the monastery are said to have been littered with tents.¹⁴⁰ Saxons 'from the whole of the Saxony' had come tither 'out of piety and reverence for the blessed martyr Vitus'. These were no novices in the faith, as is clear from their virtuous conduct: 'among the multitude that had devoutly and meekly congregated there, one heard not a single shameful word and encountered neither jokes nor banter; instead they offered praise and thanks to God day and night, and Kyrie eleison was forever on their lips'.¹⁴¹

The *Translatio s. Viti* offers perhaps the most uncomplicated of all the Saxon accounts on the Saxon Wars. Problematic aspects of the Saxon past are not so much confronted or reinterpreted; they are simply left out and remain unacknowledged. The Saxon conversion is remembered as a smooth and inevitable step in the ongoing process of Christian salvation. In line with this view, Charlemagne's conquest of Saxony was merely the implementation of

¹³⁷ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 3, p. 40: Auebatur tamen cotidie numerus monachorum ex nobilissimo Saxonum genere...

¹³⁸ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 3, p. 42: Tunc inierunt consilium cum episcopis et comitibus, et cum nobilissimis viris eiusdem gentis, ut instanter eundem locum excolerent, et monasterium ibidem collocarent.

¹³⁹ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 22, p. 58.

¹⁴⁰ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 27, p. 62.

¹⁴¹ *Translatio s. Viti*, c. 27, p. 62: inter ipsam denique multitudinem tam devotissime et humiliter concurrentium nullum ibi verbum turpe auditor, nullus iocus aut scurrilitas invenietur, sed die noctuque Deo laudes et grates referentur, semper in ore ipsorum Kyrie eleison habetur...

divine will. In the *Translatio s. Viti*, the spread of Christianity is not a struggle, but a glorious triumph. Possibly, such confidence reflects Corvey's pre-eminent status. Its merits were widely acknowledged by the Carolingian rulers. And unlike the Saxon bishoprics, Corvey did not want for patronage.¹⁴² Here was a community for whom Saxony's incorporation into the Carolingian realm had not been a trauma but a blessing.

Vitus was not the only saint whose remains were transferred to Saxony by the Ecbertiner. In 860, Warin's niece Haduwi (d. 887) arranged for relics of the saint Pusinna to be transferred from Binson, in West-Francia, to Herford, where she was abbess. The political conditions in 860 were not as favourable for such a *translatio* as they had been in 836.¹⁴³ The death of Lothar I in 855 had disrupted the balance of power in the Carolingian realm, souring relations between the surviving brothers Charles the Bald and Louis the German. In 858, Louis, the East-Frankish king, had gone so far as to launch an invasion of his brother's West-Frankish kingdom. Charles had eventually managed to ward off the attack, but only with the greatest difficulty. The Ecbertiner at this point belonged to Louis the German's camp; Herford even stood under the king's direct protection. That Charles the Bald nevertheless consented to Haduwi's request for a *translatio* had probably to do with a family connection between the West-Frankish king and the Saxon abbess.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, both boasted ties to the Welfs, who had come to Charles' defence at a crucial moment in 859, and may have acted as negotiators for the *translatio*.¹⁴⁵ Whatever the motive for Charles' benevolence towards Haduwi, the king did more than just give his consent. The community of Binson was not at all willing to part with their relics and the

¹⁴² On the relative poverty of the Saxon bishoprics, Carroll, 'The Bishoprics of Saxony'.

¹⁴³ For a detailed report, Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 190-204.

¹⁴⁴ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, ed. R. Wilmans (Münster, 1867), c. 3, p. 542: *Erat autem aditus ad ipsum, sive consanguinitatis gratia, cum ei tertio quartoque cognationis gradu iungeretur...* Charles' Saxon grandmother Heilwig was an aunt to the Saxon count Ecbert, Haduwi's grandfather and patriarch of the Ecbertiner. See Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 65-66, Wenskus, *Sächsischer Stammesadel*, pp. 253, 345, Krüger, *Studien zur Sächsischen Grafchaftsverfassung*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁵ Thus Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 196-98.

local bishop in fact refused to sanction the *translatio*. Ignoring their wishes (and Church law), Charles had the relics ‘moved’ to his palace, where he entrusted them to Haduwi’s brother Cobbo.¹⁴⁶

Somewhere between 862 and 875, Haduwi commissioned a report on the events.¹⁴⁷ The author of this *Translatio s. Pusinnae* was almost certainly a Saxon, though his or her location remains uncertain. Considering the close ties between Herford and Corvey, Haduwi could have approached Corvey’s scriptorium for the task.¹⁴⁸ A more likely option, however, is that the author was a Saxon nun from Herford, possibly Haduwi herself.¹⁴⁹

Like the previous texts, the *Translatio s. Pusinnae* commenced with a historical prologue on the conquest and conversion of the Saxons. The author pursued a twofold strategy: first, to say as little on the matter of war as possible, and second, to underline that conquest had been a lesser and auxiliary event to the fundamental development of conversion.¹⁵⁰ A single sentence sufficed to explain all this:

The noble and vigorous people of the Saxons, endowed by nature with great acumen, and mentioned even by the writers of old, was subjected to the rule of Charles, the greatest and most glorious emperor of our time, by the shifting fortunes of war – if only with difficulty and in thirty years, because God desired it – and accepted the treaties of the Divine Word, the faith in God, and the hope for eternal blessedness.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 5, p. 543. See also Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, p. 192: ‘Angesichts der Umstände, unter denen die Transaktion stattfand kann man von einem Reliquiendiebstahl mit königlicher Unterstützung sprechen’.

¹⁴⁷ These dates derive from the fact that the text refers to Badurad (d. 862) as a *former* bishop of Paderborn, whereas Charles the Bald, who was crowned emperor in December 875, is still referred to as a *rex*. See Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, VI, p. 868.

¹⁴⁸ K. Honselmann ‘Gedanken sächsischer Theologen des 9. Jahrhunderts über die Heiligenverehrung’, *Westfalen*, 40 (1962), pp. 38-43, here p. 39. For the connection between the two religious centres, Semmler, ‘Corvey and Herford’.

¹⁴⁹ Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 109-115.

¹⁵⁰ Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, p. 108-19.

¹⁵¹ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 1, p. 541: *Nobilis et strenua, iuxtaque dotem naturae sagacissima gens Saxonum, ab antiquis etiam scriptoribus memorata, summi et gloriosissimi nostra memoria*

This, indeed, is all the *Translatio s. Pusinnae* has to say about Charlemagne and the *bellum Saxonicum*: a divinely ordained war that had brought an old and venerable people into its rightful inheritance, that is, Christianity. There is no room here for detailed descriptions of battles and bloodshed; nor for the Franks and their missionary allies.¹⁵² Even Charlemagne's agency is kept to a bare minimum. Yes, the 'greatest emperor of our time' had brought the Saxons under his rule, if with great difficulty. But the most important act – the decision to accept Christianity – had been nobody's but the Saxons.

It made for a bold move to invoke the protracted nature of the Saxon Wars as evidence for the nobility of the Saxons. But the Herford nun must have known it led her onto thin ice. Frankish war narratives had consistently explained the length of the war in terms of Saxon infidelity. Their continuing circulation in the ninth century ensured that this explanation remained as potent as ever. How to proceed in the face of this lingering accusation: stone-faced denial, like the *Translatio s. Viti*, or careful reinterpretation, like the Paderborner Anonymus? As it turned out, the nun from Herford went for a third option: writing a well-argued refutation. She focused on the conversion of the Saxons, which she explained in the following manner:

Indeed, this people turned to the true faith rather stiffly at first, because they were held back by ancient rites and it seemed sinful to ascribe error to ancestral ceremonies [...] For he who strives to renounce the religious customs passed on to him by his ancestors, implies that they were wrong and that he himself discovered the truth. But whether this tendency should be called rigidity, stubbornness or perversity, or whether an another designation is more fitting – inborn wisdom and a noble and sharp disposition responsive to all subtleties – this tendency was weakened by

imperatoris Caroli auspiciis varia sorte bellorum vix per triginta annos Deo volente subdita, verbi divini foedera, et fidem in Deum et spem beatitudinis suscepit aeternae.

¹⁵² As observed by Shuler, 'The Saxons within Carolingian Christendom', p. 47.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

fitting insights and examples; and subsequently [it was] broken and vanquished by valid arguments and proofs, as if by siege engines.¹⁵³

The above passage went a long way towards neutralizing the accusation of Saxon *perfidia*.¹⁵⁴ Their hesitance to embrace Christianity had not been vested in deceit or infidelity, but in loyalty to ancient customs. In fact, following the above line of reasoning, it would have been a sign of Saxon fickleness and infidelity had they immediately swapped their old customs for new ones. The prudent line of action was caution; and the Saxons, a wise and prudent people, had adopted that line. The author's subsequent explanation of the Saxon conversion was equally laudatory. That the Saxons eventually decided to embrace Christianity was due not to force or outside pressure, but to their own reasoning and conviction. They gradually abandoned their resistance against the true faith in the face of proofs and examples. This was exactly the sort of conversion which Pope Gregory the Great had advocated for the mission to the Anglo-Saxons and which Alcuin of York had later come to reiterate in his letters to Charlemagne: slow, voluntary and based on reasoning and instruction.¹⁵⁵ It is safe to say that the actual Saxon conversion had failed to live up to this ideal. But this is how the Saxon community of Herford wished to remember it.

Following the conversion of the Saxons, the narrative zooms in on the foundation and rise of Herford, the author's own community.¹⁵⁶ The Ecbertiner play a prominent role in this section of the text; so prominent, in

¹⁵³ *Translatio s. Pussinæ*, c. 1, p. 541: Haec primo quidem duriuscule ad divinam fidem accessit, quoniam antiquis ritibus tenebatur, et nefas videbatur maiorum ceremoniis errorem ascribere, quod videlicet fiebat novorum sacrorum susceptione, et veterum rituum abdicacione. Qui enim ceremoniis a maioribus sibi traditis renuntiare contendit, errasse eos, se vero veritatem invenisse, tacite confitetur. Sed illa sive duritia sive pertinacia, sive perversitas dicenda est, sive alio quolibet nomine convenientius appellanda, prudentia naturali et ingenio ad omnem subtilitatem nobilissimo et acutissimo, rationibus commodis et exemplis labefacta, post etiam argumentis et approbationibus validis, quasi quibusdam muralibus machinis, infracta et expugnata est.

¹⁵⁴ Shuler, 'The Saxons Within Carolingian Christendom', p. 48; Beumann, 'Die Hagiographie "bewältigt"', pp. 156-57.

¹⁵⁵ Gregory the Great, *Registrum Gregorii*, ed. L.M. Hartmann, MGH Epp. 2 (Berlin, 1899), 11, no. 37, pp. 308-309; Alcuin, *Epistolae*, ed. Dümmler, no. 110, pp. 157-59. See also Beumann, 'Die Hagiographie "bewältigt"', pp. 156-57.

¹⁵⁶ *Translatio s. Pussinæ*, cc. 2-3, p. 542.

fact, that the narrative appears to assume the character of a family history.¹⁵⁷ The author is particularly concerned with validating the family's ties to Herford and Corvey. Herford's original Saxon founder Waltger is conveniently left out of the story. Instead, Herford is said to have been founded by Adalhard and Wala at the same time the brothers founded Corvey.¹⁵⁸ Their appointment of Warin as first abbot of Corvey is presented as a fateful moment, by which the monastery secured the protection and patronage of an illustrious aristocratic family: Warin's father Ecbert was a powerful count and duke in Saxony;¹⁵⁹ his mother Ida was of the highest birth, whilst her brothers were also *clarissimi viri*, who stood out not just among the Saxons, but also in other parts of the realm.¹⁶⁰ Warin's elevation paid off: it was through his efforts that Corvey soon received the bones of the martyr Vitus.¹⁶¹

The text repeatedly emphasises the family's ties to the Carolingians, and always in a context where these ties can be seen to benefit Herford. It is evident from the start that Pusinna's *translatio* made for a difficult enterprise. That abbess Haduwi was nevertheless able to obtain Charles the Bald's support, was due entirely to her royal connections: 'for she had easy access to him (i.e. Charles the Bald) partly on account of their blood-relationship, because she was related to him in the third and fourth line, partly because her elders had enjoyed the close intimacy and liberality of said prince'.¹⁶² This was not the only wrinkle Haduwi's *Königsnähe* helped smooth over. The author explains how Haduwi had initially refrained from informing the bishop of her diocese of her plans to transport relics to Herford, allegedly because she did not think the

¹⁵⁷ Röckelein, 'Das Gewebe der Schriften', pp. 23-24.

¹⁵⁸ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 2, p. 542.

¹⁵⁹ On Ecbert's 'ducal' dignity, Becher, *Rex, Dux, Gens* pp. 121-22.

¹⁶⁰ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 2: Quo in monasterio primus abbas ab iisdem venerabilibus institutus est Warinus, nobilissimo genere propagatus: fuit enim genitus Echberto clarissimo comite et duce, matre splendidissima, nomine Ida, tam naturae muneribus et generositatis, quam elegantia morum, cuius fratres adaeque clarissimi viri, magnis dignitatibus illustres et apud exteros et apud domesticos enituerunt. See on this passage, Fried, 'Der lange Schatten', pp. 120-22.

¹⁶¹ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 4, p.

¹⁶² *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 3, p. 542: Erat autem ei aditus facilis ad ipsum, sive consanguinitatis gratia, cum ei tertio quartoque cognationis gradu iungeretur, sive quod maiores eius multa familiaritate ac liberalitate memorati principis usi essent...

translatio had much chance of succeeding.¹⁶³ This did not sit well with the bishop in question, who appears to have threatened to appropriate the relics before they reached Herford: ‘had it not been for her proximity to the ruler and the large crowd of bishops and magnates [accompanying the *translatio*], neither the bishop of her diocese nor the populace would have tolerated to be robbed of such a heavenly treasure’.¹⁶⁴ Only after the relics had been secured, did Haduwi approach the bishop for permission, who refused at first, but rethought his decision and gave his consent later on.

Though the bishop is never mentioned by name, he must have been none other than Badurad of Paderborn (d. 862). As the head of Herford’ diocese, his had not only been the formal right to approve of the *translatio*, but also the duty to personally accept the relics when they first entered his diocese.¹⁶⁵ There are several reasons why Haduwi might have opted to leave Badurad in the dark about her plans. Family rivalry is one of them; the uneasy balance of power between a heavily patronized royal convent and its nominal ecclesiastical superior is another. She may also have feared that Badurad would not suffer a potential rival saint in the vicinity of the cult of Liborius and decided that it was better to ask for forgiveness than ask for permission.¹⁶⁶ Whatever Haduwi’s motives may have been, the author of the *Translatio s. Pusinnae* had a clear purpose in rehearsing this highly suggestive story: to signal that the Ecbertiner were able to defend Herford’s interests against episcopal interference.

Though the structure of the *Translatio s. Pusinnae* is similar to the previous two texts, the views underlying it are not. This is perhaps most evident from the author’s unusual approach to the actual *translatio*. The text offers no description of the relics’ itinerary. Nor does it report any miracles that occurred on the way. This was an unorthodox choice, as miracles were testimony to the

¹⁶³ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 8, pp. 544-45.

¹⁶⁴ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 8, p. 545: Et profecto nisi vicinitas principis et frequentia episcoporum ac procerum affuisset, neque episcopus parochiae illius neque populi multitudo pateretur caelesti thesauro se spoliari.

¹⁶⁵ Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, p. 196.

¹⁶⁶ H. Röckelein, ‘Eliten markieren den sächsischen Raum als christlichen: Bremen, Halberstadt und Herford (8.-11. Jahrhundert)’, in P. Depreux (ed.), *Les élites et leurs espaces. Mobilité, Rayonnement, Domination* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 273-298, here 294-95.

saint's mediating powers and essential to his or her cult. They also signalled that the saint approved of the *translatio*. Still, the Herford nun openly disavowed that any miracles had taken place during the *translatio*.¹⁶⁷ This is not to say that she discounted the possibility of miracles altogether. In fact, plenty had occurred when Pusinna had still been among the Franks in Bison, and some had happened thereafter in Herford. Yet as the author was happy to explain to the 'less educated' (*minus studiosos*) lambasting the fact that Pusinna had worked no miracles on her way to Saxony: *signa magis infidelibus quam fidelibus necessaria sunt*, 'the unfaithful require miracles more than the faithful'.¹⁶⁸ As she went on to explain: God allows miracles to rouse the minds of the unfaithful from their sleep and keep them vigilant thereafter. Steadfast believers, on the contrary, do not need them, for they know that miracles merely testify to the presence of sanctity; they do not transfer this sanctity to the witness.¹⁶⁹ Virtue, charity and orthodoxy are the true keys to a mature Christian life.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, church fathers like Jerome and Augustine had raised no one from the dead, but their dogmatic works had saved untold numbers from a spiritual death. Though the gist of this audacious theological parenthesis is clear, it is not easy to decode the politics underlying it. Most modern scholars take this closing passage to refer to the Saxons as a whole. The author used the lack of miracles during Pusinna's *translatio* to underscore once more that the Saxons were model Christians, more so even than the Franks. The former pagans had surpassed their conquerors in piety and Christian virtue.¹⁷¹ But considering the problems which Pusinna's *translatio* had already caused between Herford and its bishopric, we could also envision a more local context of inter-Saxon rivalry. The author was defending Herford and its new saint against rival cults like that of Liborius, by taking potential or actual detractors to task about the true meaning of miracles. The legitimacy of Pusinna's transfer to Herford was not in

¹⁶⁷ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 9, p. 545.

¹⁶⁸ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 11, p. 546.

¹⁶⁹ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 11, p. 546: Qui autem in soliditate fidei constant, illud fixum tenent, miracula sanctitatem plerumque ostendere, non etiam facere...

¹⁷⁰ Appleby, 'Spiritual Progress', pp. 608-612; Honselmann 'Gedanken sächsischer Theologen', p. 43.

¹⁷¹ Shuler, 'The Saxons Within Carolingian Christendom', p. 48.

any way compromised by a lack of miracles. Rather, this confirmed that Herford was a community of true believers.

Like the previous texts under consideration, the *Translatio s. Pusinnae* combined local with Saxon history. Its narrative of the Saxon Wars offered an intelligent rebuttal of the Frankish accusation of Saxon *perfidia*, whilst at the same time showing the Saxons to have been the main agents behind their own conversion. This positive portrayal of Saxon virtue and fidelity served as a prelude to the rise of Corvey and the author's own community of Herford. Here, the text acted as a family history of sorts. The point was to make the rise of Corvey and Herford more or less synonymous with the abbacies of the Ecbertiner Warin and Haduwi. It was this family, with its eminent lineage and court connections, that had obtained the relics of Vitus and Pusinna. It was this family, also, that could protect Herford from episcopal interference. The underlying message was clear. Both Corvey and Herford had thrived under the influence of the Ecbertiner. The way forward for these communities was also through this family.

5.6. Carolingian counts, founding families: Hessi and Widukind

Saxons did not just serve as abbots and abbesses in royal monasteries. They also founded monastic communities of their own. Ninth-century Saxony witnessed a veritable explosion of aristocratic foundations, in particular of female communities.¹⁷² Not all of these communities were 'monasteries' in the strict sense of the word. While most male communities in Saxony appear to have lived according to the rule of St Benedict (monasteries proper), the vast majority of female communities had a canonical character.¹⁷³ The foundation of

¹⁷² C. Ehlers, 'Franken und Sachsen gründen Klöster: Beobachtungen zu Integrationsprozessen des 8.-10. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel von Essen, Gandersheim und Quedlinburg', in M. Hoernes and H. Röckelein (eds.), *Gandersheim und Essen: Vergleichende Untersuchungen zu sächsischen Frauenstiften* (Essen, 2006), pp. 11-31.

¹⁷³ Ehlers, *Die Integration Sachsens*, p. 200. For a critical view on the distinction between monastic and canonical female communities, I. Crusius, "Sanctimoniales quae se canonicas vocant". Das Kanonissenstift als Forschungsproblem', in Crusius (ed.), *Studien zum Kanonissenstift* (Göttingen, 2001), pp. 9-38.

a religious community served various purposes. For one, it was a way to invest in one's salvation. After the founder's death, the community was expected to continue to pray for the founder's soul, easing his or her way into heaven. Depending on whether the founding family retained proprietary rights (a so-called 'Eigenkirche'), endowing a foundation with lands was also a convenient way to keep such lands in the family and protect them from appropriation by outsiders.¹⁷⁴ Often, the founding family also retained the right to appoint an abbot or abbess, enabling them to make suitable arrangements for their (widowed) daughters and sons.

While these aristocratic foundations did not usually develop schools and scriptoria like Corvey, they did contribute to the ninth-century textual record, by commissioning foundation histories and reports on the transportation of relics. Two important ninth-century hagiographies – the *Vita Liutbirgae* and the *Translatio s. Alexandri* – can be traced back to a Saxon aristocratic foundation. We will look at these two texts in turn.

The *Vita Liutbirgae* was written in the second half of the ninth century for the convent of Wendeshausen, in the Harz region. This convent was founded ca. 820-30 by the descendants of Hessi or Hassio, an Eastphalian nobleman who had been active during the Saxon Wars.¹⁷⁵ Hessi is one of the few Saxons mentioned by name in the eighth-century annals. The ARF reports how in 775 Hessi headed a group of Eastphalian Saxons (*Austreleudi Saxones*) who surrendered to Charlemagne at the river Oker.¹⁷⁶ Following his surrender, Hessi converted to Christianity and was eventually made a count in Saxony. In his old age, the Saxon retired to Fulda, 'to soldier for the Lord', where he died in

¹⁷⁴ On the terminology, C. Moddelmog, 'Stiftung oder Eigenkirche?: Der Umgang mit Forschungskonzepten und die sächsischen Frauenklöster im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert', in F. Rexroth, Frank and W. Huschner (eds.), *Gestiftete Zukunft im mittelalterlichen Europa. Festschrift für Michael Borgolte zum 60. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 215-243. See more generally, S. Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2006),

¹⁷⁵ On Hessi and his family, Wenskus, *Sächsischer Stammesadel*, pp. 178-181, Krüger, *Studien zur Sächsischen Grafschaftsverfassung*, pp. 84-89.

¹⁷⁶ ARF, s.a. 775, p. 40: *Ibi omnes Austreleudi Saxones venientes cum Hassione et dederunt obsides, iuxta quod placuit, et iuraverunt sacramenta, se fideles esse partibus supradicti domni Caroli regis.*

804.¹⁷⁷ Hessi was survived only by daughters. The eldest was named Gisela, a typically Carolingian name, which could indicate that Gisela's mother – Hessi's wife – was related to the royal family.¹⁷⁸ Under Gisela, the family rose to further prominence in Carolingian Saxony. She married the Saxon count Unwan, but survived her husband by several decades. Between 820 and 830, she used her father's patrimony to found two convents, one in Francia, the other in Saxony. The latter was Wendhausen.¹⁷⁹ Her widowed daughter Biliheld became the convent's first abbess. Her son Bernhard, another count, was named Gisela's heir, and the convent's protector.

At that point, Gisela had already adopted into her household and family a girl named Liutbirga, who was probably a relation of her late husband.¹⁸⁰ Following Gisela's death, Liutbirga took the veil and retired to a cell near Wendhausen, where she spent her last thirty years praying and fasting in self-imposed confinement. She thus became the first known anchoress on Saxon soil. Her piety quickly gained her a reputation as a typical holy woman, who could offer advice, heal the sick, conduct exorcisms and mediate in local disputes.¹⁸¹ Liutbirga's fame rubbed off on Wendhausen and its founding family, who actively sought to perpetuate her memory. Soon after Liutbirga's death ca. 870, the community of Wendhausen commissioned a life of its

¹⁷⁷ He is mentioned in the *Annales Necrologici Fuldenses*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH SS 13 (Hanover, 1881), pp. 166, 169. On the *Annales Necrologici*, J.E. Raaijmakers, 'Memory and Identity: the *Annales necrologici* of Fulda', in Corradini et al (eds.), *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 303-322

¹⁷⁸ F. Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess in Ninth-century Saxony: the Lives of Liutbirga of Wendhausen and Hathumoda of Gandersheim* (Washington, DC, 2009), pp. 29-30, Wenskus, *Sächsischer Stammesadel*, p. 178, Krüger, *Studien zur Sächsischen Grafschaftsverfassung*, p. 87.

¹⁷⁹ On Wendhausen, H.A. Behrens, and B. Behrens, *Kloster Wendhusen. 1: Die erste Adelsstiftung in Ostfalen und das Leben der Klausnerin Liutbirg* (Thale, 2009).

¹⁸⁰ Thus Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*.

¹⁸¹ On Liutbirga, V.L. Carver, 'Learned Women? Liutberga and the Instruction of Carolingian Women', in P. Wormald and J.L. Nelson (eds.), *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 121-138; S.F. Wemple, 'Late Ninth-Century Saints, Hathumoda and Liutberga', in E.R. Elder (ed.), *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Essays in Honor of Jean Leclercq* (Kalamazoo, 1995), pp. 33-47. See furthermore, J.M.H. Smith, 'The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c. 780-920', *Past and Present*, 146 (1995), pp. 3-37. On the function of holy men/women, P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971), pp. 80-101.

famous recluse. This *vita Liutbirgae* appears to have been completed before 876.¹⁸² It is uncertain where or by whom the text was composed. One possible option is Wendhausen itself, which would suggest a female author.¹⁸³ However, most scholars incline towards either Halberstadt, which was Wendhausen's episcopal centre, or Fulda, a monastery obviously familiar to Hessi's descendants and also among the leading centres for the writing of hagiography in that period.¹⁸⁴ While the author of the text need not necessarily have been Saxon, its audience certainly was. As Frederick Paxton has pointed out, the *Vita Liutbirgae* catered to two, overlapping, audiences.¹⁸⁵ The first was the congregation at Wendhausen, where the text would have been read out aloud during meals and liturgical services.¹⁸⁶ The second audience were Hessi's descendants – Gisela's son Bernhard and his family – for whom the text would have served as a family history.

In line with these audiences, the *Vita Liutbirgae* appears to interweave two stories. The brunt of the text deals with Liutbirga, whose exemplary life and accomplishments are held up as a model of virtuous conduct. This section is preceded, however, by an extensive account of Wendhausen's founding family, starting with its rise to prominence under Charlemagne. The *vita's* very first lines read as follows:

Emperor Charles the Great, who was the first in Germania to assume the title of Caesar Augustus, subjected many nations to the kingdom of the Franks. Among the many he acquired at that time was the most noble and powerful nation of the Saxons, which he obtained and converted from their pagan customs to the Christian faith, partly through wars, partly through

¹⁸² *Vita Liutbirgae*, ed. O. Menzel, *Das Leben der Liutbirg. Eine Quelle zur Geschichte der Sachsen in karolingischer Zeit*, MGH Dt. MA 3 (Leipzig, 1937). An English translation can be found in Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*.

¹⁸³ R. McKitterick, 'Women and Literacy in the Early Middle Ages', in McKitterick (ed.), *Books, Scribes and Learning in the Frankish Kingdoms 6th-9th Centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), p. 28.

¹⁸⁴ Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, pp. 16-20; L.J. Samons II, 'The Vita Liutbirgae', *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 43 (1992), pp. 272-286 and O. Menzel, 'Das Leben der Liutbirg', *Sachsen und Anhalt*, 13 (1937), pp. 78-89.

¹⁸⁵ Paxton, *Anchoress and Abbess*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁶ Thus Menzel, *Das Leben der Liutbirg*, p. 5.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

his character and his great diligence and acumen, and also through great gifts. A certain man named Hessi, who was among the first and most noble of that people, he invested with comital office together with many others; and he sustained him with great honours, because he had found him faithful in all matters.¹⁸⁷

Once again, we find a Saxon hagiographical account commence with the Saxon Wars. The decision is not without significance: for a Christian family like that of Hessi, the pre-conquest past could be forgotten; it was Saxony's transformation into a Carolingian and Christian province that stood at the roots of their current circumstances and was thus truly memorable. That said, the *Vita Liutbirgae* offers a very selective reading of this transformation. One is struck immediately by the positive appraisal of the Saxon people: they are characterized not by infidelity or some other damning epithet, but by their great nobility and strength, which placed them above the other *gentes* subjugated by Charlemagne. Equally striking is the explicit reference to Charlemagne's imperial credentials. In reality, the Frankish king had obtained this dignity a good twenty-eight years after his first foray into Saxony. If anything, his coronation in Rome had been the conclusion of, rather than a prelude to, his carving out of a multi-ethnic empire. Yet the invocation of the title in the *Vita Liutbirgae* was anything but arbitrary. It signalled that the Saxons had not been subdued by just any neighbouring people, but by an

¹⁸⁷ *Vita Liutbirgae*, c. 1, p. 10: Temporibus imperatoris Magni Karoli, qui primus in Germaniae partibus augusti caesaris nomen adeptus est, qui multas gentes Francorum regno subiugavit, et inter quam plurimas eo tempore nobilissimam ac praepotentem viribus gentem Saxonum partim bellis, partim ingenio suo ac magnae sagacitatis industria, insuper etiam magnis muneribus acquisivit, ex paganico ritu christianae religioni subiugavit, quendam inter primores et nobilissimos gentis illius, nomine Hessi, cum aliis quam plurimis, quibus comitatum dederat, magnis etiam sustentavit honoribus, quia fidelem sibi in cunctis repererat.

imperator, the very embodiment of a ruler who ruled over many peoples.¹⁸⁸ This went a long way towards making conquest acceptable.¹⁸⁹

Even more important are the means by which Charlemagne accomplished Saxony's subjugation. As in most hagiographical accounts of the Saxon Wars, violence is downplayed in favour of other means of persuasion, such as the liberal bestowment of benefices and honours.¹⁹⁰ Here, the story of the Saxon nation is made to converge into the story of Wendhausen's patriarch Hessi. His decoration with comital office by Charlemagne is a distinct source of pride to the author of the *vita*, as is the underlying cause of Charlemagne's largess: Hessi's unquestionable fidelity to the emperor (*quia fidelem sibi in cunctis repererat*). One final detail should not elude us: the *Vita Liutbirgae* preferred to remember Hessi as a Saxon rather than an Eastphalian noble. Apparently, the Saxon subgroups listed in the eighth-century annals held little meaning to Hessi's descendants in the 870s, who instead thought of themselves as members of the *gens Saxonum*. We have seen above that they were not alone in this preference.

The history of Hessi and his family shows us the successive stages of Saxon elite integration into the Carolingian realm. First, there is the Saxon leader Hessi, whose surrender to Charlemagne during the Saxon Wars brought him titles, property, and possibly, a marriage into the Carolingian family. Second, there is Hessi's daughter Gisela, who used her father's inheritance to found the convent of Wendhausen, which became home to the first anchoress on Saxon soil. Finally, there is the *Vita Liutbirgae*, composed ca. 870 for the extended community of Wendhausen, which preferred to remember the Saxon Wars not as a trauma, but as a defining moment in the past. On a general level, the

¹⁸⁸ On the terminology, D. van Espelo, 'A Testimony of Carolingian Rule? The Codex epistolaris carolinus, Its Historical Context, and the Meaning of imperium', *Early Medieval Europe*, 21 (2013), pp. 271-79, D.A. Bullough, 'Empire and Emperordom from Late Antiquity to 799', *Early Medieval Europe*, 12 (2004), pp. 377-387, H. Beumann, 'Nomen imperatoris. Studien zur Kaiseridee Karls des Großen', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 185 (1958), pp. 515-549.

¹⁸⁹ A century later, the Saxon historian Widukind of Corvey would use the very same strategy. Widukind of Corvey, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum Libri Tres*, ed. P. Hirsch and H.-E. Lohmann, MGH SS rer. Germ. 60 (Hanover, 1935), c. 15, p. 25.

¹⁹⁰ On this, Beumann, 'Die Hagiographie "bewältigt"'.

period 772-804 had witnessed the conversion and incorporation of the *gens Saxonum*. On a more local level, the period had introduced Wendhausen's founding family to the benefits of Carolingian patronage. Both developments were worth commemorating.

Hessi was not the only Saxon leader whose family history became the object of Saxon hagiography. Something similar happened with another, more famous eighth-century Saxon: Widukind. To be sure, Widukind's history is rather more complex than that of Hessi. His protracted struggle against Charlemagne, followed by his dramatic surrender and conversion at Attigny, have appealed strongly to the medieval and modern imagination. Over the course of the centuries, his life and deeds have been subjected to a steady stream of readings and claims. He has been commemorated as a Christian saint, a pagan hero, a Muslim invader, a church-founder, a proto-German and an anti-French activist.¹⁹¹ Yet in spite of his formidable *Nachleben*, no reliable account survives of what transpired after Widukind's baptism in 785. In the ARF and other contemporary annals, he simply disappears from the narrative after his surrender.¹⁹² It seems reasonable to deduce from this that the Westphalian noble kept his peace during the renewed Saxon rebellions of 792-804, but in what sort of condition is far from evident. Some have argued that Charlemagne must have come to employ his former adversary as a count in Saxony.¹⁹³ Others

¹⁹¹ See for an exhaustive overview of Widukind's reception up till the early twentieth century, E. Rundnagel, 'Der Mythos vom Herzog Widukind', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 155 (1937), pp. 233-277, 475-505. For Widukind's controversial reputation in Nazi Germany, W. Zöllner, *Karl oder Widukind? Martin Lintzel und die NS-"Geschichtsdeutung" in den Anfangsjahren der faschistischen Diktatur*, Wissenschaftliche Beiträge Halle 10 (Halle a. d. Saale, 1975) and more recently, P. Lambert, 'Duke Widukind and Charlemagne in Twentieth-Century Germany. Myths of Origins and Constructs of National Identity', in C. Raudvere, K. Stala and T.S. Willert (eds.), *Rethinking the Space for Religion* (Lund, 2012), pp. 97-125.

¹⁹² A treatment regularly dished out to political opponents; see for instance S. Airlie, 'Narratives of Triumph and Rituals of Submission: Charlemagne's Mastering of Bavaria', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Series 6, 9 (1999), pp. 115-8.

¹⁹³ Krüger, *Studien zur Sächsischen Grafschaftsverfassung*, p. 94. In support of this argument, attention is often drawn to the acts of an episcopal synod held at Koblenz in 922. The acts show the attending bishops laying claim to the tithes from the property belonging to Widukind and his descendants. Widukind is referred to as *antiquus comes vel dux*, MGH Concilia 6.1, no. 4, c. 16, p. 72.

have stressed, rightly in my opinion, that a comital appointment would have constituted a remarkably lenient treatment of an enemy of Widukind's stature.¹⁹⁴ Charlemagne did not usually suffer potential rivals to retain power upon defeat, as is evinced by the treatment dished out to Widukind's contemporaries Desiderius and Tassilo: following their surrender in 774 and 788 respectively, both spent their remaining days within the confines of a monastery.¹⁹⁵ It is not unlikely that Charlemagne made similar arrangements for his most formidable Saxon foe.

Gerd Althoff has argued that Widukind retired to the Bavarian monastery of Reichenau, at Lake Constance.¹⁹⁶ He pointed to a ninth-century confraternity list from Reichenau that mentions an unordained monk named *Uuituchind*, who entered the monastery somewhere in the 780s and died after the list was drawn up in 825. Considering that the name Widukind was uncommon in the ninth century, this list could well have referred to the famous rebel leader, though it would mean that he lived to an exceptionally old age. Alternatively, the monk in question was a relative, perhaps one of Widukind's sons.¹⁹⁷

While Widukind's fate thus remains unsure, we do know that his descendants retained (or regained) positions of power in Carolingian Saxony.¹⁹⁸ His son Wikbert was a *fidelis* of Lothar I.¹⁹⁹ In 834, he donated several estates in Frisia to the Church of St Martin in Utrecht for the salvation of his soul and

¹⁹⁴ Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 197, Althoff, 'Der Sachsenherzog Widukind', p. 255.

¹⁹⁵ For Tassilo's monastic exile, M. de Jong, 'What Was Public About Public Penance? Paenitentia publica and Justice in the Carolingian world', in *La Giustizia Nell'alto Medioevo, Secoli IX-XI*, Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 44 (1997), pp. 880-82; for Desiderius, S. Gasparri, 'The Fall of the Lombard Kingdom: Facts, Memory and Propaganda', Gasparri (ed.), *774. Ipotesi su una Transizione* (Turnhout, 2008), pp. 41-66.

¹⁹⁶ Althoff, 'Der Sachsenherzog Widukind'.

¹⁹⁷ Springer, *Die Sachsen*, p. 198.

¹⁹⁸ Above all K. Schmid, 'Die Nachfahren Widukinds', *Deutsches Archiv*, 20 (1964), pp. 1-47. See also Ehlers, *Die Integration Sachsens*, pp. 164-170, Wenskus, *Sächsischer Stammesadel*, pp. 115-177 and Krüger, *Studien zur Sächsischen Grafchaftsverfassung*, pp. 90-95.

¹⁹⁹ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, ed. Krusch (Göttingen, 1933), c. 4, p. 427.

that of son Waltbert.²⁰⁰ This Waltbert, who was Widukind's grandson, was educated at Lothar's court and later held comital office.²⁰¹ Early in the 850s, he founded the collegiate church of Wildeshausen in Westphalia.²⁰² With Lothar's support, Waltbert also travelled to Rome to obtain relics for his new foundation.²⁰³ Pope Leo IV received the Saxon count favourably and offered him the remains of the Roman saint Alexander. Following Lothar's death in 855, the family transferred its allegiance to Louis the German. Waltbert's son Wikbert II served as a chaplain at Louis' court.²⁰⁴ In 874, Wikbert became bishop of Verden, prompting somewhat of a family tradition where episcopal appointments were concerned. By the end of the tenth century, Widukind's descendants had served as bishops in four Saxon dioceses (Verden, Hildesheim, Hamburg-Bremen and Osnabrück) and at least two non-Saxon ones (Trier and Metz).²⁰⁵

By that time, the East-Frankish kingdom had already passed from the Carolingians to a local Saxon dynasty, the Ottonians (919-1024).²⁰⁶ Interestingly, the new ruling family also claimed a connection to Widukind, through queen Matilda (d. 968), wife of Henry the Fowler (d. 936) and mother of Otto I (d. 973). Matilda's precise relationship to Widukind remains disputed. She belonged to the so-called Immedinger, a family that could

²⁰⁰ The charter survives in the same ms. as the *Annales Xantenses*, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hanover, 1829), p. 217.

²⁰¹ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 4, p. 427. He is also listed among the counts standing witness to a donation made by Louis the German to the Saxon convent of Herford on 25 April 859, MGH DD LD, no. 95, pp. 137.

²⁰² In 871, Wildeshausen was granted immunity by Louis the German, MGH DD LD, no. 142, p. 199. A year later, in 872, Waltbert and his wife Alburg arranged for their son Wikbert to inherit Wildeshausen upon their death. From then onwards, the church was to pass on to the closest male relative who had received clerical tonsure, Wilmans (ed.), *Die Kaiserurkunden*, no. 4a, pp. 532-34. On these arrangements and Wildeshausen's collegiate status, Schmid, 'Die Nachfahren Widukinds', pp. 2-8.

²⁰³ Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 241-43.

²⁰⁴ He is referred to as a *diaconus regis* in two of Louis the German's charters, MGH DD LD, no. 142, p. 199 and no. 153, p. 215.

²⁰⁵ Schmid, 'Die Nachfahren Widukinds', pp. 36-37. See also, Ehlers, 'Sachsen als sächsische Bischöfe', p. 103.

²⁰⁶ Becher, *Rex, Dux, Gens*, pp. 195-250.

probably trace back its ancestry to Widukind's son-in-law Abbio.²⁰⁷ Ottonian historians and hagiographers eagerly embraced the connection, though they went to some lengths to downplay Widukind's subordination to the Carolingians and to fashion him into a proto-Ottonian instead.²⁰⁸ Widukind had been a Saxon king;²⁰⁹ his baptismal father had not been Charlemagne but saint Boniface (d. 754);²¹⁰ and much like his Ottonian descendants, Widukind had been a zealous founder of churches.²¹¹ Many of the myths surrounding Widukind in later times had their roots in Ottonian image-making.

Widukind's ninth-century descendants were not as eager to write about the Saxon Wars and lay claim to Widukind's legacy as the Ottonians. The sole exception was Widukind's grandson Walbert, the Saxon count who had gone to Rome to obtain relics for his new foundation of Wildeshausen. He subsequently commissioned an account of his journey and the miraculous events surrounding it, known today as the *Translatio s. Alexandri*. While this text has already received considerable attention in the introduction of this thesis, a short recap of the text's contents and circumstances of composition seems in order.²¹² At some point after (or during) his return from Rome in 851, Walbert approached the monastery of Fulda for a *Translationsbericht*. The task was taken up by Rudolf (d. 865), the head of Fulda's scriptorium and a renowned hagiographer. Rudolf managed to write a short history of the Saxons from their arrival on the Continent up till the Saxon Wars, but died before getting to the actual *translatio*. The project was eventually taken up by this student Meginhart, who finished it somewhere between 865 and 888.

²⁰⁷ Schmid, 'Die Nachfahren Widukinds', pp. 12-23 and Wenskus, *Sächsischer Stammesadel*, pp. 111-55. Though see G. Althoff, 'Genealogische und andere Fiktionen in mittelalterlicher Historiographie', in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter*, 1, MGH Schriften 33.1 (Hannover, 1988), pp. 417-41, specifically 428-33, who argues for a direct male line.

²⁰⁸ Althoff, 'Der Sachsenherzog Widukind', pp. 274-76.

²⁰⁹ Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, ed. R. Holtzmann, MGH SS rer. Germ. N.S. 9 (Berlin, 1935), lib. 1, c. 9, p. 14.

²¹⁰ *Vita Mathildis antiquior*, ed. B. Schütte (Hanover, 1994), c. 1, p. 113.

²¹¹ *Vita Mathildis antiquior*, c. 1, p. 114.

²¹² See also Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, pp. 711-14 and Röckelein, *Reliquientranslationen nach Sachsen*, pp. 127-34.

We have seen in the introduction that Rudolf's early history of the Saxons was in essence a literary creation. He drew heavily on the texts available in Fulda's library, such as Tacitus' *Germania*, which he copied, rewrote and reordered as he saw fit. This literary approach to the Saxon past is evident also in Rudolf's description of the Saxon Wars. Here, the narrative leans mostly on Einhard, with the ARF and the *Annals of Lorsch* being occasionally added to the mix. This strong reliance on Frankish historiography has led some modern commentators to evaluate the *Translatio s. Alexandri* as a conservative Frankish text, that perpetuated the traditional image of Saxon infidelity, paganism and subordination to the Franks.²¹³ While all these elements are present in a way, such a reading falls short of appreciating the lengths to which Rudolf went to reorganize and reshape his material to make it more acceptable for his Saxon audience.

His Tacitean digression on pre-conquest Saxon customs presents the Saxons as a noble people with a single significant flaw: 'they used the best laws for the punishment of criminals. And they took care to include among their upright customs many useful practises that were in accordance with natural law. These could have helped them obtain true blessedness, had they not been ignorant of their Creator and adverse to the truth of worshipping Him'.²¹⁴ There is no shortage of moralism here. But unlike Tacitus, Rudolf did not cast the Saxons as noble savages merely to inform an audience of insiders of their own moral depravity. Rudolf raised the issue of pre-conquest Saxon customs and paganism to make sense of subsequent events: 'I have recounted these things, so that the prudent reader might perceive, from what darkness of error they [the Saxons] have been delivered through the grace and mercy of God, when by the light of True Faith, He deigned to lead them to recognize His

²¹³ See for instance, Shuler, 'The Saxons Within Carolingian Christendom', pp. 44-45.

²¹⁴ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 2, p. 424: Legibus etiam ad vindictam malefactorum optimis utebantur. Et multa utilia atque secundum legem naturae honesta in morum probitate habere studuerunt, quae eis ad veram beatitudinem promerendam proficere potuissent, si ignorantiam creatoris sui non haberent, et a veritate culturae illius non essent alieni.

name.²¹⁵ As the introduction to his chapter on the Saxon Wars, this offers an explanatory framework: the Saxon Wars were not about conquest, but about Saxons turning from paganism to Christianity. In what follows, the reader continues to find himself nudged in this direction. Einhard's diatribe about perfidious Saxons going back on their promises every other year is adopted in full.²¹⁶ Yet midway the invective, Rudolf interposed a short digression on sacred groves and the 'universal pillar' Irminsul, inviting the reader to take these as the prime objects of Saxon *perfidia* and *permutatio*. Rudolf's interpretation of Saxon (mis)conduct during the Saxon Wars was thus rather less hostile than that of Frankish historiography: Saxon infidelity had been religious in nature. Its political dimension is downplayed.²¹⁷

A final example of Rudolf's creative interaction with his source material is his account of the end of the war:

It is evident that the war waged for so many years was brought to an end on these conditions, proposed by the king and accepted by [the Saxons]: that having abandoned their worship of devils and ancestral customs, they would accept the sacraments of Christian faith and religion, and be united with the Franks into a single people. Next, having accepted bishops and priests as preachers of truth, they were instructed in the sacraments of the true faith and baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and with faith and the true cult maturing among them, they were joined to the people of God up till the present day. Widukind, also, who stood out among them through the eminence of his lineage and the extent of his power, and who had been the contriver and tireless instigator of infidelity and manifold defections, became faithful to Charles out of his own accord;

²¹⁵ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 2, p. 425: Haec vero ideo commemoravi, quo prudens lector agnoscat, a quantis errorum tenebris per Dei gratiam et misericordiam sint liberati, quando eos ad cognitionem sui nomine lumine verae fidei perducere dignatus est.

²¹⁶ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 3, pp. 425-26, Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, pp. 9-10.

²¹⁷ Thus Beumann, 'Die Hagiographie "bewältigt"', pp. 146-48.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

he was baptized at Attigny and raised from the sacred font by the king; and the whole of Saxony was subjugated.²¹⁸

Einhard had envisioned a single grand ending for Charlemagne's most daunting military enterprise. Browbeaten by the king's *constantia*, the Saxons had finally consented to become *unum populum* with the Franks, which for Einhard implied both political and religious unity. Rudolf turned this ending into two distinct steps. The Saxons first became politically united with the Franks, which following Einhard, could be achieved by means of a treaty. This political unity was a precondition for the Saxons' incorporation into a more important community: that of the *populus Dei*, the people of God. This now was a community whose membership could not be obtained by means of an agreement. It required preaching, instruction, and finally, baptism.

At his point, the narrative turns to Widukind, whose baptism is presented as the final conclusion to the Saxon Wars. Considering Rudolf's familiarity with Frankish historiography, he must have known that Widukind's baptism had taken place in 785, nineteen years before the end of the war. His decision to forego correct chronology in favour of this particular ending had everything to do with the fact that Rudolf addressed his narrative to Widukind's grandson Waltbert. It was with this audience in mind, also, that Rudolf got to work on the figure of the Saxon rebel-leader himself. The *Annals of Lorsch* had been the first to brand Widukind 'the instigator of many crimes and inciter of infidelity' (*tot malorum auctor ac perfidie incentor*), which had a decidedly negative ring to it.²¹⁹ Rudolf retained the second of the two epithets, but turned it into a badge of honour: Widukind had led Saxon resistance because 'he stood out among

²¹⁸ *Translatio s. Alexandri*, c. 3, p. 26: Eaque conditione a rege proposita et ab illis suscepta tractum per tot annos bellum constat esse finitum, ut, abiecto daemonum cultu et relictis patriis caerimoniis, Christianae fidei atque religionis sacramenta susciperent et Francis adunati unus cum eis populus efficerentur. Posthaec susceptis predicatoribus veritatis episcopis et presbiteris, imbuti verae fidei sacramentis, baptizati sunt in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti, et crescente fide ac vera religione, adunati sunt populo Dei usque hodiernum diem. Witukind quoque, qui inter eos claritate generis et opum amplitudine eminebat, et qui perfidiae atque multimodae defectionis eorum auctor et indefessus erat incentor, ad fidem Karoli sua sponte veniens, Attiniaci baptizatus et a rege de fonte sacro suceptus est, et Saxonia tota subacta.

²¹⁹ *Annals of Lorsch*, s.a. 785, p. 34.

them through the eminence of his lineage and the extent of his power (*inter eos claritate generis et opum amplitudine eminebat*). Note that this was the exact same phrase which Einhard had used for the Carolingian mayors of the palace.²²⁰ Arguably Rudolf's most important intervention, however, was his suggestion that Widukind had come to Charles and the baptismal font 'out of his own accord' (*sua sponte*). Not only was this the correct way to approach baptism, it also implied that Waltbert's illustrious grandfather had eventually seen the error of his ways, and willingly embraced Carolingian rule and Christianity. This was the sort of ancestor with which a ninth-century Saxon count and church-founder could affiliate. Regardless of what had really happened to Widukind after 785, he was commemorated by his grandson as the man whose voluntary baptism had ended the Saxon Wars.

5.7. Saxons writing for Franks: the Poeta Saxo

We have seen that Saxon perceptions of the past were usually the product not of actual experience, but of creative interaction with a corpus of literary sources. Saxons rewrote the narratives they encountered in Einhard and the annals. But in a way, they also *relied* on these narratives. This certainly goes for the final author under consideration: the anonymous poet known today as the Poeta Saxo.²²¹ Between 887 and 892, this 'Saxon Poet' composed a five-book poem celebrating Charlemagne's life and deeds.²²² The poem's first four books are in dactylic hexameters and offer a year-by-year account of Charlemagne's military achievements from 771 to 814. Up till 801, the work is a verse rendition of the Revised Version of the *Annales Regni Francorum*.²²³ The fifth and final book is in elegiac couplets and deals with the king's death and legacy. Here the dominant source is Einhard's *Vita Karoli*.

²²⁰ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 2, p. 4: Qui honor non aliis a populo dari consueverat quam his qui et claritate generis et opum amplitudine ceteris eminebant.

²²¹ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, ed. P. von Winterfeld, MGH Poeta 4.1 (Berlin, 1899), pp. 7-47.

²²² Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, 6, pp. 862-67.

²²³ J. Bohne, *Der Poeta Saxo in der Historiographischen Tradition des 8. bis 10. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1963), pp. 40-59.

While many ninth-century Saxons were interested in Charlemagne, the Poeta Saxo had a particular incentive to write about the Carolingian king. He addressed his work to Arnulf of Carinthia, one of Charlemagne's (illegitimate) great-great-grandsons, who had taken up the royal dignity in 887 after successfully wresting it from his uncle Charles the Fat.²²⁴ Writing Arnulf a poem that linked him to Charlemagne, the 'archetypical' Carolingian ruler, was an effective way to declare support for the new regime and to acknowledge its dynastic legitimacy.²²⁵ The Poeta's motives for offering Arnulf this literary *fiat* are disputed. The Poeta is traditionally linked to the Westphalian monastery of Corvey, which Arnulf is known to have favoured and which he visited in 889.²²⁶ The poem could thus be interpreted as the community's attempt to repay Arnulf's largess and incur additional favour. A recent study by Ingrid Rembold, on the other hand, relocates the Poeta to Paderborn, Corvey's episcopal see.²²⁷ Unlike Corvey, Paderborn had fallen on hard times after Arnulf's coup, probably due to its close ties to Charles the Fat. Among other things, it had lost to Corvey a significant portion of its tithes.²²⁸ Against this background, Rembold argued that the poem was commissioned by Paderborn's bishop Biso, with the intention to soften Arnulf's disposition towards his see. The fact that Charlemagne had shown great concern for the Saxon episcopate

²²⁴ For Arnulf, see the essays in F. Fuchs (ed.), *Kaiser Arnolf. Das ostfränkische Reich am Ende des 9. Jahrhunderts ; Regensburger Kolloquium, 9.-11. 12. 1999* (München, 2002). On his supposed illegitimacy, M. Becher, 'Arnulf von Kärnten – Name und Abstammung eines (illegitimen?) Karolingers', in U. Ludwig (ed.), *Nomen et fraternitas: Festschrift für Dieter Geuenich zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 665-682. On the circumstances that led to his takeover, Maclean, *Kingship and Politics in the late Ninth Century*, pp. 161-198.

²²⁵ On the address to Arnulf, Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 5, v. 125-48, pp. 58-9; for the comparison to Charlemagne, v. 415-24, p. 65.

²²⁶ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 23; Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, 6, pp. 862-63; Krüger, 'Die ältern Sachsen als Franken', pp. 239-43. On the hypothetical connection between the Poeta Saxo and Agius of Corvey, Hüffer, *Korveier Studien*, pp. 19-21.

²²⁷ Rembold, 'The Poeta Saxo at Paderborn'. See also, K. Schoppe, 'Die Translatio S. Liborii und der Poeta Saxo', *Die Warte. Heimatzeitschrift im südöstlichen Westfalen*, 23 (1962), pp. 179-81, 185-87.

²²⁸ For further details and sources, Rembold, 'The Poeta Saxo at Paderborn', p. 182.

and had also established episcopal tithes – details advertised in the poem – would have imbued the poem with an adhortatory subtext.²²⁹

While local loyalties no doubt played a role in the Poeta's literary enterprise, it deserves to be underlined that the poet never explicitly claims any local ties. Indeed, the only identity he claims, repeatedly and unambiguously, is that of the *gens Saxonum*. Uniquely among the authors dealt with in this chapter, the Poeta Saxo remembered the Saxon Wars almost exclusively in collective terms, as a Saxon rather than a local experience. The only time the Poeta can be seen to deviate from this perspective, is when he reflects on what Charlemagne meant to himself: 'I owe Charles ever-burning love and perpetual obedience, for he made our people recognize the light of faith, after taking away the darkness of infidelity'.²³⁰ The Poeta, however, did not just stress how important Charlemagne was for the Saxons. He was equally concerned with showing how important the Saxons were for Charlemagne. On the surface, the poem seems to deal with all aspects of Charlemagne's life and career. Yet as the narrative progresses, the reader becomes more and more convinced that Charlemagne's reign and kingship were defined by his relationship with the Saxons. As we will see, this was very much a conscious effort on the part of the Poeta. By claiming a special connection between Charlemagne and the Saxons, he was inviting his successor Arnulf to perpetuate this connection.

Turning the Saxon Wars into Charlemagne's signature achievement was not overly difficult; the Frankish annals offered much raw material to build on. The main challenge was to turn this annalistic material into a coherent story about the Saxon Wars, whilst still retaining a year-by-year structure and realm-wide outlook. The key was to insert timely explanations, alerting the reader to how specific events fitted into a wider story. A good example of such signposting is the Poeta's treatment of the events of 772, the year Charlemagne first invaded Saxony. In the Frankish annals, this invasion appears rather *ad hoc*: Charlemagne simply marches into Saxony, without an underlying cause or motive. There is little indication that this was the onset of a thirty-three-year

²²⁹ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 1, v. 329-336, p. 15.

²³⁰ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 5, v. 24-26, p. 56.

war of conquest and conversion. To remedy this lack of context, the Poeta inserted an explanatory passage (v. 27-58), outlining that Charlemagne's 772 campaign was the fateful beginning of a protracted war between Franks and Saxons, which the latter were destined to lose.²³¹ The Franks, after all, had already subjugated many peoples, who supported them in their military enterprises. More importantly, the Franks were 'Christ-worshippers' (*Christicolae*), who would find God on their side during the war. The Saxons, on the other hand, had not yet submitted to the 'sweet yoke of Christ' at this point. To make things worse, they were a deeply fragmented people; instead of one king, they had 'almost as many leaders as districts' (*quot pagos tot paene duces*), leaving them like a body whose limbs acted on their own.²³²

It is implied, of course, that these Saxon defects – having no king and having no faith – would be remedied by the war. Such implications are made explicit in the Poeta's report on the year 775.²³³ Again, we find the poet expanding on the material he found in the Revised ARF. The Reviser had presented the year 775 as a point of no return, when Charlemagne had fully committed himself to an all-out war of conquest and conversion against the Saxons.²³⁴ The Poeta followed this take on events, but stressed that there was a higher power at work behind Charlemagne's ambitions:

O blessed piety of God, which desires that every race of men
 be saved. He knew that the hearts of this people (i.e. the Saxons)
 could not be softened in any other way,
 so that their stiff neck would learn to turn away from its inborn resistance
 and subject itself to the mild yoke of Christ.
 For this reason, He offered them this *doctor* and teacher of faith,
 the illustrious Charles, who would pressure with war

²³¹ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 1, v. 28-57, pp. 7-8.

²³² Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 1, v. 44, p. 8.

²³³ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 1, pp. 11-12. See also B. Bischoff, 'Das Thema des Poeta Saxo', in Bischoff (ed.), *Mittelalterliche Studien. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte*, 3 (Stuttgart, 1981), pp. 253-59, here 254.

²³⁴ Reviser, s.a. 775, p. 41: Cum rex in villa Carisiaco hiemaret, consilium iniit, ut perfidam ac foedifragam Saxonum gentem bello adgrederetur et eo usque perseveraret, dum aut victi christianae religioni subicerentur aut omnino tollerentur.

those whom he could not tame with reason,
and would thus force even the unwilling to be saved.²³⁵

The Poeta was not the first to cast Charlemagne in the role of divine agent. The *Translatio s. Viti* had also depicted the Carolingian king as an instrument of God's will. But unlike the *Translatio s. Viti*, the Poeta had no qualms about the means by which Charlemagne was going to fulfil God's plan. The *doctor fideique magister* would apply reason as well as force to lead the unwilling Saxons inside the Christian fold.²³⁶

In the course of the poem, the poet repeatedly mentions that Charlemagne's piety left him anxious to spill Christian blood.²³⁷ Violence against the pagan, on the contrary, he considered not just acceptable, but necessary, especially when salvation was at stake. In line with this view, the Saxons' slow and brutal subjugation by the Franks could be reconstructed in meticulous and merciless detail. Not a single battle was left out, not even the Verden Massacre of 782. While other Saxon authors preferred to 'forget' this gruesome episode, the Poeta outlined the events casually, without the slightest trace of anger or regret: 'forty-five hundred men, who had waged a harsh battle against the Franks on [Widukind's] advice, were delivered to the king; he beheaded them all in one day, near the river Aller at a place called Verden. And having meted out this punishment, that most glorious king returned to his villa of Thionville'.²³⁸ Another notable instance of the Poeta's cavalier approach to Saxon defeat is the revolt of 798, when Saxons beyond the Elbe (*Saxones Transalbiani*) killed several royal legates. According to the Revised Version of the ARF, Charlemagne had responded by 'destroying with fire and steel all that

²³⁵ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 1, v. 13-21, p. 11: O pietas benedicta dei, quae vult genus omne / Humanum fieri salvum! Quia noverat huius / Non aliter gentis molliri pectora posse, / Disceret ut cervix reflectere dura rigorem / Ingenitum mitique iugo se subdere Christi, / Ob hoc doctorem talem fideique magistrum / Scilicet insignem Carolum donavit eisdem, / Qui bello premeret, quos non ratione domaret, / Sicque vel invitos salvari cogeret ipsos.

²³⁶ See also Beumann, 'Die Hagiographie "bewältigt"', pp. 139-42.

²³⁷ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 2, v. 264-5, p. 25 and 4.197, p. 50.

²³⁸ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 2, v. 99-100, p. 21: Hac ubi vindicta regum clarissimus acta / Ad propriam rediit villam Theodone vocatam.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

laid between the Elbe and the Weser'.²³⁹ Apparently, this was not enough for the Saxon Poet, who preferred a rather more graphic outline of royal revenge:

And like a just avenger of his legates' death,
he loosened the reins of (his) wrath on the deserters,
ordering his legions to spread out widely and lay waste
to the land. All around his frantic army raged;
everywhere rivers of blood soaked the land;
and horrid slaughter grew in all places.
Wounds, death, sorrow, cries, flight, flames and pillage
permeated all, until the deep waters of the Elbe
checked the advance of arms.²⁴⁰

The scene is replete with the language and imagery of classical epic. The phrase 'loosening the reins of wrath' can be traced back directly to the *Aeneid*.²⁴¹ Such flourishes underline that the Poeta was engaged in a literary enterprise: celebrating the accomplishments of a former Carolingian prince for one of his Carolingian descendants. His main concern was not to come to terms with a Saxon trauma, but to glorify Charlemagne's military prowess and Christian virtue. We are reminded of Venantius Fortunatus – an author known to the Poeta – who had also used elaborate descriptions of battles to panegyricize Frankish kings. Yet where Venantius had used barbarian outsiders to measure the greatness of his patrons, the Poeta used the conquest and conversion of his own people.

While Charlemagne is the hero of the Poeta's story, the Saxons share in his triumph. From the poet's perspective, the Carolingian king did not just defeat

²³⁹ Reviser, s.a. 798, pp. 102-104. While Charlemagne was busy laying waste to the lands between the Weser and Elbe, he called on the Abodrites to deal with the insurgents beyond the Elbe. See on these events, Springer, *Die Sachsen*, pp. 206-208.

²⁴⁰ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 3, v. 383-91, p. 40: Atque necis legatorum iustissimus ultor, / In desertores ire laxavit habenas, / Vastari late sparsis legionibus illam / Precipiens terram. Tum sevis ubique furebat / Miles, ubique cruor rivis madefecerat arva, / Omnibus atque locis increverat horrida clades. / Vulnera, mors, luctus, clamor, fuga, flamma, rapine / Omnia complebant, donec conpescuit altis / Albia gurgitibus procedere longius arma.

²⁴¹ Vergil, *Aeneid*, 12, v. 498-99: terribilis saevam nullo discrimine caedem / suscitatur, irarumque omnis effundit habenas.

the Saxons; he saved them. The mutual benefits of the Saxon Wars are clearly spelled out in the (fictitious) treaty with which these wars are shown to have ended. In the ‘noble year’ 803, Franks and Saxons supposedly entered a peace agreement at a place called Salz.²⁴² The Poeta makes it very clear that the terms of this ‘Peace of Salz’ were not imposed but negotiated, hence their fair and favourable character. The Saxons pledged to completely abandon their gentile ways, embrace Christianity and forever serve the Christian God. In return, they were freed from any taxes or tributes due to the Frankish kings. Henceforth, their only monetary obligations would be to the Church in the form of tithes. Furthermore, the Saxons agreed to obey their bishops and clergy.²⁴³ They were also given judges, but were allowed to live in liberty and under their own paternal laws. The final stipulation of the Franco-Saxon treaty was in the spirit of Einhard: ‘that they would cordially become one nation and people, and forever share obedience to one and the same king’.²⁴⁴ With the end of the Saxon Wars, the Saxons were faithless and kingless no more.

The Peace of Salz was almost certainly an authorial invention.²⁴⁵ The poet seems to have gotten the idea from the 803 entry of the ARF, which mention a peace treaty at Salz between Charlemagne and the Byzantines.²⁴⁶ The Poeta replaced the Byzantines with Saxons, added several details found in Einhard and then added several more of his own device. He must have been aware that the resulting scene was not beyond suspicion, for he invited anyone ‘to whom this may appear doubtful’ to read ‘the famous and *truthful* narrator Einhard

²⁴² Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 4, v. 93-114, p. 48.

²⁴³ See for this, Rembold, ‘The Poeta Saxo at Paderborn’, pp. 193-94.

²⁴⁴ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 4, v. 113-14: ut gens et populus fieret concorditer unus / ac semper regi parens aequaliter uni. Compare Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 10: Eaque conditione a rege proposita et ab illis suscepta tractum per tot annos bellum constat esse finitum, ut, abiecto daemonum cultu et relictis patriis caerimoniis, Christianae fidei atque religionis sacramenta susciperent et Francis adunati unus cum eis populus efficerentur.

²⁴⁵ Bischoff, ‘Das Thema des Poeta Saxo’, p. 255; M. Lintzel, ‘Der Sachsenfrieden Karls des Großen’, in Lintzel (ed), *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 2, p. 175; B.E. von Simson, ‘Der Poeta Saxo und der angebliche Friedensschluß Karls des Großen mit den Sachsen’, *NA*, 32 (1907), pp. 27-50. But see McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 105.

²⁴⁶ ARF, s.a. 803, p. 118 et missi domni imperatoris de Constantinopoli reversi sunt, et venerunt cum eis legati Nicifori imperatoris [...] Qui venerunt ad imperatorem in Germania super fluvium Sala, in loco qui dicitur Saltz, et pactum faciendae pacis in scripto susceperunt.

(my italics)’. This is sheer bluff, for as said, many essential details mentioned by the Poeta cannot be found in the *Vita Karoli*, or anywhere else for that matter.²⁴⁷

Despite it being a literary invention, the Peace of Salz has become a bone of contention in a longstanding debate about the nature and development of the Ottonian kingdom, the *regnum francorum atque saxonum*.²⁴⁸ Debate revolves around the question whether this Franco-Saxon polity was a tenth-century development, or whether it had ideological or political roots in the Carolingian period. Proponents of the latter take the final stipulation of the Peace of Salz – *ut gens et populus fieret concorditer unus / ac semper regi parens aequaliter uni* – as evidence for the existence of a special Franco-Saxon unity in the 880s.²⁴⁹ Proponents of the former hold that the Poeta merely underlined that the Saxons were integrated into the Frankish realm, without any special status.²⁵⁰

The problem with this debate is that most participants fail to make a firm distinction between political reality and authorial intention. On the whole, Sören Kaschke is probably right to state that there is little concrete evidence to support the idea that the Saxons enjoyed a special or privileged position under the rule of Louis the Younger (d. 882), Charles the Fat (d. 888) or Arnulf of Carinthia (d. 895).²⁵¹ But the Poeta Saxo certainly tried to make it appear as if the Saxons were special inhabitants of the Frankish realm. On the one hand, he used the notion of a peace treaty to assure a new Carolingian ruler of the

²⁴⁷ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7, p. 10.

²⁴⁸ For the term, H. Beumann, ‘Die Hagiographie “bewältigt”’, p. 135.

²⁴⁹ They also stress that a shared Franco-Saxon identity could already have been created during the reign of Louis the Younger (d. 882), who in 865 was given the command over his own sub-kingdom of Saxons, Thuringians and Eastern Franks, as part of the so-called Division of Frankfurt. See Becher, *Rex, Dux, Gens*, pp. 41-50, 124-58 and J. Semmler, ‘Francia Saxonique oder Die ostfränkische Reichsteilung von 865/76 und die Folgen’, *Deutsches Archiv*, 46 (1990), pp. 337-374. On the division of Frankfurt in 865, Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, pp. 276-77.

²⁵⁰ S. Kaschke, ‘Sachsen, Franken und die Nachfolgeregelung Ludwigs des Deutschen: unus cum eis populus efficerentur’, *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 79 (2007), pp. 147-186 and W. Eggert, ‘“Franken und Sachsen” bei Notker, Widukind und anderen. Zu einem Aufsatz von Josef Semmler’, in A. Scharer und G. Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 1994), pp. 514-530.

²⁵¹ Kaschke, ‘Sachsen, Franken’.

Saxons' continued allegiance. The Saxons had agreed to obey Charlemagne, so would agree to obey his descendant Arnulf. On the other hand, it served to remind Arnulf that the Saxons were not mere lackeys of the Franks. They were equals, who owed neither tax nor tribute to the Frankish kings, and lived under their own paternal laws. Underlying this reminder was a subtle but effective admonishment: if the great Charlemagne had entered a peace agreement with the Saxons on these terms, who was Arnulf to deny the Saxons these privileges?

The final book of the poem, dealing with Charlemagne's death and legacy, served to integrate the king's dealings with the Saxons into a wider salvation narrative. Ever since God had driven man from Paradise, He had appointed strong men to educate the weak and 'help up the fallen'. The first agents of God were the patriarchs, prophets and judges from the Old Testament. Then came Christ, his apostles and martyrs.²⁵² Last of the elect was Charles, 'who was to many the cause of the greatest salvation'. The Poeta, then, was crystal clear about Charlemagne's legacy. He may have been an ideal Christian prince, whose conquests put to shame those of Caesar and the Scipios, and whose 'David-like virtue' paralleled that of Constantine and Theodosius.²⁵³ Yet in the grand scheme of things, he should be remembered first and foremost as the divinely ordained ruler who had brought the Saxons Christianity.

As if to absolutely drive home this point, the Poeta concluded his poem with a vision on the End of Times, when Charlemagne would be united with the Saxons once more, to receive the ultimate reward for his efforts:

Who can count how many souls he gave to the Lord
when he made the Saxon peoples believe?
How many churches now gleam, where once the ancients
worshipped temples? How many monasteries were built
and how much praise onto them, o Christ, and vows onto You
the Saxon faithful give? In equal measure You shall reward Charles!
O, when that final Day of Judgment shall arrive,
when You shall give to every man what he deserves,

²⁵² Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 5, v. 62-68, p. 57.

²⁵³ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 5, v. 653-62, p. 70.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

how delighted will he be, handing back the talents
entrusted to him once, now multiplied with great profit.
Nobody shall be closer to the ranks of the apostles than he,
and be more deserving of it, as the proceeding itself will show.
For when Peter shall come forward, attended by a Jewish train
- those who set store by his doctrine -
and Paul brings forth those delivered through his teaching:
the gentiles of the entire world (if so 't is permitted to say);
and Andreas leads the Greek peoples in his wake,
whilst John presents the churches of Asia;
Matthew the Ethiopians, whom baptism rendered white as snow
and Thomas shepherds the Indian flocks to the stars -
then a jubilant troop of Saxons shall follow Charles;
glory to him and perpetual grace!²⁵⁴

With the Poeta and the Paderborner Anonymus, we have two ninth-century Saxon authors claiming Charlemagne as their apostle. Possibly, this is an indication that both authors worked at the same centre, i.e. Paderborn.²⁵⁵ Certainly, it suggests that by the 880s, Saxons had become very adept at shaping their own past. By claiming Charlemagne as their apostle, Saxons guaranteed themselves a place in Christian history. They could remember their own conversion as a distinct and divinely ordained step in the salvation of mankind. It also helped a once kingless people forge a special connection to Charlemagne; a connection which could be exploited in their dealings with

²⁵⁴ Poeta Saxo, *Annales de Gestis Caroli Magni imperatoris*, 5, v. 667-687, p. 71: Quis numeret, quantas animas, dum credere fecit / Saxonum populos, reddiderit domino? / Quot nunc aecclesiae fulgent, ubi fana colebant / Antiqui, quot sunt structa monasteria, / Quot laudes in eis vel quot tibi vota fideles / Reddunt, tot Carolo premia, Christe, dabis. / Iudiciiue dies cum venerit ultima magni, / Qua reddes omni quod meruit homini, / O quam laetus erit sibimet commissa talenta / Presentans grandi multiplicata lucro; / Nullus apostolici tunc iure propinquior illo, / Ut res ipsa docet, caetibus esse valet. / Nam cum Iudaico processerit agmine Petrus / Stipatus, cuius dogmate crediderat, / Paulus totius (liceat si dicere) mundi / Gentes salvatas duxerit ore suo, / Andreas populos post se producet Achivos, / Iohannes Asiae proferet ecclesias, / Matheus Aethiopes niveos baptismate factos, / Indorum Thomas ducet ad astra greges: / Tum Carolum gaudens Saxonum turma sequetur, / Illi perpetuae gloria laetitia.

²⁵⁵ Rembold, 'The Poeta Saxo at Paderborn', pp. 175-76; Löwe, *Geschichtsquellen*, 6, p. 863.

subsequent Carolingian rulers. The Poeta Saxo was happy to offer his new king Arnulf of Carinthia the legitimizing force of Charlemagne the Carolingian. But by accepting a link to Charlemagne the Carolingian, Arnulf also became heir to the apostle of the Saxons, with all the obligations such a legacy entailed.

5.8. Conclusion

In the fifth instalment of his monumental history on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the eighteenth-century British historian Edward Gibbon dedicated several colourful pages to the life and deeds of Charlemagne. On the whole, Gibbon's impression of the Frankish king was favourable. However, he also acknowledged 'some blemishes in the sanctity and greatness of the restorer of the Western empire'. Charlemagne's conduct at the Saxon front was among these blemishes:

I shall be scarcely permitted to accuse the ambition of a conqueror; but in a day of equal retribution, the sons of his brother Carloman, the Merovingian princes of Aquitain, and the four thousand five hundred Saxons who were beheaded on the same spot, would have something to allege against the justice and humanity of Charlemagne. His treatment of the vanquished Saxons was an abuse of the right of conquest; his laws were not less sanguinary than his arms, and in the discussion of his motives, whatever is subtracted from bigotry must be imputed to temper.²⁵⁶

Gibbon's assessment of Saxony's Christianization was not free from censure either:

The idols and their votaries were extirpated: the foundation of eight bishoprics, of Munster, Osnaburgh, Paderborn, and Minden, of Bremen, Verden, Hildesheim, and Halberstadt, define, on either side of the Weser, the bounds of ancient Saxony; these episcopal seats were the first schools

²⁵⁶ E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. with intr. H.Trevor-Roper (New York, 1994), 5, c. 49, pp. 201-202.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

and cities of that savage land, and the religion and humanity of the children atoned, in some degree, for the massacre of the parents.²⁵⁷

Gibbon's biting irony presents a striking contrast with the texts dealt with in this chapter. Ninth-century Saxon writing about the war never extended into criticism of Charlemagne, be it open or covert. None of the authors dealt with above questioned the justness or humanity of Charlemagne's cause. In fact, most considered Charlemagne's conquest and conversion of the Saxons to be his most singular achievement, and a crucial development in the Saxon past.

Of course, not all Saxons would have been equally content with this development. Indeed, the Stellinga Revolt of 841-43 was a clear indication that the benefits of Carolingian rule were not for everyone. Yet here we run into the inevitable bias of the textual record. In Saxony, like elsewhere in the realm, the written word became the domain of monks, nuns, clergy, and to a lesser extent, the secular elite. The majority of Saxon narrative texts can be traced back to royal monasteries, episcopal sees and the personal foundations of aristocratic families. These, now, were precisely the people who had the biggest stake in the changes wrought during the Saxon Wars. They had received a monastic or court education. They served as counts, bishops or abbots. They enjoyed the benefits of royal generosity. They boasted ties to the Frankish aristocracy. They attended realm-wide assemblies and synods, confirming their membership of the Carolingian realm. In short, those writing and reading in ninth-century Saxony were uniquely conditioned to appreciate the period 772-804 not just as a time of loss, but also of gain. And naturally, they shaped their memory of the events accordingly.

There was, to be sure, no unified Saxon view on the Saxon Wars. For some, like the author of the *Translatio s. Viti*, the encounter was best kept as brief and superficial as possible. Others, like the enigmatic Poeta Saxo, happily dedicated thousands of lines of hexameter to the events. All were engaged not just in a process of recollection, but also of forgetting, selecting and reshaping. Saxon war memory was not excavated from the eighth-century past, but

²⁵⁷ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall*, c. 49, p. 207.

reconstructed in the ninth-century present. One of the goals of such reconstruction was to make the past more acceptable for the Saxon people as the whole. The Saxons had not been perfidious, but noble and loyal. The Saxons had not been defeated by a Frankish king, but by an emperor. Their defeat had not been the result of weakness, but of a divine plan. Many also emphasised the importance of salvation. For the Poeta Saxo, the Saxon Wars had been first and foremost a war of conversion. Charlemagne had not been a conqueror but an apostle. The *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, on the other hand, preferred to completely separate the Saxon Wars from the Saxon conversion. Charlemagne had incorporated the Saxons in his realm, but the Saxons were themselves responsible for embracing Christianity.

Post-conquest Saxons, however, did not merely write about the past to rid it of potential anxieties. Saxon war memory was strongly dependent on local circumstances and ambitions. For the Paderborner Anonymus, the conquest of Saxony was closely tied up with the foundation of his bishopric. The community of Wendhausen remembered the Saxon Wars as a crucial episode in the history of its founding family, when patriarch Hessi had been rewarded for his loyalty. The Saxon nobleman Waltbert remembered the deeds of his grandfather Widukind, whose nobility had made him the leader behind Saxon resistance, but whose voluntary surrender had eventually signalled the end of hostilities. The Poeta Saxo used the Saxon Wars to ensure a new Carolingian king of the Saxons' loyalty, and possibly also to petition for patronage for his bishopric or monastery. The Saxon Wars, in other words, were seldom remembered solely as a collective Saxon experience. Nor were they remembered merely for the sake of commemoration. The ninth-century Saxons did not merely seek to come to terms with the past, but also to use this past to further their own agendas.

CONCLUSION

The student of the early medieval Saxons faces a number of methodological challenges. First, before the ninth century, the Saxons can only be known through reports composed by outsiders. Either Saxons left no writing of their own, or more likely, none of it survived. Second, what little reliable evidence we do have with regard to the political organisation of the pre-conquest Saxons, suggests that they were deeply fragmented. In all likelihood, it was only as a result of their incorporation into the Frankish realm, that the Saxons became a well-defined people. Finally, while Saxon texts are available from the ninth century onwards, these texts were inevitably shaped by the changes wrought during and after the Saxon Wars. Moreover, they were composed by members of a Christian elite, who, on account of their position and education, had little in common with their pagan ancestors. There is indeed a paradoxical element to this situation: incorporation into the Carolingian realm brought Saxons into greater contact with the written word and created the circumstances for the survival of Saxon texts, but because incorporation wrought such profound changes in Saxon society, it also disqualifies post-conquest Saxon writing as a reliable window on pre-conquest Saxon society.

In this study, I have tried to side-step these complications by adopting a different focus. Rather than taking 'the Saxons' as my point of departure, I focused on the ethnic label *Saxones* and its use in late antique and early medieval texts. Following recent insights into the flexibility of ethnic terminology, I abandoned the assumption that this label always denoted members of a single homogenous people, i.e. 'the Saxons'. In fact, I left open the question whether there existed such a people prior to the Saxon Wars. Instead, I took as my object of study the Roman, Frankish and finally Saxon authors writing about Saxons. I looked at more than just isolated references to

CONCLUSION

Saxones. I explicitly sought to understand these references in a wider literary and political context. Who were the people writing about Saxons? What were their literary intentions? And how did they react to larger geo-political developments: the political disintegration of the Western Roman Empire, the migrations to Britain, Frankish military expansion, the Saxon mission, etc.? Moreover, I approached these texts not just as passive meditations on reality, but also as active attempts to influence and shape reality. Each text I studied offered an individual interpretation of the label *Saxones* and imbued it with certain territorial, religious, social and/or political connotations. The resulting pictures may or may not have been 'accurate'. Either way, they served to perpetuate and spread a particular understanding of the term *Saxo*. In this way, they contributed to an ongoing discourse on Saxon identity. This study has looked into four 'stages' of this discourse: Saxons from a Roman perspective (ca. 150-500), Saxons from a Merovingian perspective (ca. 550-750), Saxons from a Carolingian perspective (ca. 750-830) and Saxons from a Saxon perspective (ca. 830-900).

In the Roman Empire, Saxons were generally defined as barbarian outsiders attacking the Roman borders. With the exception of Ptolemy, who located the Saxons in modern Schleswig-Holstein, Roman authors did not have a very clear conception of a Saxon homeland. Most identified Saxons by the places they attacked: the coasts of Gaul and Britain. While a number of authors referred to Saxons as a people (*gens*), and some even credited them with a particular appearance and customs, it is evident that the Saxons in the Roman textual record cannot be taken to reflect a homogenous ethnic group. In fourth-century texts, Saxons are nearly always paired up with Franks. From the fifth century onwards, *Saxo* began to function as a blanket term for barbarians raiding the Channel. As barbarian outsiders, Saxons could fulfil various literary roles. Panegyrist like Claudius Claudianus and Sidonius Apollinaris measured the military prowess of their patrons by their ability to defeat outside peoples. In such works, Saxons typically feature as one among a host of barbarian enemies vanquished at the hands of Roman generals and emperors. Christian authors like Ambrose, Salvian and Gildas looked at Saxons through a

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

moralizing lens. Ambrose cast the Saxons as agents of divine displeasure, hoping to scare Emperor Theodosius into altering his religious policies. Salvian used Saxons to criticise by contrast: even pagan peoples were morally superior to the Christian degenerates inhabiting Roman Africa. Gildas, finally, used the 'Saxon' migrations to the Isles to castigate his own people for its lack of faith. The Britons were a Chosen People, but if they would not walk in line with God's mandates, He would continue to plague them with adversities.

That Roman descriptions of Saxons were highly literary, does not mean that they were disconnected from a historical context. The one overriding theme that characterised nearly all reports on Saxons was the extreme danger they represented. Ammianus Marcellinus dubbed them a 'lethal band of robbers'. Sidonius Apollinaris spoke about 'the most ferocious of enemies'. In this sense, panegyric references to defeated Saxons must have been ubiquitous precisely *because* Roman audiences recognized Saxons as an enemy to be reckoned with. Apart from specific concerns about Saxon attacks, many authors were also informed by a more general anxiety about the disintegration of Roman rule and the demise of what they perceived as a superior Roman and/or Christian civilization. Casting Saxons as noble savages or agents of divine punishment was a way to negotiate this unsettling reality.

On the other hand, the otherness of Saxons should not be overestimated. Barbarian groups were widely used as soldiers in the late Roman army, and Saxons were no exception to this rule. Ammianus referred to a group of Saxon levies. The *Notitia Dignitatum* mentioned a Saxon military contingent in Phoenicia. Even outside a military context there was room for 'inter-cultural' encounters. Sidonius Apollinaris spoke in chilling terms about Saxon pirates who sacrificed human victims to satisfy their perverse superstitions. But the bishop of Clermont also encountered these Saxons when he came to plead his case at the court of the Visigothic king Euric.

The Roman rhetoric of the barbarian outsider is far less present in writing from the Merovingian period. The most striking example of this is of course Gregory of Tours, who made mankind, rather than the Franks or Romans, the subject of his moralistic *Histories*. But in a way, none of the authors dealt with

CONCLUSION

in chapter 2 fully excluded or ‘othered’ the Saxons. This certainly goes for the Saxon groups in western Gaul, who had come to reside in Normandy and the Loire basin following the fourth- and fifth-century migrations. Venantius Fortunatus celebrated the baptism of Saxons by Felix of Nantes. Gregory of Tours mentioned the Saxons of Bayeux, who stood under Merovingian rule. Arguably the best examples of Saxon inclusion into the Frankish realm are individuals like Childeric and Aeghyna, whose careers in and out of Merovingian service are outlined by Gregory and Fredegar respectively. Gregory knew Childeric personally and interceded on his behalf with the Frankish king Guntram. Aeghyna was a prominent *dux* at the seventh-century Burgundian court, where Fredegar may have met him. The political status of the Saxons north-east of the Frankish kingdoms was less clearly defined. Venantius and Gregory recorded how Austrasian kings like Clothar I and Sigibert had various dealings with Saxon groups beyond the Rhine. This picture continues in Fredegar’s *Chronicon* and the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, where Saxons appear alternatively as tributaries, rebels, allied neighbours and soldiers in Frankish armies. These latter two texts also bring a more Frankish perspective to their reports on Franco-Saxon relations. The Saxons beyond the Rhine *should* be part of the Frankish sphere of influence.

Under the Carolingian king Charlemagne (d. 814), Frankish ambitions towards the Saxons beyond the Rhine were realized, if slowly and with great military effort. At that point, it was confirmed also that the notion of a single Saxon people beyond the Rhine was an illusion; the regions between the Lower Rhine and Lower Elbe were inhabited by various Saxon sub-groups. It was an illusion, however, which, if pursued with enough tenacity, could be wrought into a reality. Indeed, by incorporating the various Saxon groups beyond the Rhine into his realm, Charlemagne appears to have created the administrative and ideological circumstances for the formation of a Saxon people. So far, this process has been studied mainly from a governmental perspective. Matthias Becher has investigated the rise of the administrative entity of ‘Saxony’.¹ Caspar Ehlers has painstakingly reconstructed the development of Saxony’s

¹ Becher, *Rex Dux und Gens*.

ecclesiastical landscape.² Hedwig Röckelein has used the specific practice of relic transfers to bring into focus the political, social and religious ties that bound ninth-century Saxony to the wider Carolingian empire.³ This study has focused more on the written discourse surrounding this process of incorporation and ethnogenesis. In particular, it has sought to explain how Frankish and subsequently also Saxon authors dealt with the repercussions of Saxon incorporation into the realm. On what terms did (partial) outsiders become insiders? How did the Franks legitimize their violent incorporation and conversion of the Saxons? And how did the post-conquest Saxon elite harmonize memories of defeat with its new-found membership of the Carolingian realm?

Frankish perceptions of the Saxons were strongly shaped by the experience of a thirty-three-year war. The length of this violent endeavour was inevitably affected by the fact that the Saxons were still a fragmented people in the eighth century. Behind neat categories like ‘Saxony’ and ‘Saxons’, there existed rather less neat and coherent realities, forcing the Franks to continuously assert and reassert their authority in a region they long since considered vanquished. Frankish commentators seem to have been only partially aware of the underlying cause of their distress, and preferred to account for the drawn-out process with increasingly loud cries of collective Saxon infidelity. These cries were all the more indignant, because the disobedience they bewailed was no longer just political, but also religious. Here, the Carolingian discourse on Saxon allegiance came to be fundamentally different from the Merovingian one. Although it is doubtful that Charlemagne invaded Saxony for the explicit purpose to win the Saxons for Christianity, conversion soon developed into a prerequisite for Saxon inclusion into the Frankish realm. And when Saxons could indeed be made to convert, contemporary commentators eagerly stressed it as a unifying factor between conquerors and conquered: the Saxons were the newest addition to the *populus Christianus*, administered with divine approval by the Carolingian kings. The inevitable side-effect of this deepening of

² Ehlers, *Die Integration Sachsens*.

³ Röckelein, *Reliquientranslation*.

CONCLUSION

Frankish ambition, was that, when frustrated, the fires of discontent were fuelled to equally daunting heights. The Saxons came to be accused not just of disloyalty to Charlemagne, but also to Christ and God. As they owed faith (*fides*) in the dual sense of the word, so their *perfidia* was considered double-natured.

In a way, it was only after 804, in the 810s and 820s, that the events of 772-804 could be shaped into a coherent narrative, with a clear beginning and end. With hindsight, historians like Einhard could make confident statements about the outcome of 'the longest, fiercest and most toilsome war ever fought by the Franks'. The Saxons, one of the lawless and devil-worshipping *nationes* of Germania, had been slowly beaten into submission by a persistent Charlemagne. Despite their constant uprisings and infidelity, they had eventually accepted Christianity and been united with the Frankish into a single *populus*. The godless outsiders had become faithful insiders.

The Saxon incorporation into the Carolingian realm had profound implications for Saxon society, as well as for Saxon self-perception. As with other regions brought under Carolingian dominion, Charlemagne and his successors strove to involve local elites in the administrative and ecclesiastical organisation of their 'own' Saxony. Saxon cooperation was enforced through a policy of calculated ruthlessness. Defiant elements among the Saxon population were either killed or stripped of their lands and deported to other parts of the realm. Saxons who proved themselves faithful to king and God, on the other hand, were invested with lands and offices. Saxon loyalty was further ensured through widespread hostage-taking. Children of prominent Saxon families were sent to Francia to be educated in Frankish monasteries and households. Some of them would return to Saxony as monks. Others would come to serve as priests and bishops in their former homeland. The result of such policies was that Carolingian Saxony came to be governed by a privileged Saxon elite that had a deep stake in Christianity and Carolingian rule. This elite dominates the ninth-century textual record.

One of the most striking features of Saxon self-perception is how closely it resembled the Frankish discourse on Saxon identity. In the course of the Saxon

Wars, Frankish historians and legislators had come to offer a rather strict definition of who the Saxons were, or rather, who they should be: a people residing north-east of the Rhine, that stood under Frankish rule and had embraced Christianity. In the eighth century, this definition was still very much contested. Yet it is precisely this definition that stands at the heart of ninth-century Saxon self-perception. Post-conquest Saxons thought of themselves as Christians inhabitants of the Carolingian realm. They spoke confidently about their membership of the *gens Saxonum* – ‘our people’, as several authors proudly pronounced. They also appear to have preferred Saxon identity above that of the various sub-groups mentioned in Frankish historiography. Had the *Annales regni Francorum* still referred to Hessi as an Eastphalian nobleman, his descendants thought of themselves as Saxons rather than Eastphalians. In a similar fashion, Widukind was remembered by his grandson as a Saxon leader, not a Westphalian one. Significantly, Saxon authors did not consider the *gens Saxonum* a recent creation. Rather, they looked at their own people as a historical entity that had already existed prior to the Saxon incorporation into the Frankish realm and could in fact be traced deep into the past. That said, few ninth-century Saxons felt the need to do so. For the majority of the Saxon hagiographers and poets, Saxon history commenced with the Saxon Wars. This was the episode that was most crucial to ninth-century Saxon (elite) identity. On a general level, the Saxons Wars had introduced the *gens Saxonum* to Christianity and the benefits of Carolingian rule. On a more local level, it had witnessed the foundation of bishoprics and monasteries, and the political elevation of loyal Saxon families. Those with access to the written word in ninth-century Saxony typically identified with both developments.

Part of the reason Saxon self-perception stayed so close to the Frankish ideal was that Saxon authors relied on Frankish texts to document their own past. The anonymous authors of the *Vita Liutbirgae*, the *Translatio s. Pusinnae* and the *Translatio s. Liborii* all offered variations on the narrative created by Einhard in his *Vita Karoli*: Charlemagne engaging the pagan *gens Saxonum* in a protracted military struggle, by the end of which the Saxons were incorporated into the Frankish realm and converted to Christianity. Rudolf of Fulda and the

CONCLUSION

Poeta Saxo even repeated Einhard's triumphant conclusion: the Saxons had been united into a single people with the Franks. Of course, none of these authors passively copied Frankish historiography. Rather, they actively reworked the Frankish discourse so as to make it more acceptable for a Saxon audience. In Saxon hagiography, the Saxons were transformed from a *gens perfidia* to a *gens nobilis*. The length of the Saxon Wars became a sign of Saxon military valour as well as an indication of Saxon steadfastness and loyalty to ancient customs. The humiliation of defeat was mitigated by interpreting this defeat as part of a divine plan.

The Saxon interaction with Frankish historiography raises an obvious follow-up question: to what extent were ninth-century Saxons familiar with the late antique discourse on Saxons? There is little concrete evidence for such a familiarity. The anonymous author of the *Translatio s. Pusinnae* commenced her historical prologue with the statement that the Saxon people was already mentioned 'by the writers of old'.⁴ It is possible that the Herford nun had specific authors in mind. But if so, then she did not consider the information provided by these *antiqui scriptores* important enough to include in her work. At any rate, her statement seems to have been intended first and foremost as a vindication of the antiquity and venerability of the *gens Saxonum*. A similar situation presents itself with the Poeta Saxo. The Saxon poet appears to have been acquainted with various (late) antique poets, including Venantius Fortunatus. His narrative, however, focused solely on Charlemagne's reign, for which he relied on Einhard and the Revised Version of the ARF. The pre-conquest past was beyond his remit. An exception of sorts is Rudolf of Fulda's *Translatio s. Alexandri*. As head of one of the greatest libraries in the Carolingian realm, Rudolf used Tacitus and Gregory of Tours to create an early history of the Saxons, though the information he took from these authors had not originally been related to Saxons. Interestingly, there is evidence that Fulda possessed copies of Ammianus Marcellinus's *Res Gestae* and Eutropius' *Historia*

⁴ *Translatio s. Pusinnae*, c. 1, p. 541: Nobilis et strenua, iuxtaque dotem naturae sagacissima gens Saxonum, ab antiquis etiam scriptoribus memorata

Romana in Rudolf's day.⁵ Careful perusal of these histories could have led the Frankish monk to conclude that the Saxons of antiquity were frequent sea-farers and formidable fighters, as well as allies of the Franks. All these elements are present in the *Translatio s. Alexandri*, if in a different form. That said, we have seen that Rudolf's history, like other ninth-century 'Saxon' histories, was firmly anchored in the post-conquest world, which it sought to explain and legitimize. In general, post-conquest Saxon identity and history were created in the ninth-century present, not resurrected from the pre-conquest past.

In looking at the written discourse on Saxons, this thesis has sought to contribute also to a more general debate about late antique and early medieval ethnicity. A recurring bone of contention in this debate is the link between textual representations and ethnic reality. It is commonly understood that this link is problematic, due to the flexibility of ethnic terminology, the pervasiveness of authorial biases, and the fact that texts were often composed by 'outside' witnesses. In this thesis, I have approached textual representations not as distortions of reality, but as attempts to influence and shape reality. Late antique and early medieval authors did not passively observe barbarian groups like the Saxons. They actively and consciously defined them. The motives underlying such defining varied widely, and could have little bearing on the group described. Indeed, Roman authors often wrote about barbarians to define themselves. Depending on context, barbarians could either help to uphold the notion of Roman military and cultural superiority, or bring into focus Roman moral shortcomings. Frankish authors, too, were deeply concerned with Frankish identity when writing about other *gentes*. Perpetual triumph and rule over many peoples became an important feature of Frankish self-perception under the Carolingians. In fact, one of the reasons Frankish historians came to brand their north-eastern neighbours a *gens perfida* was that the Saxons successfully challenged Frankish military hegemony.

Significantly, an insider's perspective does not render textual representation of ethnicity any less subjective and constructed. If anything,

⁵ McKitterick, *History and Memory*, pp. 43, 189-90.

CONCLUSION

ethnic identity becomes vastly more complex when defined by insiders. Ninth-century Saxon self-perception depended on a combination of elite experience, interaction with Frankish historiography and local circumstances. As a result, different authors came to espouse different views on Saxon identity and history. Moreover, ninth-century Saxon authors typically treated Saxon identity as something that existed parallel to other identities: membership of a monastic community, of an aristocratic family, of the Carolingian polity, or of the *populus Christianus*. Early medieval Saxon identity, in short, was not a fixed and objective given. Rather, it was constantly redefined, in relation to new circumstances and ambitions. Late antique and early medieval texts about *Saxones* do not merely *record* this ongoing process of defining and re-defining. As this study has shown, texts were *part* of the process.

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SAMENVATTING/ SUMMARY IN DUTCH

De Saksen, zoals bijna alle volkeren van Germania, bezaten een wilde inborst, waren verknocht aan de verering van demonen en stonden vijandig tegenover onze religie. Het schenden van goddelijke noch menselijke wetten beschouwden zij als oneervol. – Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 7.

Aldus de Frankische historicus Einhard (d. 840) in zijn beroemde biografie van de Frankische koning Karel de Grote (d. 814). Karel, zo lezen we in Einhards biografie, had in zijn leven vele veldtochten ondernomen en oorlogen gevoerd, maar zijn oorlog tegen de Saksen was de langste, gruwelijkste en zwaarste geweest. Meer dan dertig jaar had de Frankische vorst nodig gehad om de bewoners van het huidige Noord-Duitsland aan zich te onderwerpen en tot het christendom te bekeren. Karels ‘Saksenoorlogen’ (772-804) worden door historici vaak beschouwd als een keerpunt in de Saksische geschiedenis. Ten eerste luidde deze periode een belangrijke religieuze verandering in: de Saksen namen als een van de laatste zogenaamde barbaarse volkeren het christendom aan. Ten tweede stonden de Saksenoorlogen aan de basis van een nieuwe Saksische gemeenschapszin. Het gebied tussen Rijn en Elbe werd in de eeuwen voor 772 bewoond door verschillende Saksische groepen, die min of meer onafhankelijk opereerden. Drie decennia van gemeenschappelijke weerstand tegen Karels militaire ambities, gevolgd door administratieve integratie in het Frankische rijk, resulteerden evenwel in grotere cohesie tussen de Saksische subgroepen; zij begonnen over zichzelf te denken als één Saksisch volk. Een derde ontwikkeling die voortvloeide uit de Saksenoorlogen is vooral voor moderne historici van belang: de Saksen kwamen in structureel contact met het geschreven woord. Hoewel al vanaf de tweede eeuw n. Chr. over Saksen geschreven werd, zijn er uit de periode vóór de negende eeuw geen Saksische teksten overgeleverd. De vroegste Saksische teksten stammen uit c. 830, toen Saxonia al enkele decennia onderdeel uitmaakte van het Frankische rijk.

Dit derde punt vormt meteen ook het grootste obstakel in modern onderzoek naar de Saksen: voor de periode c. 150-830 kunnen Saksen alleen maar bestudeerd worden op basis van de berichtgeving van ‘buitenstaanders’, dat wil zeggen, Romeinse, Britse en Frankische auteurs. Niet alleen zijn deze bronnen vaak gebrekkig geïnformeerd over Saksen, de informatie die zij verstrekken is ook sterk gekleurd door vooroordelen, literaire clichés en politieke agenda’s. Einhards vileine toespelingen op Saksische wetteloosheid zijn hiervan nog een relatief mild voorbeeld. Hoewel vanaf c. 830 wel Saksisch bronnenmateriaal voorhanden is, zijn deze teksten op een andere manier onbetrouwbaar. Zoals elders in het Frankische rijk, werd het geschreven woord in Saxonía het domein van een christelijke elite. Hiertoe behoorden Saksische monniken, nonnen, geestelijken en aristocraten, wier leef- en denkwereld sterk gevormd waren door kerstening en incorporatie in het Frankische rijk. Zij zagen zichzelf als trouwe en christelijke onderdanen van de Frankische koningen en voelden maar een beperkt verwantschap met hun heidense voorouders. Zij die toch over de vooroorlogse situatie schreven, deden dat met naoorlogse motieven en idealen: het heidense verleden werd met terugwerkende kracht herschreven en in dienst gesteld van het christelijke heden. Naoorlogse Saksische teksten geven dus een sterk vertekend beeld van de situatie in vooroorlogs Saxonía en zijn zodoende ongeschikt als bronnenmateriaal voor deze periode.

Ondanks de weerbarstigheid van het bronnenmateriaal, is modern onderzoek naar de vooroorlogse Saksen in de hoofdzaak nog steeds gericht op het reconstrueren van de feitelijke Saksische geschiedenis. Deze studie heeft een andere invalshoek. Centraal staan niet de Saksen zelf, maar de laatantieke en vroegmiddeleeuwse beeldvorming rondom Saksen. Hoe werd tussen 150 en 900 over Saksen geschreven? Wat verstond men in deze periode überhaupt onder het label ‘Saks’ (*Saxo*)? En hoe ontwikkelde dit beeld zich in de loop der eeuwen en in relatie tot nieuwe politieke omstandigheden? Deze vragen staan aan de basis van dit proefschrift. Hierbij wordt expliciet in het midden gelaten of er voor de negende eeuw wel zoiets bestond als één verenigd Saksisch volk. De focus ligt op laatantieke en vroegmiddeleeuwse teksten en het (veranderende) gebruik daarin van het label ‘Saksen’ (*Saxones*). Deze studie gaat

echter verder dat het bestuderen van individuele tekstuele verwijzingen naar *Saxones*. Het doel is nadrukkelijk om de context te reconstrueren waarin dergelijke beeldvorming tot stand kwam. Wie schreef er over Saksen? Wat waren hun literaire motieven? En hoe werd hun Saksenbeeld beïnvloed door grotere politieke ontwikkelingen, zoals de Saksische incorporatie in het Frankische rijk? Deze dissertatie, kortom, onderzoekt een doorlopend tekstueel discours over Saksische identiteit. In dit tekstuele discours kunnen vier opeenvolgende fasen onderscheiden worden: Saksen vanuit een Romeins perspectief (c. 150-500), Saksen vanuit een Merovingisch perspectief (c. 550-750), Saksen vanuit een Karolingisch perspectief (c. 750-830) en Saksen vanuit een Saksisch perspectief (c. 830-900). Deze fasen worden in deze studie hoofdstuksgewijs behandeld.

Romeinse auteurs zagen Saksen als barbaarse vijanden, die aan de periferie van het Romeinse rijk opereerden en buiten de Romeinse maatschappij stonden. Er bestond evenwel geen eenduidig beeld van wie de Saksen precies waren en waar zij leefden. Sommigen spraken over Saksen als een volk (*gens*) en dichtten hen ook specifieke gebruiken toe. De Alexandrijnse cartograaf Ptolemaeus liet optekenen dat de Saksen een gebied in Germania bewoonden, in het moderne Schleswig-Holstein. De Gallo-Romeinse bisschop Sidonius Apollinaris sprak met ontzetting over Saksische mensenoffers. De meeste Romeinse auteurs gebruikten het begrip *Saxones* echter in een bredere context: het was de standaardterm voor barbaarse piraten die in de vierde en vijfde eeuw n. Chr. de kusten van Gallië teisterden. Ook de verschillende groepen die in deze periode naar Brittannië migreerden, werden vaak met de overkoepelende term *Saxones* aangeduid. In de Romeinse periode verwees de term *Saxones* dus lang niet altijd naar een homogene etnische groep ('de Saksen'). De Romeinse beeldvorming rondom *Saxones* werd daarnaast sterk beïnvloed door literaire en politieke motieven. In laatantieke panegyriek werd op gloedvolle wijze over de (dikwijls fictieve) militaire verrichtingen van Romeinse keizers en generaals gerapporteerd. De Saks, als geduchte barbaarse vijand, was in dergelijke lofdichten een terugkerende verschijning: een goede generaal was een generaal die Saksen verslagen had. De politieke desintegratie van de West-Romeinse Rijk

in de vijfde eeuw n. Chr. resulteerde erin dat Saksen ook steeds vaker door een moralistische lens bekeken werden. Saksische aanvallen op de Romeinse grenzen werden geduid als een goddelijke straf voor de eigen zondigheid; de Saksen figureerden als gesel Gods. Andere auteurs presenteerden Saksen als nobele wilden, wier onbezoedelde gebruiken scherp contrasteerden met de morele verdorvenheid van de Romeinse maatschappij. Het Romeinse publiek werd via de Saksen als het ware een spiegel voorgehouden: zij hadden hun huidige tegenslagen aan zichzelf te danken.

Romeinse ideeën over Saksen vonden hun weerklink in de Merovingische periode. De zesde-eeuwse dichter Venantius Fortunatus schreef weliswaar voor Frankische koningen in plaats van Romeinse keizers, maar hij bediende zich hierbij van de traditionele literaire beeldtaal. In Venantius' lofdichten was de Saks nog steeds een buitenlandse vijand, wiens rol er vooral uit bestond op het slagveld verslagen te worden en zo de militaire superioriteit van Frankische vorsten te onderstrepen. Net als hun Romeinse voorgangers, hanteerden Frankische auteurs een brede definitie van het begrip *Saxones*. De term kon zonder veel onderscheid gebruikt worden voor groepen in West-Gallië, groepen in Italië en groepen ten noordoosten van de Rijn. Het Frankische Saksenbeeld ontwikkelde zich vanaf de zesde eeuw echter ook in een nieuwe richting. Hadden Romeinse auteurs de Saksen nog uitsluitend als barbaarse buitenstaanders gepresenteerd, Frankische auteurs neigden ernaar Saksen ook als (potentiële) leden van de eigen gemeenschap te zien. In eerste instantie ging het hierbij vooral om een universeel soort gemeenschap: het idee dat Saksen net als Franken en Romeinen onderdeel waren van een wereld die volledig beheerst wordt door de goddelijke voorzienigheid. Deze notie is bovenal aanwezig in het werk van de bisschop en historicus Gregorius van Tours (d. 594). Zevende- en achtste-eeuwse historici stonden daarentegen een meer politieke gemeenschap voor: Saksen waren onderdeel, of moesten onderdeel worden, van het Frankische rijk. Dit Saksenbeeld was niet volledig gestoeld op de realiteit. De Merovingische koningen rekenden Saksische groepen in West-Gallië en Germania tot hun invloedssfeer, maar deze invloed was, vooral in Germania, zeer beperkt. Dat Frankische hegemonie over perifere groepen bij historici

desondanks steeds meer op de voorgrond kwam te staan, was vooral het resultaat van de politisering van de Frankische geschiedschrijving. Historici schreven geen universele geschiedenis meer, maar Frankische geschiedenis. Zij vereenzelvigden zich met de militaire en politieke ambities van hun Frankische vorsten.

Onder de Karolingische koning Karel de Grote (d. 814) werden de Saksen daadwerkelijk onderworpen aan Frankisch gezag, zij het met grote moeite. Ook werden zij geïntroduceerd tot het christendom. Karels Saksenoorlogen hadden verstrekende gevolgen voor hoe er door Franken over Saksen gedacht en geschreven werd. Allereerst werd het begrip Saks scherper gedefinieerd. *Saxo* werd de standaardterm voor inwoners van het Rijn-Elbe gebied. Tegelijkertijd werd het de Franken in de loop van de Saksenoorlogen steeds duidelijker dat dit gebied niet bewoond werd door één volk, maar door verschillende Saksische subgroepen. Het was precies deze politieke versnippering die het voor Karel en de Franken zo moeilijk maakte de Saksen definitief te verslaan. In Karolingische geschiedwerken wordt een dubbel beeld geschetst van de Saksenoorlogen. Aan ene kant worden zij gepresenteerd als een glorieuze onderneming, waarbij Karel een heidens volk het koninkrijk Gods binnen wist te leiden. Aan de andere kant zat er voor de Franken ook een bittere bijmaak aan deze onderneming. Geen andere oorlog had zoveel slachtoffers gemaakt onder de Frankische elite of de vanzelfsprekendheid van Frankische militaire hegemonie zo ter discussie gesteld. Frankische geschiedschrijvers zochten naarstig naar een verklaring voor het feit dat een christelijke vorst meer dan drie decennia en vijftien veldtochten nodig had gehad om zijn heidense burens zijn wil op te leggen. Moderne historici zijn geneigd te wijzen op het gebrek aan politieke cohesie onder de achtste-eeuwse Saksen. Frankische geschiedschrijvers wezen echter liever op het inherent trouweloze karakter van hun vijand. De Saksen hadden zich gedurende de oorlog een verraderlijk volk getoond dat met grote regelmaat verdragen had geschonden en op gemaakte afspraken was teruggekomen. Karel, zo luidde de Frankische conclusie, had de Saksen snel genoeg overwonnen, maar had vervolgens een verbeterde strijd moeten leveren tegen Saksische opstanden en afvalligheid. De aldus in het leven geroepen beschuldiging van Saksische

perfidia, die zowel naar politieke als religieuze ontrouw verwees, bleef nog lang na 804 doorwerken in Frankische oorlogsverhalen.

Een belangrijk gevolg van de Saksische incorporatie in het Frankische rijk was een toename in Saksische geletterdheid. Zodoende zijn vanaf c. 830 ook Saksische teksten voorhanden. Deze teksten geven inzicht in Saksische zelfperceptie, of beter gezegd, de zelfperceptie van een selecte groep binnen de Saksische samenleving: de christelijke elite. Deze elite stond positief tegenover de Saksische incorporatie in het Frankische rijk. Dit was het directe gevolg van het geraffineerde integratiebeleid dat Karel en zijn opvolgers voerden met betrekking tot de veroverde Saksische gebieden. Zij plaatsten het bestuur over naoorlogs Saxonia welbewust in handen van loyale Saksische edelen, die zij begunstigen met grafelijke titels, landerijen en huwelijksverbintenissen met vooraanstaande Frankische families. Ook nieuwe Saksische kloosters en (in mindere mate) bisdommen plukten de vruchten van Karolingische vrijgevigheid. Saksen die zich daarentegen tegen het Karolingisch gezag bleven verzetten, werden onteigend en afgevoerd naar andere delen van het rijk. Het aldus vrijgekomen land kon door de Karolingen gebruikt worden om de loyale Saksische aristocratie nog verder aan zich te binden. Een van de meest opvallende aspecten van het Saksische zelfbeeld dat in negende-eeuwse teksten naar voren komt, is hoe sterk dit beeld lijkt op de Frankische beeldvorming. Frankische historici hadden de Saksen gepresenteerd als een volk dat het gebied tussen Rijn en Elbe bewoonde en dat ondergeschikt was aan de Frankische koningen. In de achtste eeuw was dit beeld meer ambitie dan werkelijkheid geweest. Maar in de negende eeuw werd het de basis voor Saksische zelfperceptie. De naoorlogse Saksische elite zag zichzelf als leden van één Saksisch volk (*gens Saxonum*), dat trouw was aan God en de Karolingische vorsten. De Saksen brachten in dit zelfbeeld wel hun eigen nuances aan. Vooral het Saksische oorlogsverleden werd op een creatieve en selectieve manier herschreven. De Saksen waren niet trouweloos geweest, maar nobel; zij hadden geen oorlog verloren, maar waren voor het christendom gewonnen; zij waren niet verslagen uit zwakte, maar omdat God dat zo besloten had; het was niet Karel die de Saksen tot het christendom bekeerd had, maar de Saksen zelf. Zo

DEFINING AND REDEFINING SAXONS

wist een onderworpen volk een pijnlijk verleden met terugwerkende kracht acceptabel te maken.

Saksische identiteit was geen vaststaand gegeven. Het begrip *Saxones* werd tussen 150 en 900 steeds opnieuw gedefinieerd, door buitenstaanders maar ook door Saksen zelf. Romeinse auteurs definieerden Saksen als rovers en heidenen. Frankische auteurs definieerden hen als onderdanen. De naoorlogse Saksen definieerden zichzelf als trouwe en vrome christenen. Dit proefschrift toont niet alleen hoe de beeldvorming rondom Saksen zich in zeven eeuwen ontwikkelde, maar geeft ook inzicht in de verschillende literaire en politieke motieven die aan deze beeldvorming ten grondslag lagen. Het biedt geen Saksengeschiedenis, maar een representatiegeschiedenis.

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Robert Flierman was born on 2 January 1987, in 's Hertogenbosch. He received his BA in History (cum laude) from the University of Amsterdam in 2007 and his Research MA in Medieval Studies (cum laude) from Utrecht University in 2009. In 2010, he spent three months at the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome with a Ted Meijer Stipendium. From 2010 to 2014, he did PhD research as a member of the HERA JRP *Cultural Memory and the Resources of the Past, 400-1000*. During this time, he also taught seminars in medieval history and medieval Latin. He has published on Charlemagne and Carolingian historiography, and is currently preparing a publication on Charlemagne's first Saxon capitulary.