The Promise of History:
Oaths in Frankish Historiography

Helmut Reimitz*

The article explores narratives of the oath in the Histories of the post-Roman Frankish kingdom – the most enduring successor state of the Western Roman Empire – and how they reflect the increasing salience of the oath of fidelity for the constitution of legitimate political authority in that kingdom. It studies the ongoing work on the interpretation and function of the oath of fidelity from the Frankish kingdoms under the Merovingian dynasty (ca. 480-751 CE) to the early Carolingian rulers – from the establishment of the general oath of fidelity as the legitimizing basis of post-Roman rule to its increasing sacralization in the Carolingian period establishing a dualism of fidelity to God and the ruler, as is well documented in the formula *fideles Dei et regis*. As Paolo Prodi observed some time ago in his study on the Sacrament of Power (*Il sacramento del potere*), it was in the Carolingian period that the Christian church managed to establish its interpretative prerogative to define how oaths could be linked to claims to power. The study of histories written in the early medieval Frankish kingdom indicates that this was not a steady process of increasing ecclesiastical control over the interpretation of the oath, but should be seen as a more dynamic process in response to the intensified instrumentalization of the dualistic view of the oath by early Carolingian politics.

Keywords: Oath of fidelity, transformation of the Roman world (West), Frankish kingdoms, Merovingian period, Carolingian period, Gregory of Tours, Chronicle of Fredegar, Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar/Historia vel Gesta Francorum (Childebrand, Nibelung), Annales regni Francorum

In a concise article about storytelling and oaths, Yves Reuter explored how oaths are social, legal, religious, or cultural acts that are themselves charged with meaning. The commitment of an individual or community to actions and deeds in the future assumes a generally known order or set of expectations.[1] In narratives, oaths play a more active role than just an object of the narrative. They can structure the plot in terms of chronology, causality and hierarchy, and they can also contribute to the coherence and legibility of a narrative. This does not mean that our extant narrative sources reflect only the codified meaning of oaths. Instead, these narratives assume that the oath's codified meaning will connect them to specific ideological, religious, political, and social programs. This, in turn, allows us to study the relationship of these narratives to other social discourses. In this paper, I would like to explore

---

1   Reuter, Serment et narrativité.

historical narratives from the most successful and enduring successor state of the Western Roman Empire, the Frankish kingdoms. How do the promises of oaths structure the plot of these histories? How do these narrative structures reflect not only the ideas of their authors but also the political and social structures of their time? I hope these questions will provide some starting points for assessing similarities and differences in the discourses about the oath between early and late medieval Europe and medieval Japan.

The Ten Books of Histories, composed by the bishop of Tours, Gregory, provide a good starting point. With these Ten Books of Histories – *Decem libri historiarum* – Gregory wrote the first comprehensive post-Roman history in the Latin West.[2] He worked on it in the last decades of the sixth century, roughly a century after the last Western Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed. During this century, a new political order was established in the former provinces of the Western Empire. The empire was replaced by a multitude of kingdoms – regna – in the terminology of the time: the Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy, a kingdom ruled by Burgundian kings along the Rhône in Southeastern France, the Visigothic kingdom in Southern France and Iberia, the Vandal kingdom in Africa.[3] Some of these kingdoms had a relatively short half life. The kingdom in which Gregory lived, however, the Frankish kingdom ruled by the Merovingian dynasty, became the most enduring and successful polity in the post-Roman West and played therefore an important role as filter and transmitter of Roman models and post-Roman experiments that shaped the social and political structures of Europe after the end of the Western Roman empire.

Oaths played a very important role in this process. They established formalized agreements in the nascent kingdoms emerging from these little Romes.[4] A general oath of fidelity that had to be sworn by the whole free population in the new kingdoms established the king as the highest legal and military authority.[5] The oath had its roots in the Roman military oath of fidelity, which had a lengthy pedigree in Roman history. The oath became increasingly redefined as an oath of loyalty to the emperor. With the reconfiguration of the Roman imperial constitution in the principate.[6] This was further reinforced by the fact that Roman troops played an increasingly important role in supporting their commander to claim the imperial throne.[7] The military oath was also sworn by non-Roman or barbarian troops who fought increasingly with or within the Roman armies for Western provinces.[8] Upon rising to the highest military ranks, commanders of these Roman armies must have been responsible for the administration of the military oath, and not least for the swearing in of barbarian

---

2　For studies on Gregory of Tours see below, n. 39.

3　Recent overviews: Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*; *idem.*, *Through the Eye of a Needle*; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West*; Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*, Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung*; and Wood, *Christian Economy*; for the Franks see Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*; Esders *et al.* (eds.), *East and West*; and the collection of essays in Meier and Patzold (eds.), *Chlodwigs Welt.*

4　See the contribution of Stefan Esders in this volume, with further references.

5　Esders, *Sacramentum fidelitatis.*

6　Esders, Schwur, cols. 38-40.

7　Shaw, War and violence.

8　Esders, ›Faithful believers‹.

units that were hired by the Roman empire to support the Roman army.[9] Thus, oaths must have been a well-known instrument of establishing the chain of command and legitimating the authority of barbarian governors. Extending this oath from the military to the whole free population allowed them to create a new social contract with their subjects and to establish legitimate rule. But this also came with a price. In exchange for their oath, new rulers had to grant far-reaching autonomies and privileges to local and regional populations, confirm their social and legal status, and concede to various laws. As Stefan Esders has shown: »The general oaths of allegiance belong to the most important legal foundations of early medieval statehood, since they represent an unprecedented process of legalization, intended to establish a direct legal relationship between the ruler and the individual subjects. While the oath of fidelity enabled a partial reception of ancient models of governance and statehood their adoption in the post-Roman kingdoms brought about the decisive changes that characterized the transformation from the constitution of the Roman empire to those of the post-Roman kingdoms.«[10]

The same was the case when Clovis I (481/82-511 CE), the first Christian king of the regnum, established Frankish rule over most of the former provinces of Gallia and Germania. His descendants, also known as the Merovingian dynasty, came to rule roughly the territory of modern France until the middle of the eighth century.[11] Despite starting out as the governor of a relatively small client-kingdom in the territories of modern-day Belgium, Clovis became the ruler of most of the territory of modern France in only two decades.[12] After establishing his rule over the highly militarised and increasingly independent power-blocs in the Northern half of Gaul in the first decade of his reign, he moved into the wealthy and densely populated areas of Aquitaine where Visigothic kings had already established their post-Roman regnum. Conquest certainly contributed to this process. However, as populations had already started to develop their own post- or sub-Roman policies and constitutions, negotiations and agreements with these quite diverse regions were equally if not more important for integrating those populations into a common political framework of the Merovingian kingdom.

---

9   Esders, Rechtliche Grundlagen, 423-425.

10 Esders, Rechtliche Grundlagen, 425: »Die allgemeinen Treueide gehören daher zu den wichtigsten rechtlichen Grundlagen frühmittelalterlicher Staatlichkeit, stehen sie doch für einen massiven, ja beispiellosen Verrechtlichtungsprozess, insofern sie eine direkte Rechtsbeziehung zwischen dem Herrscher und dem einzelnen Reichsbewohner herstellen sollten. Ihre Transferfunktion bestand darin, dass der Eid eine partielle Rezeption antiker Staatlichkeitstraditionen ermöglichte, was aber gleichzeitig zu entscheidenden Veränderungen gegenüber der antiken Staatlichkeit führte.«

11 Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 33-54.

12 See the excellent collection Meier and Patzold (eds.), *Chlodwigs Welt.*

This strategy may have been more significant for Clovis's integration of the Frankish *regnum* than in the case of other post-Roman kingdoms. The primary legitimation of Clovis's rule was not a mandate from the Roman empire.[13] His legitimacy may well have depended more on agreements and contracts in which he provided concessions and benefits in exchange for submission to his rule. This was certainly true for the highly militarized regions of Northern Gaul, but the basic principle was also observed in the establishment of Merovingian rule over the ›little Romes‹ of the South, from Bordeaux to the Côte d'Azur and the Provence. The laws and rights of the inhabitants of the regions and cities remained valid, and in many cases there was even continuity of administrative structures and offices.[14] So the Merovingian Frankish kings did more than rule a highly socially and ethnically diverse kingdom; indeed, they multiplied this diversity by granting rights to different legal communities and ceding some autonomy to regional elites. In doing so the Merovingian kings placed themselves equidistant to all the various groups within their kingdom – that is, at the centre of a power balance that was difficult to conceive without them.[15]

This Merovingian equilibrium still existed when Gregory of Tours wrote his Histories at the end of the sixth century. It had even been reinforced by the peculiar system of succession established after Clovis's death. The kingdom was divided among his four sons. This provided the model for later partitions of the kingdom as well.[16] When Gregory became bishop of Tours in 573 CE, there were three Merovingian kings: Gunthram (d. 592 CE), the ruler of the former Burgundian subkingdom where Gregory had grown up, Sigibert I (d. 575 CE), the king of the Austrasian kingdom to which Tours belonged, and Chilperic I (d. 584 CE), the ruler of the Northwestern kingdom of Soissons who clearly cast an eye on Tours with its prestigious shrine of Saint Martin. The perpetual competition between the kings intensified even in Gregory's time when the three grandsons of Clovis ruled.[17] Having grown up in Gunthram's kingdom and presiding as bishop in Tours, Gregory was uniquely positioned to reflect on the disposition of the three subkingdoms as he was also particularly exposed to the rather limited but nevertheless vicious fights between the three kings.[18] His bishopric lay in the Loire valley, which was a crucial juncture between the Northern territories containing the political centres of the three kings and the wealthy Southern regions of Gaul. When the different kings attempted to extend their influence by persuading or threatening cities and regions to submit to their lordship, Tours and its bishop were often directly or indirectly involved in the conflicts.

---

13   Esders, Nordwestgallien um 500, 352-357.

14   Liebs, Geltung kraft Konsenses; Siems, Die Entwicklung von Rechtsquellen; for the Burgundian kingdom under Merovingian rule: Wood, Governing class of the Gibichung; on administrative continuities see still: Buchner, *Die Provence in merowingischer Zeit.*

15   For a longer discussion with further references, see Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, 96-103.

16   Widdowson, Merovingian partitions, Ewig, Die fränkischen Teilungen.

17   Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 55-70.

18   See, Halsall, Preface to book V; Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*, 152-157.

However, the competition between these kings for the support and loyalty of the elites provided ever new possibilities for their members to profit and to confirm (or even renegotiate) privileges. Gregory himself clearly knew how to capitalise on these possibilities when Childebert II, the successor and son of Gregory's patron Sigibert I, sent his tax collectors to Tours.[19] In this episode, Gregory, narrating his own actions, described how he received the legates of the king politely but also informed them that the city had been exempt from taxes since the time of Clovis's son, Clothar I, the present king's grandfather. Chlothar, so explained Gregory to the tax collectors, had originally granted the exemption because of his love for Saint Martin, the patron of the church of Tours. He also emphasized that Charibert, Clothar's son, renewed this grant when the city had written its oath of fidelity to him.

> »After king Clothar's death this people swore an oath of loyalty (*sacramentum*) to king Charibert and he swore that he would not impose any new laws or customs (*leges consuetudinesque novas*) and guarantee the status and rights that they had under the rule of his father; and he also promised that he would not impose any new ordinance or assessment.«[20]

According to Gregory, Charibert had even burned the tax rolls of the city in reverence for and fear of Saint Martin. After Charibert's death, his successor Sigibert I followed this example by never asking for any taxes from the city; and his son, the present king Childebert, followed suit in the first fourteen years of his rule. According to Gregory, the legates ought to think carefully:

> »Now it is in your power whether a tax should be collected or not, but beware of the harm which you will do if you act contrary to the king's oath (*sacramentum*).«[21]

Additionally, Gregory sent his own messengers to the king, and they came back with a charter in which the king confirmed the tax exemption: out of reverence for Saint Martin (*pro reverentia Sancti Martini*), the people of Tours should not be subjected to tax assessments.[22]

The story illustrates that the political economy around the oath of fidelity had been well established in the first hundred years of the Merovingian kingdoms. There is ample evidence for this. Both literary and administrative sources demonstrate a shared notion of the social and political function of the oath of fidelity.[23] However, the episode in Gregory's Histories highlights the need to avoid overstating its power. While the situation obviously demanded a clear reference to the oaths and the mutual obligations that were concluded between the rulers and the city of Tours, Gregory emphasizes repeatedly the reverence for Saint Martin and the fear of God, which were above all else the main bases for the privilege. This is in direct harmony with one of Gregory's main agendas in writing his Histories. In his first four books, he took great care to reconstruct the long history of Christian Gaul, the formation of

---

19   Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IX.30, ed. Krusch and Levison, 448f.

20   Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IX.30, ed. Krusch and Levison, 449, transl. Thorpe, 516 (with slight changes).

21   Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IX.30, ed. Krusch and Levison, 449, transl. Thorpe, 516 (with slight changes).

22   Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IX.30, ed. Krusch and Levison, 449.

23   Esders, *Sacramentum fidelitatis*, 226-306.

Christendom in late Roman and post-Roman Gaul, and Christendom's constitutive function within the post-Roman kingdom. The Christian future of this earthly regnum was his main concern. Its social cohesion depended not on oaths between humans but on their covenant with the Christian God. Throughout his Histories Gregory maintains a somewhat ambivalent stance towards oaths and oathtaking. Whether this had more to do with Jesus's prohibition of oathtaking in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:33-37) or with the increasing salience of various oaths in the post-Roman kingdom of Gregory's time is up to historical inference.

Patristic commentaries most commonly interpret the prohibition of oaths in the Sermon on the Mount is as a deliberate statement to distinguish the new covenant from the old. Given that Christians were obliged to be truthful, oaths were actually redundant for Christian communities.[24] Hilarius of Poitiers, one of the well-promoted saints of Gaul in Gregory's Histories, also followed this line of argument in his commentary on Matthew. Like many other early Church fathers, Hilarius explained that Jesus was mostly concerned with oaths in the name of God.[25] From early on Christian theologians used the elasticity of terms like sacramentum and fides to reflect on the relationship of political loyalty and Christian faith. This created a relatively wide spectrum of opinions from justification to resistance on the blending of imperial and Christian connotations, one example being the reinterpretation of the sacramentum militia into a militia Christi and the integration of different meanings of the sacramentum in a militia Christi.[26] In his early fifth century translation and continuation of Eusebius's Church history, Rufinus writes that Theodosius won the decisive battle against the pagan alliance under Arbogast by relying not on the army but on fasts and prayers.[27] Rufinus's contemporary Orosius emphasizes the Theodosian integration of imperial and Christian virtues even more. Theodosius was a second Trajan. But although he was »Trajan's equal in all the virtues of our mortal life, he surpassed him beyond all comparison in his fidelity to the faith (*sacramentum fidei*).[28] By putting all his trust in the help of Christ (*omnem fiduciam sui ad opem Christi*), he defeated the barbarians as well as the *tyrannus Maximus*, who although worthy of the throne had established his rule by usurpation *contra sacramenti fidem*.«[29]

Gregory cited both Rufinus's Church history and Orosius's history in his *Decem libri historiarum*.[30] However, he does not blend different meanings of *fides* in his portrayal of Theodosius: »Theodosius put all his hope in the grace of God (*omnem spem suam et fidutiam in Dei misericordiam ponit*), and achieved his victories not so much through the sword, but through prayers (*multas gentes non tam gladio quam vigiliis et oratione conpescuit*).«[31] More

---

24 For an excellent brief overview of the the early Christian discussion, see Esders, Schwur, cols. 45-54, with further references; and *idem*, ›Faithful believers‹.

25 Hilarius of Poitiers, *In Matthaeum 4*, ed. Doignon, 142.

26 Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*; Michaélidès, *Sacramentum chez Tertullien*; Kolping, *Sacramentum Tertullianeum.*

27 Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica,* XI, ed. Schwartz *et al.*, 1037.

28 Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos*, Libri VII, VII.34.2-3, ed. Zangemeister, 521f..

29 Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos,* Libri VII, VII.34.9, ed. Zangemeister, 524.

30 On Gregory's sources, see the introduction of the edition of the Histories in Krusch and Levison, p. XIX-XXI; and cf. Reimitz, Genre and identity, 166-172, with further references.

31 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, I.42-43, ed. Krusch and Levison, 28.

so than his predecessors, Gregory seems concerned with drawing a clearer distinction between a worldly and a spiritual sphere. Gregory's dual role as author and actor in his story appears again when, as bishop of Tours, he has to deal with the crimes of a certain Pelagius. Responsible for the royal stables, Pelagius repeatedly abused his power to the detriment of the church of Tours and its people.[32] By a certain point Gregory had enough and excommunicated him. Pelagius, however, responded to his expulsion from the Christian community by resorting to the worldly tool of a purgatory oath. With twelve oath-helpers in tow acting as guarantors of Pelagius's honor and the truthfulness of his oath, he reproached Gregory. But Gregory could not allow perjury on such a scale. For this reason he received the oath from Pelagius alone, sending away the twelve oath-helpers. By doing so Gregory had saved not only the souls of the twelve but also their lives. Pelagius died in the following summer, and Gregory interpreted this as the punishment of Saint Mary in whose church Pelagius had performed his false oath.

Oaths appear quite often throughout Gregory's Histories. They were frequently used in all kinds of agreements, political alliances, and peace negotiations. But they were broken as often as sworn. While the Histories suggest that oathtaking was ubiquitous in Gregory's world, the practice does not seem to have been very effective in keeping peace and order in the kingdom. Oaths were unjustly enforced, sworn with bad intention, and broken.

At one point Gregory himself was even forced to swear an oath. He was accused of a *crimen maiestatis* – i.e., of high treason. Gregory had allegedly spread rumors that Queen Fredegund, the wife of king Chilperic I, had committed adultery with bishop Bertram of Le Mans. From his account it is clear that he found this to be a very difficult situation.[33] Gregory had to defend himself at a synod, which was followed by the intervention of not only of bishops but also members of the royal family, before he was eventually acquitted. To be exonerated, Gregory had to swear (a *sacramentum*). In his narrative he comments that this was only on behalf of the king, as the oath was actually against the laws of the church.[34] The story is one of the last episodes in Gregory's book V, in which there are notably many stories about the precarity of the oath as a social and political instrument.[35] The frequency may vary in other books, but the tendency is the same.[36] Gregory's own hopes as bishop as well as historian become defeated in the course of his Histories. At the end of book VII, he tells of a conflict between two citizens of Tours: Sichar and Chramnesind. This involved the murder of

---

32 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VIII.40, eds. Krusch and Levison, 406f.; for a more comprehensive discussion, see Esders, Der Reinigungseid mit Helfern.

33 Wood, *Gregory of Tours*,15-17; Wood, Individuality of Gregory of Tours, 44.

34 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.49, ed. Krusch and Levison, 261; on the trial against Gregory see now the discussion in Stüber, Der inkriminierte Bischof, 243-265, with further references.

35 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, V.2; 5; 14; 16; 18; 25; 26; 32; 35; 38; 48; 49, ed. Krusch and Levison, 195f.; 200-202; 211; 214; 223f.; 231; 232; 237; 241f.; 245; 258; 259-261.

36 E.g. Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IV.4; 23; 30; 45; 46, ed. Krusch and Levison, 137f.; 155f.; 162f.; 180; 182; *ibid.*, VI.3; 11; 12; 31; 43, ed. Krusch and Levison, 267; 280-282; 282; 299-302; 314-316; *ibid.*, VII.7; 12; 13; 23; 24; 26; 29; 36; 38; 47, ed. Krusch and Levison, 330; 333; 334; 343; 344; 345; 346-349; 357f.; 359-361; 368; *ibid.*, VIII.9; 16; 30; 40, ed. Krusch and Levison, 376; 383f.; 394; 406f.; *ibid.*, IX.14; 16; 18; 20, ed. Krusch and Levison, 428; 430f.; 431f.; 434-439; *ibid.*, X.3 and 9, ed. Krusch and Levison, 485f. and 491f.

a servant, which started a spiral of violence that could be stopped and sorted out by a judge and the court of the city of Tours. Even then a satisfactory compromise could only be found by bending the rules and paying a significant contribution to the compensation from the funds of the church of Tours which, as Gregory admitted, was against the law. »They swore to each other (*datis sibi partes invicem sacramentis*) that they would from now on abstain from any further violence«. *Et sic altercatio terminum fecit.* »And so was the conflict concluded,« as was book VII.[37] However, we learn in book IX that Gregory's intervention and hope was in vain. He had to admit that »the two parties resumed the fighting and hostilities which he had thought to be concluded (*superius diximus terminatum*).«[38]

Over the last decades studies on Gregory's writings have shown that the bishop of Tours was by no means the naïve story-teller that older generations of historians had painted him to be.[39] On the contrary, Gregory knew of the dangers of writing history[40] but was convinced that as a pastor of a new age it fell within his remit and responsibility. His audience needed to be told and shown how »the other world was woven into this world,« and Gregory did this »with a circumstantiality that had not occurred before in Latin Christian literature.«[41] The business of truth was important for Gregory the pastor as an actor in and author of his Histories. The complexity of his times provided Gregory with enough stories to invite his readers to join him in seeing the core truth beneath narrative patterns. The codes of this world, whether narrative or legalistic, should not determine the parameters of such a search in his Histories. Gregory's overall pastoral agenda explains his insistence on the precarious nature of the oath, its multiple meanings, and the possibility of various outcomes. The great attention he dedicates to oaths suggests that he may have also wanted to contribute his perspective to the contemporary discourse about oaths and oathtaking, and their increasing importance in the social and political life of the post-Roman kingdom.

Gregory was well aware that his view was one of many in the Merovingian kingdoms. This becomes obvious when comparing his Histories written in the last decades of the sixth century with the so-called Fredegar-chronicle (the second oldest history of the Merovingian kingdoms), which was compiled roughly two generations after Gregory died in 594 CE. The Fredegar-chronicle did not receive its current name until the early modern period, and its true authors remain unknown.[42] It presents readers with a comprehensive world chronicle from the beginning of the world until the middle of the seventh century. Starting with the

---

37 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, VII.47, ed. Krusch and Levison, 367f., for a critical discussion of the story as evidence for an early medieval »feud«, see Halsall, Reflections.

38 Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, IX.19, ed. Krusch and Levison, 432.

39 One important turning point for the establishment of a new view on Gregory's work was around 1990 with: Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*; Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*; Gauthier and Galinié (eds.), *Grégoire de Tours et l'espace gaulois*; Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority*; Wood, *Gregory of Tours*; Mitchell and Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*; for a more recent volume, see Murray (ed.), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*; for a recent study, see Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity*; but see already Brown, Relics and social status.

40 Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity,* 51-73.

41 Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*, 151-152.

42 Wood, Fredegar's fables; Fischer, *Die Fredegar-Chronik.*

Liber generationis, which includes comprehensive lists of biblical prophets, ancient peoples, kingdoms, emperors, kings and Roman popes, the chronicle provides a chain of chronicles including a reworking of Jerome's world chronicle (until 378 CE), its continuation by the Chronicle of Hydatius, a rewrite of Gregory's books I through VI, and a continued narrative up until the middle of the seventh century in the last book.[43] The extant chronicle was most likely compiled in the 660 CE.[44] However, the incomplete oldest extant manuscript rather reflects an ongoing work on the chain of chronicles that continued the work of earlier compilers over several decades.[45] The authors and compilers of the extant redaction of the chronicle had a particular interest in the rise of Frankish elites and the role of these elites in securing the well-being and stability of the Frankish kingdom.[46] The oaths in the overall narrative and across the different chains of chronicles serve to illustrate the rise of these elites in the post-Roman kingdom.

In the first books on ancient and Roman imperial history, oaths and loyalty are sworn by or to emperors and the empire.[47] But as the narrative proceeds into the dissolution of the Western Roman empire, post-Roman rulers take over this role.[48] By the third book of the chronicle, the réécriture of Gregory of Tours's Histories, the Merovingian kings are the arbiters of oaths.[49] Just like in Gregory's account, these oaths often do not help to establish peace and stability. The *sacramentum* between Childebert I (d. 556 CE) and Theuderic I (d. 533 CE) was quickly broken, and many of the senators' sons who were given as hostages became enslaved.[50] After king Chilperic had sworn to the Visigothic legates that he would never depose the Visigothic princess Galswinth after their marriage, he had her killed.[51] Similarly, the peace treaties and oaths between Sigibert (d. 575 CE), Chilperic (d. 584 CE), and Gunthram (d. 592 CE) – all grandsons of Clovis – were broken as often as they were sworn.[52]

---

43   For a comprehensive discussion, see Fischer, *Die Fredegar-Chronik.*

44   See Wood, Fredegar's fables; Fischer, Rewriting history, 189-199

45   For a discussion of the possibility of earlier layers in the decades before 660, see Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity,* 190-199.

46   See Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity,* 176-190.

47   E.g. Fredegar, *Chronicae*, II.37, ed. Krusch, 62 (Trajan); *ibid.*, II.57, ed. Krusch, 75 (the Visigothic king Theoderic I to the Empire); *ibid.*, II.62, ed. Krusch, 85 (the emperor Justinian and Belisarius).

48   Fredegar, *Chronicae*, II.57, ed. Krusch, 80-81 (to the Ostrogothic king, Theoderic I); *ibid.*, II.58, ed. Krusch, 83 (the Visigothic king Alaric II to the Frankish legate); *ibid.*, III.3, ed. Krusch, 94 (to the Frankish magister militum Arbogast).

49   Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III.60, ed. Krusch, 109.

50   Fredegar, *Chronicae,* III.37, ed. Krusch, 105.

51   Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III.60, ed. Krusch, 109.

52   Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III.55, ed. Krusch, 108; *ibid.*, III.71, ed. Krusch, 112.

Unlike in Gregory's accounts, however, the boundaries between political loyalty and Christian faith are not clearly drawn. The chronicle reports that Clovis (the first Christian Frankish king) demonstrated his faith after his baptism by claiming that he would have defended Jesus with his troops had he been there.[53] Furthermore, the chronicle purports that the Frankish elites above all others demonstrate their faith and loyalty to the kingdom – sometimes in lieu of the kings, and sometimes even when the kings fail to keep the peace. The Frankish legate defends the Lombard Queen Gundeberga in a mission to the Lombard kingdom – a *parens Francorum* – as she is held prisoner by king Rothari despite his own oath as well as the *sacramenta* of the Lombards to the queen. On his own initiative, the Frankish legate threatens king Rothari and warns him not to provoke the Franks and their kings. Rothari immediately frees Gundeberga and renews the treaties and agreements between the two kingdoms.[54]

When the various Merovingian kings themselves were not able to come to an agreement, sometimes members of the Frankish elite had to intervene to keep the peace and stability. On several occasions we hear that kings themselves asked for a *iudicium Francorum* to resolve their conflicts.[55] In 625/626 CE, for instance, king Chlothar II and his son, the Austrasian sub-king Dagobert, had a dispute over the territory between the Ardennes and the Vosges. They agreed to let a *iudicium Francorum* of twelve bishops and wise men (*pontifices et viri sapientissimi*) decide.[56] A member of this committee was Arnulf of Metz, who along with the mayor of the palace Pippin excelled in faith, loyalty and wisdom. About a decade earlier, both Pippin and Arnulf were instrumental in helping Chlothar II defeat Brunhilde, the powerful queen-regent of the Austrasian and Burgundian kingdom, in 613 CE (after she had not agreed to call a *iudicium Francorum* to end the conflict). In turn, this victory helped Clothar II establish his monarchy in all three kingdoms.[57] And like Arnulf, Pippin plays an important role as a member of the elite in guaranteeing the well-being of the Frankish republic.[58]

Pippin and Arnulf became celebrated ancestors of the Carolingian dynasty after the family usurped the Frankish throne in the middle of the eighth century.[59] To legitimate the new Carolingian kings, Childebrand and Nibelung – two members of the new royal family – reworked and continued the Chronicle of Fredegar until the year 768 CE under a new title: *Historia vel Gesta Francorum*.[60] The colophon stating names of the authors and title comes right after the account of the elevation of their relative Pippin:[61]

---

53 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, III.21, ed. Krusch, 101: »Iam fidem his verbis ostendens, christianum se verum esse adfirmat«

54 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV.71, ed. Krusch, 156f.

55 Fredegar, *Chronicae,* IV.37, ed. Krusch, 138 (between Theuderic II and Theudebert II); *ibid.*, IV.40, ed. Krusch, 140 (between Chlothar II and Brunhilde).

56 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV.54, ed. Krusch, 147.

57 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV.40, ed. Krusch, 140.

58 Fischer, *Karl Martell*; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 273-292.

59 See the overviews in Becher and Jarnut (eds.), *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751*; Semmler, *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751*; Schieffer, *Die Karolinger*, 59-67; Airlie, *Making and Unmaking*, 27-52.

60 See Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken.*

61 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii* c. 33, ed. Krusch, 182.

»Up to this point, the illustrious Childebrand, uncle of the said King Pippin, took great pains to have his history or ›geste‹ of the Franks (*historia vel gesta Francorum*) recorded. What follows is by authority of the illustrious Count Nibelung, Childebrand's son.«[62]

This chapter and the preceding chapter on Pippin's coronation constitute a double break in the narrative: the change from Merovingian to Carolingian rule, and the change from Childebrand to his son Nibelung as the author of the narrative. However, this double break may well have been a very deliberate move. It highlights what has been called ›a double continuity‹ between Merovingian and Carolingian rule which was the construction of a continuity with Merovingian history as well as continuity with Carolingian history as important members of the Frankish elites under Merovingian rule. Before the takeover of the royal throne by his nephew Pippin, the author of the earlier part of the chronicle, Childebrand, fought alongside Pippin's father Charles Martel – the powerful mayor of the palace – to defend the kingdom against the Saracens. The chronicle depicted this victory as a heroic battle with strong biblical overtones – that is, as a fight to save the Christian kingdom from Saracen dominance.[63] Taking action and responsibility for the Frankish and Christian commonwealth, both Childebrand and his brother Charles were presented as true descendants of Pippin and Arnulf, the two supporters of Chlothar II in the first decades of the seventh century. Now, after Pippin's elevation or usurpation of the Frankish throne, Childebrand's son Nibelung, who continued the narrative after 750 CE, and the new king Pippin himself, as the main actor of Nibelung's narrative, would follow the models of their ancestors and also assumed their responsibility for the Frankish kingdom. In the *Historia vel Gesta Francorum* they do so in the different roles of a Frankish ruler and a member of the new royal dynasty, but in continuity with their Merovingian and Carolingian past.[64]

Although the *Historia vel Gesta Francorum* holds critical importance as a historical source for the eighth century, its narrativity has not been widely appreciated by modern scholarship. The nature of its writing has often led to its dismissal as a martial account of the great triumphs of Carolingian generals, mayors, and kings, representing a rough and uneducated milieu of a warrior culture.[65] However, it is in fact a carefully crafted text that blends a biblically inspired epic style with legal and formulary language to legitimate the new Carolingian rulers.[66] In the effort to present Pippin as a legitimate ruler, the authors of the *Historia* faced a serious problem. As we saw, members of the new royal dynasty and their ancestors had

---

62 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii,* c. 34, ed. Krusch, 182: »Usque nunc inluster vir Childebrandus comes avunculus predicto rege Pippino, hanc historiam vel gesta Francorum diligentissime scribere procuravit. Abhinc ab inlustre viro Nibelungo, filium ipsius Childebrando, itemque comite, succedat auctoritas«, trans. Wallace-Hadrill, 101-103.

63 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii*, 20, ed. Krusch, 177f.

64 For a longer discussion of this strategy, see: Reimitz, *Viri inlustres und omnes Franci*; and for the term »doppelte Kontinuität«, see Wolfram, *Intitulatio I*, 145-150.

65 The standard English translation of Fredegar by John-Michael Wallace-Hadrill still supports this judgement influentially (Fredegar, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, trans. Wallace-Hadrill); for different views see Becher, Eine verschleierte Krise; Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*; McKitterick, Die Anfänge des karolingischen Königtums, 155-156; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 133-140; an excellent discussion of the interaction and connections of various arenas of royal representation in the historical and diplomatic evidence is Airlie, *Making and Unmaking*, 43-51; a careful discussion of how the rise of the Carolingians is orchestrated in the ›house-chronicle‹ of the *Historia vel Gesta Francorum.* Nelson, *King and Emperor,* 39-41, 55-62.

66 Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity*, 299-304 and 320-326.

been important members of the political elites before the coup in the 750s CE. It is very likely that as mayors of the palace, as royal officials, and as members of the court, they themselves had already sworn the oath of loyalty to the Merovingian kings. Charles Martel, the father of the new king Pippin, had increasingly monopolized access to the king and had used this position to establish himself as the *de facto* ruler of the Merovingian kingdom.[67] Contemporary sources addressed him with the title *princeps*.[68] For most of his reign, he had always ruled under a Merovingian king. But in 737 CE he seems to have been powerful enough to continue his reign without one. When he died in 741 CE, his two sons Pippin and Carloman inherited his practical power as the kingdom's *de facto* ruler. By 743 CE the two brothers had already decided to install another Merovingian king, Childeric III, who held the office until Pippin deposed him in 751 CE with the support of the Roman pope.[69]

Josef Semmler has argued that the papal intervention and legitimation of the Carolingians' usurpation of the Frankish throne may have been necessary to absolve the new king Pippin from the oath he had sworn to Childeric III.[70] His evidence came from the Byzantine chronicler Theophanes.[71] Frankish sources, however, avoid this sensitive issue. In the *Historia vel Gesta Francorum*, the uncle and cousin of the new king presented readers with an alternative political theory. The loyalty that the subjects of the Merovingian kingdoms owed to their Merovingian *reges Francorum* was increasingly interpreted as a loyalty owed not only to the kings but also to the community they represented – the Franks. The emphasis of the Fredegar-chronicle on the responsibility of Frankish elites, to which prominent Carolingian ancestors also belonged, provided the perfect foundation for this argument. The general consensus of this community (with their Carolingian leaders) thus served not only to legitimize the Carolingians' ascendancy to replace the Merovingian kings but also – as the new *reges Francorum* – to redirect the *sacramentum fidelitatis* towards the Frankish community and their newly anointed kings.

The new arrangement of the Merovingian Fredegar-chronicle and its continuation by Pippin's relatives in the *Historia vel Gesta Francorum* carefully developed this redirection and channelling of loyalties with the help of further constructions of double continuities. Episodes about the Saxons living along the Northeastern periphery of the Frankish kingdoms from the very beginning provide an excellent example. In the Fredegar-chronicle they are depicted as being under the authority and influence of their Frankish neighbors. This relationship included tribute payments; book IV tells us of a tribute of five hundred cows per year that the Saxons had provided since the times of Chlothar I (d. 561 CE). The defeat of the Saxons under Chlothar in the mid-550s CE is also recounted in the chronicle's third book, which is an abbreviated version and reworking of Gregory of Tours's *Histories*. But this story is unusually comprehensive in retelling Gregory's story in detail. The Saxons see an opportunity to renegotiate their deal during the seventh century

---

67 Fouracre, *Age of Charles Martel*; Fischer, *Karl Martell.*

68 Wolfram, *Intitulatio I,* 147-151.

69 Airlie, Making and Unmaking, 27-43.

70 Semmler, *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751*, 23-31.

71 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, a. 6216 (724 CE), ed. De Boor, 403, trans. Mango and Scott, 557.

when Dagobert I ruled the Eastern kingdom as subking of his father Chlothar II. They sent legates to Dagobert asking whether he would waive the tributes they had paid since Chlothar I's reign if they would take over the military defense of the Eastern border against the Slavs.[72] On the advice of his Western courtiers, Dagobert agreed and the Saxons swore solemn oaths (*sacramenta*) to protect the border as Frankish clients, which as the author of the chronicle already knew in the 660s CE they would not hold.[73] Easterners like Arnulf or Pippin would have known better already at the time when Dagobert concluded the treaty with the Saxons.[74]

The *Historia vel Gesta* picks up the story of the Saxons at the time of Charles Martel, the father of the future king Pippin. In chapter 11, Charles defeated a Saxon rebellion[75] and when the *paganissimi* Saxons revolted again in 738 CE, he moved into their territory, causing a terrible bloodshed and resubjected them to tributes.[76] When his two sons Pippin and Carloman had taken over the government of the kingdom, Carloman had to fight against the Saxons again. He defeated them and this time they were not only subjected to Frankish rule but also consecrated by the *sacramentum* of baptism.[77] In the year 747 CE Carloman abdicated and entered the monastery of Montecassino in Italy. At this point Pippin became the sole Carolingian *princeps* of the kingdom although nominally still mayor of the palace under king Childeric III. When the Saxon revolted again in 748 CE, Pippin, confronted them holding them to the oaths they had sworn to his brother. After their defeat, the Saxons asked for peace, and submitted to Frankish rule as they had done since old times (even promising to pay the tribute that they had once pledged to the Merovingian king Chlothar I).[78]

The next revolt is recounted in the narrative of the *Historia vel gesta* right after the chapters of Pippin's elevation to king and the colophon of the two authors, Childebrand and Nibelung. It is again the same story. The Saxons broke the oaths they had sworn to the *praefatus rex* – the above-mentioned king. On the one hand, this was a king had just been elected; but on the other, this was the same man to whom they had given their oaths three years ago as the mayor of the palace. The king marches into their lands with the whole army of the Franks – *commoto omni exercitu Francorum* – and after another devastating defeat, the Saxons swear *sacramenta* and to pay an even higher tribute than before.[79]

---

72 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, 74, ed. Krusch, 158.

73 Fredegar, *Chronicae,* 74, ed. Krusch,158: »Sed parum haec promissio sortitur aefectum.«

74 Wood, Fredegar's fables, 364.

75 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii,* 11, ed. Krusch, 174f.

76 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii,* 19, ed. Krusch, 177.

77 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii,* 27, ed. Krusch, 180f.

78 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii*, 31, ed. Krusch, 181: »*Saxones ... pacem petentes, iure Francorum sese, ut antiquitus mos fuerat, subdiderunt et ea tributa quae Chlothario quondam prestiterant plenissima solutione ab eo tempore deinceps esse reddituros promiserunt.*«

79 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii,* 35, ed. Krusch, 182f.: »*His transactis, sequente anno, iterum Saxones eorum fidem, quod praefato rege dudum promiserat, solito more iterum rebelles contra ipso existent. Convidentens Saxones penitentia commoti, cum solito timore clementia regis petunt, ut pacem eis concederet, et sacrameta atque tributa multa maiora, quam antea promisserant, redderent et numquam ultra iam rebelles existerent.*«

The plot is wheeled out repeatedly for old Frankish territories such as the Alemannic, Bavarian duchy, and also for Burgundy, Provence, and the long-winded conflicts with the Aquitanian dukes.[80] The Fredegar-chronicle extensively presents claims of historical Frankish overlordship and its revival under Carolingian rule, particularly concerning the Lombard kingdom. Here too the story could be linked to the episodes in the older chronicle about Frankish domination over Italian territories and the Lombards.[81] In this success story king Pippin plays a particularly important role and the restoration of oaths figure as an equally important aspect. After the pope had visited the new king in Ponthion and asked for help against the Lombards,[82] Pippin convened his army and began his campaign against the Lombard kingdom and their king Aistulf.[83] After being defeated, Aistulf asked for peace through the magnates of the Franks. He swore oaths to preserve the peace and promised to respect the authority and laws of the Franks. He vowed to never revolt against king Pippin and the Frankish authority, and he swore to refrain from waging war against the apostolic see.[84] Like the Saxons before him, however, Aistulf, broke the promises and oaths he had sworn, so that Pippin once again had to march out with the whole army of the Franks. That army's strength proved too great for Aistulf, who again turned to the Frankish nobles, bishops, and magnates for intercession.[85] As in the case of the Saxons, the narrative duplicates the ritual of submission. And similarly, the report is part of a chain of references linking the submission to Frankish rule (*ditio Francorum*) under Pippin to Merovingian precedent: old obligations owed to the Franks now had to be sworn to the Carolingian kings.

---

80 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 75-88.

81 Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV, 34; 51; 70, ed. Krusch, 133f, 145f., 156.

82 Buc, Warum weniger die Handelnden selbst, Airlie, *Making and Unmaking*, 39-41.

83 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii*, 36, ed. Krusch, 183: »*Ibique Stephanus papa Romensis ad praesentiam regis veniens, multis muneribus tam ipsi regi quam et Francis largitus est, auxilium petens contra gentem Langobardorum et eorum regem Aistulfum, ut per ejus adiutorium ab eorum oppressionibus vel fraudulentia de manibus eorum liberaretur, et tributa et munera, quae contra legis ordinem a Romanis requirebant facere, desisterent. … praefatus rex ad Kalendas Martias omnes Francos, sicut mos Francorum, Bernaco villa publica ad se venire praecepit.*«

84 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii*, 37, ed. Krusch, 184: »*Sacramenta et obsides ibidem donat, ut numquam a Francorum ditione se abstraheret, et ulterius ad sedem apostolicam Romanam et rempublicam hostiliter numquam accederet.*«

85 *Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii,* 38, ed. Krusch, 185: »*Haec Aistulfus rex Langobardorum cernens, et iam nullam spem se evadendi speraret, iterum per supplicationem sacerdotum et optimatum Francorum veniens, et pacem praedicto regi supplicans, et sacramenta quae praefato regi dudum dederat, ac quod contra sedem apostolicam rem nefariam fecerat, omnia per iudicium Francorum vel sacerdotum plenissima solutione emendaret. Igitur rex Pippinus solito more iterum misericordia motus, ad petitionem optimatum suorum vitam et regnum iterato concessit. Aistulfus rex per iudicium Francorum vel sacerdotum, thesaurum qui in Ticino erat, id est tertiam partem, praedicto regi tradidit, et alia multa munera maiora quam antea dederat, partibus regis Pippini dedit. Sacramenta iterum et obsides donat, ut amplius numquam contra regem Pippinum vel proceres Francorum rebellis et contumax esse debeat , et tributa quae Langobardi regi Francorum a longo tempore dederant, annis singulis per missos suos desolvere deberent.*

The effort to legitimate the Carolingian usurpation of the royal throne was an ongoing project for several decades after 750 CE.[86] After the *Historia vel gesta Francorum* ended its account with the death of the first Carolingian king Pippin in 768 CE, the authors of the Royal Frankish Annals took over the task for his successor, Charlemagne. The narrative was structured in years counted from the incarnation of Jesus Christ. But it started only in 741 CE, ten years before the coronation of Pippin. The Carolingian takeover and the ensuing success story of Carolingian rule was knitted into the seams of an endlessly expandable story. Numerous breaks in the extant text suggest that it was written in multiple stages.[87] Its first obvious break was in 788/89 CE with the account of the deposition of Tassilo III, Charlemagne's cousin and the powerful duke of Bavaria.[88] To legitimate his deposition, the Annals claim that Tassilo broke the oath he had sworn to the Carolingian rulers and the Franks, first to Pippin as early as 757 CE and later to Charlemagne in 781 CE.[89] According to the Annals, Tassilo forced Charlemagne to react by continuously challenging his authority. This culminated in a trial – a *iudicium* – and the duke's deposition in 788 CE.[90] It is obvious that the authors of this part of the Annals used the playbook of the *Historia vel gesta Francorum*. But unlike Childebrand and Nibelung, they assumed Charlemagne's legitimate role as the ruler and representative of the Frankish community to whom these oaths needed to be sworn and kept.

This may well have been more contested than the Annals would have readers believe. The continuation of the narrative after 788 reflects continued efforts to reinforce the authority of the Carolingian king, albeit with a stronger and more explicit integration of political elements with spiritual ethics. The narrative reflects ongoing work on the language of faith – fides. This finds its most powerful expression in the formula *fideles Dei et regis*, where the rhetorical configuration deliberately omits a word in the combination of two clauses: in this case, *fideles*.[91] It can therefore be translated as »the ones who have faith in God and the king« or as »the ones who are loyal to God and the king.« This purposefully blends the two kinds of *fides* that Gregory of Tours tried to keep distinct in his Histories. The formulation appears in the Carolingian period and goes on to have a long history in texts and documents of the Middle Ages and beyond.

---

86   McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 133-155.

87   McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 31-43.

88   Becher, *Eid und Herrschaft*.

89   For a discussion of the doubtful accuracy of these claims, see already Wolfram, *Grenzen und Räume*; Wolfram, *Tassilo III*; Airlie, Narratives of triumph; *Annales regni Francorum*, a. 757, ed. Kurze, 14-16; for a careful and detailed reconstruction of the series of events see now also: Nelson, King and Emperor, 186-191, 244-248, 251-254.

90   *Annales regni Francorum*, a. 787, ed. Kurze, 72-80.

91   Esders, *Fideles Dei et regis*.

The first occurrence of *fideles Dei et regis* appears in a charter for the abbot of the monastery of Saint Denis as early as 755 CE. The monastery had received some property that had been confiscated by the treasury after a trial of high treason in a *iudicium Francorum*.[92] After this, there is a period of over 30 years in which this formula is not used in the extant evidence. Its big entrance into history came only in the late 780s, more precisely in 788 CE in the trial against the Bavarian duke Tassilo. Because Tassilo was Charlemagne's relative, the king did not execute him after the judgement; rather, together with the *fideles Dei et regis*, Charlemagne allowed the deposed Bavarian duke to enter a monastery if he swore to enter the community of the *fideles Dei et regis*.[93] After the account of Tassilo's deposition, the narrative of the Royal Frankish Annals repeatedly accentuates this integration of political loyalty and Christian faith, in particular in the accounts of the ongoing wars with the Saxons and the triumph over the Avar empire in the last decade of the eighth century.[94] In the decades around the renovation of the Roman empire by Charlemagne in the year 800 CE, the use of this new rhetoric of fides emerges in many other Carolingian texts and documents.[95] But it is already in connection with the Avar campaign where voices are raised that express strong reservations about the equation of faith and loyalty. Two bishops responsible for the Christianization of the Eastern periphery of the Carolingian empire made it clear in several statements that the conversion to Christianity was not just a one-off decision but a longer process. The success of conversion depended on thorough guidance and education of the new members of the Christian community and should not be too easily conflated with political submission of the *gentes* of the Avars or the Saxons.[96]

Conclusion

The short overview of the historiographical sources from the Frankish world may help to demonstrate that the Carolingian period was a crucial moment for the oath of fidelity's interpretation as a Christian sacrament, as Paolo Prodi observed in his admirable study on the sacrament of the oaths some time ago.[97] However, at least in the historical writings of the Carolingian period, it seems that this was above all supported by the spin doctors of the new royal dynasty while members of their Church were taking a more critical stance on the conflation of the different meanings of fides. They still reflect the concerns of the earlier historian and bishop Gregory of Tours, who tried to keep Christian faith in a different category by attempting to put oaths into perspective with their different meanings. In Gregory's narrative oaths do not help to give order to the historical narrative. Rather, they emphasize the precarious nature of human obligations. A social code and a set of expectations may

---

92 D. Kar. I, nr. 8, ed. Mühlbacher, 12f.; for a longer discussion, see Esders, *Fideles Dei et regis*, 338-342, with further references.

93 *Annales regni Francorum*, a. 788, ed. Kurze, 80.

94 Reimitz, Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen; see also Reimitz, Conversion and control; Flierman, *Saxon Identities*, 89-118.

95 Esders, *Fideles Dei et regis*, 343-352.

96 Reimitz, Conversion and control.

97 Prodi, *Das Sakrament der Herrschaft.*

shine through in Gregory's Histories but only through their constant contestation in the various case histories of the Ten Books. Gregory's Carolingian successors as bishop and pastors seem to have shared at least some of his reservations. Like Gregory, they may have worried about the blending of the political meaning of oaths and the Christian sacrament of baptism. Unlike the time of Gregory, there are extant voices of contemporaries from the eighth and ninth centuries whose instrumentalization of sacred promises the Carolingian pastors found disturbing. The authors of these histories built upon the epic style of the Old Testament to create a providential perspective on the rise of the Carolingians and their legitimation as the new rulers of the Frankish kingdoms. In these narratives the profane and spiritual meanings of oaths increasingly permeate each other. The ongoing efforts to define this semantic program resulted in the brilliant rhetorical design of the zeugma *fideles Dei et regis*. The zeugma managed to integrate various social codes of the oaths, their instrumentalization as well as problematization, and so became one important focus for ongoing debates and reflections on how to draw the boundary between the sacred and the profane. The formation of this discourse is of course a history that would demand further studies including more and other sources, such as normative texts, and above all hagiographical narratives. However, I hope that for the purpose of this collection of essays that aim at a comparison between different social and cultural contexts, between the early and the late Middle Ages, between medieval Europe and medieval Japan, the evidence of the historical narratives can still provide some starting points for further discussion.

References

Abbreviations

MGH   Monumenta Germaniae Historica
   DD Diplomata
   SS   Scriptores

Primary Sources

Annales regni Francorum inde ab A. 741 usque ad A. 829 qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses Maiores et Einhardi, ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH SS Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum separatim editi (Hannover, 1895).

Continuationes Chronicarum Fredegarii, ed. Bruno Krusch, *Chronicarum quae Dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici Libri IV cum Continuationibus*, MGH SS Rerum Merovingicarum 2 (Hannover, 1888) 168-193. English translation: John-Michael Wallace-Hadrill, *Fredegar, The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar, with its Continuations*, Medieval Classics (London, 1960).

Fredegar, *Chronicarum Libri IV cum Continuationibus*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SS Rerum Merovingicarum 2 (Hannover, 1888) 1-167. English translation: Fredegar, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar, with its Continuations*, translated from Latin by John-Michael Wallace-Hadrill, Medieval Classics (London, 1960).

Gregory of Tours, *Decem libri historiarum*, ed. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, MGH SS rerum Merovingicarum 1, 1 (Hannover, 1951). English Translation: Lewis Thorpe, History of the Franks (London, 1977).

Hilarius of Poitiers, *In Matthaeum 4*, ed. Jean Doignon, Sur Matthieu, vol. 1, Sources Chrétiennes 254 (Paris, 1979).

Paulus Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, ed. Karl Zangemeister (Leipzig, 1889).

Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. Eduard Schwartz, Theodor Mommsen and Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Eusebius Caesariensis Werke. Zweiter Band, Zweiter Teil. Die Kirchengeschichte*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte 6 (second edition), (Berlin, 1999) 957-1040.

Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, ed. Karl de Boor, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1883); translated by Cyril Mango and Roger Scott with the assistance of Geoffrey Greatrex (Oxford, 1997).

Die Urkunden der Karolinger. Erster Band. Die Urkunden Pippins, Karlmanns und Karls des Grossen, ed. Engelbert Mühlbacher, MGH DD Karolinorum 1 (Hannover, 1906).

Secondary Sources

Airlie, Stuart, *Making and Unmaking the Carolingians, 751-888* (London, 2020).

Airlie, Stuart, Narratives of triumph and rituals of submission: Charlemagne's mastering of Bavaria, in: Stuart Airlie, *Power and Its Problems in Carolingian Europe*, Variorum Collected Studies Series 1010 (Farnham, 2012).

Becher, Matthias, *Eid und Herrschaft. Untersuchungen zum Herrscherethos Karls des Großen*, Vorträge und Forschungen Sonderband 39 (Sigmaringen, 1993).

Becher, Matthias, Eine verschleierte Krise. Die Nachfolge Karl Martells 741 und die Anfänge der karolingischen Hofgeschichtsschreibung, in: Matthias Becher, *Macht und Herrschaft. Praktiken – Strukturen – Begründungen. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Linda Dohmen, Florian Hartmann, Hendrik Hess and Daniel König (Göttingen, 2019) 261-290.

Becher, Matthias and Jörg Jarnut (eds.), *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung* (Münster, 2004).

Breukelaar, Adriaan H. B., *Historiography and Episcopal Authority in Sixth-century Gaul. The Histories of Gregory of Tours Interpreted in Their Historical Context*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 57 (Göttingen, 1994).

Brown, Peter, Relics and social status in the age of Gregory of Tours, in: Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (first paperback edition), (Berkeley, CA, 1989) 222-250.

Brown, Peter, *The Ransom of the Soul. Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity* (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

Brown, Peter, *The Rise of Western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (third anniversary edition), (Chichester, 2013).

Brown, Peter, *Through the Eye of a Needle. Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton, 2012).

Buc, Philippe, Warum weniger die Handelnden selbst als eher die Chronisten das politische Ritual erzeugten – und warum es niemanden auf die wahre Geschichte ankam: nach 754, in: Bernhard Jussen (ed.), *Die Macht des Königs. Herrschaft in Europa vom Frühmittelalter bis in die Neuzeit* (Munich, 2005) 27-37.

Buchner, Rudolf, *Die Provence in merowingischer Zeit. Verfassung – Wirtschaft – Kultur*, Arbeiten zur deutschen Rechts- und Verfassungsgeschichte 9 (Stuttgart, 1933).

Collins, Roger, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, MGH Studien und Texte 44 (Hannover, 2007).

Esders, Stefan, Der Reinigungseid mit Helfern. Individuelle und kollektive Rechtsvorstellungen in der Wahrnehmung und Darstellung frühmittelalterlicher Konflikte, in: Stefan Esders, *Rechtsverständnis und Konfliktbewältigung. Gerichtliche und außergerichtliche Strategien im Mittelalter* (Böhlau, 2007) 55-78.

Esders, Stefan, ›Faithful believers‹: Oaths of allegiance in post-Roman societies as evidence for eastern and western ›Visions of Community‹, in: Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner and Richard Payne (eds.), *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World. The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100* (Farnham, 2012) 357-374.

Esders, Stefan, *Fideles Dei et regis.* Ein Zeugma in der politisch-religiösen Rechtssprache des Karolingerreiches, in: Bernhard Jussen and Karl Ubl (eds.), *Die Sprache des Rechts. Historische Semantik und karolingische Kapitularien*, Historische Semantik 33 (Göttingen, 2022) 315-374.

Esders, Stefan, Nordwestgallien um 500. Von der militarisierten spätrömischen Provinzgesellschaft zur erweiterten Militäradministration des merowingischen Königtums, in: Mischa Meier and Steffen Patzold (eds.), *Chlodwigs Welt. Organisation von Herrschaft um 500* (Stuttgart, 2014) 339-361.

Esders, Stefan, Rechtliche Grundlagen frühmittelalterlicher Staatlichkeit: der allgemeine Treueid, in: Walter Pohl and Veronika Wieser (eds.), *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat – Europäische Perspektiven*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 16 (Vienna, 2009) 423-432.

Esders, Stefan, *Sacramentum fidelitatis. Treueid, Militärwesen und Formierung mittelalterlicher Staatlichkeit.* Unpublished Habilitationsschrift (expanded version), (Berlin, 2009).

Esders, Stefan, Schwur, in: Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum. Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt 30 (Stuttgart, 2021) cols. 29-70.

Esders, Stefan, Yaniv Fox, Yitzhak Hen and Laury Sarti (eds.), *East and West in the Early Middle Ages. The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective* (Cambridge, 2019).

Ewig, Eugen, Die fränkischen Teilungen und Teilreiche (511-613), in: Eugen Ewig, *Spätantike und fränkisches Gallien* (München, 1976) 114-171.

Fischer, Andreas, *Die Fredegar-Chronik. Komposition und Kontextualisierung* (Vienna, forthcoming).

Fischer, Andreas, *Karl Martell. Der Beginn karolingischer Herrschaft* (Stuttgart, 2012).

Fischer, Andreas, Rewriting history: Fredegar's perspectives on the Mediterranean, in: Andreas Fischer and Ian Wood (eds.), *Western Perspectives on the Mediterranean. Cultural Transfer in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 400-800 AD* (London, 2016) 55-75.

Flierman, Robert, *Saxon Identities. AD 150-900*, Studies in Early Medieval History (London, 2017).

Fouracre, Paul, *The Age of Charles Martel*, The Medieval World (London, 2000).

Gauthier, Nancy and Henri Galinié (eds.), *Grégoire de Tours et l'espace gaulois. Actes du congrès international (Tours, 3-5 novembre 1994)*, Supplément à la Revue Archéologique du Centre de la France 13 (Tours, 1997).

Goffart, Walter, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800). Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (second edition), (Notre Dame, IN, 2005).

Halsall, Guy, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge, 2007).

Halsall, Guy, The preface to book V of Gregory of Tours' Histories: Its form, context and significance, *The English Historical Review* 122/496 (2007) 297-317.

Halsall, Guy, Reflections on Early Medieval violence: the example of the »Blood Feud«, *Memoria y Civilisacion* 2/1 (1999) 7-29.

Heinzelmann, Martin, *Gregory of Tours. History and Society in the Sixth Century*, translated from German by Christopher Carroll (Cambridge, 2001).

Heydemann, Gerda and Helmut Reimitz (eds.), *Historiography and Identity II. Post-Roman Multiplicity and New Political Identities*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 27 (Turnhout, 2020).

Kolping, Adolf, *Sacramentum Tertullianeum. Neue Untersuchungen über die Anfänge des christlichen Gebrauches der Vokabel sacramentum* (Regensburg, 1948).

Liebs, Detlef, Geltung kraft Konsenses oder kraft königlichem Befehl? Die lex Romana unter den Westgoten, Burgundern und Franken, in: Verena Epp and Christoph H.F. Meyer (eds.), *Recht und Konsensus im frühen Mittelalter,* Vorträge und Forschungen 82 (Ostfildern, 2017) 63-85.

McKitterick, Rosamond, *Charlemagne. The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge, 2008).

McKitterick, Rosamond, Die Anfänge des karolingischen Königtums und die Annales Regni Francorum, in: Walter Pohl and Maximilian Diesenberger (eds.), *Integration und Herrschaft. Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 3 (Vienna, 2002) 151-168.

McKitterick, Rosamond, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004).

Meier, Mischa and Steffen Patzold (eds.), *Chlodwigs Welt. Organisation von Herrschaft um 500* (Stuttgart, 2014).

Michaélidès, Dimitri, *Sacramentum chez Tertullien* (Paris, 1970).

Mitchell, Kathleen and Ian Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions. Medieval and Early Modern Peoples 8 (Leiden, 2002).

Morgan, Teresa, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford, 2015).

Murray, Alexander Callander (ed.), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 63 (Leiden, 2016).

Nelson, Janet, *King and Emperor. A New Life of Charlemagne* (London, 2019).

Pohl, Walter, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung und Integration* (second edition), (Stuttgart, 2005).

Pohl, Walter and Gerda Heydemann (eds.), *Post-Roman Transitions: Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 14 (Turnhout, 2014).

Prodi, Paolo, *Das Sakrament der Herrschaft. Der politische Eid in der Verfassungsgeschichte des Okzidents*, translated from Italian by Judith Elze, Schriften des Italienisch-Deutschen Instituts in Trient 11 (Berlin, 1997).

Reimitz, Helmut, Conversion and control: The establishment of liturgical frontiers in Carolingian Pannonia, in: Walter Pohl, Ian Wood and Helmut Reimitz (eds.), *The Transformation of Frontiers. From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians*, The Transformation of the Roman World 10 (Leiden, 2001) 189-207.

Reimitz, Helmut, Genre and identity in Merovingian historiography, in: Gerda Heydemann and Helmut Reimitz (eds.), *Historiography and Identity II. Post-Roman Multiplicity and New Political Identities*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 27 (Turnhout, 2020) 161-211.

Reimitz, Helmut, Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen im karolingischen Mitteleuropa, in: Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (eds.), *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter,* Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 1 (Vienna, 2000) 105-166.

Reimitz, Helmut, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550-850*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought Fourth Series (Cambridge, 2015).

Reimitz, Helmut, *Viri inlustres* und *omnes Franci*: Zur Gestaltung der feinen Unterschiede in historiographischen und diplomatischen Quellen der frühen Karolingerzeit, in: Andreas Schwarcz and Katharina Kaska (eds.), *Urkunden – Schriften – Lebensordnungen. Neue Beiträge zur Mediävistik. Vorträge der Jahrestagung des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung aus Anlass des 100. Geburtstags von Heinrich Fichtenau (1912-2012)*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 63 (Vienna, 2015) 123-149.

Reuter, Yves, Serment et narrativité, in: Raymond Verdier (ed.), *Le Serment. 1. Signes et Fonctions* (Paris, 1992) 203-217.

Rotman, Tamar, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth Century Gaul. Rethinking Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam, 2022).

Schieffer, Rudolf, *Die Karolinger* (fourth reworked and expanded edition), (Stuttgart, 2006).

Scholz, Sebastian, *Die Merowinger* (Stuttgart, 2015).

Shaw, Brent, War and violence, in: G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, 1999) 130-169.

Semmler, Josef, *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751 und die fränkische Königssalbung*, Studia Humaniora Series Minor 6 (Düsseldorf, 2003).

Siems, Harald, Die Entwicklung von Rechtsquellen zwischen Spätantike und Mittelalter, in: Theo Kölzer and Rudolf Schieffer (eds.), *Von der Spätantike zum frühen Mittelalter: Kontinuitäten und Brüche, Konzeptionen und Befunde*, Vorträge und Forschungen 70 (Ostfildern, 2009) 245-285.

Stüber, Till, *Der inkriminierte Bischof. Könige im Konflikt mit Kirchenleitern im West-Gotischen und Fränkischen Gallien (466-614)*, Millenium-Studien zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr. 82 (Berlin, 2020).

Wickham, Chris, *The Inheritance of Rome. A History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London, 2010).

Widdowson, Marc, Merovingian partitions: A ›genealogical charter‹?, *Early Medieval Europe* 17/1 (2009) 1-22.

Wolfram, Herwig, *Grenzen und Räume. Geschichte Österreichs vor seiner Entstehung*, Österreichische Geschichte 378-907 (Vienna, 1995).

Wolfram, Herwig, *Intitulatio I: Lateinische Königs- und Fürstentitel bis zum Ende des 8. Jh.s*, Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung. Ergänzungsband 21 (Graz, 1967).

Wolfram, Herwig, *Tassilo III: Höchster Fürst und Niedrigster Mönch*, Kleine bayerische Biografien (Regensburg, 2016).

Wood, Ian N., Fredegar's fables, in: Anton Scharer and Georg Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 32 (Vienna, 1994) 359-366.

Wood, Ian N., *Gregory of Tours* (Bangor, 1994).

Wood, Ian N., *The Christian Economy in the Early Medieval West. Towards a Temple Society* (Binghamton, NY, 2022).

Wood, Ian N., The governing class of the Gibichung and Early Merovingian Kingdoms, in: Walter Pohl and Veronika Wieser (eds.), *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat – Europäische Perspektiven*, Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 16 (Vienna, 2009) 11-22.

Wood, Ian N., The individuality of Gregory of Tours, in: Kathleen Mitchell and Ian N. Wood (eds.), *The World of Gregory of Tours*, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions. Medieval and Early Modern Peoples 8 (Leiden, 2002) 29-46.

Wood, Ian N., *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (London, 1994).