

Coronations in the Carolingian age

The inauguration rituals of Louis the Pious



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Frontispiece: Jean Fouquet, *Couronnement de Louis le Pieux*, 1455-1460, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France.

Introduction

Louis the Pious (778-840) was the second emperor of the Carolingian empire. He was the son of the greatest ruler of West-Europe in the Early Medieval period: Charlemagne (747-814). From his father Louis inherited an empire that covered most of Western Europe, spanning 1,112,000 square kilometres on mainland Europe. Though he tried to rule in a conscientious manner, Louis' administration would be wracked by civil wars that would eventually break the Carolingian empire. Louis is seen in popular history as Charlemagne's lesser son, a weak ruler, unable to control his rebellious sons. A low point came in 833, when he was temporarily deposed. However, he did rule his empire for 26 years, he managed to win back the throne, and he defeated every uprising against him. Despite everything Louis kept his legitimacy to rule. That legitimacy was, at least partially, conferred to him through the ritual of coronation.

CHARLEMAGNE'S EMPIRE



The empire of Charlemagne, as inherited by Louis in 814. Source: http://www.edmaps.com/charlemagne_empire_814.jpg, consulted on 10-7-2016.

§ The purpose of ritual for rulers

Before one studies rituals it has to be made clear what they are and why they were performed. A ritual is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a

sequestered place, and performed according to set sequence.¹ These activities hold certain meanings which are understood by the performers and the spectators. Performing rituals was a way for the ruler to communicate with his subjects, to broadcast his elevated position, his power and authority and his relationship to other members of the community. Furthermore, it communicated the nature of power, the structure, beliefs and values in their society. Rituals are an ideal way to show power relationships, since these are built on the relationships between people.²

The number of people able to witness a royal ritual was limited. These rituals were usually performed in a palace or a church, places that could accommodate a relatively small amount of people. Because these rituals were seen as legitimizing royal power, the kings wanted as large an audience as possible. To reach as many people as they could, the performed rituals were recorded in annals, biographies, histories and capitularies, which were spread around the realm. These records would describe the protagonists, the movements, props and the witnesses present that day.³

Studying Early Medieval rituals has to be done with caution. The writers of the sources always had a specific agenda to follow and they were never objective. Authors were able to emphasize or downplay the rituality of events at will.⁴ Ritual performances could have several diverging interpretations, as we don't have access to the rituals themselves, but only to the written testimonials about the rituals

§ The imperial coronation

The coronation was one of the most important rituals of the medieval ruler.⁵ Through this act a man became elevated to king or emperor, he gained the authority to rule. The significance, both political and symbolic, of this ritual can be seen from the fact that no medieval king, or emperor, simply ascended to the throne when his predecessor passed away.⁶ The death of a king was always a time of tension, open possibilities, rival claims, rebellions. Sometimes civil wars had to be fought between competitors before the throne could be claimed, at other times

¹ Miriam-Webster, 'Ritual', <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ritual>, geraadpleegd op 24-4-2016.

² Mariëlle Hageman, *De kleren van de keizer; rituelen en media in de tijd van Karel de Grote* (Amsterdam, 2006), 10.

³ Hageman, *Kleren van de keizer*, 246.

⁴ Philippe Buc, *The dangers of ritual; Between Early Medieval texts and social scientific theory* (Princeton, 2001), 8.

⁵ Janet Nelson, 'Symbols in context: rulers inauguration rituals in Byzantium and the West in the Early Middle Ages', in: *Politics and ritual in early medieval Europe* (London, 1986) 97-119, alhier 99.

⁶ Janet Nelson, 'Inauguration rituals', in: *politics and ritual in early medieval Europe* (London, 1986), 283-308, alhier 284.

a kingdom had no king for several years or even decade, creating political upheaval.⁷ A coronation indicated the political victory of a claimant and the hope for return to normalcy. It was an act which signalled the consensus for a new ruler. Furthermore a coronation spread certain messages about the nature of power, the qualities of the ruler and the values and beliefs of the society at the time.⁸

§ The research question and method

Louis the Pious received two imperial coronations, in 813 and 816. He also received a royal coronation in 781 for the kingdom of Aquitaine, but that falls out of the purview of this essay. These coronations differed from each other, from the performing actors, to the desired effect and which message they conveyed to their audience. They both happened in a different political context, the rituals were adapted to reckon with the changing times. What's more, these coronations were recorded by various contemporaries. These authors, writing in a span of twenty years, all gave different accounts of Louis' coronations. They were influenced by many things, like the shifting fortunes of Louis' reign, their respective station in life, their audiences and many more factors. These disparate accounts have created some historical confusion on these events, with some historians favouring one account over the other, while others create a synthesised, mixing details from different authors into one story. This is a distortion of history, as one can't know which details are true and which are not.

The aim of this essay will be to analyse both the coronations and the accounts on the coronations. The main question to be investigated in this research is how the contemporary accounts on the coronations of Louis the Pious are influenced by political factors. Furthermore, it is equally important to also examine how did Louis' coronations reflect the political needs of the time.

This essay will be set up as follows. The first chapter will give a very succinct overview of the history of the Carolingian ruling family up to the death of Louis. It will give the reader the necessary information to place Louis' coronation in a larger political picture. What follows is an in-depth exploration of the contemporary sources on Louis' life. It will look at the biographical information of the writers, the work they wrote, when they wrote, to what purpose and for which audience. This information is needed to come to any conclusion as to the goals of these authors. Chapter two will be devoted to the coronation of Louis as emperor of the Franks in 813, performed by Charlemagne. Chapter three will deal with his coronation in 816, with pope Stephen II doing the honors. These two chapter will be most

⁷ Nelson, 'Inauguration rituals', 284.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 287.

concerned with analyzing the sources reporting the coronations. By analyzing the information and on the way to answer the main research question, a hypothesis arises; it provides a nuanced view of how the changing political context shaped both the coronations of Louis and the reporting on those coronations.

§ Status Quaestionis

§ Heinrich Fichtenau

Louis has had a bad reputation in the historiography. He is generally perceived to be a weak ruler, too pious to act and unable to control the empire. An example of this is Heinrich Fichtenau, an Austrian historian, whose *Das Karolingische Imperium* (1949) paints Louis as an emperor with no resources or authority, who was wracked by guilt by every decision he made.⁹ The control imposed by Charlemagne slipped away after his passing and Louis could only watch helplessly as his empire crumbled. His papal coronation and his acts of penance were destabilizing events, made by a man too religiously motivated to act sensibly.

§ Walter Ullmann

Walter Ullmann (1910-1981), an Austro-Jewish scholar specialized in Medieval political thought and legal theory, also saw Louis as a weak ruler, dominated by the pope. This position is worked out in the *Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages: A study in the ideological relation of clerical to lay power* (1955).¹⁰ Ullmann believed that the popes had been developing a Galesian, hierocratic position wherein they would be the ultimate authority, with the emperor as their protector and right-hand man, a development that would reach its fruition in the twelfth century. He saw the coronation of Louis as a papal initiative. The unction also meant that Louis was adopted by the pope, which would place Stephen subtly higher than Louis.

§ Francois-Louis Ganshof

The Belgian historian Francois-Louis Ganshof had a more positive judgment of Louis. He published *The Carolingians and the Frankish monarchy: studies in Carolingian history* (1971). In it he contended that Charlemagne's empire had a poor administration and it was already slipping at the beginning of the ninth century.¹¹ Charlemagne appreciated the title of emperor, but had continued to act as a Frankish king in a patrimonial manner. Louis had tried to deal with the problems with new capitularies, general assemblies and by embracing the idea of supreme power. Louis believed that the emperor was endowed with a universal authority destined to protect the church and to spread the Christian faith. To do this the integrity of the

⁹ Heinrich Fichtenau, *Das Karolingische Imperium* (Zurich, 1949), 290.

¹⁰ Walter Ullman, *Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages: A study in the ideological relation of clerical to lay power* (London, 1955).

¹¹ Francois-Louis Ganshof, 'Louis the Pious reconsidered', in: Francois-Louis Ganshof (red.), *The Carolingians and the Frankish monarchy: studies in Carolingian history* (London, 1971), 171-180, alhier 173.

state had to be safeguarded.¹² In the end it all came to naught, but Ganshof believed that Louis tried his best.

§ Thomas Noble

A different interpretation came in 1974, by the dissertation *Louis the Pious and the papacy : law, politics and the theory of empire in the early ninth century* by Thomas Noble. Noble would later become an respected Medieval history professor.¹³ He argued that it was Louis who was the instigator of his own coronation. Louis made pragmatic use of the visit of Stephen IV. He could increase his legitimacy, if he was crowned by the vicar of Christ.

Noble would return to the interplay between emperors and popes in his seminal work *The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State, 680-825*.¹⁴ It was a local history of the founding of an autonomous territory for the popes, after the Byzantine empire lost control in northern Italy. The Carolingians played a role in this, acting as the protector of Rome in exchange for papal support for their rule. Noble shows how this Franco-papal alliance ran from Pippin III in 751 to the death of Charles the Fat in 888. According to Noble both parties in this pact were autonomous individuals, the emperors never claimed any authority over the See of Rome and the pope never exerted dominance on a Carolingian.

§ Timothy Reuters

In 1985 Timothy Reuters, an English/German historian, wrote several articles in which he built on Ganshof's idea of Louis inheriting a failing empire from his father.¹⁵ According to Reuters, Charlemagne's empire was based on plunder and tribute.¹⁶ Plundered loot would be shared among the king's nobles, giving him prestige. Under Louis the possibilities of plunder had diminished, there were no easy victims left. This military stagnation caused destabilization. The big displays of forgiveness and humility by Louis would have been meant as an example to his nobles, who saw their resources dry up.¹⁷

§ Matthew Innes

Ganshof had been convinced that the Carolingian empire was run from central institutions and the reason it failed was because these institutions were not implemented efficiently enough.

¹² Ganshof, 'Louis the Pious', 176.

¹³ Thomas Noble, *Louis the Pious and the papacy : law, politics and the theory of empire in the early ninth century* (Michigan, 1974).

¹⁴ Thomas Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State, 680-825* (Pennsylvania, 1984).

¹⁵ Timothy Reuter, 'Plunder and tribute in the Carolingian Empire', in: Janet Nelson (red.), *Medieval politics and modern mentalities*, 231-150.; Timothy Reuter, 'The end of Carolingian military expansion', in: Janet Nelson (red.), *Medieval politics and modern mentalities*, 251-267,

¹⁶ Reuter, 'Plunder and tribute in the Carolingian Empire', 233.

¹⁷ Timothy Reuter, 'The end of Carolingian military expansion', in: Janet Nelson (red.), *Medieval politics and modern mentalities*, 251-267, alhier 265-267.

This view is challenged in 2000 by Dr. Matthew Innes, in *State and society in the Early Middle Ages*.¹⁸ Innes argues that power in the Early Middle Ages was not just about central power, but about negotiations of the center with the periphery. Frankish kings and emperors had very limited impact on local communities, since they had to rule through regional aristocrats who had monopolized local power. Any authority the kings exerted in those regions came through brokerage, patronage and reciprocity with these local elites.

§ Stuart Airlie

Dr. Stuart Airlie gives more weight to the role of the center, the royal or imperial courts of the eighth and ninth century. Airlie enjoys a high standing in the academic world as a foremost interpreter of Carolingian political culture, he has provided an enormous contribution to the historiography of that subject. His articles were recently combined in *Power and Its Problems in Carolingian Europe*.¹⁹ According to Airlie the Carolingians were extraordinarily successful in centralizing their authority, convincing everyone for over two centuries that they were the natural rulers of the Frankish world. They did this by first tying the aristocracy to the court through service and reward. Second, they employed a refined program of propaganda, of rituals, palaces and published works, through which the very identity of the Franks became associated with the Carolingians.

§ Mariëlle Hageman

Recently there has been a rise of interest in the use of rituals in the Carolingian period. Dr. Mariëlle Hageman wrote a book on the subject: *De kleren van de keizer*, based on her dissertation.²⁰ The book is an enumeration of imperial rituals of the Carolingian and Ottonian houses. Rituals were the “clothes” of the emperor, their outward manifestation of their inner qualities to rule. Using such rituals a ruler could communicate to their subjects about their social status, power and even set norms. Hageman analyses rituals and how they were reported in the Medieval media. One section of her book is about coronation rituals, making it ideal for this thesis.

§ Courtney Booker

Two works have come out recently focusing on Louis’ act of penance of 833: Courtney Booker’s *Past convictions* and Mayke de Jong’s *Penitential state*. Together they complement

¹⁸ Matthew Innes: *State and society in the early middle ages: the Middle Rhine Valley, 400-1000* (Cambridge, 2000).

¹⁹ Stuart Airlie, *Power and Its problems in Carolingian Europe* (Ashgate, 2012).

²⁰ Mariëlle Hageman, *De kleren van de keizer : Rituelen en media in de tijd Van Karel De Grote* (Amsterdam, 2006).

each other, painting a revisionist picture of the events of 833. Bookers work is historiographical in nature, focusing on the attestations of the bishops that put Louis through his penance. According to her, it was not a cynical power play of the bishops, but an earnest attempt to remedy a ruler that had fallen into sin.²¹ It fit in with the imperial ideology propagated by Louis himself. Perhaps Louis even appreciated their attempts to save him. Booker's work is invaluable, as it analyses how Louis' deposition has been researched in a great many historical publications.

§ Mayke de Jong

De Jong writes on how the concept of penance had shaped Louis era and how the emperor himself used public displays of penance to address conflicts, reduce crises and manipulate public opinion.²² It was one of the many rituals Louis could perform in a very Christian world. According to her rituals were not empty displays, but performances full of meaning recognized by all parties involved. De Jong's book is extra useful, as it gives a great biography of Louis in the first chapter.

²¹ Courtney Booker, *Past convictions; the penance of Louis the Pious and the decline of the Carolingians* (Pennsylvania, 2009), 158.

²² Mayke de Jong, *Pentitential state; Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge, 2009).

Chapter 1: The life of Louis and the sources

This chapter is meant to give context to the coronations of Louis. It will start with a short history of the Carolingians up to the death of Louis, followed by an analysis of the contemporary sources on his life. The rise of Pippin III, the Franco-papal alliance and the challenges of Louis' reign, are crucial to understanding the development of his coronation rituals.

§The Carolingian empire

§The rise of Carolingian power

The name of the Carolingian dynasty derived from Charles Martel (686-741), mayor of the palace during the Merovingian period. The Merovingian line had occupied the Frankish throne since the fifth century, but had lost much of its influence in the eighth century.²³ The king was reduced to a figurehead, Martel ruled as the power behind the throne from 715 to 741.²⁴ When Charles died the position of mayor of the palace shifted to his son Pippin III (714-768).

Pippin wanted to be the king of the Franks, but lacked the dynastic legitimacy of the Merovingians. To alleviate this, he made an alliance with pope Zachary (679-752).²⁵ The bishop of Rome was confronted with both the decline of Byzantine power in Italy and the rise of the Lombard kingdom. Zachary wanted Pippin to be a protector of Rome, while Pippin wanted some legitimation for his usurpation.²⁶ Thus the Franco-papal alliance was born. For the duration of their reign, the Carolingians and the papacy maintained a special relationship in which they both profited.²⁷

Pippin was made king in 751. In 754 Zachary's successor Stephen II (715-757) crossed the Alps to Paris, where he anointed Pippin and his sons Carloman and Charlemagne (747-814) king.²⁸ This was the first time the ritual of anointing was used to consecrate a Frankish king.²⁹ Stephen gave Pippin and his sons the special title of *Patricius*, an old Roman title signifying protector of Italy and the see of St Peter.³⁰ Furthermore, the pope forbade the

²³ Rosamund McKitterick, *The Frankish kingdoms under the Carolingians 751-987* (New York, 1983), 43.

²⁴ Constance Bouchard, *Rewriting saints and ancestors; Memory and forgetting in France, 500-1200* (Pennsylvania, 2015), 109.

²⁵ McKitterick, *The Frankish kingdom*, 34.

²⁶ Bouchard, *Rewriting saints and ancestors*, 96.

²⁷ For an overview of this alliance please see Thomas Noble, *The republic of St. Peter* (Pennsylvania, 1984), 256-276.

²⁸ Bouchard, *Rewriting saints and ancestors*, 97.

²⁹ Janet Nelson, 'the lord's anointed and the people's choice: Carolingian royal ritual', in: David Cannadine (red.), *Rituals of royalty; power and ceremonial in traditional societies* (Cambridge, 1987), 137-180, alhier 141.

³⁰ McKitterick, *The Frankish kingdom*, 48.

Frankish aristocracy, under the threat of excommunication, to choose a king not from the house of Pippin.³¹ The new Frankish king kept his part of the bargain, invading Lombardy in 755 and stopping the Lombards from annexing Roman territory.³²

Charlemagne, succeeding his father in 768, kept the Franco-papal alliance. When the Lombards stirred again, Charlemagne defeated and annexed the Lombard kingdom in 774. In 800, on Christmas day, Charlemagne was crowned emperor by pope Leo III (r. 795-816). It was the first time in centuries the West had an emperor, the first time a pope was involved and the first time a Frank ascended the imperial throne. Charlemagne would pass the imperial crown to his son Louis the Pious in 813.

§ The life of Louis the Pious (778-840)

Louis the Pious, Hludowicus, was born in Poitou, on 16 April 778. His twin brother Lothar died early in his infancy.³³ Louis had two older brothers: Charles (772-811) and Carloman (773-810). These would be the chosen successors of Charlemagne.

Louis' political career started in 781, when he was three years old he was made king of Aquitaine. Following the tradition of the Franco-papal alliance, Louis was anointed king by pope Hadrian during Easter. His territory was a relatively new addition to the Frankish realm and young Louis had to contend with local uprisings and Muslim incursions from Spain. Once he was old enough to rule he turned out to be a competent ruler, especially in military matters. His campaigns usually ended in success, a highlight was the conquest of Barcelona in 801.

Besides fighting, Louis was most concerned with the religious sphere in Aquitaine. Many monasteries were rebuilt or repaired and many more communities were founded under his patronage.³⁴ Louis drove for church reform, especially in monasteries, his efforts made sure all Aquitanian monasteries followed the Rule of St Benedict. Through his work the efficiency of the church was increased and the monastic prayer was both improved and unified.³⁵

In the dynastic area Louis was just as successful. He married Irmingard in 794. She blessed Louis with three sons, Lothar (795-855), Pippin (797-838) and Louis 'the German' (806-876). These sons would later give Louis endless grief.

³¹ Bouchard, *Rewriting saints and ancestors*, 98.

³² McKitterick, *The Frankish kingdom*, 48.

³³ The Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris*, in: Thomas Noble (red.), *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious; lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan and the Astronomer* (Pennsylvania, 2009), 3, 229.

³⁴ Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris*, 18, 243-244.

³⁵ McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms*, 108.

§ Louis' rule as emperor

Despite his successes, Louis was never meant to inherit his father's empire. That role was supposed to be filled by his older brother Charles, with Louis and Pippin remaining sub-kings.³⁶ When both his male siblings died Louis was made sole emperor by Charlemagne in 813. After Charlemagne's death in 814, Louis let pope Stephen IV crown and anoint him in 816. In 817 Louis made up a political will for his sons, named the *Ordinatio Imperii*.³⁷ Lothar was made co-emperor, with the understanding he would become full emperor after Louis' death. Pippin and Louis the German were made sub-king in Aquitaine and Bavaria respectively. Louis' cousin, Bernard the king of Italy, was not named in the succession scheme. Bernard feared for his position and that of his family and he rebelled.³⁸ His rebellion was quickly squashed, he was captured and blinded, later dying from his wounds. In 822 Lothar was given the kingdom of Italy, he received an imperial coronation from pope Pascal I a year later.

Emperor Louis enacted a platform of reform. He had a deeply religious view in which the empire and Christendom were synonymous and he strove to put the empire on this new ideological footing. The churches and monasteries in the empire were reformed to follow the Rule of St Benedict, like Louis had done in Aquitaine. Enquiries and councils were made to stamp out corruption. Attempts were made to help and protect the poor in the land.

§ The disruption of civil war

In 829 the empire started to fall apart. Louis had fathered a new son, Charles (the Bald) in 824 and he had to reshuffle his initial inheritance scheme, to the chagrin of his other sons. At the same time Lothar was becoming unsatisfied with his role as co-emperor. This led to a series of civil wars Louis fought against his sons from 829 to his death in 840. In these wars alliances would shift, with the sons sometimes fighting with their father and sometimes against him.³⁹ Louis would continually play the brothers against each other by reconfiguring his will, punishing and rewarding with loss and gain of title and land.⁴⁰

The actions of Lothar caused the deposition of Louis as emperor. That happened after the event on the field of Lies in 833. Louis was encamped with all his retainers during a

³⁶ Francois-Louis Ganshof, 'The last period of Charlemagne's reign: a study in decomposition', in: Francois-Louis Ganshof (red.), *The Carolingians and the Frankish monarchy: studies in Carolingian history* (London, 1971), 240-255, alhier 245.

³⁷ *Ordinatio Imperii*, in: A. Boretius (red.), *Capitularia regum Francorum*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Leges, 2, 2 (Hannover, 1883) 270-273, alhier 270.

³⁸ McKitterick, *The Frankish kingdoms*, 135.

³⁹ Leonie van Beckum, 'Een keizer onttroond; Lodewijk de Vrome en zijn openbare boetedoening', in: Mayke de Jong, Marie-Thérèse Bos (red.), *Macht en gezag in de negende eeuw* (Hilversum, 1995), 61-78, alhier 74.

⁴⁰ De Jong, *Pentitential state*, 45.

campaign against Lothar. During one night most of Louis' retainers abandoned him for Lothar's camp, leaving Louis helpless. That episode was called the field of lies, as his retainers had all sworn an oath of fealty to Louis. It was also noteworthy because of the intervention of pope Gregory IV (790-844). Gregory was brought along by Lothar to open diplomatic talks between Louis and his son. These talks failed however and Louis was captured and forced to do penance for his alleged crimes. This humiliation served as a deposition and Lothar assumed command as emperor. This development was extremely shocking to contemporaries: the emperor, stripped of his regalia and dressed in a hair-shirt was bent on his knees, begging for forgiveness.⁴¹ Despite this humiliation Louis regained his imperial title in 835, through some deft political manoeuvring. Lothar was sent back to Italy. Pippin passed away in 838. Louis kept on fighting his remaining sons, until he fell ill on campaign against Louis the German. He died in Ingelheim on 20 June 840. After his death his sons continued fighting, finally splitting the empire into three pieces.

§The sources on the reign of Louis the Pious

The next part of this essay will explore the contemporary sources on the life of Louis. This essay is largely built on analyzing these texts. The main sources are the work of Einhard, Ermoldus, Thegan, the Astronomer and Nithard. Before anything can be done with these works, their context has to be investigated. What do we know about their authors? Their upbringing, education, social status, proximity to the emperor are all influential on how they reported on the coronations. The stated or implicit goal of their writing, the time in which they wrote and their intended audience are also important. These factors colored the perspective in which events were documented.

Compared to the earlier centuries of the Middle Ages the reign of Louis has been relatively well documented. Charlemagne's efforts to increase literacy in his time had its effects. The ninth century saw a real growth of literary output such as history, biography and poetry.⁴² Classical literature was rediscovered and appropriated. One of the first Franks to write in a classical manner was Einhard, in his biography of Charlemagne.

The contemporary biographies and histories of this period share some similarities. They were all produced by members of the upper class. These were the ones with the means

⁴¹ Mayke De Jong, 'Power and humility in Carolingian society: the public penance of Louis the Pious', *Early Medieval Europe*, 1 (1992), 29-52, alhier 41.

⁴² Matthew Innes, Rosamund McKitterick, 'writing of history', in: Rosamund McKitterick, *Carolingian culture, emulation and innovation* (Cambridge, 1994) 193-222, alhier 209.

and education to even write such works. Not just that, but these authors were all connected to the imperial court in some way, and gained their status and identity from their relationship to the emperor.⁴³ The text they produced were always with a specific goal in mind, either to improve their own standing, to exact some kind of change, or to admonish the ruler.⁴⁴ The writers, their ruler and the other members of the elite all shared fundamental values, which are continuously appealed to in the narratives. These text should therefore not be read without keeping in mind these goals and values, as they shaped the very form or the narrative. The main authors will now be examined.

§Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*

Einhard (770-840) was a Frankish scholar and a courtier. Born to German speaking aristocrats, he was educated in the monastery of Fulda.⁴⁵ : Around 790 Einhard was summoned by Charlemagne to join his court, as at that time the emperor aimed to surround himself with scholars.⁴⁶ After Charlemagne's death, Einhard stayed on the court of Louis. The numerous squabbles among Louis' sons dispirited Einhard, who withdrew to a private life around 830.⁴⁷ He still kept contact with the court through the exchange of letters.

§The work

Einhard wrote a secular biography on Charlemagne. *The Life of Charles the emperor* was a divergence from the style at the time, most biographies were chronological lives of the saints, written in plain Latin.⁴⁸ The picture Einhard paints of Charlemagne is of a virtuous and vigorous warrior and leader, a fascinating character. He based it on the writing of Suetonius and Cicero.⁴⁹ Einhard imitated structurally Suetonius when he created a thematically composed portrait of Charlemagne, instead of a chronological narrative. He borrowed several key phrases in order to give Charlemagne a distinct imperial charisma.⁵⁰ Cicero served as an

⁴³ Stuart Airlie, 'Semper fideles?', Loyauté envers les Caroliens comme constituant de l'identité aristocratique', in: Stuart Airlie, *Power and its problems in Carolingian Europe* (Surrey, 2012), 129-143, alhier 133.

⁴⁴ De Jong, *Penitential state*, 62.

⁴⁵ Hageman, *De kleren van de keizer*, 17.

⁴⁶ Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 7.

⁴⁷ David Ganz, 'Einhard's Charlemagne, the characterization of greatness', in: Joanna Story (red.) *Charlemagne, empire and society*, (Manchester, 2005), 38-51, alhier 39.

⁴⁸ Sverre Bagge, 'The model emperor: Einhard's Charlemagne in Widukind and Rahewin', *Viator* 43, 2 (2012) 49-78, alhier 50.

⁴⁹ Paul Barnwell, 'Einhard, Louis the Pious and Childeric III', *The institute of historical research*, 78 (2005), 129-139, alhier 131.; Matthew Kempshall, 'Some Ciceronian models for Einhard's Life of Charlemagne', *Viator* 26 (1995), 11-38, alhier 12.

⁵⁰ Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 15.

inspiration for the beautiful Latin Einhard used.⁵¹ Using these *exempla*, Einhard was putting a link between the Frankish ruler and the classical Roman emperors.⁵²

§ The date of writing

Einhard wrote his biography during his employ under Louis. There is some debate concerning the date it was written, with estimates ranging from 817 to 829.⁵³ The *Vita* must have been written after the *Ordinatio imperii* and before the civil wars. Louis would have been at the peak of his power and Einhard would have been working at his court. In this time Louis was attempting to communicate his distinct imperial ideology, a biography of Charlemagne based on classical imperial authors would serve to further broadcast such ideas.⁵⁴

§ Purpose and intended audience

Einhard gives a purpose for his work in his prologue. According to him he owed it to Charlemagne, who showered him with love, friendship and care, to report for posterity the many remarkable deeds of Charlemagne.⁵⁵ Einhard felt he was particularly well suited to write about this, as he was an eyewitness to many of these deeds.⁵⁶ The work was a celebration of Charlemagne and perhaps also a defence. In the 820s criticism of Charlemagne became widespread, with Louis admitting culpability for his and Charlemagne's failing in 822. Several accounts were distributed with visions of Charlemagne being tortured in hell.⁵⁷ Einhard could be responding to these allegations.

It could be that Einhard was contrasting the deeds of Charlemagne, portrayed as very positive, with the then ruling emperor Louis. If Einhard was writing in the late 820s, he would have witnessed some disruptions at court. The *Vita* could have been meant to criticise the failings of the new government, or show it an example how it should perform.⁵⁸ This ties in with the intended audience for Einhard's work. This could have been Louis or Louis' courtiers. These courtiers could have put pressure on Louis to change his ways.

⁵¹ Kempshall, 'Some Ciceronian models', 18.

⁵² Ildar Garipzanov, *The symbolic language of authority in the Carolingian world (c.751-877)* (Leiden, 2008), 286.

⁵³ F. L. Ganshof, 'Einhard, biographer of Charlemagne', in F. L. Ganshof, *The Carolingians and the Frankish monarchy* (1971), pp. 1–16, alhier 4.; H. Löwe, 'Die Entstehungszeit der Vita Karoli Einhard's', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 34(1981), 85–103.; K. F. Werner, 'Hludovicus Augustus. Gouverner l'empire chrétien – idées et réalités', in: P. Godman and R. Collins (red.) *Charlemagne's heir: New perspectives on the reign of Louis the Pious (814–40)*, (Oxford, 1990), 3–123, alhier 82.; Rosamond McKitterick, 'The writing of history', in: Rosamond McKitterick, *Carolingian culture : emulation and innovation*, (Cambridge, 1994), 195–220, alhier 200.

⁵⁴ Garipzanov, *The symbolic language of authority*, 287.

⁵⁵ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, in: Thomas Noble (red.), *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious; lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan and the Astronomer* (Pennsylvania, 2009), 22–50, alhier prologue, 23.

⁵⁶ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, prologue, 22.

⁵⁷ Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 12.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 13.

The *Vita* was widely read and circulated, with over 100 manuscripts still in existence today.⁵⁹ Because of this popularity, the biography served as an inspiration and an example to other authors. Writing a biography on a secular man had not been done yet in the Medieval world, but after Einhard no less than four writers wrote one on Louis. All of them must have been aware of the *Vita*, Thegan and the Astronomer were inspired the most by it. Thegan imitated Einhard's thematic structure. The Astronomer knew and admired Einhard and used his book as a source.⁶⁰

§ Ermoldus, *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris*

The author of the poem *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris*, or *In honour of Louis, the most Christian emperor*, Ermoldus Nigellus, or Ermoldus the Black, is somewhat enigmatic. It is not even known around what year he was born or when he died. There is some consensus that he was a cleric, but this has recently been contested.⁶¹ What little that can be said about him derives entirely from his writing. He was a member of the court of Pippin I of Aquitaine, the second son of Louis. At some point after 824 Ermoldus was exiled to Strasbourg, possibly because of an accusation of dogmatic error or some sort of criticism of Louis.⁶² His flattering poem was supposed to display the virtues of Louis and by doing so win back favor to secure his release to his homeland.⁶³ These goals Ermoldus openly states in the introduction of his poem.⁶⁴ It is unknown whether he succeeded in his goal. His work does not appear to have been widely read: only two copies survive, from the tenth and the fifteenth century.⁶⁵

§ the work

The *in honorem Hludovici imperatoris* is a panegyric biography, split into four books. The first book was an overview of Louis' Aquitanian kingship, with special attention paid to the campaign against Barcelona. Book 2 is concerned with his assumption of imperial power with the coronations of 813 and 816. This part has a lot of speeches on the ideal of Christian rule, it is most useful for this essay. Book 3 is about the Breton campaigns of 818 and book 4 about the baptism of the Danish king Harald.

⁵⁹ Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), 51.

⁶⁰ Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris*, in: Thomas Noble (red.), *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious; lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan and the Astronomer* (Pennsylvania, 2009), 41, 272.

⁶¹ Shane Bobrycki, 'Nigellus, Ausulus: self-promotion, self-suppression and Carolingian ideology in the poetry of Ermold', in: R. Corradini, M. Gillis (red.), *Ego trouble: authors and their identities in the Early Middle Ages* (Vienna, 2010), 161-173, alhier 163.

⁶² Peter Godman, 'Louis the Pious and his poets', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 19 (1985), 239- 289, alhier 253.

⁶³ Shane Bobrycki, 'Nigellus, Ausulus', 163.

⁶⁴ Ermoldus, *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris*, in: Thomas Noble (red.), *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious; lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan and the Astronomer* (Pennsylvania, 2009), 127-186, alhier 128.

⁶⁵ Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 122.

The speeches are important, as they are an indication of the prevailing imperial ideology of the time. Ermoldus was quite well connected at the imperial court, he knew what would be favorably received and what not. The speeches were probably not quoted verbatim, but an amalgamation of what was then perceived as the attributes of the perfect Christian emperor.⁶⁶

§ Date of writing

As Ermoldus was banished in 824, it stands to reason he would have begun writing his panegyric as soon as possible. Consensus seems to point for the period between 824-826. His work seems to have been inspired by another poet who was exiled several years earlier. Theodulf had been a successful poet in the court of Charlemagne, who fell out of favour upon the succession of Louis.⁶⁷ Implicated in Bernard's rebellion in 817, Theodulf was banished to a monastery in Angers.⁶⁸ Theodulf responded by sending a poem protesting his innocence to another court poet Moduin in 820, who in turn sent poetry in the form of verse-epistle to Louis pleading Theodulf's case.⁶⁹ These poems had the desired effect, in the same year Louis offered a pardon to Theodulf. Facing similar circumstances, Ermoldus adapted Theodulf's and Moduin's efforts to his purposes.

§ Purpose and intended audience

The most important purpose of the *In Honorem* was to get Ermoldus out of exile. To reach that goal, Ermoldus employed as much flattery as he could muster toward Louis. The attributes Ermoldus emphasised were Louis' piety and mercy. By constantly restating these virtues Ermoldus hoped to engender them in Louis. This would be helped by the form of his poems: the verse-epistles were meant to be read aloud at court. If Louis would not show the virtues Ermoldus wrote about, in forgiving the author, his retinue would certainly notice the contrast.

The insiders at Louis' court were the secondary intended audience for Ermoldus. He tried to tap into the social network around the emperor for maximum effect.⁷⁰ Louis' wife Judith was praised, along with a whole slew of important figures around the court. Ermoldus had a keen understanding of Louis' court and hierarchy as exemplified from the many nobles

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 121.

⁶⁷ Peter Godman, 'Louis the Pious and his poets', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 19 (1985): 239-289, alhier 245.

⁶⁸ Godman, 'Louis the Pious and his poets', 248.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 248-253.

⁷⁰ De Jong, *Penitential state*, 90.

he names, coupled with their position at court.⁷¹ In his flattery, he projected these nobles how they wanted to be seen, magnifying their good qualities and ignoring their lesser sides.⁷²

§ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*,

Like Ermoldus, there is very little known about the life of Thegan, all information about him was mined from his text. He was probably born before 800, died somewhere around 850 and it is quite likely he was educated in the monastery of Lorsch. He enjoyed some status as a member of the Frankish aristocracy and by 825 he was the chor bishop of Trier under Archbishop Hetti. Thegan's relationship with his subject Louis is unclear.

§ The work

The *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, a.k.a. *The Deeds of Louis* was written by Thegan around 836-37.⁷³ It was partially modelled on Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*. Up to chapter 19 Thegan organises his biography thematically like Einhard did, writing chapters on statesmanship and character. Though Thegan imitates Einhard in structure, the end product is quite different; Einhard's Charlemagne is very human, while Thegan's Louis is an ideal Christian ruler: modest, pious, generous, wise. Above all Louis employed a strict self-governance: he was moderate in food and drink, worked hard and he never allowed himself to laugh in public. This kind of image of self-control was also popular in the propaganda of Byzantine emperors, it is possible that Thegan was consciously mirroring this trend.⁷⁴ From chapter 21 on Thegan abandons the example Einhard set and adopts a chronological, annalistic approach in his narration of events.

Thegan was working from a viewpoint that was both Christian and aristocratic. His aristocratic background comes through in how he regarded non-noble people; he disdained them, especially if they rose above their station. His religiosity can be detected by the Christian virtues he ascribes to Louis and the twenty-eight biblical passages cited in the text. It also shines through in the teleological perspective of Thegan: events are placed in into the context of salvation history. God, displeased with the moral failings of the Franks, punished them by internal strife.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Peter Godman, *Poets and emperors: Frankish politics and Carolingian poetry* (Oxford, 1987), 108-125.

⁷² De Jong, *Penitential state*, 89-90.

⁷³ Ernst Tremp, 'Thegan und Astronomus, die beiden Geschichtsschreiber Ludwigs des Frommen', in: Peter Godman, Roger Collings (red.), *Charlemagne's heir. New perspectives on the reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)* (Oxford, 1990), 691-700, alhier 692.

⁷⁴ De Jong, *Penitential state*, 74.

⁷⁵ Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 192.

§Time of writing

Thegan began writing after the revolts of 830-833 disrupted the empire and he ends his narrative in 835. At that point Louis had finally overcome the rebellions against him and he was reinstated in his rule. Thegan was in full support of Louis and his biography was meant to portray him as the legitimate emperor.⁷⁶ He devoted his first chapters to the genealogy of Louis' family. Special attention is given to the two imperial coronations of 813 and 816, both are described in great detail to prove Louis was the rightful and most Christian emperor.

§ Purpose and intended audience

The purpose of the work was to defend Louis and to put the blame for the troubled 830s on others. Louis is painted as a saintly figure, bogged down by the bad counsel, ultimately undone by selfish men. Thegan's main antagonist is Ebbo, the archbishop of Rheims who forced Louis to do penance in 833, effectively deposing him. Ebbo did not come from noble stock, but had been elevated to his position by Louis. This betrayal was considered most vile by Thegan, who spends pages scolding the archbishop.⁷⁷ It is possible Thegan hated Ebbo, because he tried to curtail the power of the office of chor bishop.⁷⁸ Lothar was Thegan's second target, he believed him to be unworthy of his father and the imperial title. Thegan was much more positive about Louis the German. The work may have been an attempt to effect a reconciliation between the older and younger Louis.⁷⁹

§ The Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris*

The Astronomer is the anonymous author of the *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris, the Life of Louis the Pious*. This moniker was given to him centuries later, based on an incident he recorded where he and Louis discussed Halley's comet and its portents.⁸⁰ Like other authors of the ninth century, what little is known about him must be gleaned from his own writing. From that it is clear the Astronomer was a member of the nobility, an insider in the court of Louis.⁸¹ He was well educated, as shown by his excellent use of Latin and the many references he made to classical history and obscure biblical texts. This biblical knowledge suggests the Astronomer was a cleric. It is believed that the Astronomer became a courtier of Louis' son

⁷⁶ Ernst Tremp, *Studien zu den Gesta Hludowici imperatoris des Trierer Chorbischofs Thegan* (Hannover, 1988), 77.

⁷⁷ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, 44, 211-213.

⁷⁸ Tremp, *Studien zu den Gesta Hludowici*, 70-76.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 192.

⁸⁰ Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris*, in: Thomas Noble (red.), *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious; lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan and the Astronomer* (Pennsylvania, 2009), 4, 229.

⁸¹ David Ganz, 'The Astronomer's life of Louis the Pious', in: Valerie Garner, Owen Phelan (red.), *Church, faith and culture in the Medieval west; studies in honour of Thomas F.X. Noble* (Surrey, 2014), 129-148, alhier 130.

Lothar when the old emperor died.⁸² Lothar might even have commissioned the *Life*, evidenced by the generally positive way the Astronomer writes about him.⁸³

§The work

Astronomer's *Life* is a biography of Louis, starting with the latter's birth and ending with his passing in June 840. As a biography, the work is inspired by Einhard's biography of Charlemagne. Both the Astronomer and Einhard were high placed men at the court of Louis, they would have known each other. Structurally however, the works are different, as Einhard worked thematically and the Astronomer's account is purely chronological. Einhard wrote a secular portrait of his subject, while the Astronomer is much more religious. Other influences are the work of the monk Adhemar, a contemporary of Louis, raised alongside the man, who wrote a now lost account of the years up to 813.⁸⁴ For the years 814 to 829 the Astronomer used the Royal Frankish Annals as a source, adapting, adding and discarding wherever necessary. Changing the material meant he could keep the focus on Louis. For the later years, 829 to 840, the Astronomer claimed to be an eyewitness, describing events from memory, which explains the confusion in chronology that sometimes occurs. Among historians there is some debate on whether he consulted the *Annals of St Bertin* or Nithard's *Histories* for this period.⁸⁵ Any similarities between these works seems mostly based on the authors basing their work on the same events and the same sources.

The *Vitas Hludovici imperatoris* shares similarities to the *Via regia*. That book was written by Smaragdus in 810 for Louis when he was king of Aquitaine. It was a guidebook for a king how to be an ideal Christian ruler. The virtues it espoused for the king are the same as the Astronomer lists in his prologue: sobriety, wisdom justice, and virtue.⁸⁶ Both works emphasized the importance of clemency.⁸⁷ The Astronomer gives many examples of the forgiveness of the emperor and the hardships he faced because of it.⁸⁸ The humility and mercy of Louis is painted, not as a weakness, but a deliberate imperial policy.⁸⁹

⁸² Hans Werner Goetz, 'The perception of power and state; the case of the Astronomer's life of Louis the Pious', in: Bjorn Weiler, Simon Maclean, *Representations of power in Medieval Germany 800-1500* (Turnhout, 2006), 15-37, alhier 17.; Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 224.; De Jong, *Penitential state*, 80.

⁸³ Innes, McKitterick, 'The writing of history', 209-210.

⁸⁴ De Jong, *Penitential state*, 82.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 82.; Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 221.; Booker, *Past convictions*, 34.

⁸⁶ Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris*, prologue, 227.

⁸⁷ Ganz, 'The Astronomer's life of Louis the Pious', 142.

⁸⁸ Andrew J. Romig, 'In praise of the too-clement emperor: The problem of forgiveness in the Astronomer's *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*', *Speculum*, 89, 2 (2014), 382-409, alhier 392.

⁸⁹ Romig, 'In praise of the too-clement emperor', 394.

The Astronomer shows a profoundly religious perspective in his writing. Besides the biblical references, most events were placed in the context of a universal, salvation history.⁹⁰ Charlemagne had received his kingdom from God and he recommended himself and his lineage to saint Peter to receive their help to govern justly. Louis was compared to Melchisedech, his qualities made him transcend the boundaries between king and priest, to combine them in one person. It was his task to lead his people to the Kingdom of Heaven, setbacks were consistently portrayed as the work of the devil. The Astronomer lavishes great attention to the church reforms of Louis, to his protection of Christendom and to the propagation of the Christian faith. The Astronomer also appreciates the importance of rituals. For example: Louis' wish to be officially reinstated by the bishops after his disposition in 833 can only be found in this account.⁹¹

§Time of writing

It is likely the book was written in the years 840-841.⁹² It was finished after the death of Louis, as the book ends with that. The author expressed hope that the settlement of 839, in which Lothar was made sole imperial heir, would mean an end to the confusion of the 830s. That hope would have been dashed after the terrible battle of Fontenoy fought between Louis' sons in May of 841.⁹³ It is therefore likely that the *Life* was written before that, in 840-841. Given the threat of civil war hanging over the empire, the Astronomer's message of endless forgiveness makes sense. He was hoping the merciful Louis would be an example to his sons, if they could forgive their brothers, the war could be prevented. At the time of writing the empire had a chance to remain intact, if this line of clemency could be enacted.

§Purpose and intended audience

The stated reason the Astronomer gave for writing his *Life*, was that Louis was a virtuous man. The Astronomer wanted to describe him so others could emulate him. He used biography as a means to show what should be followed and what should be avoided.⁹⁴ Louis' qualities as a Christian ruler are the main focus of the narrative. During his coronation he received instructions from Charlemagne on how to protect and govern his realm and Louis strove to fulfill this task. His main characteristic was his *clementia*, his forgiveness, which the envious would see as excessive.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Goetz, 'Perception of power and state', 36.

⁹¹ Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris*, 51, 282.

⁹² Goetz, 'Perception of power and state', 16.

⁹³ Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 220.

⁹⁴ Ganz, 'Astronomer's life of Louis', 135.

⁹⁵ Astronomer, *Vita Hludovici Imperatoris*, prologue, 228.

Courtney Booker supposed the Astronomer used the emplotment of Greek tragedy to structure his narrative, partly because he once used the Greek word *drama*.⁹⁶ An emplotment is an assembly of a series of historical events into a narrative with a plot. The Astronomer's emplotment revolved around a good king, Christ-like even, who is brought down by his own moral code and the imperfect world he inhabited. De Jong disagrees with this, as the Astronomer used the word *drama* when describing a visit by Byzantine legates and he possibly just wanted to use some prestigious Greek words.⁹⁷

The intended audience were the three ruling brothers left after Louis had died. As said before it is possible Lothar himself commissioned the work, the Astronomer does present him as the lawful legitimate hope of conserving the empire. Most of all the Astronomer to promote unity between the three brothers and to end the threat of civil war. Unfortunately for him this unity would be shattered forever, less than a year after the completion of his work.

§ Nithard, the *Historiae*

One particularly bleak account of the life of Louis is the *Historiae*, or *Histories* by Nithard (ca. 795-844). Nithard was an insider to the imperial family, the offspring of Charlemagne's daughter Bertha and Angilbert, the abbot of St. Riquier near Amiens. This coupling was scandalous, since they were not married to each other, which made Nithard an illegitimate son. In 814 Bertha was banished from Aken by Louis, along with all the other sisters and nieces of the new emperor.⁹⁸ Nithard was permitted to stay at court, where he enjoyed an excellent education.⁹⁹ Eventually he took over his father's job as lay abbot and gained employ in the court of Charles the Bald (823-877), the last son of Louis and king of West-Francia. There he served as court historian, diplomat and warrior. He had his hands full with the last two functions, given the poisoned political state of the 840's. Nithard was sent as envoy to Lothar at least two times and he fought several battles, the most infamous being Fontenoy in 841. In 844 Nithard became badly wounded in one of these battles, he died soon after.¹⁰⁰

§ the work

The *histories* were composed on the orders of Charles the Bald. It was an attempt to describe and explain the troubled situation of that time. It also was meant, at least the first parts, to

⁹⁶ Courtney Booker, 'Histrionic history, demanding drama: The penance of Louis the Pious in 833, memory, and emplotment', in: Helmut Reimitz, Bernhard Zeller (red.), *Vergangenheit und Vergegenwärtigung: Frühes Mittelalter und europäische Erinnerungskultur* (Vienna, 2009), 103–27, 111–113.

⁹⁷ De Jong, *Penitential state*, 88.

⁹⁸ Dana Polanichka, Alex Cilley, 'The very personal history of Nithard: family and honour in the Carolingian world', *Early Medieval Europe*, 22:2 (2014) 171–200, alhier 173.

⁹⁹ Janet Nelson, 'Public Histories and Private History in the Work of Nithard', *Speculum* 60:2 (1985) 251–293, alhier 258.

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, 'Public histories', 253.

defend the actions of Charles, who took up weapons against his older brother Lothar.¹⁰¹ The work consists of four books, in which the first one lays the historical groundwork for the civil war, beginning with Charlemagne and moving through the reign of Louis up to his death. Book II, III and IV are a more or less contemporary account of the civil war.

§Time of writing

The *histories* were being written in 841-843, while their subject, the war between Louis' sons, were still raging. This meant Nithard did not know how they would end and could therefore not write a unified text about them. The tone changes. Disappointed with the conflict that just wouldn't end, volume III is much bleaker than II, while IV is practically despairing. Volume IV contains some pointed criticism towards Charles the Bald, where earlier volumes would praise and defend him. It is also much more personal, with a small biography of its author included.

§Purpose and intended audience

Charles commissioned this work and he had a goal in mind. The intended audience would be the nobles on Charles' side, to convince them of the righteousness of Charles' cause. Charles is usually presented as reasonable and legitimate, while Lothar is very much the antagonist. Lothar was Charles' main rival and he is consciously portrayed as a greedy oath breaker fighting against his own father and brothers. As the work progressed, Nithard's purpose shifted. There is some consensus now that the fourth volume was meant to influence Charles, by unsparing criticism, to seek for peace.¹⁰²

Nithard was a member of the Carolingian family and it was in his interest to present the rule of Charlemagne as a historic inevitability, part of the natural order, in this way legitimizing Carolingian rule.¹⁰³ The reign of Charlemagne is presented as natural beginning point. Charlemagne is the source of Carolingian royal authority, Louis gains his legitimacy to rule through his lineage. Similarly, Louis functions as a source from which family members take identity and status.¹⁰⁴ His sisters, brothers, nephews and sons are all defined in their relationship to him, to show the Carolingian royal continuity they represented.¹⁰⁵ Nithard is careful to note their status and any changes to it. As an insider Nithard is also concerned with

¹⁰¹ Nelson, 'Public Histories', 256.

¹⁰² Janet Nelson, 'History-writing at the courts of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald', in: A. Scharer, G. Scheibelreiter (red.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 1994), 435- 442, alhier 439.; Booker, *Past convictions*, 6.; De Jong, *Penitential state*, 97.; Polanichka, Cilley, 'The very personal history of Nithard', 172.

¹⁰³ Stuart Airlie, 'The world, the text and the Carolingian: royal, aristocratic and masculine identities in Nithard's histories', in: P. Wormald, Janet Nelson, *Lay intellectuals in the Carolingian world* (Cambridge, 2007), 51- 76, alhier 62.

¹⁰⁴ Airlie, 'The World, the text and the Carolingians', 63.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 64.

proper etiquette, feasts and ceremonies are all duly recorded, as are the other rituals that were important for imperial rule. This focus on etiquette were to show how ordered life was under the Carolingians, Nithard suggests that without the Carolingians life would be unordered and chaotic.

Louis comes off as a somewhat passive ruler, who did not command loyalty.¹⁰⁶ His indecisive nature regarding his sons and their inheritance ends up spurring his oldest into action. Lothar is the antagonist, a greedy oath breaker fighting against his own father. But many other nobles lost their way according to Nithard. It was this shared lack of loyalty and moral fortitude that caused the disintegration of Carolingian society and made Nithard lose hope for his generation.

§The *Liber Pontificalis*

The *Liber Pontificalis*, or *the book of the popes*, is a collection of biographies on the bishops of Rome, written from the sixth to the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Even though the popes would play an important part in the Carolingian empire, this work will not be examined as closely as the others sources mentioned in this chapter. The reason for this is that the *Liber pontificalis* is a Roman source, written from the perspective of the papacy and this essay is concerned with the Frankish imperial representations of Louis' coronations. Furthermore, the *Liber Pontificalis* is completely silent over Louis' coronations, his royal coronation and anointing by Hadrian is not recorded, as is his imperial coronation of 813.¹⁰⁸ Neither does it mention the coronation and anointing by Stephen IV in 816. Only the political concessions and exchanged gifts are reported.¹⁰⁹

§Conclusion

These sources are invaluable as all the authors were contemporaries of Louis, even as some of them wrote after his death. As such they were aware of the most pressing concerns of that time and they could give their own impression of events and personalities. Sometimes they were witnesses to these events. Since the discussed works were written years apart, Einhard possibly as early as 817, Nithard 843 at the latest, a shift in priorities can be detected. Where Einhard was writing in a context of a new emperor taking over the reins, subsequent writers had to deal with a disgraced emperor, rising political tensions and civil war. This changed

¹⁰⁶ De Jong, *Penitential state*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ H. Zimmermann, 'Liber pontificalis', *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, (Stuttgart, 1977-1999), <http://apps.brepolis.net/lexiema/test/Default2.aspx> [geraadpleegd op 16-1-2017].

¹⁰⁸ *Liber Pontificalis*, in: Raymond Davis, *The lives of the eighth century popes (Liber Pontificalis); the ancient biographies of nine popes*, Translated texts for historians, 13 (Liverpool, 1992), 120-169.

¹⁰⁹ *Liber pontificalis*, 232-233.

how people viewed the coronations of Louis. The first of these imperial coronations will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: the imperial coronation of Louis the Pious in 813

Louis was made king of Aquitaine in 781, ruling a sizeable but peripheral part of the empire. By unhappy circumstances, the death of his brothers, he came to be the sole emperor of the whole Frankish realm. This chapter will first look at the difficulties that come up when an unknown entity has to take over the reins of power and how a coronation ceremony could be employed to mitigate these problems. The coronation received considerable attention in the contemporary sources, though how it was reported differs substantially. It will be analyzed how and why these differences occur.

§ The *Divisio regnorum* and its failure

Back in 806 Charlemagne made arrangements for his succession with the *Divisio Regnorum*, the partition of the kingdom.¹¹⁰ This political will stated the Frankish realm was to be divided among Charlemagne's three sons. Pippin and Louis would keep their kingdoms of Italy and Aquitaine, while Charles would inherit the heartland of the empire consisting of Neustria, Austrasia and any territories conquered east of the Rhine and north of the Danube. All three rulers would be kings in their own right, independent of the other.¹¹¹ However, Charles would enjoy pre-eminence among them as his territories were the undivided ancestral lands of the Franks.¹¹² Charles had been crowned king of the Franks on Christmas day 800, the same day his father received the imperial title.¹¹³ He was allowed to stay in the court of Aachen, cultivating relationships with the premier members of the aristocracy.¹¹⁴

If Charlemagne had any imperial ambitions, it is not immediately obvious in the *Divisio Regnorum*. There is no mention of anyone inheriting the imperial title.¹¹⁵ There was no concept of a united empire, the kingdom was to be divided among the heirs like in the Frankish custom. If one of the inheritors passed away before Charlemagne, his land would be split up and parcelled out to the two remaining brothers. It even allowed for the possibility for

¹¹⁰ Francois-Louis Ganshof, 'The last period of Charlemagne's reign: a study in decomposition', in: Francois-Louis Ganshof (red.), *The Carolingians and the Frankish monarchy: studies in Carolingian history* (London, 1971), 240-255, alhier 245.

¹¹¹ Thomas Noble, *Louis the Pious and the papacy: law politics and the theory of empire in the early ninth century* (Michigan, 1974), 47.

¹¹² Matthew Innes, 'Charlemagne's Will: Piety, Politics and the Imperial Succession', *The English Historical Review*, 112, 448 (1997), pp. 833-855, alhier 842.

¹¹³ Janet Nelson, 'Charlemagne the man', in: Joanna Story (ed.) *Charlemagne, empire and society*, (Manchester, 2005), 22-37, alhier 33.

¹¹⁴ Innes, 'Charlemagne's will', 842.

¹¹⁵ Ganshof, 'The last period of Charlemagne's reign', 246.

the children of the deceased party to inherit their father's kingdom instead of their uncles.¹¹⁶ A division of the empire seemed inevitable.

§ Attempts at unity

Even if Charlemagne had wanted to keep his empire whole, he may have had little choice in dividing it. If he was to leave his younger sons out of the inheritance, they might turn against their father. Discontented aristocrats could flock to their banner, leading to rebellion and civil war. This had happened many times during the Merovingian dynasty. For this reason it was custom to give royal sons a share of land and governmental responsibilities.¹¹⁷

Charlemagne was obligated to give his sons their share of land, but he did make some attempts at keeping his land unified. He restricted the division to only legitimate sons, leaving any children from concubines out.¹¹⁸ He also made sure the central Frankish heartland went to Charles, leaving the lands of secondary importance to the younger two. In this way Charlemagne could keep his sons happy, while keeping the core of his empire intact.

§ Death of Pippin and Charles, rise of Louis

Unfortunately for Charlemagne his succession scheme did not succeed. Death took his two older sons, Pippin in 810 and Charles in 811, only Louis survived.¹¹⁹ According to Einhard, this deeply affected Charlemagne, driving him to tears.¹²⁰ In theory the *divisio* could still have worked, as it had been constructed with the mortality of its subjects in mind. Pippin had left a son, Bernard (797-818), who could take his father's share; and Charles' land could be portioned between Louis and Bernard.¹²¹ However, Charlemagne, after years of deliberation, decided to forgo this option. He made the choice to crown Louis in 813 as sole heir emperor to the entire empire. Bernard kept his position of king of Italy.¹²² The coronation of Louis would prove to be the final political act of Charlemagne, as he died in 814.

Louis' rise as emperor was borne out of necessity. Charlemagne had been grooming Charles to succeed him and his death was a severe blow to Charlemagne. The lack of enthusiasm for Louis can be extrapolated in that it took two years for Charlemagne to settle on him as the new emperor. This uncertainty is not felt in the sources, which all present Louis as the natural choice.

¹¹⁶ Innes, 'Charlemagne's will', 842.

¹¹⁷ Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, Simon Maclean, *The Carolingian world* (Cambridge, 2011), 195.

¹¹⁸ Innes, 'Charlemagne's Will', 843.

¹¹⁹ Janet Nelson, 'The Frankish kingdoms, 814–898: the West', in: Rosamund McKitterick (red.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History Volume 2: c. 700–c. 900* (Cambridge, 1995), 110-141, alhier 110.

¹²⁰ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, 19, 38.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, 249.

¹²² *Annales regni Francorum*, 95.

§The coronation of Louis as attested in the sources

§Einhard

Of the sources attesting the coronation of Louis by Charlemagne, Einhard is the first. In *The Life of Charles the emperor* he devotes a paragraph to the coronation.

*At the very end of his life, he summoned his son Louis, the king of Aquitaine, who was the sole remaining son of Hildegard. He solemnly assembled all the leaders of the Franks from his whole realm, and with the advice of all of them, he made his son consort in all his kingdom and heir to his imperial dignity. He crowned him and ordered that he be called emperor and Augustus. His plan was accepted with great pleasure by all who were present, for he seemed to have been divinely inspired to look out for the wellbeing of his kingdom.*¹²³

According to Einhard Charlemagne got his leading men involved in the coronation. There was some sort of election, in which all the leaders gave their support for Louis. Einhard places great emphasis on the unanimity of the Frankish leaders for Louis. This consensus was made possible by God's will, as Louis' election was divinely inspired. In Einhard's telling it was the consensus of the Franks, as led by God, that made Louis emperor.

The consensus of the Franks seems important to Einhard. He described two other coronations in his biography that bear this out. The first one was Charlemagne and his brother taking over in 768 after Pippin III had died. Einhard uses the same words as he did for 813. The succession passed to Charlemagne by 'divine will', and the Franks, 'having gathered in a general assembly, made both kings.'¹²⁴ Again the Franks, in accordance with God's plan, had made Charlemagne king. In contrast, Charlemagne's imperial coronation of 800 by Leo III is described quite negatively. If we are to believe Einhard, Charlemagne did not expect or want to be crowned by the pope.¹²⁵ No details are even given on the coronation. Einhard is generally downplaying the role of the papacy in Frankish politics, minimising the coronation of 800 and omitting the inaugurations of 754, 781 and 816, all performed by popes.

This unwillingness to show the pope crowning a Frank could be attributed to a worry about legitimacy. If Louis and Charlemagne received their titles from the pope, then the pope held power over them.¹²⁶ In Einhard's writing the legitimate constitutive rite was through the

¹²³ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, 30, 45.

¹²⁴ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, 3, 26.

¹²⁵ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, 28, 44.

¹²⁶ P.S. Barnwell, 'Einhard, Louis the Pious and Childeric III', *Viator*, 78, 200 (2005), 129-139, alhier 133.

consensus of the Franks expressing God's will.¹²⁷ This idea was repeated in the last sentence of the *Life of Charlemagne*, in which Einhard states: "Louis succeeded Charlemagne on God's command."¹²⁸

§ Ermoldus

Ermoldus describes the events in another way. Charlemagne calls an assembly at his palace. Speaking to the nobles, Charlemagne laments the loss of his two older sons.¹²⁹ He wants the advice of this assembly on his succession. Einhard spoke up:

He fell before Charles, kissed his well-loved feet, and, wise in counsel, was the first to speak: "Oh Caesar, famous in the heavens, on land and sea, you who give the imperial name to your people, I cannot add anything to your counsels, nor has Christ given it to any mortal to do so. Dear one, you have one son of surpassing virtue, the one who, for his merits, is capable of holding your realms. We all-the greater and the lesser, and the ordinary people too- desire him; the church wants him; Christ himself favours him. After your sad funeral, this one will have the ability to maintain the rights of your empire by arms and skill and faith. Joyful Caesar agreed to this and right away sent for his son."¹³⁰

Ermoldus gives Einhard a major role in the election of Louis. While reading Ermoldus, it must always be kept in mind that he was trying to get out of exile through flattery. That's possibly why Einhard is described as the perfect courtier: Ermoldus was aiming to get him on his side. But his main goal was to please the emperor: Louis is presented as particularly suited to be emperor because of his many virtues. Even though it is only Einhard talking, he speaks for all the Franks who want Louis to be emperor.

It did not take Louis long to respond to the summoning:

The clergy of Aachen rejoiced, the people too, the nobles and Charles. Charles began all over again and both related and explained to his beloved son: "Son, you whom God has left me as a consolation, you are dear to God, to your father and to your subjects. My death is approaching. My top concern involve the government of my kingdom, which God himself assigned to me, even though I did not deserve it. I was born in Francia. Christ accorded me honour; Christ gave me my father's kingdom. I have held to this kingdom, indeed I have

¹²⁷ Matthew Innes, Rosamond McKitterick, 'The writing of history', in: Rosamond McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture, emulation and innovation* (Cambridge, 1994), 193-220, alhier 207.

¹²⁸ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, 33. 50.

¹²⁹ Ermoldus, *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris*, 142.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*, 143.

*expanded it: I have been both shepherd for the Christians and guardian to my flock. I was first among the Franks to take the name of Caesar and I gave this Romulean name to the Franks.*¹³¹

Again the consensus for Louis is shown by Ermoldus, with people of all rank and status cheering as he entered Aachen. Ermoldus places the coronation in the palace. In his speech to Louis Charlemagne gives the main three characteristics of his empire: it was Christian, it was Frankish, and it was Roman. Since Charlemagne received the imperial title (*Caesareum nomen*), he gave the Romulean name (*Romuleum nomen*) to the Franks. Romuleum refers to Romulus, the founder of Rome.

After his speech Charlemagne crowned Louis:

*He placed a golden crown with jewels, the token of empire, on his son's head. "Receive son, with Christ himself conferring it, my crown and receive with it the symbol of empire too. May the one who confers upon you the height of honour also grant you the power to please him."*¹³²

Ermoldus pays special attention to the ritual acts concerning the coronation and the precious golden crown. The crown was a token of empire (*pignus imperii*) with which Charlemagne transferred the imperial dignity. Ermoldus had first described Louis' innate virtues, now he was focussing on the imperial pageantry. Being an emperor meant having both internal and external qualities, of which rituals were important.¹³³ The meaning of this ritual, was that Louis received his imperial powers not just from Charlemagne, but from Christ himself.

§ Thegan

Another account can be found in the *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, the deeds of emperor Louis, by Thegan, a noble auxiliary bishop of Trier.

[Charlemagne] summoned his son Louis to himself, along with his whole army, bishops, abbots, dukes, counts and minor officials. He held a general assembly with them peacefully and honourably at the palace of Aachen, urging them to be faithful to his son and asking everyone, from the greatest to the least, if it was agreeable to them that he give the imperial

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, 143-144.

¹³² *Ibidem*, 144.

¹³³ Mariëlle Hageman, *De kleren van de keizer* (Amsterdam, 2006), 79.

*office, to his son Louis. They all responded joyfully that this was the counsel of God in this affair.*¹³⁴

Thegan emphasises the unanimous consent of Louis' election. He even goes so far as to list all the different ranks and titles that agreed to him. Thegan leaves no doubt that Louis received a mandate to rule from all the Franks.

*On the next Sunday he put on his regalia, placed a crown on his head, and processed forth decked out and adorned with such distinction as befitted him. He reached the church that he himself had built from the ground up and approached the altar. He ordered that a golden crown, different from the one he was wearing, be placed on that altar.*¹³⁵

Thegan is the only author to place the ceremony in a church. There must be a reason why Thegan thought it necessary to set the scene there. One possibility was that he was a choir bishop, and he felt a coronation should take place in a religious building. Thegan turns the inauguration into an especially religious ceremony, with prayer, a mass and a religiously tinted speech from Charlemagne.

*After he and his son had prayed for a long time, he spoke to his son in the presence of the whole multitude of bishops and magnates. First of all he urged him to love and fear almighty God, to keep his commands in every way, to lead the churches of God, and to defend them from wicked men. He instructed him always to show unfailing mercy to his younger sisters and brothers and to his nephews and all relatives. Then he told him to honour priests like fathers, to love the people like sons, to drive haughty and wicked men onto the path of salvation, to comfort monks, and to be a father to the poor. He instructed him to appoint faithful and God-fearing officers who would detest bribes. He was urged to dismiss no one from his office without due judgment and to show himself blameless at all times before God and the whole people.*¹³⁶

This speech could have been uttered by Charlemagne, but it is possibly invented by Thegan. It expresses what Thegan felt to be important qualities for an emperor. The most important aspects are probably those listed first and they are exclusively about God and the church.

¹³⁴ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, 6, 196-197.

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*, 6, 197.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, 6, 197.

These are followed by typically Christian virtues like loving family, honouring priests and helping the poor.

[Charlemagne] asked him if he wished to obey these instructions. He responded that he would willingly obey and that, with God's help, he would keep every precept that his father had given him. Then his father ordered him to pick up with his own hands the crown that was on the altar and to place it on his own head, as a remembrance of all the precepts that his father had given him. So he fulfilled his father's command. After this was done, they heard a solemn mass and went back to the palace.¹³⁷

Instead of Charlemagne placing the crown on him, Louis is ordered to place it on his own head. In this way the meaning of the ceremony changes. This act, a detail only Thegan gives, conveys not the transfer of power from Charlemagne to Louis, but the piety the son had to the father. It was an indication Louis would keep his promises.

Thegan was writing his biography while in the employ of a damaged emperor, in a different context Einhard and Ermoldus wrote their work. In 836 Louis had suffered several big rebellions and one deposition. Louis had just won back his throne, but his right to rule was shaky and far from self-evident.¹³⁸ Thegan was writing a defence of Louis. Louis had lost the unanimous support of his people during the civil wars. The consensus of the Franks could not be used as the most important legitimation for his rule. Thegan does mention the Franks choosing Louis, but then he changes the coronation to a religious ceremony. He placed it in a church, followed it by a mass. The crowning of Louis in 813 becomes a prelude to his inauguration by pope Stephen IV in 816, which actually was a religious ceremony. Thegan does not call Louis emperor until he is anointed by Stephen.¹³⁹ This anointing becomes the actual constitutive act, done by the highest religious authority in the realm.

§ The Astronomer

The Astronomer has a relatively short description of events.

Meanwhile emperor Charles was contemplating his speeding tumble into old age and was afraid that when he was withdrawn from human affairs, he would leave behind in a state of confusion the kingdom that he had with God's help nobly organised. That is, he feared that it might be struck by external attacks or troubled by internal divisions, so he sent to his son and

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, 6, 197.

¹³⁸ Hageman, *Kleren van de keizer*, 80.

¹³⁹ Hageman, *De kleren van de Keizer*, 82.

*summoned him from Aquitaine. He received him gently when he arrived, and spent the whole summer with him. He instructed him on those matters that he thought needed discussion, for instance, how he ought to live and rule, how the realm should be organised and, once organised, maintained. He admonished him and finally crowned him with a imperial diadem and informed him with that with Christ's help he was going to have the highest power over all. When this affair had been concluded, he granted him permission to return home.*¹⁴⁰

The Astronomer does not describe the consensus of the Franks, there is no election, or acclamation. Just an undetailed admonition, followed by a crowning.

Where Thegan took pains to outline the virtues of Louis as emperor, the Astronomer is more concerned with practical matters: organizing and maintaining the empire. Only the Astronomer speaks of Charlemagne spending the entire summer with Louis, instructing and preparing him to rule. The Astronomer, as a nobleman in the court of Louis, would have been intimately familiar with the practicalities of government.¹⁴¹ It would make sense he would be most interested in that aspect of the state. But there was another reason.

The Astronomer was writing in the early 840's, after Louis had passed away.¹⁴² He was witness to the multiple rebellions against Louis, and could speak from experience how devastating such internal divisions could be. When the Astronomer was writing Louis' sons were turning against each other. The Astronomer's main concern was to avoid any further bloodshed from these bellicose sons. He wanted them to imitate Louis, who always forgave his enemies.¹⁴³ Charlemagne status as a great ruler was already mythical. To make Louis more worthy of emulation, the Astronomer constructed a tale of Louis spending a summer with Charlemagne, receiving wisdom and knowledge of statecraft.

As the Astronomer continues, he suggests Louis succession was perhaps not as unanimous as earlier authors made it seem. As he tells it, when Charlemagne died and Louis made his way to the palace in Aachen, he feared for what Wala might do.¹⁴⁴ Wala was the cousin of Charlemagne, grandson of Charles Martel and the count of the palace of Aachen. This man was a potential rival to the throne. He had the family connection and he would be well placed to block Louis. Eventually he submitted to Louis without issue, but his explicit mention of the Astronomer shows Louis had to consider rivals for the throne.

¹⁴⁰ Astronomer, *Vita HLudovici Imperatoris*, 20, 245.

¹⁴¹ Ganz, 'The Astronomer's life of Louis the Pious', 130.

¹⁴² Goetz, 'Perception of power and state', 16.

¹⁴³ Ganz, 'Astronomer's life of Louis', 135.

¹⁴⁴ Astronomer, *Vita HLudovici Imperatoris*, 21, 246.

§ Nithard

Nithard, in his *Historiae*, omits the coronation of 813 altogether. He placed the start of his history in 814, when Louis rode to Aachen after Charlemagne's death.¹⁴⁵ Nithard is the second writer to cast doubt on the consensus of Louis accession. As Louis came to Aachen, "no one objected when he asserted authority over the nobles arriving on the scene, but reserved judgement on those whose loyalty seemed doubtful."¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately, this is all he has to say on the subject; the coronation of 816 is passed over as well.

The *Historiae* were commissioned by Charles the Fat, to legitimize his position. Since the political situation of 840's took form under Louis reign, Nithard decided to give an overview of this period. It seems odd that Nithard would completely pass over Louis' coronation, as he was otherwise quite occupied with proper procedures and ceremonies.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps the answer to this omission can be found in the poor treatment Nithard got from Louis when he was still young. Nithard's mother was exiled from the palace when Louis took over the reins.¹⁴⁸ This was a traumatic experience for Nithard; his relationship with Louis soured. This negative view of the emperor translated to Nithard's biography. A coronation endowed legitimacy on the recipient, Nithard probably left it out of the biography on the man who sent his mother away.

§ the shift in sources

In the thirty years between Einhard and Nithard we see a distinctive change in how the coronation of Louis in 813 is reported. Einhard portrays it as the only constitutive ceremony for Louis, as he received the consensus of the Franks. Ermoldus mentions this consensus, but he gives more attention to the ritual of the crowning itself. Thegan shifts the priority of Louis' coronations, the one in 813 becomes a prelude to the inauguration of 816, when the pope got involved. The Astronomer leaves the consent of the Franks out of the picture, focussing more on the wisdom Charlemagne conferred on the new emperor. Nithard declines to mention Louis accession.

The changes in the reporting can be explained by the civil wars and especially the watershed moment of Louis' deposition in 833. The Frankish consensus, could not be used uncritically once a large part of the Frankish nobility had revolted against him. Louis legitimacy was damaged even more when he was forced to do penance and was removed from office. Once Louis' status as emperor was no longer self-evident, other legitimizing factors

¹⁴⁵ Nithard, *Historiae*, 1, 129.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 2, 130.

¹⁴⁷ Airlie, 'The world, the text and the Carolingian', 62.

¹⁴⁸ Polanichka, Cilley, 'The very personal history of Nithard', 173.

had to be found: Thegan used Louis's coronation by the pope, the Astronomer went for the practical lessons of Charlemagne, while Nithard did not even bother.

§ The coronation and its meaning

Charlemagne was the main driving force for the coronation of Louis. However, Charlemagne did not just impose his command on his nobles. He actively got them involved with the coronation, asking their advice and their consent for his successor. When Charlemagne gave his crown to Louis, it was with the high nobility and the important clergymen in attendance.¹⁴⁹ The performance of the coronation ritual was meant for the elite to witness and participate in, as it communicated Louis' authority and created a political consensus.¹⁵⁰

Charlemagne wanted the nobles to be on board with Louis as the new emperor for two reasons. First, a change of regime was in the Middle Ages always a time fraught with tension and danger.¹⁵¹ For Charlemagne it was imperative to let the transition progress smoothly, to not endanger his legacy. Second, a medieval ruler could not govern without the help and support of the nobility.¹⁵² They managed his lands, collected his taxes, implemented his decrees and supplied the soldiers and leaders for his armies.¹⁵³ The power of the king greatly depended on the strength of the relationships between him and his nobles.¹⁵⁴ Louis had been away from the Aachen court for most of his life and as such he was an unknown quantity. A public coronation would mitigate this liability a little.

One striking aspect of this coronation was the absence of pope Leo III. This was a break from tradition as there had been a papal involvement with the Carolingian inaugurations since 751. It is never clearly stated by the Carolingians why the pope was left out of the ceremony of 813, but a reason can be extrapolated from the sources. Almost all the sources, besides the Astronomer, write about the consensus of the Franks in Louis' ascension. In Charlemagne's coronation the acclamation and thus the consent comes from the Romans, with the pope performing the constitutive rite.¹⁵⁵ Despite being crowned emperor in Rome, Charlemagne

¹⁴⁹ Janet Nelson, 'The lord's anointed and the people's choice: Carolingian royal ritual', in David Cannadine, *Rituals of royalty; power and ceremonial in traditional societies* (Cambridge, 1986), 137-180, alhier 158.

¹⁵⁰ Ildar Garipzanov, *The symbolic language of authority in the Carolingian world (c.751-877)*, (Leiden, 2008), 10.

¹⁵¹ Janet Nelson, 'Inauguration rituals', in: Janet Nelson (ed.), *Politics and ritual in early medieval Europe* (London, 1986) 283-308, alhier 285.

¹⁵² Stuart Airlie, 'The aristocracy in the service of the state in the Carolingian period', in: Stuart Airlie, W. Pohl (ed.), *Staat in frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 2006), 93-111, alhier 99.

¹⁵³ Peter Heather, *The restoration of Rome* (London, 2013), 255.

¹⁵⁴ Stuart Airlie, 'Charlemagne and the aristocracy, captains and kings' in: Joanna Story (ed.), *Charlemagne, empire and society*, (Manchester, 2005), 90-102, alhier 94.

¹⁵⁵ Noble, *Louis the Pious and the papacy*, 52.

ruled a Frankish empire, with a predominantly Frankish elite. He may have wanted his son to be chosen emperor by the Franks, rather than by the Romans. In that plan there was no role for the pope.

§The road to Aachen 814

After his coronation Louis was sent back to Aquitaine. Charlemagne died soon after, January 28. Once Louis heard the news, it took him 30 days to go to Aachen.¹⁵⁶ It was the capital of the Frankish empire and Louis needed to gain control of the palace to rule. Despite his imperial coronation, it was not certain he would be able to take over. Dynastic rivals could ruin his chances. These rivals were the aforementioned Wala and Bernard, the son of Pippin of Italy.¹⁵⁷ While Louis and his family had been away in Aquitaine, his brother Pippin had kept his children in Aachen. After the passing of Pippin, his only son Bernard had been despatched as king of Italy in 812.¹⁵⁸ His five sisters had remained behind, cultivating relationships with the aristocratic elite and Charlemagne's daughters. Together they formed a power block more favourably disposed towards Bernard, than to Louis.¹⁵⁹

Luckily for Louis he came out victorious. Wala himself greeted him outside the gates of Aachen, kneeling and offering his loyalty.¹⁶⁰ His example made the other courtiers follow and they all swore homage. It was an important moment for Louis and the empire, as regime change had been achieved without bloodshed.

Louis wasted no time securing his position. Almost all women, especially Charlemagne's and Pippin's daughters, were all banished from the court.¹⁶¹ Wala and several other powerful courtiers were removed soon after. Bernard was a potential problem, as he was an independent king, outside of Louis' dynasty.¹⁶² But Louis had made a promise to his father and Bernard was left alone for the time being.¹⁶³

§Conclusion

The ascension of Louis as emperor was unexpected. When Charles died and Louis had to take over, he was starting from a disadvantage. He was the second choice, relatively unknown and

¹⁵⁶ *Annales regni Francorum*, 97.

¹⁵⁷ Bouchard, *Rewriting saints and ancestors*, 122.

¹⁵⁸ Phillipe Depreux, 'Das Königtum Bernhards von Italien und sein Verhältnis zum Kaisertum', *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, 72 (1992), 1-25, alhier 10.

¹⁵⁹ Costambeys, Innes, Maclean, *The Carolingian world*, 197.

¹⁶⁰ The Astronomer, *Vita HLudovici Imperatoris*, 21, 246.

¹⁶¹ Innes, 'Charlemagne's will', 845.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, 846.

¹⁶³ Karl Ferdinand Werner, 'Hludovicus Augustus. Gouverner l'empire chrétien -- Idées et réalités', in: Peter Godman, Roger Collins (ed.), *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)*, (Oxford, 1990), 3-123, alhier 37-38.

unloved in Aachen and he had to contend with two competitors for the throne. To give him a chance, Charlemagne gave him an imperial coronation, making sure to get the consensus of the important courtiers. This paid off, as Louis managed a relative smooth transfer of power once his predecessor died.

There is a shift in the sources regarding Louis imperial coronations. Earlier authors place the constitutive moment for Louis' reign at his coronation of 813, with special mention of the consensus of the Franks. Later writers place the important coronation in 816. Why that is will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: the imperial coronation and unction of Louis

Louis managed to ascent the throne with no real issue, bolstered by his coronation. In a few months Louis hold on power was secure. Three years later Louis decided to hold another coronation ceremony for himself, with the help of pope Stephen IV.

This chapter will look at how the second imperial coronation reflected the needs of Louis and how it was reported in the sources. The main reason for this coronation was to propagate a new imperial ideology. This ideology will be analysed, by way of the *Via Regia*, a guidebook for kings written by Smaragdus, from which Louis took most of his political and religious ideas.

§ Louis and the new imperial ideology

From 814 on Louis was recognized as a legitimate emperor. His sons he made sub-kings: Lothar I became king of Bavaria, Pippin of Aquitaine, while he kept the youngest, Louis (the German) at court.¹⁶⁴ Louis was a pro-active emperor. In his early years he set up a series of sweeping reforms to improve his empire.¹⁶⁵ He produced many charters, improved judicial procedure, and intensified church reform. This church reform consisted of implementing the Benedictine rules on all monasteries of the empire, a continuation and broadening of the policy he followed in Aquitaine. Louis also improved the efficiency of local administration, and the control of the imperial court on the empire.¹⁶⁶ His agents were sent to investigate complaints of injustice and corruption against local nobilities.¹⁶⁷

Louis cast all these activities as part of a reforming imperial ideology of Christian values.¹⁶⁸ The Carolingians, starting with the anointing of Pippin III, had presented their rule as a sacred kingship.¹⁶⁹ Prosperity of the land had been tied to just and pious rule. Louis took this ideology and enhanced it. In his view Christianity and empire were intertwined, while Louis had received a sacred task from God himself.¹⁷⁰ It was the explicit duty of the emperor to safeguard the souls of all his subjects and to create the conditions to bring about the kingdom of heaven. This ideology was formed during Louis' reforming of the monasteries of Aquitaine. The principles of this imperial ideology were summarized in the *Via Regia*, a

¹⁶⁴ Nelson, 'the Frankish kingdoms', 111.

¹⁶⁵ Booker, *Past convictions*, 223.

¹⁶⁶ De Jong, *Penitential state*, 23.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 23.

¹⁶⁸ Costambeys, Innes, Maclean, *The Carolingian world*, 201.

¹⁶⁹ Mary Garrison, 'The Franks as a new Israel? 131.

¹⁷⁰ Mayke de Jong, 'Power and humility in Carolingian society: the public penance of Louis the Pious', *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992) 29-52, alhier 38.

handbook written for Louis.¹⁷¹ This book is important, as its ideas would greatly influence Louis' outlook on imperial Christianity and his own role as emperor.

§ The *Via Regia*

The *Via Regia* was written in 810, when Louis was still king of Aquitaine. It can be seen as one of the first mirrors for princes, as it was a moral guidebook filled with advice on good rule and display of virtues.¹⁷² Its author was Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel (c. 760 – c. 830), biographical details on him are sparse. Smaragdus was the abbot of Mt. Castellion from 805 and the founder of the abbot of Saint-Mihiel near Verdun in 814. In 809 he was sent by Charlemagne to Rome to help solve the *filioque* controversy, a dispute concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son.¹⁷³ To be selected for such a sensitive mission would indicate that Smaragdus was well connected and respected at court. Besides his other duties Smaragdus was also a prolific writer, composing several works on the proper observance of monastic life. Smaragdus was a proponent of curbing the abuse in the Frankish monasteries by uniting them all under a shared policy of strict Benedictine rules.¹⁷⁴

The *Via Regia*, which translates to 'the king's road', was an adaptation of Smaragdus earlier work *Diadema monachorum* (The Crown of Monks).¹⁷⁵ That work was a collection of ascetic rules and reflection arranged by topic meant for the spiritual enlightenment of monks. Likewise, the *Via* was meant to lead Louis to salvation. Through thirty-two chapters of moral and spiritual counsel Louis was urged on the same path that biblical kings, like Solomon and David, before him had walked, so he could reach the kingdom of God.¹⁷⁶ This meant following Christian virtues, like being merciful, patient and humble, taking good advice, fearing God and avoiding pride, anger and bad advice.

Smaragdus ties Christianity into kingship. According to him the king's baptism, anointing and crowning were closely related.

He anointed your head with the oil of sacred chrism, and worthily adopted you as a son. He established you as king of the people of the earth, and

¹⁷¹ Michael Moore, *A sacred kingdom, bishops and the rise of Frankish kingship; 300-850* (Washington, 2011), 289.

¹⁷² Rutger Kramer, *Great expectations; Imperial Ideologies and Ecclesiastical Reforms from Charlemagne to Louis the Pious (813-822)* (Maastricht, 2014), 118.

¹⁷³ Kramer, *Great expectations*, 107.

¹⁷⁴ Matthew Ponesse, 'Standing distant from the fathers: Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel and the reception of early Medieval learning, *Traditio* 67 (2012), 71-99, alhier 80.

¹⁷⁵ Kramer, *Great expectations*, 107.

¹⁷⁶ Smaragdus, *Via Regia*, in: Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (Parijs, 1851) 102, 931-970, alhier 934.

*ordained that you become the heir of His own Son in heaven. Enriched by these sacred rewards, you rightly wear the diadem of a king.*¹⁷⁷

The king was a religious figure with a divine origin, his rule was universal ruling over all Christians. He had received ministry from God through anointing, coupled with several gifts such as faith, good health, children and prosperity. These gift could be lost if the king did not fulfil his responsibilities. A monarch had the duty, as representative of Christ, to protect the house of God and maintain the peace in the world. This meant fighting injustice and protecting his subjects from oppression, corruption and poverty. Through pious and just rule a king could keep his subjects out of sin and lead them into the path to salvation.¹⁷⁸ This sacred duty was called *ministerium*, it was shared by all the agents of the ruler, but it was he who was ultimately responsible.¹⁷⁹ These ideas found expression in the coronation of 816.

§ The coronation of Louis in 816

After three years of Louis' rule, Pope Stephen IV (816-817), the successor of Leo III, left Rome for Rheims. Once there he anointed and crowned Louis emperor on Sunday, 5 October. Why Louis felt the need to be crowned again is not commented upon by the sources. There are no sources that claim the pope set out to crown Louis, or that Louis planned such an event before Stephen came to his doorstep. Stephen's motive for going to Rheims is only mentioned in the *Liber Pontificalis*.

§ The *Liber Pontificalis*

The *Liber Pontificalis* state that Stephen undertook his journey to "reinforce the peace and unity of God's holy church."¹⁸⁰ This likely indicates Stephen wanted to reaffirm the Franco-papal alliance, as usually happened when a new pope or Carolingian took over. When Stephen IV was elected (22 June 816) His first act as pope was to order the populace of Rome to swear fidelity to Louis.¹⁸¹ This was unprecedented, as no pope had done this for a Frankish king or emperor. Stephen wanted to show his fidelity to Louis and the alliance. The coronation is not mentioned at all in the *LP*, only that Stephen got everything he asked for. This included political concessions, a villa and the return of some exiles to Rome.¹⁸² The *LP* is only

¹⁷⁷ Smaragdus, *Via Regia*, 933.

¹⁷⁸ Kramer, *Great expectations*, 125.

¹⁷⁹ Leonie van Beckum, 'Een keizer onttroond; Lodewijk de Vrome en zijn openbare boetedoening', in: Mayke de Jong, Marie-Thérèse Bos (red.), *Macht en gezag in de negende eeuw* (Hilversum, 1995), 61-78, alhier 67.

¹⁸⁰ *Liber Pontificalis*, in: Raymond Davis (ed.), *The lives of the eighth century popes (Liber Pontificalis); the ancient biographies of nine popes*, Translated texts for historians, 13 (Liverpool, 1992), 2, 232.

¹⁸¹ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, 16, 201.

¹⁸² *Liber Pontificalis*, 2, 232.

concerned with the boons for the Roman see and does not seem aware of any political importance to Stephen anointing and crowning Louis.

§ Ermoldus

Ermoldus gives the most contemporary and the most elaborate account of the coronation, giving special attention to the gestures and speeches made by the actors. According to Ermoldus, Stephen came to Rheims under orders from Louis.

*“Then Louis ordered his patron, to whom the world gave the name Stephen, to come from the Roman see. The holy man complied with love, obeyed the welcome orders and hurried eagerly to see the kingdoms of the Franks.”*¹⁸³

In this telling it is Louis who is undoubtedly the dominant partner, ordering the pontiff to come to him. This contrasts with the description of *LP*, in which Stephen came out of his own volition.

Once the pontiff arrived, Louis greeted him in a large procession. He had the clergy arrayed on the right, the nobility on the left, the general populous in the rear and himself in the middle, shining with gems.¹⁸⁴ In this way Louis was honouring Stephen, but he was also showing his control over the Frankish world. Louis knelt for Stephen and adored him three times, after which the two kissed each other on the eyes, lips, neck, head and breast.¹⁸⁵ All these exchanged kisses can be seen as a welcoming rite, or they could indicate the great friendship between pope and emperor.¹⁸⁶ At Hand in hand, they walked to church enjoyed mass, followed by a banquet. Louis asked Stephen why he had come, Stephen answered he had been drawn there like the queen of Sheba to Solomon. Satisfied, both men went to their quarters for the night.

The next morning Louis summoned his magnates and the pope. Again Ermoldus makes Louis the dominant partner. The emperor ascended his throne, clad in a toga and launched into a speech.

“Behold, almighty God in His mercy has given me my father’s kingdom and every mark of honour as well. Merciful Christ has given me all this not for my merits, as I believe, but in my father’s honour. I beg you, my faithful men, and you, excellent

¹⁸³ Ermoldus, *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris*, 147.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, 147.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 148.

¹⁸⁶ Phillip Depreux, ‘Gestures and Comportment at the Carolingian Court: Between Practice and Perception’, *Past & Present*, 203 (2009), 57-79, 63.

priest, duly to bring me abundant council. Bring me your assistance, you servants, and you too, holy priest, who will serve with me in our government. May my clergy and people, the pauper and the powerful alike, be able to continue in their ancestral rights, with my help. May the law of our fathers bring our people together. May the order of monks increase in the teaching of Benedict; may it seek by the character of its life the holy and heavenly pasture. May the rich apply the law, may the poor be led by it without regard to the rank or status of the persons. Let there be no situation where foul deeds can be redeemed with money, and let corrupting gifts be banished far away. If we rightly feed the tender flock that the lord has given to me, and to you too, beloved pastor, if we correct the wicked and reward the just, and if we make the people follow their ancestral law, then God on high will take mercy on us and the people who follow us, vouchsafe us the kingdom of heaven, maintain our honour in the present, and keep the attacks of enemies far away. Let us be an example to the clergy and a standard for the people; let us both teach justice to our people.”¹⁸⁷

This is, in a nutshell, the imperial ideology Louis would try to follow for the rest of his reign. The inspiration of the *Via Regia* should be obvious. Louis saw it as his task to lead his subjects into salvation, by battling corruption, lawlessness and evil from his empire, helping the poor and being a pious example for people to follow. If Louis could achieve that God would protect the realm from enemy attack and vouchsafe the kingdom of heaven.

Louis continued his speech, comparing his role to Moses leading the Jews through the desert: “when the people lost their way God punished them, but those that kept the faith were led to Jerusalem.”¹⁸⁸ The Carolingians had compared themselves to biblical kings since Pippin III, as they had stood halfway between their people and God.¹⁸⁹ Louis addressed the pope directly:

“You are a holy priest, I am the king of Christians. Let us serve our people in dogma, law and faith. (...) If your rights persist, you who bear responsibility for Peter’s government and if in the role that has been assigned to you, you feed his flock. If otherwise, I warn you, let me know: I

¹⁸⁷ Ermoldus, *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris*, 149.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 150.

¹⁸⁹ Bouchard, *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors*, 93.

will act right away on your words eagerly. As my ancestors served Peter's honour, so I will serve it, prelate, for the love of God."¹⁹⁰

Louis is asking the pope to help him, then he turns it around, offering Stephen help should he need it. This was a confirmation of the Franco-papal alliance.

Stephen responded in thanks by asking God in a prayer to keep Louis as the leader of his people and the adornment of the kingdom and church.¹⁹¹ He embraced Louis and gave him a precious gift:

*"Rome transmits to you, Caesar, the gifts of Peter, worthy gifts for a worthy man, a suitable mark of honour." Then he ordered a crown with gems and gold to be brought forth, one that had previously belonged to Caesar Constantine.*¹⁹²

The crown Stephen brought along was unlikely to have been from Constantine, but what mattered is what Ermoldus was trying to say with it. If it had been in possession of both Constantine and the papacy, it was a symbolic unison between Christianity and empire. By placing it on Louis's head Stephen made him heir of both Romes, papal and imperial.¹⁹³ This would fit with the universal idea of empire and Christianity of the *Via Regia*.¹⁹⁴

The pope blessed the crown in another speech calling for God to protect Louis. He touched the head of the emperor and said:

*"May almighty god, who increased the seed of Abraham, grant that you see children, whence you will be called grandfather; may He grant you offspring, may he double and triple your descendants, so that a rich harvest may grow from your seed and may they rule the Franks and Rome as long as the name of Christian is heard in the world."*¹⁹⁵

This is a clear comment on the dynastic qualities of the Carolingian name. When Ermoldus was writing this, around 827, Louis and his sons were indeed the only rulers of the Frankish world. However, in 816 Louis still had to content with Bernard, his nephew who was the king of Italy. Bernard was deposed by Louis in 818 and replaced by Lothar in 822. To put Louis

¹⁹⁰ Ermoldus, *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris*, 151.

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 152.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*, 152.

¹⁹³ Walter Ullmann, *The growth of papal government in the Middle Ages: A study in the ideological relation of clerical to lay power* (London, 1962), 145.

¹⁹⁴ Smaragdus, *Via Regia*, 933.

¹⁹⁵ Ermoldus, *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris*, 152.

and his descendants as the only ruler was to retroactively normalise the political situation of 827.

*Louis was anointed, hymns were sung from the mass and the pope placed the crown on Caesar's head.*¹⁹⁶

After Louis, his wife was crowned, precious gifts were exchanged and Stephen went back to Rome.¹⁹⁷

Ermoldus gives more detail on this coronation than on the one of in 813. The speeches Louis and Stephen give are detailed. It is likely these speeches were constructions by Ermoldus. However, they probably reflected the realities of the day. Ermoldus was trying to flatter his way out of exile, he would be following Louis' ideas closely.¹⁹⁸ The speeches give an outline of imperial ideology, which closely follows the *Via Regia*.

§ Thegan

Thegan has the pope be the initiator.

*[Stephen IV] sent his envoys to the prince, telling him he very much wished to see him in any place that would be acceptable to him. On hearing this, Louis was filled with great excitement and began to rejoice. (...) Encountering each other in a great field near Rheims, each dismounted, and the prince bodily prostrated himself on the ground three times at the feet of the holy pontiff.*¹⁹⁹

Louis acts like the subordinate to Stephen. The pope sends to word to Louis he wishes to see him, with the emperor rejoicing and getting exited. This is quite different in Ermoldus' version, in which the emperor ordered the pontiff to Rheims. The reverential approach from Louis to Stephen is exemplified in their first meeting, when he prostrates himself three times. This followed the rules of St. Benedict. Any monk following that rule was proscribed to greet any guest to their monastery with a triple prostration.²⁰⁰ Louis would have been familiar with that rule, as he was reforming the monasteries of the empire according to the rule of St Benedict. Thegan was painting Louis as the ideal Christian ruler, as pious as a monk.²⁰¹ The greatest Christian virtue a man could have was modesty, as the biggest mortal sin was pride.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 152.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, 153.

¹⁹⁸ Shane Bobrycki, 'Nigellus, Ausulus', 163.

¹⁹⁹ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, 16. 201.

²⁰⁰ Hageman, *De kleren van de keizer*, 181.

²⁰¹ De Jong, *Penitential state*, 74.

Humility was closely tied to justice, as modesty kept a ruler from the hubris of feeling above the law.²⁰²

Thegan continues:

He saluted the pontiff with these words: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The Lord is God, and his light shines upon us." The pontiff responded: "Blessed be the Lord our God, who permits our eyes to see the second King David." Embracing and kissing in peace, they went to the church. After they had prayed for a long time, the pontiff arose and (...) sang for him the royal lauds.²⁰³

Louis' quotes Psalm 118:27, a passage that was also proscribed by the rules of St Benedict to be said as a welcome to any guest of a monastery.²⁰⁴ Thegan has Stephen compare Louis to David, whereas Ermoldus made comparisons to Solomon and Moses. The Carolingians liked to compare themselves to kings from the Old Testament, since these were the first kings to be anointed.²⁰⁵ Through administration of the unction these men underwent a rebirth, becoming God's chosen. David was also a famous example of humility, as he professed remorse and self-abasement toward God and the prophet Nathan.²⁰⁶ Finally, after all these displays of humility, Stephen sings the royal lauds for Louis. The lauds were a litany of prayer and praise. Thegan's point was that Louis' humility and reverence did not demean him, but exalted him.

The actual coronation happened somewhat later:

On the next Sunday, in the church, before solemn mass and in the presence of the clergy and the whole people, he consecrated and anointed him emperor and placed upon his head a gold crown that he had brought with him. It was amazingly beautiful and adorned with the most precious gems. He also called Queen Irmingard Augusta and put a gold crown on her head.²⁰⁷

The setting in this coronation is the same as Thegan gives of the one of 813: in a church. One key difference is the crowning. The crown gets a special mention in regards to how beautiful it is. What is important is that the pope crowns Louis, after consecrating and anointing him. In Thegan's account of 813, Louis was not actually crowned; he places the crown on his own

²⁰² Hageman, *De kleren van de keizer*, 126.

²⁰³ *Ibidem*, 16, 201.

²⁰⁴ Hageman, *De kleren van de keizer*, 182.

²⁰⁵ Nelson, 'the lord's anointed and the people's choice', 150.

²⁰⁶ Hageman, *De kleren van de keizer*, 126.

²⁰⁷ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, 17, 201-202.

head, as a sign of filial piety and obedience.²⁰⁸ To add to that Thegan does not call Louis emperor until the moment pope anointed him.²⁰⁹ It can be surmised that Thegan considered Louis' coronation by the pope as the constitutive act. The one from 813 was less important.

Thegan was writing in 836, a decade later than Ermoldus. Louis had lost a great deal of prestige and legitimacy. He had been deposed by a cabal of Frankish bishops. This rankled Thegan, himself a bishop, who saw it as a great betrayal.²¹⁰ As a defence for Louis Thegan wanted to portray him as a Christian, divinely appointed and properly instituted emperor. This is why Thegan draws attention to papal coronation as constitutive as the pope was the highest religious power in the West, the ideal man to show God's favour to Louis. Thegan made Louis a most Christian emperor. His humility in the presence of the representative of God was exemplary. Louis received divine sanction to be emperor.

§ The Astronomer

The Astronomer writes this:

After [Stephen's] consecration he did not hesitate to come to the emperor; after scarcely two months he hastened with the greatest possible speed to meet him. He even sent a legation ahead to make satisfaction to the emperor concerning his ordination.²¹¹

From this account the pope comes across as worried for his position, rushing to the emperor to get his approval. It reads more like the pope was a supplicant, rather than Thegan's proud pontiff deigning to grace Louis with his presence. Rome was in the grip of political turmoil at that time, it took seven months to elect Stephen and that election was contested.²¹² Seen in that light, the pope's hasty journey looks like he took flight from Rome.

Louis, meanwhile, decided to wait for the pontiff in Rheims and send out some men to greet him.

The emperor processed one mile from the monastery of the holy confessor Remigius and received him most honourably as the vicar of blessed Peter, helping him dismount from his horse, supported him with his own hand on

²⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 6, 197.

²⁰⁹ Hageman, *Kleren van de keizer*, 82.

²¹⁰ Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, 44, 211-213.

²¹¹ The Astronomer *Vita HLudovici Imperatoris*, 26, 252.

²¹² Noble, *Louis the Pious and the papacy*, 68.

*entering the church, with various orders of the church singing out in abundant joy.*²¹³

Louis is not prostrating himself, nor is he kneeling down. He is following protocol and receiving a welcome and esteemed guest. It was expected of him to ride out when a dignitary like the pope came to visit. This ritual of accepting guests was called an *adventus*, literally ‘arrival’.²¹⁴ An *adventus* existed of two components, an *occursus*, in which the host rode out to meet the guest, and an *ingressus*, with the guest riding into town, being welcomed by an exuberant crowd. The *ingressus* seems to be here the abundantly joyful singing in the church as the pope entered.

After mass, the pope explained the reasons for his coming, though The Astronomer doesn’t mention these reasons. The Eucharist was enjoyed by both.

*The next day, the lord emperor summoned the lord apostolic, prepared a most lavish banquet, and honoured him with many gifts. In similar fashion, the emperor was invited by the lord apostolic on the third day and was given many different kind of gifts. On the next day, which was made Sunday, he was crowned with an imperial diadem and signed with a blessing during the celebration of mass.*²¹⁵

The Astronomer was an insider at the court of Louis, he had an intimate knowledge on proper procedures. Mutual gift giving among high dignitaries, lavish banquets, these were all accepted procedures, dutifully recorded to give the coronation legitimacy. The Astronomer does not give us a lot of information on the coronation itself: no speeches or any extra details are recorded.

This focus on cordiality and etiquette is striking when we compare Astronomer’s account on a different papal visit. In 833 Louis was at war with Lothar, he stood arrayed with their battle lines not far from each other. Lothar had brought Gregory IV along to open talks, but the pontiff did not receive a warm welcome in Louis’ camp. He was seen as a pawn of Lothar and rumours were spread he came to excommunicate the emperor.²¹⁶ When Gregory arrived:

²¹³ The Astronomer *Vita HLudovici Imperatoris*, 26, 252.

²¹⁴ Hageman, *De kleren van de keizer*, 168..

²¹⁵ The Astronomer, *Vita HLudovici Imperatoris*, 26, 252-253.

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 48, 280.

*The emperor stood right in his battle line to receive him as he arrived – rather less honourably than was normal- telling the pope he had brought this on himself by coming to him in such an unusual way.*²¹⁷

By foregoing the normal rituals of welcome, Astronomer was showing Louis thought this visit was illegitimate. The pope had not asked permission to come, nor had he been invited. Even worse his motives and intentions were questioned. By contrasting these instances it becomes clear Astronomer thought the coronation of Louis was valid, as the proper rituals were used, while the pope's intervention in 833 was not.

§ The meaning of the coronation of 816

The anointing during the coronation was a new development. Although Louis had received an anointing when he was made king by Hadrian in 781, this was the first time it was used in an imperial coronation. Royal anointing had been a visible and public divine confirmation, first sought by Pippin III to legitimize his coup d'état.²¹⁸ It is possible Louis had a different message with his imperial anointing, inspired by Smaragdus. Through anointing Louis was adopted by God as his own son, king of all the people and the heir of Christ.²¹⁹ Louis was sacralising his position, to be anointed and crowned by the highest ecclesiastical power was a good way of announcing this message to his people.

It is unclear if the initiative for this coronation came from Louis, or the pope, or if they came up with it together during their negotiations. The sources give no answer, since they disagree on crucial details. The *LP* does not mention the coronation, Ermoldus makes it sound like Louis ordered the pope to come, Thegan reverses this with the pope deciding on his own to come, while the Astronomer makes it sound like Stephen was fleeing Rome. It is possible that the pope decided to come to Rheims, seeking to renew the Franco-papal alliance, and Louis made pragmatic use of this visit to propagate his Christian ideology. The ambiguity of the situation gave contemporary authors the room to give their own interpretation of events.

The coronation had a dynastic element in it. Irmingard, the wife of Louis was crowned *Augusta*. This was a message about the exclusivity of the dynastic line directly descending from the imperial couple, only their children would be legitimate rulers.²²⁰ Ermoldus explicitly put the legitimacy of Louis' descendants in a papal speech.²²¹ This was dire news to Bernard, who still reigned over northern Italy as king and had children of his own. The

²¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 48, 280.

²¹⁸ Noble, *The republic of St. Peter*, 70.

²¹⁹ Smaragdus, *Via Regia*, 933.

²²⁰ Werner, 'Hludovicus Augustus', 38-40.

²²¹ Ermoldus, *In honorem Hludovici imperatoris*, 152.

news got even worse after the publishing of the *Ordinatio imperii*. Louis had arranged for his sons to take over the empire after his death, but left out any mention of Bernard or his sons. When the worried king came to complain, he was charged with treason, captured and blinded.²²² His land was impounded and incorporated back into Louis' empire.

§ Conclusion

How did this coronation reflect the needs of the time? It reflected the need of Louis, who had developed a new and Christian narrative on the status and the responsibilities of the emperor. Louis considered his empire as the unified whole of Christendom, and himself as the divinely appointed guardian of the souls of his subjects.²²³ By getting himself a second coronation, a consecration and anointing by the pope Louis could show his subjects the sacralisation of his dignity. Besides the ideological dimension, the coronation conveyed a dynastic one. Louis successfully framed the legitimate succession as coming only from the imperial couple.

This message of imperial *imperium* would become muted in the contemporary sources as time wore on. Ermoldus account, written a decade later, is quite overt in towing the party line. In numerous speeches, Louis' position is explained in great detail. Later on, with the troubles of the thirties, the authors feel the need to defend the emperor more than they need to explain his ideology. Thegan makes Louis into the personification of Christian virtues, exalted by his saintly humility. The Astronomer shows how Louis followed the proper rituals and procedures, to show how his coronation was legitimate.

²²² Thomas Noble, 'The revolt of king Bernard of Italy of 817: its causes and consequences', *Studi Medievali* 3, 5 (1974) 315-326, alhier 318.

²²³ Mayke de Jong, 'Power and humility in Carolingian society: the public penance of Louis the Pious', *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992) 29-52, alhier 38.

Conclusion

If there is one thing that can be said about the coronations of Louis, it is that they were distinctive. They differ in the details, the actors, the environment. Louis has had coronations in Rheims and Aachen; in church and palace; during mass and assembly; by emperor and pope. The ceremony was prone to change, adapting to political circumstances.

The imperial coronation of 813 was made during stressful circumstances. Louis was an unexpected successor, thrust forward by the death of his brothers, with no connections at the court in Aachen and several potential rivals. Charlemagne gave Louis the legitimacy he needed by making him co-emperor. Imperative was the involvement the Frankish elite in the ceremony, making them voice their support for their new emperor. This ploy paid off and Louis was able to ascend the throne in 814. The coronation of 816 seems to have been an invention of Louis, making use of the visit of Stephen IV. Louis had a new imperial ideology he wanted to implement, using this coronation to communicate this. By getting an anointing by the pope Louis could show his new sacralized position. The performance of these ceremonies were influenced by political factors such as alliances, court politics and ideology.

Likewise, the coronations are changed and morphed in their retelling in the sources, affected by political pressures. The watermark was Louis' deposition, forced penance and imprisonment in 833, a truly disruptive event. It was only slightly ameliorated by his reinstatement as emperor in 835. Writers creating histories or biographies on Louis after then had to deal with this blight in Louis' reputation, casting preceding years in a different light. Einhard and Ermoldus, writing before 833, presented 813 as the key ceremony for Louis' reign. Louis was acclaimed by all the Franks (the elite and clergy), and their support gave Louis the legitimacy to rule. Einhard did not even bother to describe 816, whereas Ermoldus used it to show Louis' authority over the pope and to illuminate the Christianized imperial ideology.

After 833 authors would put the main emphasis on the coronation of 816. Thegan did comment on the unanimity of the Franks for Louis in 813, but he changed the meaning of the ceremony from office taking to filial piety. In Thegan's account of 816, special care was taken to highlight Louis' humility before the pope. Thegan casts this humility as a saintly trait, the main reason Louis is worthy of the imperial throne. Nithard omitted any mention of Louis' coronations, mentioning only the high tensions of his accession after Charlemagne's death. Since his portrayal of Louis was quite negative, this could have been done to minimize Louis' authority. The Astronomer radically changed the coronation of 813, with Charlemagne instructing Louis in statecraft and then placing a crown on his head, foregoing the acclamation

of the Franks altogether. The Astronomer used 816 to focus on the proper enactment of protocol and ritual. Louis gives a perfect performance, making him the exemplar the Astronomer wished him to be to his sons.

Political factors exerted a great amount of influence on Louis' coronations, both on the actual performance and their later reporting. Louis' forced penance put the Frankish world on its head, contemporary writers had to scramble to make sense of it. That retroactively put a heavy bias on their reporting of earlier moments, so heavy it became distorting. This serves as a warning for historians to always account for the political situation in contemporary sources.

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