DAS FRANKFURTER KONZIL VON 794

KRISTALLISATIONSPUNKT KAROLINGISCHER KULTUR

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SELBSTVERLAG
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Why Frankfort? The point of my question is not to ask why Frankfort is called Frankfort. Everyone knows the answer — or at least an answer — to that one! There is a famous story, first recorded from the telling of «credible men» in the early eleventh century, of how a deer, as if sent by God, showed the fleeing Franks an escape-route across the Main, thus enabling them to escape the pursuing Saxons via the «ford of the Franks». My question this morning is not about Frankfort's name, but rather: why was Charlemagne here, at Frankfort, in June 794? Why was it to Frankfort that he summoned what was apparently the largest assembly he had ever held, and to discuss a whole range of fundamentally important issues? Why was it here that Charlemagne chose to represent his regime to his realm, indeed to his world? Why this particular «Inszenierung»? The aim of my paper is to suggest an answer — not, I hasten to add, the only answer. No doubt there were a number of reasons for the choice of Frankfort in 794. But, since you can never have too many cooks engaged in preparing the historical broth, I shall offer this contribution to Frankfort's 1200th birthday-feast.

Nearly half a century ago François-Louis Ganshof's Observations sur le synode de Francfort included no observation on the siting of the council. It was, he wrote, «one of those specially important assemblies», a sequel to that at Herstal in 779;

1 There is a lively painting of this episode by Leopold Bode, «Karl der Große findet die Frankfurt», 1888, Historisches Museum Frankfurt, reproduced in G. Kapfhammer, Sagenhafte Geschichte. Das Bild Karls des Großen durch die Jahrhunderte, Munich 1993, 52. The earliest written record of the story is Thietmar, Chronicon VII 75, ed. R. Holzmann, MGH SRG N.S. IX, Berlin 1935, 490.
the meeting-place was, according to Ganshof, »la grande salle du “palais” royal«, which we should envisage on the model and scale of Ingelheim and Aachen. But in 794 was there really a »grande salle du palais« at Frankfort? What was Frankfort in 794? Thanks to the research of Thomas Zotz and his colleagues, we know the whole history of the royal palace of Frankfort in the Middle Ages — after 794. It seems to have no pre-history in terms of written evidence. Did it spring fully-equipped from Charlemagne’s head?

In Charlemagne’s charters, the first mention of Frankfort as a royal residence comes, punctually, in 794, on 22 February: charter 176 was issued »super fluvium Moin in loco nuncupante Franconofurd«. Charter 177 is datelined 31 March and simply »in Franconofurd«. Charter 178, issued on 20 July, signals some enhancement of status: »actum in Franconofurd palatio«. But you don’t build a palace on the scale of Aachen or Ingelheim overnight, or even in a few months. A residence, some kind of estate-centre we must presume, had been upgraded. Frankfort had been put on the political map, where, as we all know, it would remain permanently.

This needs to be set in a context. Charlemagne’s six-month stay at Frankfort was part of a shift, a Schwerpunktverlagerung, of the Frankish realm: the old core-area of the Merovingian regnum had been the Seine-Aisne-Oise region, where royal palace-residences lay thick on the ground. Charlemagne changed that — Charlemagne, note, and not his father Pippin. The shift was not therefore simply dictated by the location of the Carolingians’ family-lands. Charlemagne’s own residence-pattern began rather similar to his father’s. It moved to centre on the Rhine-Main region, gradually at first, in the 770s, then fairly definitively, in the later 780s.

Why? Military reasons may seem the obvious answer. They have so often been put forward as the mainspring of Charlemagne’s reign as a whole. But while they may have played a part in the eastwards shift, they can hardly be the whole story. Charlemagne had campaigned in Saxony up to 785, but from then on until

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4 MGH *Dipl. I*, ed. E. MÜHLBACHER, Hannover 1906, no. 176, 238. This is an original.
5 MGH *Dipl. I*, nos. 177 and 178, 239, 240 survive only in copies of the early modern period.
792, at least as depicted in the *Annales Regni Francorum*, the Saxons seemed pacified, and so too did the Bavarians after 788. In this source, for the years 789–794 there is a marked shortening of the individual annals compared with the action-packed earlier ones, and also compared with what is to come later. And for 790 and 792, there is the striking phrase: »nullum fecit iter«, »(Charlemagne) made no expedition.« The revised version of the 790 annal, written soon after Charlemagne's death, actually adds a little apology:

»Lest he should give the appearance of lassitude through inaction or time-wasting, Charlemagne travelled by boat up the Main to his palace at Salz, and then from there came back downstream on the same river to Worms again«\(^7\).

Now that is quite a journey upstream, the best part of 200 km. on the water, and it would take quite a lot of hard work to row that far, though presumably it was not Charlemagne himself who did that hard work. Yet 789–794 was not a period for laziness, nor of quiet preparation for what was to come.

We need to appreciate the exceptionally tense and chequered character of these years, 789–794, precisely because Charlemagne's reign has so often been viewed teleologically, from Christmas Day 800, with everything beforehand leading inexorably to that extraordinary event, after which dawned a new era. Ganshof detected a more complex rhythm in the reign: there was a phase of expansion and conquest, which ended with the crisis of 778, when the newly-conquered peoples (notably the Saxons) revolted, or (in the case of Gascons, Aquitanians and Lombards) threatened revolt. This was followed by a second expansionist phase, down to 791. 791 marked the end of the »outstanding period of (the) reign, when Charlemagne widened his power, gave it a solid base, and initiated policies whose consequences were felt for centuries.« Then, problems multiplied, and Charlemagne was overwhelmed by »the second great crisis of the reign.« This is more surprising. Why should that »most decisive period in Charlemagne's ascent towards dominance over the west ... and the richest in lasting results« have been followed, immediately, by crisis? Note that this second crisis is not explicable in quite the same terms as the first. True, revolt is a common feature. Otherwise, the second crisis presents something new. Ganshof listed several symptoms: in addition to trouble with the Saxons, problems in Benevento, Saracen attack in southern Gaul, there was in 792, a very serious harvest failure, which caused famine in 793. »Far more upsetting« than any of those problems, however, was a conspiracy led by »Charlemagne's favourite bastard Pippin the Hunchback«, late in 792. What were the causes? »It revealed

\(^7\) *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 790, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SRG VI, Hannover 1895, 86-87.
in the aristocracy a feeling of discontent and opposition to royal autocracy, and second, more speculatively, but supported by the opinion of A. Kleinclausz, "it was a sign of weariness caused by unceasing warfare."

Charlemagne, Ganshof observed, in 792 was a fifty-year old: «it would seem that ... he had acquired experience and wisdom». His response was to follow better counsels, «to understand that moderation was necessary to consolidate the fruits of victory» (implying an end to forced conversions?), and to show more concern for «the interests of the Church.» The Council of Frankfort, Ganshof suggested, was symptomatic of these changed perceptions. Alcuin was the key figure; he connected the protection of the Church with the reestablishment in the West of imperial power; and so a straight line led from Frankfort to Christmas Day 800. *Quod erat demonstrandum*. More recent research seems to have shown just how prescient Ganshof was in assigning to Alcuin the role of chief ideologue in the 790s; indeed, it was a role he may have played in the 780s too. Yet, curiously, Ganshof had nothing more to say about the two reasons he had identified as causes of the great crisis of 792–793. The discontented aristocracy, and their weariness of unceasing war, remained the loose ends of his argument. If these factors caused crisis in 792–793, did they diminish thereafter? Ganshof's account ignored these themes — until «the last years of Charlemagne», when selfish nobles defied the emperor, caused «political and social defects revealing a bad government», and altogether pushed «the Frankish state» to «the verge of decay».

In the near-half century since Ganshof produced this analysis, there has been some useful tying up of ends. Karl Brunner has argued in detail for Charlemagne's success in the distribution of patronage: that is, in preventing «excessive accumulations of aristocratic power» while, at the same time, retaining the loyalty of particular noble individuals and groups. As for the alleged war-weariness:

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9 GANSHOF (cf. n. 8) 21. It now seems likely that Charlemagne was only 45 at this point: see K.F. WERNER, *La date de naissance de Charlemagne*, in his collected papers, *Structures politiques du monde franc*, London 1981, arguing for a birth-date of 747.


11 GANSHOF (cf. n. 8) 23-24.

Timothy Reuter has stressed plunder and tribute as the incentives of Frankish aristocratic warfare and so recast the problem in terms of aristocratic recalculation of profit. He concludes that it was not until the early ninth century that the sums ceased to add up. In other words, the 790s remained full of opportunities for enrichment. After all, 795 was the year when the Avar treasure came back to Francia in cartloads, making the Franks feel as if they’d been paupers before, says Einhard, so rich did they now become.

Further approaches suggest a periodisation of Charlemagne’s reign converging on, or around, 791. Peter Godman’s study of the poetry of the period shows it court-based until the early 790s, thereafter dispersed to provincial locations. Donald Bullough has evoked the aula renovata, Charlemagne’s court renewed during the generation before 791, and notably in the 780s. In effect Bullough finds here, in the years leading up to 791, the developments assigned by Ganshof to the 790s: the “enhancement of erudition”, the patronage of artists and scribes, the concern for reform, and, in the Admonitio generalis of 789, a “synthesis of ideology and administrative action … for the first time complete”. That synthesis seems epitomised in the production, in 791, of the great collection of Papal-Frankish correspondence, the Codex Carolinus; and perhaps shortly before, the writing-up of the Royal Frankish Annals and their maintenance thereafter year-by-year. Yet another approach has been via numismatics: in 793 (probably) Charlemagne undertook, successfully, a coinage reform which entailed revaluing the entire currency by some 30%. In the earlier Middle Ages, so far as I can see, such things were not undertaken in tranquillity: rather that a huge administrative effort was in effect a great taxation, provoked by a pressing need for money, yet at the same time an imposing demonstration of power. Bearing all this in mind, I think there is still more to be said on the background to that “Schwerpunktverlagerung” with

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14 EINHARD, Vita Karoli 13, ed. O. HOLDER-EGGER, MGH SRG XXV, Hannover 1911, 16.


16 D. BULLOUGH, Carolingian Renewal (cf. n. 10) 141.

17 Ed. W. GUNDLACH, MGH Epp. III, 476, for the colophon in the unique manuscript.

18 H. LÖWE, revised edn of WATTENBACH/LEVISON II, 250-252.


which I began. Let’s take a brief look back at the first of the two serious rebellions of Charlemagne’s reign. The rising of 785 was an aristocratic one, according to Einhard, “facta in Germania” \(^{21}\). That is, the rebels were located east of the Rhine. Some may have been Thuringians; but some were certainly eastern Franks. According to one version of the story, a version clearly current west of the Rhine, a key issue was the refusal of an easterner to hand over his daughter at Charlemagne’s demand to the western noble to whom she was betrothed. If intermarriage could be seen (and this was how Charlemagne saw it\(^{22}\)) as a way of cementing solidarity between different peoples within the enlarged realm, disputes over marriage, that is, over women, had the very opposite effect: they could tear the realm apart, as this case in 785 nearly did when the bride’s father “not only swore that he’d never hand her over but also assembled nearly all the Thuringians and his own kin and they determined to defend themselves against the king of the Franks” \(^{23}\). Marriage, women and the family, then, were not things to be relegated to the sidelines of “private life”. They were the stuff of politics. I shall argue that they are a crucial part of the significance of 794. But note here too the dangers that Germania posed to Charlemagne. One of those rebellious Thuringians, haled before Charlemagne at Worms, had declared that should he and his companions be found guilty of rebellion, “then no-one will ever see you alive again on our side of the Rhine!” \(^{24}\) Only Charlemagne’s exceptional mildness and wisdom enabled him to swallow such insolence for the time being. Charlemagne had already anticipated the problem revealed by the revolt of 785: the tension between eastern and western Franks. In 783 Charlemagne had married an easterner, Fastrada: an alliance intended to weld the disparate parts of the Frankish gens together, that is, the nobility, on whom Charlemagne’s power depended.

Let me first, then, underline the importance of women in royal and princely politics during the immediately preceding period. Charlemagne’s mother Bertrada had been much involved in Carolingian diplomacy in 770–1: in her case, there is an interesting and fairly typical contrast between her relatively low profile in the records during her husband’s lifetime, and her leap into action, and visibility, as a widow \(^{25}\). But it was not only royal widows, or queen-mothers who took such

\(^{21}\) *Vita Karoli* 20 (HOLDER-EGGER 25).

\(^{22}\) *Divisio regni* of 806, MGH Cap. I, no. 45, c. 12, 129.

\(^{23}\) *Annales Nazariani* s.a. 786, ed. G. PERTZ, MGH SS I, 41.

\(^{24}\) *Ibid.*, 42.

\(^{25}\) See J.L. NELSON, *La famille de Charlemagne*, in: *Byz.* 61 (1991) 194–212. Bertrada is, however, documented, as by implication politically active, in the last year or so of her husband’s life (was
very active roles. Compare the case of Tassilo of Bavaria, himself the product of one of the great scandals of the eighth century: his mother's flitting across the Rhine to marry the Bavarian duke «against her brothers' will»26. Tassilo's wife, Liutberg, daughter of the Lombard king Desiderius, was according to the revised version of the Annales regni Francorum the power behind Tassilo's throne. It was she who «constant and extreme in her hatred of the Franks since her father's exile (in 774), had incited the Huns (i.e. the Avars) to hostility against the king (Charlemagne) and to undertake a war against the Franks»27. Do we credit this female diplomacy? The details here seem too specific for mere misogyny. To the Frankish annalist, Liutberga was deo odibilis because she hated the Franks. The famous Tassilo-chalice now at Kremsmünster actually has Liutberg's name on it (along with Tassilo's), with the label virga regalis — virga not a misprint for virgo, but an allusion to the «rod» or family-tree of the Lombard royal line, perhaps also to Liutberg as her husband's «rod and staff». It was she, surely, who saw to her own parents' commemoration at Salzburg28. Her active political role alongside her husband is evident in a Freising charter's claim that Bishop Arbeo (764-783) was punished through loss of lands after incurring «the wrath of Tassilo and Liutberg» because he was allegedly «more faithful to Charles than to them»29. We shouldn't be surprised, then, to find female influence at the heart of politics.

Historians, it's true, have acknowledged the importance of some features of Charlemagne's own family: the succession, and father-son relations, have been notably well-studied during the past twenty years or so by Peter Classen and Rudolf Schieffer respectively30. Nevertheless, the historiography of Charlemagne's reign as a whole remains dominated by two kinds of narratives: one in which warfare supplies the basic structure, just as it does in the Annales regni


26 Die Fortsetzungen der Chroniken des sogenannten Fredegar 25 (KRUSCH/HOFMEISTER 294): *faciente consilio nefario noverce sue, fraudulenter ... Renum transit et ad Odilonem ducem Bagoariis pervenit (Chiltrudis) ...* Hiltrude's move immediately followed her father's death (October 741). The scandal was recalled just a century later: ASTRONOMER, Vita Hludovici 21, ed. G. PERTZ, MGH SS II, 668.

27 Annales regni Francorum, revised, s.a. 788 (KURZE 81).


29 Die Traditionen des Hochstiftes Freising, I, ed. by T. BITTERAUF, München 1925, no. 193b, 183.

Francorum and in the first part of Einhard’s Vita Karoli; the other in which religious reform provides the connecting thread, as we move from Herstal (779), to the Admonitio (789), to the Council of Frankfort and thence to the great imperial reform programmes of 802 and 813. The best modern historians manage to splice the two together, so that reform is seen (as Ganshof saw it) as a response to military problems. Fine, so far as all that goes. But to try to periodise a long reign like Charlemagne’s without discussing the changing configuration of his family is like, well, Hamlet without the prince — but also Lear without the daughters, because Lear is a story not only of older and younger generations, but also of the eddying of power around women.

Let’s come closer, at last, to Frankfort, by considering the second of the two known rebellions of Charlemagne’s reign: the rebellion of the son whom Ganshof called “Charlemagne’s favourite bastard”. That son, Pippin, whose face was handsome though he was a hunchback, says Einhard, rebelled in 792. Why? Well, we can point to snippets of evidence that suggest fear and resentment of his next brother, or rather half-brother, Charles. There is a story, datable to c.790, of “serious rivalries and disputes” between Young Charles and Pippin when a quarrel arose over the order of precedence on a river-journey, perhaps associated with their father’s efforts to avoid the impression of lassitude!

In 790 Charles had been granted a regnum west of the Seine, the duchy of Le Mans, the area known in the ninth century as Neustria.

It was a promotion of a kind: after all, Charlemagne’s next two sons, Pippin of Italy and Louis of Aquitaine had been given their regna, and papally-consecrated to kingship over them too, as long ago as 781. Furthermore, that Pippin had originally been called Carloman and his renaming in 781 might have been thought designed on purpose to disquiet, even displace, his elder half-brother and namesake. Yet there is no evidence of incipient rebellion at that point. Pippin the Hunchback made his move in 792. There is some reason to think he won support in Bavaria.

31 GANSHOP (cf. n. 8) 21.
32 EINHARD, Vita Karoli 20 (HOLDER-EGGER 25): “facie quidem pulcher, sed gibbo deformis.”
Other evidence points to the Franks. The Hunchback's mother, certainly, had been a Frank\textsuperscript{36}. The revised *Annales regni Francorum*, and Einhard, expressly mention *certain Franks*, *certain of the leading men of the Franks.* The *Annales Mosellani* interestingly specify *a very large number of the most noble Franks, younger men and older men*, as if the participation of the older group was worth noting, while that of *iuvenes* was less surprising\textsuperscript{37}. Most interesting of all is Einhard's unequivocal and repeated statement in c. 20 of the *Vita Karoli* of the cause and origin of this revolt, as of its precursor, the revolt of 785: in both cases the cause, Einhard says, was the cruelty of Fastrada. The allegation is amplified a little in the revised *Annales regni Francorum*: the Franks who rebelled *said they could no longer bear the cruelty of Fastrada and therefore conspired to kill the king*\textsuperscript{38}.

Why disbelieve this evidence? Einhard was certainly writing long after the event. But he had joined Charlemagne's court in 794, hence, very soon after these events; and when he wrote later of 792-793 he believed, and thought that his readers would believe, that Fastrada could have determined the course of events. The same would go for the reviser of the royal Annals, whether or not that reviser was Einhard himself. There may also be some whitewashing here: exculpating Charlemagne, who was normally benign and gentle, according to Einhard, meant shifting the blame onto someone else. Fastrada, you might say, was an easy target: she left no son to defend her name (though she had two daughters, Theoderada and Hiltrude). As a woman, she was an easy butt for misogyny. But in fact there is some good contemporary evidence for Fastrada's political influence between 783, when she married Charlemagne, and 794, the date of our Council here at Frankfort.

There are several distinct types of source-material in the dossier. First, the *Annales regni Francorum*: whereas they do not record Charlemagne's previous marriage to Hildegard\textsuperscript{39}, and mention Hildegard only thrice (her accompanying Charlemagne to Italy in 774 and 780, and the record of her death in 783)\textsuperscript{40},

\textsuperscript{36} Stephen III in 770 thought that Himiltrude was Charlemagne's lawful wedded wife, *Codex Carolinus* 45, ed. W. GRÜNBLACH, MGH *Epp. III*, 561; only retrospectively is she labelled a concubine: PAUL THE DEACON, *Gesta Episcoporum Mettensis*, ed. G. PERTZ, MGH *SSII*, 265; *Annales Mosellani* s.a. 792, ed. J.M. LAPPENBERG, MGH *SS XVI*, Hannover 1859, 497.

\textsuperscript{37} *Annales Mosellani* s.a. 792 (LAPPENBERG 498): *quamplures ex nobilissimis iuvenibus seu senioribus Francorum sociati.*

\textsuperscript{38} EINHARD, *Vita Karoli* 20 (HOLDER-EGGER 26); *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 792 (KURZE 91).

\textsuperscript{39} They also pass in silence over the king's previous marriage to the daughter of Desiderius; but cf. *Annales Mosellani* s.a. 770 (LAPPENBERG 496).

\textsuperscript{40} *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. (KURZE 40, 56-57, 64).
Fastrada rates five mentions: her marriage to Charlemagne is not only recorded, in 783, but it is located, at Worms, with the significant additional information that she had the title «queen»; then in 785 we are told that Charlemagne, on return from campaigning against the Saxons, «came to Eresburg and bade his wife the lady queen Fastrada, together with his sons (probably Pippin the Hunchback, and Charles) and daughters, to join him there»; under 787, the Annals, after describing Charlemagne’s third journey to Rome, record: «the most gentle king joined his wife the lady queen Fastrada in the city of Worms and there they rejoiced and were happy in each other’s company and together praised God’s mercy. The lord Charlemagne convoked his assembly to that same city and reported to his bishops and other magnates how everything had turned out on his campaign ... and explained everything that had been done in regard to Tassilo».

The revised version of this annal adds the information that Fastrada had with her already at Worms «his sons and daughters (again!) and the whole retinue whom he had left with them». In their 792 entry, the revised Annals, as we’ve seen, say that Fastrada’s cruelty was alleged by Pippin the Hunchback and the other rebels as the cause of their revolt; and finally, both versions of the Annals record not only Fastrada’s death but her burial-place. This amounts, in terms of early medieval annalistic records, to a uniquely well-documented queenly career. The affective language of the 787 entry is particularly striking. So too is the link between the happy reunion at Worms of the royal couple and the location there of the ensuing assembly: «ibi ad invicem gaudentes ... ac Dei misericordiam conlaudantes. Synodum namque congregavit rex ad eandem civitatem ...» Is it stretching a point to suggest that the favouring of Worms as the «Lieblingsresidenz» (I will not say capital) during these years resulted from Fastrada’s influence? One further sign of that influence may be the raising to the archbishopric of Mainz of the former royal chaplain Riculf whose appointment

41 Ibid., 66. The revised version adds the fact that Fastrada was the daughter of Count Radolf, but omits the location of the wedding, and also the word «queen». This latter detail is present in Annales Mosellani (LAPPENBERG 497).


43 Annales regni Francorum s.a. (KURZE, 76). Cf. revised version, 77: «At Worms he joined his wife Fastrada ... and decided to hold his assembly there.» Pippin of Italy was apparently also present at this assembly.

44 Ibid., 77: «et omnem comitatum.» I owe to the kindness of Donald Bullough the interesting observation that this seems to be the earliest usage of the term comitatus in any annals of the Carolingian period.


46 BRÜHL (cf. n. 6) 22.
possibly, and consecration certainly, took place while Charlemagne was away in Italy. If he had functioned as chief of the court chaplains from about the time Fastrada became queen, Riculf may have been among her comitatus of 786–787.

The second kind of evidence is represented by a single item: the one and only personal letter of Charlemagne’s to survive (not counting the letters written in his name by Alcuin). It was written on or very shortly after 8 September 791 at Charlemagne’s camp on the River Enns, and it is addressed to Fastrada “our beloved and most loving wife”. First Charlemagne greets his wife, “our darling daughters and our other fideles who are with you.” The substance of the letter is the transmission of two reports: one from Pippin of Italy, Charlemagne’s third son, of a great victory against the Avars and the plundering of an Avar fortress; and the other from Charlemagne himself detailing the just-completed three days of litanies, prayer and fasting performed by himself, his army and the clergy accompanying them. Charlemagne then requests Fastrada to make arrangements for the performance of similar litanies and fasts at Regensburg, though Fastrada herself is to do no more than she can manage given her infirmitas (which I take to refer not to her gender but to an illness). He ends with a request for more news about his wife’s health and other matters you may think necessary.

It sounds as if Fastrada was acting at Regensburg effectively as a regent during her husband’s absence: in September 791 there could be nothing more important to be entrusted with than the saying of the litanies which Charlemagne believed might ensure “a happy and successful outcome to the war.”

The third item in the dossier comes in c. 6 of the Astronomer’s Life of Louis the Pious, and it relates to the same period as the texts just considered, that is, winter 791–792. Louis had joined his father on campaign against the Avars, and gone as far as the Wienerwald

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47 I am much indebted to Donald Bullough for drawing to my attention the date of Riculf’s consecration, 4 March 787 (MARIANUS SCOTUS, Chronicon, MGH SS V, 548, using an earlier source) and its possible implications.

48 That is, after the death of Fulrad in 784.

49 Epistolae variorum Karoli regnante scriptae, ed. E. DÜMMLER, MGH Epp. IV, no. 20, 528–529. This letter survives uniquely in MS. BN lat. 2777, from St-Denis during the abbacy of Fardulf (c.793–806). According to the revised Annales regni Francorum s.a. 792 (KURZE 91–93): “after the conspiracy had been exposed by the Lombard Fardulf he was presented with the monastery of St-Denis as a reward for keeping faith.”


51 Cf. the use of infirmitas in the sense of illness a few lines above in the same letter.
The next piece of information to be given by the Astronomer is the news of the Hunchback's revolt. Fastrada had perhaps intervened crucially in the tangled politics around Charlemagne's sons: promoting Pippin of Italy's career (remember he had been with Fastrada and Charlemagne at Worms in 787); keeping Louis under careful surveillance but offering him a combination of stick and carrot; and, by implication (this, admittedly, is an argument from silence) encouraging a highly discriminatory family policy which denied Pippin the Hunchback any share in the spoils on either the Avar or the Beneventan front, and by further implication, denying him any sub-kingdom either. This, I suggest, was the "cruelty" against which Charlemagne's eldest son rebelled, his aim "to kill not only his father but also his half-brothers and to reign in (his father's) place". This cruelty was laid at Fastrada's door. I return to Pippin's motives in a moment.

Meanwhile, the fourth and last item of the dossier on Fastrada brings us back by a roundabout route to Frankfort. Here, some months before the famous council, we find, again, Fastrada. The evidence comes, rather unexpectedly, in one of the Formulae Imperiales of Louis the Pious which documents Louis's return of lands to a man named Richard vassallus nostor. According to Richard's testimony, the lands in question had belonged to his grandfather Hortlaicus. When Fastrada, the queen of our lord Charles had come from Bavaria to winter at Frankfort, Hortlaicus was slain in her presence by mischance (casu accidente), because before this he had himself slain a man called Ruotmund. And for this reason (hac occasione) all his property (which he had at ...) had been resumed into the public fisc.

This wording seems to suggest that it was Fastrada herself who had ordered the confiscation of Hortlaicus's property, because a dispute had turned to violence in her presence, and led to two killings. However we read hac occasione, it's surely reasonable to infer that Fastrada had a major hand in this decision.

This evidence is significant for two reasons: first because it shows Fastrada holding court on her own, in the judicial as well as the social sense, thus bearing

52 Astronomer, Vita Hludowici (Pertz 61c).
53 Annales Lorschamenses s.a. 792, ed. G.H. Pertz, MGH SS I, 33.
54 Formulae Imperiales, ed. K. Zeumer, MGH Formulae, Hannover 1882, no. 49, 323.
55 It seems likely that had Charlemagne been the confiscator, the text would have said so. Perhaps too, a queen's confiscating was easier to challenge and reverse.
out what's implied by the rest of the dossier: namely, that she was politically an important figure, and arguably becoming increasingly so. I underline this, not to claim that she was the only significant person in Charlemagne's life, but to register surprise that so many studies of Charlemagne's reign simply leave her out, as they do other women at Charlemagne's court, when the evidence is plain for Fastrada's political importance. If she appears in the textbooks at all, she does so on the margin, as part of Charlemagne's private life, as one on the list of his sexual partners, quite separate from the political world inhabited exclusively it seems by men. To give just one example: in Ganshof's *Carolings and the Frankish Monarchy*, Fastrada is not mentioned once. In other and otherwise excellent overviews of Charlemagne's reign, women and their political roles are as good as ignored. Silvia Konecny had much useful information on Carolingian queens including Fastrada; but because she limited herself to them Konecny did not fully bring out their involvement in politics generally. Charlemagne's court was surely a »höfische Gesellschaft«. Women belonged.

Secondly, then, the evidence for Fastrada's political activity has some implications for this conference. For the episode of Hortalicus's death and dispossession is most plausibly dated to the winter of 793-4. Fastrada, the Formulae-text says, had »come from Bavaria to winter ....« She had evidently come alone. Yet she and Charlemagne had apparently spent the Christmases of 791-792, and 792-793, together in Bavaria at Regensburg. Fastrada came to Frankfort before Charlemagne, who spent Christmas 793 at Würzburg. She was already there when he arrived sometime between Christmas and 22 February. Why did she make for Frankfort, a place wholly unrecorded in the written sources before this date? Non-written evidence may come to the rescue. In 1991 archaeologists excavating beneath Frankfort's splendid cathedral found a late-seventh-century girl's grave. The grave-goods and particularly the girl's necklace indicated her aristocratic, perhaps even princely, status. A noble Frankish family had evidently been settled near this site for a century or so before 793/94. Could Fastrada have

56 I borrow Norbert Elias's evocative phrase.
57 For 791-792, this is an inference from (i) Charlemagne's letter addressed to Fastrada in September when she seems to have remained behind at Regensburg, and (ii) the revised *Annales regni Francorum* for 792, which show Charlemagne returning from campaign to winter at Regensburg. Charlemagne stayed in Bavaria, mostly at Regensburg, throughout 792 and nearly the whole of 793.
58 See above, 150.
been a scion of this family? At all events, there was somewhere for her to stay, some appropriate residence for her and her comitatus, her «court», when she came from Bavaria to Frankfort to winter. Two further points about Fastrada are relevant. One we have already noted: that she had a recent history of ill-health. The other is that she died, at Frankfort, on 10 August 794. Among the reasons why the great council of 794 was summoned to Frankfort — and I am not claiming it as the only reason though I think that it’s both significant and hitherto neglected — was Fastrada’s presence here. Given her central role, and perhaps her central importance for him, Charlemagne preferred to summon all those proceres and prelates and papal legates here, to Frankfort, rather than either make Fastrada move (I am tempted to say, the dying Fastrada) or hold his assembly without her. Did the great council represent a great act of propitiation, which Charlemagne intended, or hoped, might call down a divine reprieve?

Thus, for the question, why did Charlemagne choose Frankfort? we must substitute a prior question: why did Fastrada choose Frankfort? She could after all have gone to Aachen, where she and Charlemagne had wintered in 788-789, and where Charlemagne would winter in 794-795. Why not Worms, where despite the burning-down of the palace before Christmas, the court had nevertheless remained all winter in 790-791, spending Easter 791 there too? Charlemagne and his fideles were used to camping out. In 798, the Annals enthusiastically record the gift from the king of the Asturias of an extraordinarily beautiful tent. Frankfort in 793-794 can hardly have been a very well-equipped residence as yet. Thirty years later when Louis the Pious had it refitted for his pregnant wife Judith (she gave birth to her son Charles there in June 823), there was evidently much work to do. So, it was not that Frankfort was so much more comfortable than Worms in 793. It is hard to see that it was more accessible: yes, the famine of that year no doubt made it necessary to bring in food from further afield, but Worms as well as Frankfort could be supplied by boat. Fastrada’s choice was perhaps determined by something more basic. Her father Radulf came from this area; she herself was «of the gens of the Eastern Franks, that is, Germans.» She came from east of the Rhine: she was facta in Germania. Frankfort lay in her Heimat.

In the last part of this paper I want to suggest what implications the choice of Frankfort had for Charlemagne’s growing sense of imperial status. For such a

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60 But now with a new wife, the Alaman Liutgard.
62 Her body was taken for burial to St-Alban Mainz, however. Perhaps Riculf’s position there had something to do with this decision; cf. above, 158-159.
sense surely was developing, and the Council of Frankfort did indeed signal it, as has often enough been claimed, by Ganshof for one, and recently by Judith Herrin. The aim of Pippin the Hunchback’s revolt in 792 had been the retention of the unity of the Reich by the elimination of all contenders, that is, of Pippin’s own close kin. What was the alternative? A Merovingian-style division of the regnum Francorum, a traditional parcelling-out of the patrimony? In 806 Charlemagne took a middle way: the peripheral regna were to remain distinct, and yes, they were parcelled out; but Francia, eastern as well as western, including the Rhine-Main region therefore, was to remain intact. The beneficiary was to be Charles the Younger, not Pippin the Hunchback. If Pippin’s revolt had been the result of Fastrada’s cruelty, that means that her cruelty could be construed as determination to exclude him from the succession, to maintain the existing four-way division of the empire, with Charlemagne ruling the heartlands while his three sons by Hildegard ruled the regna of Italy, Aquitaine, Neustria. The three-way division once Charlemagne had passed on would simply reunite Neustria with the heartlands. Fastrada probably had other hopes in the 780s; but her own lack of sons, and her ill-health, could have meant that, from 792 at any rate, she was committed to the sort of plan just described. The encouragement of Pippin of Italy to engage his forces against the Avars was tantamount to the promise of Bavaria. That was to be exactly the scheme of 806. Pippin the Hunchback rebelled because he was left out of a family-arrangement which his step-mother Fastrada had personally fostered and finessed. The failure of his revolt, the ruthless crushing of his adherents, surely owed much to Fastrada’s determination too. The consequences were far-reaching. It was precisely in the period between c. 787 and 794 that the future of Charlemagne’s empire in the next generation began to be addressed, and a pattern began to emerge. At its heart was a non-Roman imperial idea.

Where would be the seat (*sedes*) of this new empire? In 794 Frankfort had, perhaps, its first great moment of opportunity. At that council, a whole agenda of imperial action was sketched, and an imperial power-base was foreshadowed. It had nothing to do with geographic Rome. It reflected the power-politics of Charlemagne’s realm, and his determination to retain the heartlands undivided, with the Schwerpunkt of his realm in the Rhine-Main area. Fastrada, it can now be seen, played a part in that. Had she lived, perhaps Frankfort would have become the imperial *sedes*, as it was to become a royal one in the ninth-century kingdom of Louis the German. Fastrada’s life was thus important in shaping a realm, but

not an empire. For Fastrada’s death meant that Charlemagne reverted to an alternative possibility: Aachen. It was more squarely within the Carolingian heartlands; and it had Roman resonance. Nevertheless, a degree of eastwards shift proved permanent for the regnum Francorum. The centre of balance of the expanded realm had shifted. And the Rhine-Main area would remain close to its heart. In that sense the empire too was indeed facta in Germania. Fastrada had something (I claim no more) to do with that.

**The Itinerary of Charlemagne, 768–801**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Easter</th>
<th>Summer assembly</th>
<th>Christmas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>768</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>769</td>
<td>Rouen</td>
<td>Angoulême</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Liège</td>
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<tr>
<td>772</td>
<td>Herstal</td>
<td>Worms</td>
<td>Herstal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Herstal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td>774</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>? Ingelheim</td>
<td>Quierzy</td>
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<td>Quierzy</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>783</td>
<td>Thionville</td>
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<td>Herstal</td>
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64 My warm thanks go to Rainer Berndt for his help in the preparation of this paper for publication, and to Donald Bullough for his advice and encouragement.
## The sitting of the Council at Frankfort

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<thead>
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<td>Worms</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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