5. The position of local priests

In the preceding chapters, the priests of the Carolingian era have, by necessity and by choice, always been viewed from the perspective of bishops or gatherings in which bishops participated. The reason for this angle was that it was the ideas and ideals concerning priests and their ministry in the context of their time which were the main focus of interest. Hence the priests themselves have thus far been portrayed mainly as the passive recipients of the ensuing episcopal admonishments and other directives aimed at guiding them into leading exemplary lives amid their flocks. However, that priests were not merely passive recipients is evident in an episcopal admonishment in which the bishop shows his displeasure with priests’ disobedience on issues like their relationship with women.¹ There was, in other words, life on the other side of the fence. But when focusing on texts and the problems they present, it is easy to forget that it is impossible to interpret such texts without knowing something about the people they were written for. Consequently, it is not possible to value the purpose and possible effects of these texts without at least having some idea of the addressees' identity, of the circumstances in which they lived (and thus, the circumstances in which they received and were expected to use these texts) and of the values that dictated their behaviour. Fortunately, there some modern scholarship about what one could call 'rural society in the Carolingian period'²,

¹ As in Gerbald III, c.1 on women: 'Sicut sancta synodus Nicena interdicit, nullus umquam presbyter in domo sua habitare secum permittat mulierem extraneam praeter matrem et sororem atque amitam vel materteram, vel etiam ad secretum cubiculi vel cellario nullus presbyter feminam aliquam adire permittat. Quod si fecerit post haec, sciat se ab honore presbyteratus deponi, quia haec frequenter secundum canonicam institutionem prohibuimus et pleniter a presbyteris observatum non fuit. […]'
but as far as I am aware, local priests feature rarely and even then, only superficially.³

Hence, in this chapter, episcopal statutes and their contexts will no longer direct the main lines of inquiry. Here, it is first and foremost those on the receiving end of capitula episcoporum that will take centre stage in order to complement the rather one-sided image of priests presented in the above. A lot has been said about the ideal priest in the Carolingian period, but what do we know about priests themselves, of the 'real' people who served the local churches? Needless to say, information on this subject is scarce and scattered throughout all kinds of sources, and attempts at piecing together such evidence inevitably runs up against a wall of silence on many subjects that one would love to know more about. This does not mean that the exercise is hopeless, however. Scattered among many different texts of the late eighth and ninth centuries there are shreds of evidence concerning the backgrounds and lives of Carolingian priests, although it must be acknowledged immediately that it is quite impossible to create anything close to a representative image of all priests of this period. Most of the information on the education of a priest, for example, is not discussed explicitly but mentioned merely as a brief aside to the author's main message. Thus we can elicit only a rough outline, but this is enough to provide a counterbalance to the ideal priests of the texts, who are made of parchment only.

In what follows, four main subjects will be addressed which will, I hope, add some flesh and bones to the ideal priests of the Carolingian episcopate we

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have encountered thus far. The first is that of their provenance and background, the second concerns the social and economical position of priests within their community. Thirdly, it will be demonstrated how important a good local reputation was for a priest, which shows that not only bishops, but also local communities had clear ideas about proper priestly behaviour. Finally, the way in which priests may have functioned as a distinct group within a diocese will be discussed. The sources used are of a wide variety, though their authors are often (but not always) bishops. After all, priests themselves have, to the best of my knowledge, not left any written evidence themselves beyond the names signed under some charters, and therefore they do not tell us much about their own lives.

Background

Although a lot of priests from the Carolingian period are known by name, we know virtually nothing of their lives before they were consecrated as priests. There is evidence to suggest that some of them were born unfree\(^4\), although a candidate was required to be made free before he could be ordained.\(^5\) At the same time it is clear that not all priests came from such backgrounds. Hincmar

\(^4\) E.g. in a letter from Charlemagne to his son Pippin in Italy, dating to 806-10, in which a distinction is made between priests born free and those born unfree when it comes to the proper compensation for wounded or murdered priests: 'Verumtamen de presbyteris videtur nobis, ut si liber natus est presbyter, tripla compositione secundum tuam legem fiat compositus; et si plagatus fuerit, secundum qualitatem plagarum vel disciplinae tripla compositione emendetur qui hoc perpetraverit. Si tamen presbyter servus natus fuerit, secundum illius nativitatem tripla compositione solvatur in plagis et disciplinis.' MGH Cap.I, no. 103. This distinction between free and unfree by birth is, however, not made in other sources concerning the murder of priests, like e.g. Council of Mainz (847), c.25. See also Council of Rome (853), where priests with the status of coloni are mentioned in c.40: 'Ut presbiteri ordinati per loca ad proprii episcopi veneri nullo modo concilium neglegant. Presbiteri vero, qui in diversis locis, baptisteriis vel quibuscumque sacrarum oratoris ordinantur, instanter hac inexcusabiliter ad concilium dioecesis episcopi occurrere secundum sanctorum statuta patrum decrevimus. Hi autem, qui colonatur possessiones retinent, nihilominus volumus ad episcopi indifferenter conveniri concilium; nam si per contumatiam se quasi in alterius potestate subtraxerint et proprio non subiciantur episcopo, canonici correpotionibus subiaceant.'

\(^5\) This went for all clergy, as decided in the Statuta Rhispacensis, Frisingensis, Salisburgensis (799-800), c.13, which states that a slave had to be set free before he was ordained in any clerical function, so that his former master could no longer exert any power over him. This idea is repeated under Louis the Pious in the Capitulare ecclesiasticum (818/9), c.6.
II, c.18, for instance, mentions priests with private possessions inherited from their family (\textit{patrimonia}).\textsuperscript{6} Herard c.44, in turn, distinguishes between a priest's inheritance (\textit{hereditas}) and other property acquired during their priesthood. The former category, so the bishop instructs his priests, could be distributed as they wished, while the latter type of property devolved to their churches.\textsuperscript{7} It seems, then, that some priests came from rather humble backgrounds, whereas others came from well-to-do families of free land-holders, who, at least at a local level, constituted the higher strata of society.\textsuperscript{8} The notion that priests were by definition recruited from the ranks of the \textit{nihil habentes} should therefore be put into perspective.\textsuperscript{9}

As to the education of priests, the sources suggest several possibilities. The most specific information we have comes from a few so-called \textit{litterae formatae}, letters of introduction or recommendation written by (arch)bishops for individual priests. Such a letter was needed when, for instance, a priest wanted to move from one diocese to another or to travel through a diocese other than his own, and is often prescribed in contemporary canones and capitularies.\textsuperscript{10} In the

\textsuperscript{6} Hincmar II, c.18: ‘\textit{Investigandum similiter, si nichil patrimonii habens, quando provectus est ad ordinem ecclesiasticum, postea emerit predia, cuius iuris sint, quoniam ecclesiae, ad quam de nihil habentibus promotus est, esse debent iuxta canonicae auctoritatis decretum.’ This is a prescription frequently found in contemporary conciliar acts, e.g. Aachen (816), c.89 and Paris (829), c.16. Similar conclusions on the variety of backgrounds of priests, but then for the Merovingian period, are drawn by Robert Godding, \textit{Prêtres en Gaule mérovingienne}, Subsidia Hagiographica 82 (Brussels, 2001), pp. \textsuperscript{3-6}.

\textsuperscript{7} Herard, c.44: ‘\textit{Ut res, quas in sacris ordibus adquisierint, propriis ecclesiis dereliquant, hereditarias vero iuxta arbitrium propriae voluntatis distribuant.’} Radulf c.17 also states that property acquired after ordination fell to the priest's church and should not be considered as private.

\textsuperscript{8} Wickham, ‘Rural society’, pp. 528-9, however, points out that there were many ways and levels of land-ownership, that also many peasants were free, and that they sometimes owned some of the land they worked. See below. The term \textit{patrimonium} in Hincmar II, c.18, however, seems to point to more substantial land-ownership. Niermeyer translates the term with ‘estate, manor’ at p. 775.

\textsuperscript{9} On the supposed poverty of priests see Janet L. Nelson, ‘Making ends meet’ at p. 152. See also further on in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{10} E.g. Council of Ver (755), c.12; \textit{Admonitio Generalis} (789), c.3; Synod of Frankfurt (794), c.27; Council of Meaux-Paris (845/6), c.50. But see Council of Paris (829), book I, c.36: apparently a lot of people blatantly ignored this prescription.
few examples of such letters, we find brief descriptions of the priest's career, telling the recipient, among other things, where the priest was educated. Bishop Ebroin, for example, informs us that his priest Dodobert was born, educated and consecrated in his diocese.\(^\text{11}\) In a similar letter from Archbishop Teutgaud of Trier we learn that the priest Heligo grew up in his diocese of Trier, where he was also educated (\textit{nutritus}) and where he received his tonsure.\(^\text{12}\) The term \textit{nutritus} is interesting here, as it may imply that the priest was educated in the bishop's household, but it could also mean that he was schooled in a monastery\(^\text{13}\), while a third possibility might be that the priest was educated from childhood in one of these places. A letter dating to 865, written by Bishop John of Cambrai for his priest Teuderic, suggests that the latter was educated at the cathedral school of Cambrai (\textit{apud matrem Ecclesiam nostram}), where he also completed all of his ecclesiastical grades before he was ordained a priest.\(^\text{14}\) A similar education in an episcopal cathedral school is implied in an early tenth century letter written for the priest Gislemar, who, his bishop writes, was

\(^{11}\) Ebroini Bituricensis ad Magnonem Senonensem archiepiscopum pro Dodoberto presbytero, ut in ejus parochia apud Hercambaldum manere possit, Migne PL 129, col. 1389A-C at 1389B: ‘De caetero notum facimus sanctitati vestrae quia istum praesentem presbyterum, nomine Dodobertum, parochianum nostrum, in nostra dioecesi natum, et sacras litteras edoctum, ad ordinem sacrum promoveri jussimus.’

\(^{12}\) Teutgaudi archiepiscopi Trevirensis epistola generalis ad Carolum Calvum regem, episcopos et alios universos, pro Hegilone presbytero ad sanctorum loca peregrinante, Migne PL 129, col. 1390B-1391D at 1390D: ‘[…]. fratrer nobis carissimus, et cunctis benevolentibus, nomine Hegilo, quia dioecesanus noster erat, in nostra videlicet dioecesi nutritus et tonsus, sacroque dogmate sanctorum Scripturarum plenissime eruditus, et honestissime conversatus, atque in Ecclesia nobis commissa ad sacerdotti dignitatem fuerat promotus […]’. This letter dates to the time of Charles the Bald and can be dated no more precisely than that.

\(^{13}\) Cf. Niermeyer, p. 725, lemma 'nutritus'. On the specific monastic meaning of the term \textit{nutritus} see Mayke de Jong, \textit{In Samuel's image. Child oblation in the early medieval West} Brill's studies in intellectual history vol.12 (Leiden etc., 1996) at pp. 126-32.

\(^{14}\) Joannis episcopi Camaracensis epistola generalis ad omnes episcopos, pro Ursione presbytero, ut in qualibet illorum parochia recipi possit, Migne PL 129, col. 1391D-1392D at 1392A: ‘Et quibus praesens sacerdos, Ursio vocabulo, a beatae recordationis praedecessore nostro Teuderico, apud matrem Ecclesiam nostram per omnes gradus canonice promotus, religioseque dum licuit conversatus, suppliciter eflagitavit litteras […]’
'ecclesiasticus educatus'. It seems that on the basis of this evidence, we may assume that priests had often received an education at a cathedral school before they were ordained as priests and appointed to a church. There is, however, no direct, unequivocal evidence for priests’ being trained in monasteries, but this remains a possibility. At the same time, though on a more hypothetical level, such schooling may have formed only the second phase of their training. Quite a few episcopal statutes and also the proceedings of some important councils, mention local schools, organised by local priests and run by them or one of their clerici. Here, according to the Admonitio Generalis (789), local pueri should be taught how to read. Should we rule out the possibility that there were future priests among these pueri, who later on continued their education elsewhere when they had shown talent? I think not, although it may have depended on their background whether or not they went on directly to a cathedral school or a monastery. The possibility that future priests received some education locally should, I think, be taken into consideration.

15 Ratbodi Trevirensis archiepiscopi ad Rhotbertum episcopum Metensem, pro Gislemaro presbytero, ut et deinceps in ipsius parochia degere liceat, Migne PL 129, col. 1396A-C at 1396B: ‘[…].quia praesenti presbytero nostro, nomine Gislemaro, has dimissorias dedimus litteras, quem in nostra dioecesi ecclesiasticus educatum, de ordine clericatus ad presbyteratus provexit gradum.’

16 E.g. Walter, c.6; Herard, c.17; Capitula Trecensia, c.4.

17 E.g. Admonitio Generalis (789), c.72; Council of Mainz (813), c.45; Relatio episcoporum (829), c.24.

18 About a clericus running the local school see Hincmar II, c.11: ‘Si habeat clericum, qui possit tenere scolam […]’

19 As prescribed in the Admonitio Generalis (789), c.72: ‘[…] Et ut scolae legentium puerorum fiant […]’ Also Theodulf I, c.20: ‘Presbyteri per villas et vicos scolas habeant. Et si quilibet fidelium suos parvulos ad discendas litteras eis commendare vult, eos suscipere et docere non rennuant, sed cum summâ caritate eos doceant […]’

20 Peter Brommer holds a different view, and sees a clear division between priests educated in monasteries as opposed to the rural population educated locally. See MGH Cap.ep.I, p.116, n.68, where he comments on Theodulf I, c.20 (see previous footnote): ‘Wahrscheinlich sollte hier im Gegensatz zur Klosterschule wo in erster Linie Priesternachwuchs herangebildet wurde … in einer Art Volksschule auch die Landbevölkerung unterrichtet werden […]’ I don’t think this division is plausible, and moreover, Brommer does not give any sources for local priests educated in a monastery.
Family may also have played a role in determining whether or not a boy would work his way towards the priesthood. In Brittany, Wendy Davies has shown that there were families 'that consistently produced priests'. Although Brittany was by no means representative of the Carolingian realm as a whole (as Davies makes abundantly clear), and comparable research for the rest of Carolingian Europe is lacking, there are some hints that outside Brittany too, family may indeed have been a factor in steering boys towards the priesthood. In a charter in the Cartulary of Fulda we find a priest named Waldbraht making a donation to the monastery together with his cousins the priest Albwin and the clericus Heimbraht. This is an extraordinary example, but it does show that there were families whose members included more than one priest, although from this one reference we cannot predicate that there were families who produced generations of priests. Yet there may have been ways that priests could usher their relatives towards clerical orders, as can be inferred from Theodulf of Orléans’s first episcopal statute:

'It if any of the presbyters wishes to send his nephew or other relative to school, in the church of the Holy Cross, or in the monastery of Saint Aignan, or of Saint Benedict, or of Saint Lifard, or in others of those monasteries which it has been granted us to rule, we grant him permission to do so.'

It is not much to go on, and there are no episcopal statutes, contemporary capitularies, canon law or other sources that shows priests helping their relatives

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21 Wendy Davies, *Small worlds*, p. 68.
22 *Urkundenbuch des Klosters Fulda I* (Die Zeit der Äbte Sturmi und Baugulf), ed. Edmund E. Stengel (Marburg, 1958), no. 265, possibly dated around 790. They give all their possessions in Heimesgeshusum, Aschfeld and Niwiheim to the monastery, together with twenty serfs.
23 Theodulf I, c.19: 'Si quis ex prebyteris voluerit nepotem suum aut aliquem consanguineum ad scolam mittere, in ecclesia sanctae Crucis aut in monasterio sancti Aiani aut sancti Lifardi aut in ceteris de his coenobiis, quae nobis ad regendum concessa sunt, ei licentiam id faciendi concedimus.' The translation is Dutton ed., *Carolingian civilisation*, p. 97. Note that the first school mentioned is a cathedral school, while the others are all monastic.
to train as monks or secular clergy. However, it is probable that it did happen on occasion. As we shall see later on, at a local level at least, the priesthood could be a relatively prestigious ministry, and it stands to reason that priests would have wanted to help their relatives attain such an august position, perhaps by asking a favour from the local bishop as suggested by Theodulf.

Theodulf's permitting his local priests to send members of their family to a school within his diocese also divulges some other interesting information, which concerns the priests' interaction with their families. The litterae formatae concerning the priests Dodobert and Hegilo cited above, explicitly state that these priests were born and educated in the diocese in which they ministered, which suggests that they were geographically not far removed from their families, even though some dioceses were quite large. Theodulf's c.19 shows, in turn, that contacts between priests and their relatives were, at least in some cases, close and active, while the fact that priests came into inheritances, as mentioned previously, points to the same thing. Other evidence shows that priests not only remained embedded within their family network, but actually lived among their relatives. Hincmar of Rheims’s second episcopal statute, for instance, instructs priests to maintain the local poor only with that part of their church's tithes designated for this purpose. Local cow-herds or swine-herds did not qualify as poor enough, whereas a very poor or sick relative of the priest would have been eligible for such support. Priests should, however, feed and clothe other relatives from their own portion of the tithes.24 'Local' is well-circumscribed in this case, as a local church was meant to take care only of the poor and sick within its community. This means that it was not unusual for a priest to have relatives, even close ones, who were members of his church. Furthermore, in his first statute, Hincmar warns against bribery from 'public

\[24\] Hincmar II, c.17: 'Ut matricularios habeat iuxta qualitatem loci, non bubulcos aut porcarios, sed pauperes ac debiles et de eodem dominio, nisi forte presbiter habeat fratrem aut aliquem propinquum debilem aut pauperrimum, qui de eadem decima sustententur. Reliquos autem propinquos, si iuxta se habere voluerit, de sua portione vesti atque pascat.'
sinners or incestuous people'. Under no condition should priests accept gifts from these people in exchange for 'forgetting' their sins, nor should they refrain from telling the bishop about them, not even out of respect for the person or because the sinner was a relative. Another piece of evidence that shows a priest living in the very same place as members of his family is in a letter from the same Hincmar to Pope Hadrian, dating from around 870. The priest Trising, subject of part of the letter because he had caused a lot of trouble, is described as living in the same hamlet as his married brother. What is more, the priest even goes out drinking with his brother's brother-in-law at a nearby castellum.

All this adds up to a situation in which it was not uncommon for priests to minister close to, or even in, the very place where they originally came from. On the other hand, the litterae formatae already cited show that mobility was not impossible either. The letter about the priest Ursio, written by Bishop Jonas of Cambrai in around 865, asks all the bishops to whom Ursio might present himself to permit him to find a place within any of their dioceses to execute his ministry, as Cambrai was extremely dangerous at the time. Jonas assures his colleagues that Ursio was not a vagabond or a criminal, but simply frightened by the threats of the Northmen. In a similar vein, around 810, Magnus,

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25 Hincmar I, c.13: ’Ut nemo presbiterorum exenium vel quodcumque emolumentum temporale, immo detrimentum spiritale a quocumque publice peccante vel incestuoso accipiat, ut nobis vel ministris nostri peccatum illius reticeat, nec pro respectu culuisque personæ aut consanguinitatis vel familiaritatis alienis peccatis communicans hoc nobis vel ministris nostri innotescere detracet [...].'

26 Epistola Hincmari Rhemensis ad Adrianum papam, Migne PL 126, col. 641B-648D at 646C: ’Quaedam libera femina, soror hominis nomine Livulfi, de ipsa in qua praefatus Trisingus presbyter fuerat ordinatus, accepit maritum fratrem ipsius Trisingi presbiteri: et hac familiaritate idem Trisingus coepit frequentare domum fratris sui [...].’ About Trising, see below.

27 Idem, col. 646C-D: ’Et quadam die ipse presbyter, atque praefatus Livulfus perrexerunt ad castellum quod Mosomus dicitur, et inebriaverunt se in quadam taberna contra nostrum episcopali interdictum [...].'

28 Joannis episcopi Camaracensis epistola generalis ad omnes episcopos, pro Ursione presbytero, ut in qualibet illorum parochia recipi possit, Migne PL 129, col. 1392A-B: ’Nos igitur hujusmodi petitionem suscipientes, nostrae etiam atque ipsius miseriae condolentes,
Archbishop of Sens, asks his colleague Ebrion of Brioude to allow his priest Dodobert to stay with a man called Hercambald who lived in the Ebrion’s diocese, although it is not clear whether or not this visit was to be permanent. Mobility between various dioceses seems, however, to have been the exception rather than the rule. Canones, capitularies as well as the episcopal statutes show that no member of the clergy was allowed to change diocese as they pleased. In the famous Old High German Freisinger Klerikereid, dating from the early ninth century, a candidate for the priesthood even had to promise his bishop to be and remain 'statig' (in one place) before he was ordained. A priest should, then, in principle stay in the diocese where he was ordained; moving through or
to any other diocese was allowed only with explicit permission and an episcopal letter.

Not only was changing dioceses without a good and approved reason frowned upon, but also changing churches was discouraged, which means that a priest, once ordained, would usually stay with the church where he was appointed. Coveting a church other than one's own was considered ambitious, and attempts at getting a better church were actively discouraged.\footnote{Radulf c.17 threatens with punishment if a priest tried to get a better church than his own by means of bribery, see also Theodulf I, c.16 and Gerbald I, c.16. Against changing churches also Hincmar IV, c.1.} As Hincmar of Rheims, in his fourth episcopal statute, informs his priests: local people prefer good priests to rich ones, and therefore priests should not pester him for a richer church than their own.\footnote{Hincmar IV, c.5: ‘[…] Et non necesse esset vobis petere ecclesias cum superfluo exenio, quia quique fideles, si vestra culpa non esset, plus quaerent bonos clericos quam vestros denarios […]’} Once appointed to a church, priests seem to have remained there for considerable lengths of time, as is shown in a letter from Hincmar of Rheims to his nephew Hincmar of Laon.\footnote{Hincmari Rhemense ad eumdem (i.e. Hincmar of Laon), Migne PL 126, col. 537D-545D.} The subject is a dispute between the older Hincmar and the younger one, this time about a church in a place called Follembrai. In the course of his exposition, the details of which are not relevant here, the old Hincmar shows that he had an amazing amount of information about that church and who ministered there. Not only does he know who had this church in beneficio for the preceding decades if not centuries, he also knows precisely how these people were related to one another.\footnote{For instance idem, col.538A-B: ‘Post obitum Ferteri fuit in ipsa ecclesia Dodo presbyter, quando Odelherus filius Rodulfi, pater Parduli episcopi ipsam villam in beneficio habuit.’} Also his information about the priests ministering in this church up to his day is of astounding detail. He informs the younger Hincmar who the priests were during the preceding centuries, who ordained them and, in some cases, even where exactly and for how long they remained in office. As a rule, the job, apparently lasted for decades: Nodalbert ministered for about twenty years, Gozmar for...
thirty and Otteric for no less than sixty years. The priests who held office for only a few years always had a good reason for ending their ministries early. Bertfrid lasted a mere five years before his church was destroyed and plundered and Heimric was thrown out of his after only two and a half years.

As a rule, then, priests did not stray far from home while in office and remained with the church they were appointed to as long as they lived. They were, thus, 'local' in more than one sense: both by having family ties in the region where they ministered, and by functioning as shepherds of their local church's flock. Although by ordination they were members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and subject to the bishop alone, this must have had consequences for their position within their communities. How a priest's local status was perceived by his community is, however, very difficult to find out. Certainly his clerical rank had some influence, but within a lay community, status and position were, apart from family connections, determined by wealth. One way of estimating a priest's local status, therefore, is to ascertain how wealthy or poor he was, a question that has been the subject of some recent scholarship.

36 Idem, col. 538B-C: 'In ipso tempore fuit Nodalbertus presbyter in Codiciaco per annos viginti: obiit autem Wenilo, et successit Ostroldus episcopus in Ecclesia Laudunensi. Obiit Nodalbertus presbyter de Codiciaco, et successit ei Gozmarus presbyter qui de canonica Rhemensi missus est ad Ecclesiam in Codiciaco, et fuit ibi per annos circiter triginta.' and col.538C-D: 'Post obitum Simeonis episcopi in Laudunensi Ecclesia successit Pardulus episcopus, cujus tempore obiit Ottericus presbyter de Follanaebrayo, qui per annos circiter sexaginta in eadem ecclesia presbyter deguit.'

37 Idem, col.539A-B: 'Inde sicut ipsi homines dicunt per tuum consensum Bertfridus presbyter in eadem ecclesia, et in ecclesia tua apud Broeras per quinque annos cantavit, qui Bertfridus apud te se reclamavit quod Haimeradus ipsam capellam destructam haberet: et inde pallium unum, et casulam unam, et schillam unam, et librum unum abstulerit [...]'

38 Idem, col. 539C: '[...]: deinde ipsorum consensione Heimericus presbyter tuae parochiae per duos et dimidium annos ibidem officium sacerdotale exhibuit, usque, ut supra dixi, pridie Nonas proxime praecedentis Februar. quando praefato clerico interdicta est ipsa ecclesia [...]

39 For instance in Nelson, 'Making ends meet' and Davies, 'Priests and rural communities'.

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Poverty and wealth

With their local backgrounds and their (often life-long) ties to the church in which they were appointed\(^{40}\), priests must have become integrated members of their lay communities, despite the fact that no-one could enter the priesthood before the age of thirty.\(^{41}\) But what position did they have in such a community? What was their status? Given the obvious connection between status and wealth, it should be possible to get an impression of priestly status locally by estimating how much or how little they possessed, as well as trying to find out what opportunities they had to acquire goods and money. Interestingly, there are sources that show the existence of both poor and rich priests, although it remains to be seen how common either situation was. For the time being, and in accordance with the evidence for the priests' backgrounds, there is reason to assume that there was economic diversity within the whole group of Carolingian priests.\(^{42}\) In what follows I hope to demonstrate that, contrary to current understanding, the evidence for priestly wealth has been underestimated, whereas evidence of priestly poverty has been considerably exaggerated.

Poor priests

Let us begin with the evidence for priestly poverty - how poor were poor priests? To begin with an extreme example: Alcuin of York, in a letter to an unnamed bishop, describes a priest living under what can only be called destitute circumstances. This priest was not well-off to begin with, but 'now he has fallen into great poverty, for his already humble benefice, which he had in

\(^{40}\) Gerbald I, c.13 literally says this: 'Ut nulla presbyter a sede propria sanctae ecclesiae, sub cuius titulo ordinatus fuit, admonitionis causa ad alienam pergam ecclesiam, sed in eadem devotus usque ad vitae permaneat exitum.'

\(^{41}\) E.g. Council of Orléans (538), c.6; *Admonitio Generalis* (789), c.50.

\(^{42}\) Janet L. Nelson, 'Making ends meet' also notes this divide, pp. 152-3. She also links wealth and social position, p. 147.
Bavaria, has been taken away from him and given to others. As it had become very difficult for the priest to do his job properly, Alcuin asked the anonymous bishop to help the priest so that he might manage to support himself. Here, indeed, we have a clear example of a poverty-stricken priest, although it is clear that he was not indigent to begin with but became so for a specific reason which was presumably outside his control and not because of any wrong-doing on his part. Was it a lay lord who took his benefice from him? We can only speculate, but it is interesting to note that at some stage at least he had a benefice, small though it might have been. Such a possession put this priest into the category of free land-holders, and this was by no means the most humble of social groups, certainly not at a local level. There is no doubt that there were more priests, who, like him, lost their property to others, especially in the middle and later decades of the ninth century when church-land was often prey to alienation (see chapter 4). Moreover, certainly not all priests were treated with the 'due reverence' that bishops demanded of everyone. We have already briefly encountered the priest Heimric in Hincmar of Rheims's letter cited above, who was ousted from his church (although no reason is specified), and, given the number of warnings against such practices in contemporary conciliar

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43 Letter of Alcuin to Bishop N, Migne PL 104, col 529D-530A 'Iste presbyter nomine N. rogavit me plurimum ut pro illo apud vos intercederem, ut erga illum misericorditer agere dignaremini; qui sicut ipse asserit, in magna paupertate constitutus est, et nunc maxime quando ipsum parvum beneficiolum, quod habuit in Bajoaria, ablatum est ab illo, et alteri datum.'

44 Idem: 'Et nunc nescit quid agere, vel qualiter seniori suo servire debeat, nisi, per vestram intercessionem, domnus Hl. ei aliquod solatium ad vitam praesentem sustentandum dare dignabitur.'

45 Cf. Chris Wickham, 'Rural society', pp. 526-9, where he points out that there were many kinds of land ownership in the peasant societies of Carolingian Europe and that the way in which land was owned varied regionally. But on the whole 'There could be a very wide variety in levels of land owning in any village, from regional and local aristocrats, through village notables with dependent tenants, small owners, cultivators who owned some of their land and rented the rest, and free tenants, down to servile tenants and landless slaves. There were many intermediate grades between these, as well. None of the divisions was entirely clear-cut.', p. 528. The ownership of a small beneficium would put our priest with those 'with dependent tenants' or with the 'small owners'.
proceedings, this was presumably not an isolated case.\textsuperscript{46} It seems likely, then, that there were more priests like the one for whom Alcuin wrote his letter, people who lost their property by alienation and with the help of their 'network' tried to find some new benefice. With the support of a man like Alcuin, such poverty might have been only temporary. Bad as the situation for the unnamed priest may have been, it was clearly not impossible to find a way out. It is interesting to see in this context that a priest could indeed call upon the help of an important person to resolve the situation, which shows that the priest was not entirely helpless or hopeless when he lost his land.\textsuperscript{47}

It is also important to remember that such situations did not stand by themselves but were part of wider developments. As the preceding two chapters have shown, alienation of church-land and the associated tug-of-war between bishops and lay magnates, and within the episcopacy itself, were among the problems against which bishops reacted by trying to consolidate their hold over church-land and their diocesan clergy. This, of course, did not make poor priests richer, but it did ensure episcopal support against wrongs committed against the priests’ possessions, personnel and interests, which resulted in these matters’ attracting much attention in councils and correspondence.\textsuperscript{48} All in all, references to chronically poor priests are extremely rare; Alcuin's letter is exceptional in its lack of ambiguity. The majority of sources on which one could build a theory based on there being large numbers of poor priests in the Carolingian period,

\textsuperscript{46} Against laymen throwing priests out of their churches a.o. Capitula ad lectionem canonum et regulae S.Benedicti pertinentia (Oct? 802), c.2; Capitula ecclesiastica (810-3), c.2; Capitula e canonibus excerpta (813), c.2; Council of Attigny (822), c.5; Council of Mainz (847), c.12. Ousting a priest (like appointing one) was only possible with the permission of the local bishop.
\textsuperscript{47} Alcuin's letter is not the only example, see e.g. a letter from Lupus of Ferrière to archbishop Wenilo of Sens (dated 842-62) on behalf of the priest Elegaudus, MGH Epp. VI (Berlin, 1925), no.82.
\textsuperscript{48} See the preceding chapter. See also Hincmar of Rheims's tract 'Pro Ecclesiae libertatum defensione', in which the subject of alienation of ecclesiastical possessions gets a lot of attention. Migne PL 126, col.1035C-1070C.
lack this clarity, and merit special attention here, especially as their interpretation remains inconclusive and open to discussion.\textsuperscript{49}

There are many sources that have been interpreted as pointing to exploitation of priests and as evidence for their poverty. Janet Nelson, for instance, cites a letter by Agobard of Lyons according to which priests are used by their lay lords as servants, 'who serve at table, or mix the wine, or take the dogs out, or act as grooms for horses on which women are mounted, or look after plots of land'.\textsuperscript{50} Such a lack of reverence for priests and their ministry is also voiced in the Synod of Valence (855), where lay lords are described as submitting their priests to 'very hard service', while confiscating their meagre possessions as well as their church's land (\textit{dos}).\textsuperscript{51} Other texts warn against exploitation of priests during visits by laymen or on episcopal visitations. Radulf of Bourges, for instance, admonishes laymen not to take up residence in a priest's house with their wives (or any women, for that matter) and dogs, as this could lead to 'lay oppressions', meaning that it would divert the priest's attention from the care for his flock.\textsuperscript{52} Hincmar of Rheims, in his fifth episcopal statute, tells the archdeacons who conducted visitations on his behalf not to demand special things from a priest like fodder for their horses, special food for

\textsuperscript{49} Most notably Janet Nelson, 'Making ends meet', has made a case for exploited and poor priests, though the evidence she brings forward may also be interpreted in a different way, as I hope to demonstrate in the following.

\textsuperscript{50} Agobard of Lyons, MGH Epp.V, no.11, p.203 cited in Nelson, 'Making ends meet', p.146. The Latin reads as follows: '[…] qui aut ad mensas ministrent, aut saccata vina misceant, aut canes ducant, aut caballos quibus femine sedent regant, aut agellos provideant. […].'

\textsuperscript{51} Council of Valence (855), c.9: '[…] quia parochiales presbyteri gravissime et indigne a saecularibus premuntur, nullaque reverentia sacerdotali gradui, ab aliquibus servatur et quia possiessunculae vel dotes basilicis collatae irreverenter auferuntur durissimoque servitio extenuantur, quod clamor sacerdotum et ruinae etiam basilicarum produnt […]'

\textsuperscript{52} Radulf of Bourges, c.9: 'Omnes in commune seniores ecclesiarum laicos monemus, ut in domibus sacerdotum, quae mundae et castae ac religiosae esse debent, cum uxoribus vel alis feminis seu canibus habitare nullatenus praesumant, quoniam illicitum est eum, qui soli deo servire iubetur […] Hoc vero nefas deinceps fieri vetamus, ne dei ministri saeculari oppressione laedantur et Christi grex carissimo pretio comparatus neglegetia pastorali morte damnetur aeterna […]'
themselves or involuntary gifts.\textsuperscript{53} If one takes these texts at face value, things do, indeed, look grim for these priests. Similarly, one may interpret priests’ asking payment for sacraments\textsuperscript{54} as indicating that they were so poverty-stricken they had no other means of raising money. The same could be said for priests who pawned their liturgical vessels and vestments.\textsuperscript{55}

But do all these pieces of evidence point towards severe exploitation or priestly poverty? Not necessarily, it seems. On closer inspection, none of these sources calls priests 'poor' or even hints at their potential poverty. The term 'exploited' is used, as we have seen, but here the context in which these texts were written is important. The fragment from the Council of Valence cited above is a good example, for after the statement that lay lords abused and otherwise mistreated their priests, the real issue comes to the fore. The point of this \textit{caput} is not so much exploitation of priests, as the fact that priests strayed from the ecclesiastical hierarchy by working for a lay lord in the ways described; according to the text, priests should be left undisturbed to execute their ministry under their bishop, 'whose helpers they are'.\textsuperscript{56} It is probably going too far to interpret the abuse of priests as depicted in this text as pure rhetoric on the part of bishops who wanted to keep their priests under their own control, but given the time and the circumstances (see chapter 4), this perspective is not totally invalid either. It is no real surprise that the bishops thought that lay lords should leave their priests to execute their ministry properly, so that any infringement on this might very soon have signalled exploitation in their eyes. This also goes for Radulf's warning about laymen staying in priests' houses cited above - clearly the 'oppression' did not lead to poverty, but to a distraction from

\textsuperscript{53} Hincmar V, c.4 against demanding special food, c.5 against demanding gifts, c.6 against demanding fodder for horses.
\textsuperscript{54} As forbidden in a.o. Radulf of Bourges, c.18.
\textsuperscript{55} Hincmar I, c.11 forbids such practises: \textit{Ut nullus presbiter presbiterum calicem vel patenam aut pallam altaris vel vestimentum sacerdotale aut librum tabernario vel negotiatori aut cuilibet laico vel femine in vadimonium dare. [...]}'
the proper execution of the priest's ministry. The case of priests pawning liturgical vessels is even more debatable as proof of priestly poverty; this might simply indicate that some priests were not adverse to making money in every conceivable way open to them, irrespective of their financial position. Although this practice was, of course, strictly forbidden, we should not imagine that the local liturgy came to a grinding halt when a chalice or paten went missing - as far as we know, most churches had more than one. Of course it is not impossible that there were priests who pawned chalices in a desperate attempt to find some money for their own sustenance, but it seems equally plausible that this was a clever way of cashing in on surplus church-equipment. In principle, it was forbidden to all priests to have anything to do with money or trade, and it would be reading too much into the evidence to infer poverty from prohibitions against these practices.

Similar questions may be asked when it comes to the exploitation of priests as 'servants' of lay lords; such responsibilities automatically indicate exploitation? Not necessarily, I think, although we can but speculate on this point. Such specialised services, after all, required some specialised skills (like reading and writing of charters), and priests were presumably among the few people locally who possessed such capabilities. So is it unthinkable that priests actually agreed to fulfil these tasks because they themselves profited from such an arrangement too? Episcopal indignation about such an agreement can, moreover, only be expected in a period when bishops tried to strengthen their grip on their local clergy, so that they may have cried 'abuse' when the priest himself was happy with the situation. Again, the evidence can be interpreted as

56 Council of Valence (855), c.9: '[...] ut ipsi presbyteri sub episcopis, quibus adiutores sunt, maneant et sub matre ecclesia liberi et quieti officium ecclesiasticum exequantur [...]'
57 See for instance the Brevium exempla ad describendas res ecclesiasticas et fiscales (ca. 810), c.2 in which the contents of a church are described. Among many other objects, there were two patens and two chalices.
58 Against priests and money/trade: Gerbald III, c.14; Capitula Parisiensia, c.8; Capitula Corbeiensis, cc.7 and 8; Radulf c.35.
pointing in either direction, but should not automatically be understood in a negative sense. All in all, then, the existence of chronic priestly poverty cannot be concluded from these sources.

A text that merits special attention here is that belonging to the Council of Toulouse, a local gathering that met in 844 in the presence of King Charles the Bald. During this meeting, Septimanian priests brought forward their complaints against local bishops; the text we have is a royal capitulary written to address the problems under discussion. The decisions taken were, however, of a temporary nature, and were meant to be confirmed during a larger council later on. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that this second, general council ever met. The provisory decisions are, however, very interesting in themselves, for they show, as Nelson has pointed out, 'response to real contemporary problems'. The reason for the priests' complaints was, as the first caput of Charles's capitulary states, 'long-term oppression' by the bishops, which prompted them to involve the king. Hence, Charles tells the bishops not to bear any grudges against their priests for making these complaints, nor to make their lives difficult in any way.

Now what did this 'long-term oppression' involve? The main subject of the text is that bishops had a tendency to ask or just take too much of their priests' resources, and for clarity's sake the king specifies how much a bishop

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59 See the comments by Wilfried Hartmann, *Die Konzilien der karolingischen Teilreiche, 843-859* MGH Conc. III (843-859) (Hannover, 1984), no.4 at p. 18.
60 As can be inferred from the introductory statement to the text: Council of Toulouse (844), introduction: 'Haec, quae secuntur, capitula consultentes necessitati episcoporum Septimaniae et subiectorum et presbyterorum providentes possibilitati, tractantes etiam sacri et iuste inreprehensibilis ministrum honestatem, presbyterorum reclamatione commonititi moderamine mansuetudinis nostrae usque ad diligentiorum tractatum synodi generalis decernimus: [...]'
61 Nelson, 'Making ends meet', p. 149.
62 Council of Toulouse (844), c.1: 'Ut episcopi nullam inquietudinem sive exprobationem presbyteris aut aperte ingerendo aut alia qualibet occasione machinando pro eo, quod se ad nos hac vice reclamare venterunt, inferant; quia longe oppressio huiusmodi itineris eos fecit subire laborem.'
was allowed to take. So we read in *canon* 2 that 'Bishops are to receive from priests 1 measure of corn and 1 of barley and 1 of wine, using the legal measures, and 1 piglet worth 6 *denarii*, and nothing more; or, if they prefer, 2 *solidi* in *denarii* for the lot instead [...].'*63 Though part of this regulation is based on a *caput* from the Council of Braga (572) concerning episcopal visitations64, in the Toulouse-capitulary such payments were not connected with a visitation; these are discussed separately in c.4. There, bishops are instructed not to exert undue pressure on their priests by staying at very small churches during their round of the diocese.65 Moreover, food for episcopal use should be supplied in such a way that the bishop was provided for without detriment to the priest. Again, quantities are specified: 'ten loaves of bread, half a measure of wine, a piglet worth 4 *denarii*, 2 hens and 10 eggs and 1 measure of hay for the horses'. The system of visitation Charles has in mind works in such a way that a bishop sees five priests and their flocks at the same time. Four priests bring their lay people to the village of the fifth, with whom the bishop stays. All five priests have to give the bishop the aforementioned amount of provisions (c.4).66 In the

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63 Council of Toulouse (844), c.2: *Ut unum modium frumenti et unum modium hordei atque unum modium vini cum mensura, quae publica et probata ac generalis seu legitima per civitatem et pagum atque vicinitatem habetur, episcopi a presbyteris accipiant, et frischingam sex valentem denarios aut sex pro ea denarios et non amplius exigant; et si haec non accipiant, accipiant, si volunt, pro his omnibus duos solidos in denariis [...]’ Translation based on that by Janet Nelson, 'Making ends meet', p. 148. There is an interesting parallel with the amount of food prescribed to be given to *missi*, see *Tractoria de coniectu missis dando* (829in), MGH Cap.II, no.189.


65 See also the *Capitula ad missis instruendis* (829in), MGH Cap.II, no.187, where a similar thought is expressed: ‘Utrum episcopi in circumeundo parrochias suas ceteras minores ecclesias gravent aut populi oneri sint, et si ab ipsis aut a ministris eorum in debita exsenia a presbyteris exigantur.’

66 Council of Toulouse (844), c.4: ‘[…] presbiteri tale coniectum factiant, ut et episcopi solacium habeant et ipsi non graventur. Quod ita nobis fieri posse videtur, videlicet ut quattuor presbyteri ad locum, ubi quintus degit et episcopus resedit, plebes suas de quattuor partibus adducere studeant, et unusquisque eorum decem panes et dimidium modium vini et freschingam de quattuor denariis et pullos duos et ova decem et modium unum de annona ad
next caput, it is immediately stated that such visitations should be held no more
than twice a year - if the bishop wishes to come more often, he has to organise
his own provisions without burdening the priests.\textsuperscript{67} Moreover, he should not
bring an unnecessary number of servants, nor invite large groups of neighbours
to dinner while staying at a priest's house. Under no circumstances should they
ask more of priests than is specified in the text.\textsuperscript{68} Although the capitulary does
imply that episcopal visits at small churches may have been too much of a
burden for the incumbents, the over-riding impression we get is that the average
priest was not suffering from straitened circumstances. Apparently, it was not
considered problematic for them to part with the specified amounts of food and
drink when the bishop came by twice a year. The problem rather seems to have
been caused by the fact that there was a surplus and the bishop and his servants
saw no objection to feasting with groups of neighbours and servants at the
priest’s expense.\textsuperscript{69} Moreover, it is interesting to note that this group of
Septimanian priests was far from powerless against such episcopal 'oppressions',
as they found a sympathetic ear in the king himself.

\textsuperscript{67} Council of Toulouse (844), c.5: 'Ut semel in anno episcopi hanc circumitionem tempore
congruo faciant; et si amplius ministerium suum per diocesim agere voluerint, hanc tamen
dispensam non amplius quam semel a presbyteris per annum accipiant.'

\textsuperscript{68} Council of Toulouse (844), c.6: 'Quod et si circumitionem in salutem et necessitatem populi
quacumque de causa dimiserint, a presbyteris nec hanc dispensam neque pretium illius
exigant neque alius aut suis domesticis aut amicis exigendam concedant. Et quando
circumierint et in domo presbyteri resederint, non sub occasione adfligendi presbyteros
inmoderate et non necessarie numerum famulorum adducant neque vicinos ad pastum
incongrue convocent. Quod et si cum caritate vocare voluerint, faciant; sed non amplius a
presbiteris vel sub occasione vendendi vel alio quolibet modo, quam statutum est, exigant
neque paraveredos aut alias actiones tollant.'
The idea that bishops should not take more than their due from priests during visitations is a notion also found in Hincmar of Rheims's *Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis*. In the second and third books of this work, he discusses several problems that also came up in Toulouse (844). Hincmar had also noted irregularities in his archdiocese during episcopal visitations, and admonishes bishops never to ask more from priests than they really needed - after all, the tithes a priest receives were meant to be used to sustain the poor and guests, as well as to maintain their church, and should therefore not be unnecessarily squandered by bishops or their representatives.\(^6^9\) He thinks it wrong for bishops to live temporarily off a priest's *stipendium* without giving him some compensation - bishops or their men should travel around the diocese as preachers, not as plunderers.\(^7^0\) From yet another perspective, he writes, it is wrong for bishops to ask for anything from priests, for that boils down to expecting to be paid for confirming the people, which, in his view, is outright simony.\(^7^1\) Bishops were, however, not the only people who took advantage of priests in this way. Their archdeacons, too, should behave better in Hincmar's

\(^6^9\) Hincmar of Rheims, *Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis*, III, p. 118: 'Et qui debemus providere, ut de decimis et oblationibus fidelium a presbiteris ecclesiae restaurentur, hospites et pauperes suscipliantur, matriculari nutriantur, sic eos depraedamur, ut non illis remaneat, unde vivant. Nam si qui nostrum tales sunt, qui non habent sic sufficientes ecclesias, ut in circumvione parrochiarum de stipendiis ecclesie suae vivere possint, talemodum in acceptione sumptuum accipere debent, ut et ipse per parrochias evangelizare sufficant et illis sumptus non ad superfluitatem, sed ad necessitatem sufficient.'

\(^7^0\) Hincmar of Rheims, *Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis*, III, p. 121: 'Nos autem cum hoste collecta parrochias circuimus et non iam tantum praedicatorum verbi dei, quantum exactores et exhaustores oblationum fidelium presbiteris commissarum videmur, et non iam quasi licitum sit nobis hoc agere, sed quasi sit peccatum dimittere, non adtendentes, qualibus dominus permisit de evangelio vivere.'

\(^7^1\) Hincmar of Rheims, *Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis*, II, p. 111: '…et quia pro nullo munere spirituali aliquod temporale praemium debeatnus exquirere, quoniam simoniaca est heresis.' At p. 121 he states this idea even stronger: 'Absit quoque, ut verum sit, quod homines de nobis dicunt, quia etiam pro chrisma denarios sub nomine balsami comparandi accipiamus.'
eyes, as 'they ask tribute from priests as if they were servants'. Although Hincmar gives no precise idea of the amounts of food and drink or money that the priests should give their bishops (as Charles the Bald's capitulary does), he tells the bishops not to abuse their power by requesting 'dishonest gifts' but only to accept what is voluntarily offered. If they are not on a visitation, they should not ask for anything at all. When problems of this kind arose between priests and bishops, priests should consult the archbishop in order to solve them.

In the whole of Hincmar's text, the threat of poverty ensuing directly from undue episcopal demands on local resources is never even hinted at. Judging by the capitulary written after the Council of Toulouse (844), it seems that the principal concern is that of organising visitations so that they did not weigh more heavily on priests than was strictly necessary. Clearly there was no generally agreed policy or 'code of behaviour' on this point, and it is evident that some bishops or their representatives used this lack of clarity to their own advantage. Such practices, however, seem to have sprouted from local surplus rather than shortage, although we should keep in mind those small churches that

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72 Hincmar of Rheims, Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis, III, p.121: 'Et non solum nos, sed et archideaconi, tineae videficit, qui viciosi sunt parrochiarah et adolatores, immo deceptores episcoporum, suum tributum de presbiteris quasi ab ancillis accipiunt.'

73 Hincmar of Rheims, Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis, III, p.109: 'Eulogias autem voluntarias et presbiteris possibiles debent cum gratiarum actione recipere, quoniam episcopi, ut Petrus docet apostolus, non debent dominari in clero, sed forma esse gregi [...]

74 Hincmar of Rheims, Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis, III, p.109: 'Sine evangelizatione autem episcopi a presbiteris paratas non debent exigere nec pro paratis a presbiteris ullo modo redemptionem accipere aut alia quaque exenia sive paraveredos suo vel archidiaconi nomine iterenis vel synodi seu chrismatis occasione quasi pro balsami emptione sive alciuus conlationis expetitione aut datione inhonesta usurpare vel pro ecclesiis, quae quasi in eius sint potestate, indebita aemulumenta requirere.'

75 Hincmar of Rheims, Collectio de ecclesiis et capellis, I, p. 90 and again at II, p. 110, quoting the Council of Toledo III (589), c.20: 'Et in Toletano concilio, ut premimisimus, scriptum est: Multorum querela hanc constitutionem exigit, quia cognovimus episcopos per parrochias suas non sacerdotaliiter, sed crudeler deservire et, dum scriptum est: Forma estate gregi neque dominantes in clero, exactiones dioecesis suae vel dampna inflingunt; ideoque, excepto quod veterunt constitutions a parrochii habere iubent episcopos, alia, quae huiusque praesumpta sunt, denegentur, hoc est neque in angariis presbiteros aut diacones neque in aliquibus fatigent conditionibus, ne videamur in ecclesia dei exactores potius
could not easily receive the local bishop and his retinue in the prescribed way. Although there is, therefore, evidence for priests who had to struggle in order to execute their duties properly, most sources, even those concerning 'exactions', do not automatically lead us to conclude that the abuse was severe enough to reduce the priests to poverty. No doubt there were very poor priests, but there was apparently also a substantial number who were not in economically dire straits at all. In particular, those who cried ‘exploitation’ might have been comparatively well off.

**Wealthy priests**

We learn from the second episcopal statute by Hincmar of Rheims that, at least according to the rules, every priest appointed to a local church should have 'a *mansus* of 12 *bunnuaria*\(^{76}\), a cemetery and a yard where his church and house are situated, and four *mancipia*\(^{77}\). They had, in other words, some free land and a few people to work it, which, together with the tithes they received, would, in principle, constitute their economic base. Now there is every reason to suppose that this amount of land and number of serfs was a minimum requirement, and that in practice, the size and hence the wealth of local churches varied widely. An example of a very well-endowed local church is described in much detail in a text edited under the name *Brevium exempla ad describendas res ecclesiasticas et fiscales*, dating from around 810. Here, the possessions of a church in the diocese of Autun are carefully listed, and apart from an extensive church-inventory, containing many objects of precious metals and a substantial number of books, we find a lot of land, buildings, cattle and serfs. The

\[^{76}\text{In the *Capitulare ecclesiasticum* (818/9), c.9 this is called a }\text{’mansus integer’}.\]

\[^{77}\text{Hincmar II, c.2: ‘Si habeat mansum habentem bunnuaria XII preter cymiterium et curtem, ubi ecclesia et domus ipsius contenetur, aut si habeat mancipia IIII.’ The number of serfs prescribed, however, varies: the Council of Valence (855), c.9 mentions 3.}\]
difference from the 'standard' church’s 3 acres of land or thereabouts, is striking: 'In the same place we have found a estate (curtis) and a manor (casa indominicata), with further buildings in the care of the aforementioned church. Belonging to this estate are 740 iurnales\textsuperscript{78} of arable land; there are meadows enough to produce 110 cartloads of hay.'\textsuperscript{79} Although this may be an example of an extremely rich church, it does reveal the range within which the size of a church's property could fall. Some priests, then, had a substantial amount of land, goods and people at their disposal.

These lands and goods were, however, church property and not owned privately by the priest. All the goods that a priest acquired after his ordination would, according to the rules, also devolve to the church after the priest's death.\textsuperscript{80} This means that priests were not allowed to treat the possessions of their churches as their own, and could not buy or sell any of this land without the permission of their bishop.\textsuperscript{81} There is, however, ample evidence of their doing exactly that. The Council of Paris (829), for instance, mentions priests who 'with the goods of the church to which they are appointed [...] buy immobilities' and thus exploit their church and cause a scandal.\textsuperscript{82} Hincmar of Rheims also had a keen eye for such malpractices, for he instructs his representatives to find out whether there is 'any priest, who, under another name, has bought goods from

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\textsuperscript{78} One iurnale or diurnalis equals the amount of land that can be worked in one day, so the size will vary per soil-type as e.g. heavy clay is harder to work than sandy soil-types.

\textsuperscript{79} Brevium exempla ad describendas res ecclesiasticas et fiscales (810), c.7: ‘Invenimus in eodem loco curtem et casam indominicatam, cum ceteris aedificiis ad praefatam ecclesiam respecientem. Pertinent ad eandem curtem de terra arabili iurnales DCCXL; de pratis, unde colligi possunt de foeno carradas DCX. […]’

\textsuperscript{80} Cf. Hincmar II, c.18: ‘Investigandum similiter, si nichil patrimonii habens, quando proiectus est ad ordinem ecclesiasticum, postea emerit predia, cuius iuris sint, quoniam ecclesiae, ad quam de nihil habentibus promotus est, esse debent iuxta canonicas auctoritatis decretum.’ See also Council of Paris (829), c.16.

\textsuperscript{81} E.g. Hincmar II, c.19.

\textsuperscript{82} Council of Paris (829), c.16: ‘[…Similiter et de praesbyteris, qui de ecclesiarum rebus, quibus praesunt, praedia eo modo emunt, faciendum statuimus, quoniam multis presbyterorum occasione taliter emptarum rerum ecclesias, quibus presunt, expoliassse et a suo ministerio multitius modis exorbitasse et se diabolo mancipasse multosque laicorum ex hoc facto in scandalum damnationis et perditionis protraxisse cognovimus.’
the income of the church or from oblations or from the gifts of the faithful, and
whether he has put buildings there.'\textsuperscript{83} Some priests even neglected their churches
in order to acquire land, on which, Hincmar was informed, they built manses
where they allowed women to live - and these manses were not left to the
church after death, but to relatives or other lay people.\textsuperscript{84} More evidence for
priests' private ownership of (sometimes substantial) possessions comes from
several monastic cartularies, in which gifts to these monasteries were recorded.
Priests regularly appear in these records. Sometimes, the gifts came from their
inheritance, as in the case of a priest called Burgarad who donated a farm in
Hiruzfeld or Beogo, 'and in another place called Uuintgraba in the \textit{pagus}
of Salageuni, what everybody knows that I own there in lands, houses, buildings,
woods, fields, and water, which came to me as an inheritance' to the monastery
of Fulda.\textsuperscript{85} Clearly, this was a valuable donation, for the monastery
compensated him with a hundred pounds of gold and a hundred of silver. In
other cases, it is explicitly stated that the priest did \textit{not} inherit these goods but
obtained them in another way. The priest Solo donated to the same monastery
'all I have acquired by gifts and through my work in Alemannia and Bavaria'.\textsuperscript{86}
Most often, however, it is not stated how a priest came into the possession of the
goods he bequeathed to a monastery. It was not even uncommon for them to
donate entire churches (or parts thereof). The second part of the aforementioned

\textsuperscript{83} Hincmar II, c.19: '\textit{Inquirendum, si occasione huius precedentis capituli aliquis
presbiterorum abhinc de reditibus ecclesiæ vel oblationibus ac votis fidelium alieno nomine
res comparaverit et ibi structuras fecerit [...]}'

\textsuperscript{84} Hincmar IV, c.4: '\textit{Quosdam vestrum ecclesias nostras neglegere et alodes audio comparare
et in eis mansos exstruere atque excolere ac in eisdem mansis feminarum habitationem
habere eosque mansos non ecclesiis secundum sacros canones derelinquere, sed contra
sacros canones vel propinquus vestris vel alius quibuscumque distrahere. [...]}'

\textsuperscript{85} Stengel, \textit{Urkundenbuch I}, no.56 (17-1-772): '[...] in locis nuncupantibus Hiruzfeld seu
Beogo in marca et Nisartano et in Hnutilin[u]m una hobunne; et in alio loco nuncupante
[Uu]intgraba situm in pago Salageuni, quicquid ibidem ad me nosciur pervenisse tam terris,
domibus, aedificiis, s[i]lvis, campis, pratis, aquis aquarumque decursibus, quicquid in
hereditatem mihi convenit, ad praefatum monasterium [...]'}
*Brevium exempla* contains a short list of those who had given donations to the monastery of Wizunburch - of six people, two are priests and one is a clericus. The priest Hartwic is recorded as giving half a church, a mansus with four serfs and five vineyards\(^87\); Birniho, another priest, gave a whole church, a mansus, seven serfs, three vineyards as well as a meadow worth twenty cartloads (presumably of hay).\(^88\) By donating these gifts, they were not outdone by the laymen mentioned in the list. The monastery, however, gave goods in return, and here we see some very interesting details. Hartwic receives a (whole) church, a mansus with six serfs, five vineyards and a field worth twenty cartloads in such a way that he was allowed to hold these good *in precarium* as long as he lived, after which they would revert to the monastery.\(^89\) Was this perhaps a priest who tried, against all prohibitions, to get a better church, in this case by exchanging goods with a local monastery? Whatever the answer, these data show that some priests did occasionally possess extensive amounts of land and buildings, and that they traded, swapped or donated these goods as they saw fit.

All in all, there is plenty of evidence that shows priests doing business with both their inherited goods and those that were officially owned by the church, and presumably they profited from this too. On occasion, as we have seen, such transactions generated substantial amounts of money, like the 100

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\(^87\) *Brevium exempla*, c.10: ‘Hartwic presbiter tradidit ad ipsum monasterium supradictum in pago Wormacinse medietatem de illa ecclesia quae est constructa in villa Hessiheim, et cum casa dominicata mansos vestitos serviles IV, et de vineis picturae V [...]

\(^88\) *Brevium exempla*, c.13: ‘Birniho presbiter tradidit ad ipsum monasterium in ipso pago in villa Franconalad ecclesiam I, et cum casa dominicata mansos vestitos serviles VII, de vineis picturas III, de prata ad carradas XX [...]

\(^89\) *Brevium exempla*, c.10: ‘[...] et contra recepit illam ecclesiam in villa Unkenstein, et cum casa dominicata mansos vestitus serviles VI, de vineis picturas V, de prata et carra XX; in ea vero ratione, ut id ipsum quod tradidit diebus vitae suae habeat in precariam.’
pounds of gold and of silver paid to the priest Burgarad. Locally at least, these priests would certainly have qualified as wealthy, although land transactions were not the only money making enterprises open to them. This brings us to the many prohibitions in the episcopal statutes against usury or asking payment for all kinds of 'services' to which the priest held a local monopoly. Gerbald of Liège, for instance, in his third episcopal statute writes 'That no priest should use his money for usury, nor receive back more from somebody than he has lent.'\(^90\) The *Capitula Parisiensia* also forbid usury, and mention it in the same breath as trade.\(^91\) Radulf of Bourges is most elaborate on the point, and shows yet another way in which priests could generate money:

'It is fitting to priests and all those of the community of the faithful, when they gather and pile up the fruits of the land or any other proceeds, that they do not behave in such a way that they sell it expensively and gather treasure, but that they come to the aid of the poor in times of need, nor that they give anything in usury, for in the laws of the same lord [=Charlemagne] it is forbidden to all to give anything in usury. Usury means that one asks more back than one gives. […]' \(^92\)

Surplus tithes, then, could be sold at a profit, which could be lent to others with interest. Other prohibitions involve requesting money for a burial place, for burial itself\(^93\), for baptism, penance or other rituals, and show the indignation of

\(^{90}\) Gerbald III, c.14: 'Ut nullus presbyter suam pecuniam ad usuram donet nec a quoquam plus recipiat quam commodaverit.' See also *Capitula Corbeiensia*, c.8. Usury is also regularly forbidden in conciliar acts, e.g. *Concilium Arelatense secundum* (a.442-506), c.14; *Concilium Clippaciense* (626/7), c.1; *Statuta Rhispacensis Frisingensis Salisburgensis* (799-800), c.10.

\(^{91}\) *Capitula Parisiensia*, c.8: '[…] neque usuras vel negotia exercere […]'

\(^{92}\) The part about selling harvest expensively is an amended quote from the Council of Châlon (813), c.8. The part about usury comes from Ansegis's collection of royal capitularies (see chapter 4), so that 'the same lord' is probably Charlemagne. Radulf, c.35: 'Oportet sacerdotes et omnes in commune fideles, ut, si quando fruges vel quosdam reditus terrae congregant et protelant, non ideo hoc faciant, ut carius vendant et thesauros congr gent, sed ut pauperibus tempore necessitatis subveniant nec ad usuram aliquid dent, quoniam ab ipso domino in lege omnibus interdictum est ad usuram aliquid dare. Usura enim est, ubi amplius requiritur quam datur. […]'

\(^{93}\) Hincmar I, c.13 and Hincmar III, c.2; Radulf, c.18.
bishops at such priestly 'malign instincts' in their dioceses. Hincmar of Rheims even mentions priests forcing the poor to act as their servants in exchange for sustenance from the churches’ tithes which was theirs by right. Tithes and gifts to the church should not be sold to the poor but given, an indignant Hincmar tells his priests, for they are given by the faithful in order to seek remission from their sins. The poor should be taken care of with compassion (misericordia), and those who ask something in return do not deserve to be priests. As for hospitality, this should likewise be provided without asking for compensation.

Some priests, in other words, tried to make the best of their positions in an economical sense by asking payment for their services, selling food at a profit and lending money. They had the poor work for them, went to local feasts of conviviality, rode to the local tavern on horseback, used weapons in disagreements with others and, all in all, behaved like the local elite. All this is

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94 Radulf, c.18: 'Audivimus quosdam sacerdotes maligno instinctu agitatos pro baptismatis gratia sive pro sepulturae loco pretia iniusta a nonnullis accepisse. [...] Similiter de paenitentia danda et de sacramento in ecclesia faciendo ecclesiastica vetat auctoritas nullum prorsus exquirere donum. [...]'

95 Hincmar IV, c.2: 'Saepe vos admonui de matriculariis, quales suscipere debeatis et qualiter eis partem decimae dispensare debeatis, sed admonitionem nostram, immo dei per nostram exiguitatem, quosdam parvipendere comperi. Unde necesse mihi est iterare, quod quosdam cognosco neglegere. Interdixi enim vobis dei auctoritate, ut nemo presbyter pro loco matriculariis quodcumque xenium vel servitium in messe vel in quocumque suo servitio praesumat requirere vel accipiere et matriculariis debitam partem decimae, quam fideles pro peccatis suis redimendis domino offerunt, nemo praesumat vendere. [...] Et presbyter, qui de redemptione peccatorum, id est de decima fidelium, quodcumque xenium requirit aut accipit, non est dignus inter presbyteros nuncupari, sed deici [...]'

96 Theodulf I, c.25 and Radulf, c.11.

97 Hincmar II, c.20 says that there were laymen who asked him whether they could have the priest's horse and cape if they caught him in a tavern and there were witnesses: 'Inquirendum, si de tabernis et de commessionibus et de familiaritate indebita multorum se custodiant presbiteri, sicut sepissime interdiximus et interdiximus, quia ad contumeliam nostram laici me petunt, ut, si evidenter cum testibus, quo negari non possit a quoquam, presbiterum in tabernis invenerint, caballum et cappam inde eis habere liceat.[...]’ Against attending feasts of conviviality also Hincmar I, c.16. Proper behaviour at clerical gatherings is described in Hincmar I, c.14 and 15.

98 Like the priest Trising, who in a disagreement with a layman used the latter's sword against him, and chopped off some of his fingers in an attempt to kill him. Cf. Hincmar of Rheims, Ad Adrianum papam, Migne PL 126, col.641B-648C at 647A: 'Tunc ipse presbyter irrueus super filium Livulfi, qui spatam ad collum protabat, extravit eamdem spatam; et volens
surprisingly similar to the situation around the Breton monastery of Redon, which was studied by Wendy Davies, who places the early medieval village priests of Brittany firmly in the top stratum of local society. Breton priests accumulated, bought and sold land and other property, they had 'more liquid capital than any other social group', which they readily lent with interest. Sometimes they owned a lot of local land that they had inherited from their equally local family, and some families produced priests for generations. It seems that this situation was not unique to Brittany, and we should consider it to be the general pattern throughout the Frankish kingdoms. There was, in other words, a social stratification within the ranks of Carolingian priests, in which the poorest could barely sustain themselves and the richest were members of the village elite.

**Local reputation, local collaboration**

However poor or rich a priest might have been, and no matter if or how he tried to better his position, there were, of course, limits to what he could do. In the previous chapters, a lot of attention has been devoted to what could be called 'top-down' correctio, episcopal attempts at perfecting the lives and work of their priests, thus transmitting the ideas and ideals of Carolingian reformers at a local level. Priestly behaviour was, however, not monitored only by the bishop and his representatives: the opinion of the priest's community on the activities of the local shepherd of the Lord carried a lot of weight too. This aspect of the priest's life has not been given any attention so far, but it is an important factor in

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percutere cum per medium caput, ut illum occideret, levavit idem Livulfus manum contra spatam, et suscepit spatae ictu, et abscissi sunt illi duo digit\(\)i de eadem manu [\ldots\]'

100 Davies, *Small worlds*, p. 101.
101 Davies, *Small worlds*, p. 100.
helping us to understand how circumscribed priestly behaviour was at a local level. Although the voice of a local community is never heard directly in the sources, but always via episcopal communications, it seems that, on occasion, there was also some kind of 'bottom-up'-correctio at work, showing that local communities too had a clear idea of what constituted appropriate priestly conduct. In their episcopal statutes, bishops time and again warn against any action that may blacken a priest’s reputation (mala fama) in his community, especially when it involved women and sex. Gerbald of Liège, for instance, instructs his priests neither to live with any woman except their mothers, sisters or grandmothers, nor to have women secretly living in small rooms or cellars that the priests had access to. It is best for the priest to avoid any close contacts with such women, he states, 'so that under no circumstances he will have to suffer an enemy suggesting sin and so that none of them may risk a bad reputation among the people.'

Gerbald III, c.1: 'Sicut sancta synodus Nicena interdicit, nullus umquam presbyter in domo sua habitare secum permittat mulierem extraneam praeter matrem et sororem atque amitam vel materteram, vel etiam ad secretum cubiculi vel cellario nullus presbyter feminam aliquam adire permittat. Quod si fecerit post haec, sciat se ab honore presbyteratus deponi, quia haec frequenter secundum canonicalm institutionem prohibuimus et pleniter a presbyteris observatum non fuit. Ideoque praecipimus, ut, qui gradus honoris sui retinere vult, omnimodis a familiaritate extranearum mulierum se abstinere faciat, ut nulla occasio inimico pateat sugerendi peccatum et famam malam a populo nullus eorum incurrat.'

Theodulf of Orléans, in turn, writes that even suspicions of illicit relations with women should be avoided. Even if such rumours were patent nonsense, they could cause the priest considerable trouble if enough local people were prepared to swear to the validity of the allegations, as we will see below.

102 Gerbald III, c.1: 'Sicut sancta synodus Nicena interdicit, nullus umquam presbyter in domo sua habitare secum permittat mulierem extraneam praeter matrem et sororem atque amitam vel materteram, vel etiam ad secretum cubiculi vel cellario nullus presbyter feminam aliquam adire permittat. Quod si fecerit post haec, sciat se ab honore presbyteratus deponi, quia haec frequenter secundum canonicalm institutionem prohibuimus et pleniter a presbyteris observatum non fuit. Ideoque praecipimus, ut, qui gradus honoris sui retinere vult, omnimodis a familiaritate extranearum mulierum se abstinere faciat, ut nulla occasio inimico pateat sugerendi peccatum et famam malam a populo nullus eorum incurrat.'

103 Theodulf I, c.12: 'Nulla femina cum presbytero in una domo habitet, Quamvis enim canones matrem et sororem et huiuscemodi personas, in quibus nulla sit suspicio, cum illo habitare concedant, hoc nos modis omnibus idcirco amputamus, quia in obsequio sive occasione illarum veniunt aliae feminae, quae non sunt et affinitate coniunctae et eum ad peccandum illiciant.' There are many prescriptions against co-habiting with 'suspicious women' in the episcopal statutes, e.g. Haito, c.10; Capitula Corbeiensia, c.6; Capitula Parisiensia, c.8; Hincmar II, c.21; Hincmar V, c.3; Radulf, c.16.
First of all, however, I would like to pay attention to the case of the priest Trising, who caused so much trouble that Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims wrote a letter to Pope Hadrian in order to explain the case. It is the most detailed description of a misbehaving priest there is, and it also shows the role a local community could play in these situations. The story, as described by Hincmar in his letter, runs as follows. When Trising started to visit frequently the house of his brother, who lived with his wife and stepdaughter in the same village, neighbours and parishioners soon started to gossip about his having an affair with his brother's stepdaughter. Hincmar, under whose supervision the priest fell, heard this rumour from many quarters, and ordered Trising to come to see him to be interrogated on the matter. Trising, however, flatly denied these accusations. Nevertheless, his position within his community had clearly become difficult since his reputation had been sullied. Moreover, illegitimate sex was not the only misdemeanour he was accused of. One night, when he and his sister's brother-in-law, a man called Livulf, went out drinking in a nearby castellum, the two men got into an alcoholic brawl, 'and started an argument, as drunkards do'. Livulf then made the mistake of accusing Trising of improper behaviour with his niece, and called him all the bad names he could think of - to which Trising replied equally abusive.

'Then he (=Livulf) twice hit Trising with the stick he had in his hand. The priest then jumped on Livulf's son, who was wearing a sword at his side, and took the sword from him. And when he (=Trising) tried to hit his head in half in order to kill him, Livulf lifted his hand to ward off the sword, and caught it, and two fingers of his hand were cut off. He fell off his

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104 Although we will never know whether Trising spoke the truth, of course. Hincmar of Rheims, Ad Adrianum papam, col. 646C: 'Et, sicut idem Livulfus, qui in ipsa villa manebat, et parochiani atque vicini ejusdem presbyteri dicebant, cum filia uxoris fratris sui, quam de altero marito susceperat, coepit concumbere.' At col. 647B-C: 'Ego [=Hincmar] vero per multos hoc audiens, vocavi eum ad me, in praesentia clericorum ac comministrorum nostrorum, et interrogavi eum, ac veritatem. Qui de femina de qua reputabatur, negavit quod cum ea non concubuerit. [...]'

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horse, and the priest, thinking he was dead, got on the horse and went home.\footnote{Hinckmar of Rheims, \textit{Ad Adrianum papam}, col. 646D-647A: '[…] Et quadam die ipse presbyter, atque praefatus Livulfus perrexerunt ad castellum, quod Mosomus dicitur, et inebriaverunt se in quadam taberna contra nostrum episcopale interdictum […] Reverentes autem idem presbyter et Livulfus, ebrii, de praefato castello, coeperunt verbosare inter se, sicut ebrii solent facere, et illorum verbosatio eo usque processit, ut de ipsa sua nepte imperoparet presbytero; et e contra ipse presbyter opporbria quae invenire potuit, eidem Livulfo retulli. Idem autem Livulfus fuste, quem in manu portabat, bis percussit Trisingum presbyterum. Tunc ipse presbyter irruens super filium Livulfii, qui spatam ad collum portabat, extraxit eadem spatam; et volens percutere eum per medium caput, ut illum occideret, levavit idem Livulfus manum contra spatam, et suscepit spatae ictum, et abscessi sunt illi duo digitii de eadem manu; et cadente illo de caballo, putavit presbyter illum esse mortuum, et saliens in caballum illius perrexit domum suam. […]']\footnotetext{106} } When interrogating him, Hincmar also asked Trising if he had tried to kill Livulf, and the priest admitted that he had. This was reason enough for the archbishop to depose him, but, as far as we know, he never succeeded in doing so. A deposition could only take place during a synod, and many of these went by without any sign of Trising. After a year and a half of his absence, the inhabitants of Trising's community started to complain loudly that they had no priest, so Hincmar appointed a new one. Hincmar then confesses to Pope Hadrian: 'That he had gone to Rome, I did not know, until he, three months after a new priest had been appointed, returned from Rome carrying the letter of Your Holiness'.\footnote{Hinckmar of Rheims, \textit{Ad Adrianum papam}, col. 648A: '[…] Post annum et sex menses reclamationibus parochianis ecclesiae ipsius, in qua idem presbyter fuerat ordinatur, se non habere presbyterum; nam quia Romam perrexerit, ignoravi, donec post tres menses, quam in loco ejus fuit presbyter ordinatur, Roma veniens mihi litteras vestrae sanctitatis attulit. […]']\footnotetext{107} What Pope Hadrian wrote in his letter we unfortunately do not know, but it seems that Trising had sought and found the Pope's support for his cause, and that the Pope then wrote to the archbishop opposing Hincmar's decision to remove Trising from office. This is where the story ends, as further correspondence on the case no longer survives.\footnote{Whether Hincmar ever succeeded in solving the ensuing problems, we unfortunately do not know, but that it immensely frustrated him is, however, clear. Years later he wrote a tract on criminal priests in which he tried to ensure that there would never be a Trising again to cause such troubles. See: Hinckmar of Rheims, \textit{De presbyteris criminosis de quibus approbatio non est}, Migne PL 125, col. 1093B-1110D. Also his \textit{Epistola XXXII, Ad Joannem papam Caroli II imperatoris nomine}, Migne PL 126, col. 230D-244D deals with a related subject, i.e.
What is especially interesting here, is the role played by the lay inhabitants of Trising's village. Hincmar's letter mentions their gossip about Trising's alleged sexual relationship with his brother's stepdaughter, and about his brawl with Livulf. There is no doubt that these people were of the opinion that their priest should not have such an affair, or get drunk and fight. Not only in episcopal circles, but also among local lay communities, then, there was an unawareness of what, ideally, a priest should and should not do. Sexual relationships with women, or even the suspicion thereof, was clearly not acceptable and could lead to rumours and unrest. It even seems that local suspicions were, on occasion, more important than whether or not a priest had really misbehaved. It was his reputation that counted - if it was bad, and the bishop heard about it, trouble ensued. Still, it is important to realise that the situations about which bishops wrote, had got out of hand and had reached a stage where they felt they should intervene. These were, in other words, exceptional situations and probably just the tip of the iceberg. Still, such small eruptions of local discontent show something of the local consensus of what a local priest should be like; ideas that, in normal, unexceptional situations, were ever present but not manifestly so.

The dynamics of a situation in which a priest got a bad local reputation are interesting here. As we have seen in chapter 2, it was far from easy for bishops to get a grip on all that happened within their dioceses, including the behaviour of their priests. However, if local laymen solicited the bishop's help against a misbehaving priest, there were suddenly all kinds of things he could do, for the ability to convict a priest depended on the presence of trustworthy

the habit of priests to travel to Rome in order to rally the pope's help against their bishop. I have discussed the case of Trising and related issues elsewhere: Carine van Rhijn, ‘Hinckmar of Rheims and the problem of criminal priests', forthcoming. The aspect of Trising's seeking support with the pope in Rome is also discussed there.
oath-helpers (see below). Whereas a priest of good repute could feel protected by his community who would, for instance, not disparage him during episcopal visitations, he really had something to fear if members of his own community were prepared to testify against him, as this enabled the bishop to interrogate and possibly convict him. It is no wonder, then, that bishops tried to keep abreast of local stories about priests. Bishop Gerbald of Liège, for instance, wishes to know

'about the priests, who have been appointed in our diocese, how they behave, whether they restrain themselves in executing their office according to the canonical authorities and our admonishments or not, and what kind of testimony there is among you, that is the people, whether his reputation is good or bad. If he has a good reputation, spread the word and let it be known by all, and if his reputation is bad, announce it to all, not because of dislike or anybody's bad intention, but in order to tell the truth.'

This clearly shows the power of the local word - if the bishop was, to some extent, dependent on local opinion in order to ascertain the quality of his priests, the latter's 'careers' could literally be made or broken by a local community. A complicating factor was that rumours did not necessarily need to be true. As we will see below, perjury was a real problem that the bishop needed to reckon with - neither local laymen, nor priests themselves were considered to be always entirely trustworthy. This could work both ways. We can imagine a local

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108 The terminology is confusing when it comes to distinguishing between witnesses and oath-helpers. The word used is always 'testes', but as will be made clear below, the context in which the word is used suggests that it means oath-helpers rather than witnesses in these texts.

109 For a discussion of such local mechanisms see Chris Wickham, 'Gossip and resistance among the medieval peasantry', *Past and present* 160 (1998), pp. 3-24. Although his article deals mostly with the 12th century, there seem to be a lot of common denominators with local dynamics as discussed in this chapter.

110 Gerbald II, c.14: 'De presbyteris, qui infra nostram parrochiam constituti sunt, qualiter se habent, si infra suum officium se continent secundum canoniciam auctoritatem et admonitionem nostram aut non, vel quale testimonium inter vos habent id est in populo aut bonam famam aut malam. Et si bona est fama, denuntietur et sciatur ab omnibus, et si mala est fama, depublicetur ab omnibus non per invidiam neque per alicuius malam persuasionem, sed ex veritate proferendum.'
community spreading false allegations in order to get rid of an unpopular priest while a priest who broke some rules (like lending money to people who needed it) but was well-liked could be protected by his local community. In this respect, 'true' and 'false' were rather flexible concepts, although ultimately, a priest could be in serious trouble when his flock turned against him, whether or not there was a legitimate reason for their hostility.111

If the bishop moved to do something about an allegedly misbehaving priest, as was his duty, the consequences for this priest could be dire. A good example of what happened to a priest who was found guilty of having had a sexual relationship is known through a letter from Pope John VIII to Archbishop Willebert of Cologne, and shows how wrong such behaviour was considered to be. The priest Tal, found guilty of sleeping with a count's wife, was excommunicated and made to undergo a long penance. The priest submitted humbly, and sat through his punishment without complaining for eleven years. At that juncture, the archbishop wrote to the Pope asking for absolution, which the Pope generously granted in such a way that Tal was again free to return to priestly ministry.112 But not everybody had the stomach to wait for the verdict and to submit to such punishment. A priest called Godbald, accused of having had illicit sexual contacts with someone called Doda, ran away before

111 On these dynamics see: W. Davies and P. Fouracre eds., The settlement of disputes in early medieval Europe (Cambridge, 1986).
112 Pope John VIII, Letter CCCXXXI. Ad Wilibertum archiepiscopum Agrippinensem (anno 882), Migne PL 126, col.936D-937C at 936D-937B: ‘[…] juxta pastorale magisterium reverentiae tuae divinitus delegatum sollicitam fore, litteris vestris inspectis luculenter agnoscentes laudamus, cum apostolicae sedis privilegium perspicaci mentis intuitu conservando hunc tuae diocesaeos presbyterum, nomine Tal (aliaque desunt), Ingeltrudae Bosonis quondam comitis uxori torni conjugalem, contra divinae legis praecepta relinquenti. […] Quem scilicet, cum tuae fidelis devotionis attestatone nostro praesulatui dirigens, professus est per annos undecim illatam sibi excommunicationis sententiam humiliter sustinuisse: et quod ex polluto consortio feminae venenum attraxerat, longa poenitentiae satisfactione purgassee, a vinculo suae obligationis ut absolveremus mandasti. Nos vero misericordiae intitu, precibus tuis inclinati, interni arbitrivm judicis sequentes, a ipsius excommunicationis vinculo, si ita est, eum absolvimus, et omne officiwm vel ministerium sacerdotale, juxta praecedentem consuetudinem, jubemus solemniter ac libere cum Domini semper timore peragere. […]’
judgement could be passed on him. His absence did not prevent Hincmar from relieving him of his office.\footnote{Hincmar of Rheims, \textit{Epistola XXXV ad omnes fideles}, Migne PL 126, col 254D-255A: \\
\textit{Notum sit omnibus sanctae Dei Ecclesiae rectoribus, ministris quoque ac filiis, ad quos haec poterant pervenire, quia Godbaldus quondam presbyter parochiae nostrae, de quadam femina nomine Doda criminatus, et idoneis testibus comprobatus, et secundum sacros canones ad judicium provocatus, de ipso judicio conscientia sua redargatus fuga lapsus est. Propterea secundum sacros canones Spiritu Dei conditos, et totius mundi reverentia consecratos, omni sacerdotali officio est privatus […]}.} Now the procedure for accusing and convicting a priest may appear to be easier than it was. The situation was easy and straightforward only if a priest confessed straight away, in which case he could be deposed without further ado.\footnote{As for instance explained in Hincmar II, c.21 at p.57.} But what happened when a priest’s reputation was bad but the credibility of the rumours was suspect? Hincmar of Rheims in his second episcopal statute and in his tract \textit{De presbyteris criminosis} devotes a lot of attention to the procedure that should be followed in these cases, which shows how complicated, or at least how elaborate, it could be. When reading \textit{De presbyteris criminosis} carefully, it is immediately clear that in Hincmar's day, there was no standard procedure for these cases, and that canon law contained some major stumbling blocks that made both accusing or exculpating a priest extremely difficult, if not impossible. In \textit{De presbyteris criminosis} especially, Hincmar sets to work to address these complications. The main obstacles he tries to eliminate are contained in a papal decree, ascribed to Pope Sylvester, in which it is stated that no laymen is ever allowed to accuse a cleric, that no lower cleric may accuse a higher one, and that an astronomical number of trustworthy oath-helpers (up to 72) are needed to convict or redeem a priest with a questionable reputation.\footnote{Hincmar of Rheims, \textit{De presbyteris criminosis}, c.21. The stumbling-block is a decree by Pope Sylvester that he found in the collection of Pseudo-Isidore (\textit{’quem Isidorus episcopus Hispalensis collegavit’}): \\
\textit{”ut nullus laicus crimen clerico audeat inferre, et ut presbyter non adversus episcopum, non diaconus adversus presbyterum […] det accusationem aliquam, et}}
should be male, free, over the age of fourteen, and of impeccable reputation themselves. Piece by piece, Hincmar breaks down all these prescriptions, for which he presents sound, canonically-based alternatives, in which we may (again) recognise his attempts to find a legitimate and practicable way through the jungle of canon law. Sylvester's decree, he argues, is demonstrably false (apart from his prohibition of laymen accusing clerics), and may therefore be ignored. \footnote{116 Hincmar of Rheims, De presbyteris criminosis, c.23: [...] Quae acta legi beatus Gelasius permisit, sed auctoritatem, sicut sanctus Scripturas et sanctorum opuscula, teneri non jussit. In quibus Actibus Silvestri, de talibus constitutionibus nihil legimus. In libro vero qui titulatur Gestorum pontificum, legitimus constituisse beatum Silvestrum, ut nullus laicus clerico crimen audeat inferrer. Caetera autem, quae subsequuntur, ut supra posuimus, in regesto ipsius constituuisse eum non legimus. Quapropter credendum non est eumdem sanctum virum talia constituuisse, quae in memorato sermone continentur scripta. [...]}

Apart from that, there were also other arguments against this decree. Is it not absurd, Hincmar asks rhetorically, to prefer married oath-helpers with children to those abstaining from sex (continentes) and religious people? \footnote{117 Hincmar of Rheims, De presbyteris criminosis, c.22: Quod quam absurdum sit, ut uxor et filios habentes potius ad testimonium recipi debeant, quam continentes et religiosi, ratio aperta demonstrat [...]}

Moreover, how could a priest ever be convicted if he could not be accused by laymen - and, for that matter, how could he ever clear his name if such a great number of reliable oath-helpers is required? Some villages did not even contain enough eligible people to make up the necessary numbers. These rules, Hincmar concludes, are impossible to live up to and are therefore useless. \footnote{118 Hincmar of Rheims, De presbyteris criminosis, c.24: Alioquia, si nullus laicus adversus clericum, nullus clericus adversus laicum accusationem proferre valebit, secundum illa quae in memorato sermone ex verbis sancti Silvestri sunt dicta, quomodo quis judicabitur ab Ecclesiae sanctae, vel a legum publicarum judicibus, cum nemo vel ecclesiastico vel civili judicio regulariter atque legaliter, nisi cum sententia ordine judiciario, et quae cum integritate profertur, debeat judicari? Non si presbyter approbari non poterit, nisi cum tot idoneis testibus, sicut ibidem scriptum est, nunquam probabitur. Sunt enim apud nos presbyteri, qui tot parochianos non habent, qui mansa teneant, et uxor et filios habeant, quot testes idoneos ad comprobandum presbyterum sermo ille requirit. Frustra igitur sacri canones, et decreta sedis Romanae pontificum, expressa judicia de singulis gradibus pro evidentibus culpis promulgaverunt, et leges inaniter ad pravos coercendos vel punitendos decretae sunt, si exsequendae non sunt [...]}
The alternative Hincmar comes up with, which is supposed to be a workable alternative, is as follows. Predictably, he leaves hardly any room for misunderstanding or loose interpretation. In cases involving accusations, seven reliable oath-helpers should be found to support the statements of the accuser himself. Six of these should swear to tell the truth (for which Hincmar also provides a formula\(^\text{119}\)), whereas the seventh should swear that the other six did not lie - all this is in order to avoid malicious accusations and perjury.\(^\text{120}\) If all the oath-helpers swore, in the prescribed way, that the priest was guilty, he was convicted and deposed. The number of seven oath-helpers, however, was not fixed - Hincmar has his doubts about the usefulness of a number lower than seven, as the Bible gives some examples of perjury involving only two oath-helpers.\(^\text{121}\) If the occasion, however, demanded more oath-helpers, fourteen or even twenty-one could be asked to testify, 'so that it can be demonstrated that the truth has come out in the open'.\(^\text{122}\) It is understood that both laymen and clerics qualified to testify. If the prescribed number of reliable oath-helpers could not be found, however, there was reason to doubt the truth of the rumour. If this happened, the priest was given the opportunity to clear his name of

\(^{119}\) The text of the oath for witnesses runs as follows: Hincmar II, c.21 at p.58: 'De hoc, quod me interrogabis de isto presbitero, quid inde sciam, me sciente nec mendacium tibi dicam nec veritatem reticebo, si me deus adiuvet et isti sancti dei.' Directly afterwards follows the text of the interrogation to which these oath-helpers should be submitted under oath: 'Sancti canones praecipiant, ut presbiter talem accessum et frequentationem ac cohabitationem cum feminis non habeat, unde mala suspicio et inconveniens sacerdotti fama possit exire. Propterea dic michi, si vidisti aut pro certo scis talem accessum vel frequentiam aut cohabitationem feminas habere cum isto presbitero, unde mala suspicio esse possit et mala fama possit exire, in illo sacramento, quod modo iurasti, ut veritatem inde non reticeas et mendacium inde non dicias.'

\(^{120}\) Hincmar II, c.21 at p.59: 'Et exceptis accusatoribus septem sint testes idonei, qui inde veritatem per sacramentum dicant. Ex quibus sex iurent et septimus, si condicio vel qualitas personæ permittit, ad iudicium exeat, quod illi sex veritatem inde per sacramentum dixerunt, quia multi iam deprehendi apud nos habentur, quoniam precio conducti se periuraverunt.'

\(^{121}\) Hincmar II, c.22: 'Sed quia in historia Susanne duo testes, qui idonei populus videbantur, et in historia Nubute, verum et in historia passionis domini duo testes dixisse falsum testimonium legimus [...].'

\(^{122}\) Hincmar does not specify what such occasions could be. Hincmar II, c.22: '[...] et, si ratio vel causa coegerit, quattuordecim vel viginti et unus testes querantur, ut veritas patefacta monstretur.' Also De presbyteris criminosis, cc.14 and 15.
suspicion, for which a similar procedure existed. He had to swear an oath denying the rumours, supported by one, three or seven oath-helpers, according to the gravity of the allegations.\textsuperscript{123} In order to have a maximum of good oath-helpers at hand, Hincmar stresses the importance of dealing with problems locally, for only then could one expect to find people who could help to reveal the truth. Moreover, this would ensure that the bishop could keep control of the situation. According to one of Hincmar's letters from around 875, this was a real issue. He complains about priests who travel to Rome to plead their cause with the Pope\textsuperscript{124}, thus disentangling themselves from episcopal procedure and from the power of the local word, which they had, as we have seen, good reason to fear.

Ugly rumours, therefore, were a factor a priest had to reckon with and needed to avoid if he wished to maintain his position and remain part of his community. Given the very local nature of the process, in the course of which people may have turned against their priests, it can be assumed that the benchmark against which a priest's behaviour was measured may have varied from community to community. But there also appear to have been common denominators: sex with women, for instance, clearly fell outside the range of approved behaviour in the eyes of both bishops and laymen. This shows that episcopal prescriptions for priestly behaviour also found a receptive ear among the lay population, which, in turn, demonstrates that at least some of the principles of the Carolingian reforms did, indeed, reach grass-root levels.\textsuperscript{125} On the other hand, it also demonstrates that local communities judged according to their own standards uninfluenced, perhaps, by texts like the episcopal statutes. In

\textsuperscript{123} Hincmar II, c.24: '[…] Auctoritate convenire ducimus, ut, si presbiter infamatus fuerit et accusatores vel testes idonei defuerint, secundum qualitatem ac quantitatem, causæ atque personæ et utilitatem ac sanationem cordium infirmorum aut singulis aut cum aliis duobus testibus aut cum aliis sex testibus se ipsum sacramento a mala opinione purget. […]'\textsuperscript{124} Hincmar of Rheims, Epistola XXXII Ad Joannem papam, Caroli II imperatoris nomine, Migne PL 126, col. 230D-244D.
his behaviour, then, a priest had to manoeuvre between episcopal prescriptions and local consensus in order to keep his 'approval rating' positive from all sides. Only if he managed to avoid unrest at all levels could he hope to retain his ministry for decades. Such dynamics were a check on the ways in which a priest could better his position as described above, and, given the cases described in episcopal writings, we should take them seriously.

Collaboration among local priests
Presumably, the priests of a diocese were in regular contact with one another. They would see each other during the prescribed two synods a year, and also at meetings of local clergy on the first day of every month.\textsuperscript{126} Furthermore, some professional collaboration was needed. As we have seen above, bishops' visitations were organised in such a way that they saw a small number of communities simultaneously, which presupposes some kind of organisation between priests. The same goes for the collecting of chrism, oil for catechumens and oil for the dying. Radulf of Bourges instructs his priests to choose representatives who would visit the bishop on behalf of himself and ten colleagues to get chrism and oil for all of them, but only if they lived more than six or seven miles from the bishop's see.\textsuperscript{127} But also, given the priests' local backgrounds and schooling, as well as the length of time they were often appointed to one church, they must have known each other well and worked together if circumstances demanded. It thus seems that local networks of priests existed and functioned. Such networks, however, had a side-effect that greatly

\textsuperscript{125} Many of such ideas, as for instance the prohibition of priests having sex, were much older than de Carolingian era, as we have seen before.
\textsuperscript{126} Proper behaviour during such meetings are prescribed in Hincmar I, cc.14 and 15.
\textsuperscript{127} Radulf of Bourges, c.14: '\textit{De presbyteris, qui accipiendi chrismatis gratia ad civitates in cena domini venire soliti sunt, constituiimus, ut ex decem unus eligatur, qui acceptum chrisma sociis suis diligenter perferat. Hi vero, qui non longius a civitate quam sex aut septem milibus habitant, ad accipiendum chrisma per se veniant. Tres autem omnes secum deferant ampullas, unum pro chrismate, aliam pro oleo ad caticuminos, tertiam pro oleo ad infirmos unguendos. [...]}'
worried people like Hincmar of Rheims. It is in the context of priests’ trying to
purge their names of suspicion that we find most of the evidence for local
loyalty and active collaboration among groups of priests in a diocese, which, on
occasion, turned against the local bishop.

Hincmar of Rheims, again, provides some information about such
practices. In a letter to his colleague John of Cambrai he writes about a priest
called Hunold, 'who has told me he had priests to help him clear his name by
oath from bad rumours concerning some woman'. When Hincmar wished to
interrogate these potential oath-helpers to make sure that their oaths would be
reliable, the priest refused to co-operate, after which Hincmar felt obliged to
depose him from his ministry. Hincmar feared perjury, and therefore refused
to accept these priests' oaths as a valid way for Hunold to clear his name. This
situation was a difficult one, for there were no reliable witnesses nor even a
proper accuser to support the imputation of misconduct, so it was left to the
priest to redeem his good name. This could only be done, writes Hincmar, with
neighbouring priests 'of whom we know that they will not commit perjury when
swearing an oath'. If there was any doubt about the credibility of such priests
as oath-helpers, they should be interrogated, for the archbishop himself had
experience of priests who entered coniurationes and conspired to redeem each
other's names by committing perjury. Groups of local priests did therefore not

128 Hincmar of Rheims, *Epistola XXXIV. Ad Joannem episcopum Cameracensen. De Hunoldo et malae famae presbyteri purgatione*, Migne PL 125, col. 253B-254C at 253C: 'Iste presbyter, nomine Hunoldus, dixit mihi quia presbyteros habens cum quibus famam suam sacramento purgare voluit de quadam femina, et quoniam examinationis judicium noluit facere, ut illi presbyteri cum eo securius jurare possent, sacerdotale ministerium interdictum est illi.'
129 Idem, col. 254A: 'Si autem mala fama ex similitudine per parochiam de presbytero exierit, et accusatores et testes legales defuerint, ne contra Apostolum infirmorum corda de mala fama presbyteri percutiantur, et ne vituperetur ministerium nostrum, neque securiores presbyteri existentes licentius in peccatum labantur, secundum decreta majorum, cum denominatis sibi vicinis presbyteris, quos scimus se nolle perjurare sacramento, famam suam purget.'
130 Idem, col.254A-B: 'Si autem denominatos a nobis sibi presbyteros ad famam suam purgandum habere nequit, et alios ad secum jurandum conducerit, quoniam experti sumus
only help each other in executing their duties towards their bishop, but, on occasion, also collectively protected their own interests against him.

All this goes to show that priests were not only part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy but moved within a variety of local structures, all of which influenced their ways of life and work. Whereas episcopal statutes make it sound as if the only relation that counted to a priest was the one with his bishop, and as if the only things he spent his days doing were those activities prescribed by their ministry, this chapter has, I hope, shown that reality was very different. Priests were members of families; the rich ones also belonged to the group of local free land-holders which constituted, socially and economically, the top echelon of local power-brokers. They took part in all kinds of business transactions involving land and money, and had the opportunity to marshal help from local colleagues should their positions be threatened by local gossip and rumour resulting in an official enquiry by the bishop. There were ties with local monasteries as well as with lay lords. On the whole, it seems that most priests were relatively rich and relatively powerful at a very local level, and in that sense we are dealing with a privileged group of people.

‘This idea is nearly literally repeated in Hincmar II, c.25.