

# DAS FRANK FURTER KONZIL VON 794

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794

THE SITING OF THE COUNCIL AT FRANKFORT:  
SOME REFLECTIONS ON FAMILY AND POLITICS

BY JANET L. NELSON

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«<sup>1</sup>. 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;

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1 There is a lively painting of this episode by Leopold Bode, »Karl der Große findet die Frankenfurt«, 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<sup>2</sup>. 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<sup>3</sup>. 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«<sup>4</sup>. 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«<sup>5</sup>. 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<sup>6</sup>.

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

2 F.-L. GANSHOF, *Observations sur le synode de Francfort. Miscellanea historica in honorem A. De Meyer*, I, Louvain 1946, 306-318, at 308-309.

3 *Die deutschen Königspfalzen*, I: Hessen, edd. T. ZOTZ/K. HEINEMEYER/E. ORTH, Göttingen 1985, 158ff.; E. ORTH, *Frankfurt am Main im Früh- und Spätmittelalter*, in: *Frankfurt am Main. Die Geschichte der Stadt in neun Beiträgen*, hg. von der Frankfurter Historischen Kommission, Sigmaringen 1991, 9-52.

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.

6 See Table, 164-165, below. For the shift and its implications, see C.R. BRÜHL, *Fodrum, Gistum, Servitium Regis*, Cologne 1968, 20.

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«<sup>7</sup>.

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«<sup>8</sup>.

Charlemagne, Ganshof observed, in 792 was a fifty-year old: »it would seem that ... he had acquired experience and wisdom«<sup>9</sup>. 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<sup>10</sup>. 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«<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup>. As for the alleged war-weariness:

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- 8 F.-L. GANSHOF, *Charlemagne*, in his collected papers, *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy*, London 1970, 17-27, with reference at n. 9 to A. KLEINCLAUSZ, *Charlemagne*, Paris 1934, 203-205.
- 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.
- 10 D. BULLOUGH, »*Aula renovata*: the Carolingian court before the Aachen palace, in: *Proceedings of the British Academy* 71 (1985) 267-301, reprinted in his collected essays, *Carolingian Renewal*, Manchester 1992, 123-60; see also IDEM, »*Aluimus deliciosus regis*: Alcuin of York and the shaping of the early Carolingian court, in: *Institutionen, Kultur und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter*. Festschrift für J. Fleckenstein, edd. L. FENSKE/W. RÖSENER/T. ZOTZ, Sigmaringen 1985, 73-92.
- 11 GANSHOF (cf. n. 8) 23-24.
- 12 K. BRUNNER, *Oppositionelle Gruppen im Karolingerreich*, Vienna 1979, 61. See also M. BECHER, *Eid und Herrschaft*, Sigmaringen 1993.

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<sup>13</sup>. 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<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup>. 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 *eruditio*«, 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«<sup>16</sup>. That synthesis seems epitomised in the production, in 791, of the great collection of Papal-Frankish correspondence, the *Codex Carolinus*<sup>17</sup>; and perhaps shortly before, the writing-up of the Royal Frankish Annals and their maintenance thereafter year-by-year<sup>18</sup>. 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%<sup>19</sup>. 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<sup>20</sup>. Bearing all this in mind, I think there is still more to be said on the background to that »Schwerpunktverlagerung« with

13 T. REUTER, *Plunder and tribute in the Carolingian Empire*, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 35 (1985) 75-94; IDEM, *The end of Carolingian military expansion*, in: *Charlemagne's Heir*, 391-405.

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

15 P. GODMAN, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, London 1985.

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.

19 P. GRIERSON, *Money and coinage under Charlemagne*, in: *Karl der Große I*, 501-536, reprinted in his collected papers, *Dark Age Numismatics*, London 1979; also P. GRIERSON/M. BLACKBURN, *Medieval European Coinage*, I, Cambridge 1986, 208-209, and P. SPUFFORD, *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe*, Cambridge 1988, 44-73.

20 See J.L. NELSON, *Wealth and wisdom in the politics of Alfred*, in: *Kings and Kingship, Acta XI* (1986, from 1984), ed. J. ROSENTHAL, State University of New York, Stony Brook 1986, 31-52.

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«<sup>21</sup>. 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<sup>22</sup>) 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«<sup>23</sup>. 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!«<sup>24</sup> 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<sup>25</sup>. 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«<sup>26</sup>. 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«<sup>27</sup>. 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 Salzburg<sup>28</sup>. 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«<sup>29</sup>. 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 respectively<sup>30</sup>. 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*

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his health already causing concern?): *Die Fortsetzungen der Chroniken des sogenannten Fredegar* 49–52, edd. B. KRUSCH/A. HOFMEISTER, trans. H. HAUPT, Darmstadt 1982, 318–322.

26 *Die Fortsetzungen der Chroniken des sogenannten Fredegar* 25 (KRUSCH/HOFMEISTER 294): »faciente consilio nefario noverce sue, fraudulententer ... 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 Hludowici* 21, ed. G. PERTZ, MGH SSII, 618.

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

28 *Liber confraternitatum sancti Petri Salisburgensis vetustior*, ed. S. HERZBERG-FRÄNKEL, MGH *Necrologia Germaniae* I, Berlin 1888, 12, col. 29.

29 *Die Traditionen des Hochstiftes Freising*, I, ed. by T. BITTERAU, München 1905, no. 193b, 183.

30 P. CLASSEN, *Karl der Große und der Thronfolge im Frankenreich*, III, in: *Festschrift für H. Heimpel*, hg. von Mitarbeitern des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, Göttingen 1972, 109–134; R. SCHIEFFER, *Väter und Söhne im Karolingerhause*, in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Regnum Francorum* (BFr. 22), Paris 1990, 149–164.

*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«<sup>31</sup>. That son, Pippin, whose face was handsome though he was a hunchback, says Einhard<sup>32</sup>, 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<sup>33</sup>! 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<sup>34</sup>. 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<sup>35</sup>.

31 GANSHOF (cf. n. 8) 21.

32 EINHARD, *Vita Karoli* 20 (HOLDER-EGGER 25): »facie quidem pulcher, sed gibbo deformis.«

33 *Miracula Sancti Goaris* II, MGH SS XV, 366. See BRUNNER (cf. n. 12) 62.

34 *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. B. SIMSON, MGH SRG X, Hannover 1895, 78. See NELSON, *Gender and genre in women historians of the early Middle Ages*, in: *L'istoriographie médiévale en Europe*, ed. P. GENET, Paris 1991, 149-163, at 156-160.

35 NOTKER, *Gesta Karoli* II 12, ed. H. HAEFELE, MGH SRG, Berlin 1962, 71-72; cf. W. BRAUNFELS, *Karl der Große*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1972, 54. That Charlemagne had been having difficulty in establishing his power there seems indicated by his stays in Regensburg in 791-792, and by c. 3 of the Capitulary of Frankfort, ed. A. BORETIUS, MGH *Cap.* I, no. 28, 74.

Other evidence points to the Franks. The Hunchback's mother, certainly, had been a Frank<sup>36</sup>. 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<sup>37</sup>. 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«<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup>, and mention Hildegard only thrice (her accompanying Charlemagne to Italy in 774 and 780, and the record of her death in 783)<sup>40</sup>,

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

37 *Annales Mosellani* s.a. 792 (LAPPENBERG 498): »quam plures ex nobilissimis iuvenibus seu senioribus Francorum sociati.«

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

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).

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«<sup>41</sup>; 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«<sup>42</sup>; 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«<sup>43</sup>. 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«<sup>44</sup>. 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<sup>45</sup>. 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«<sup>46</sup> (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).

42 *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. (KURZE 68). (The English translations, here and elsewhere, owe much to those of P.D. KING, *Charlemagne*. Translated Sources, Lancaster 1987).

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.

45 *Ibid.*, 91, 94-95. The Moselle Annals and the Lorsch Annals too record her death.

46 BRÜHL (cf. n. 6) 22.

possibly, and consecration certainly, took place while Charlemagne was away in Italy<sup>47</sup>. If he had functioned as chief of the court chaplains from about the time Fastrada became queen<sup>48</sup>, 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«<sup>49</sup>. 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<sup>50</sup>. 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)<sup>51</sup>. 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

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 Karolo regnante scriptae*, ed. E. DÜMLER, 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.«

50 *Annales regni Francorum* s.a., both versions (KURZE 88–89); *Annales Mettenses Priores* s.a. (SIMSON 78–79). See M. McCORMICK, *The liturgy of war in the early Middle Ages: crisis, litanies and the Carolingian monarchy*, in: *Viator* 15 (1984) 1–23.

51 Cf. the use of *infirmitas* in the sense of illness a few lines above in the same letter.

»before being ordered to go back and stay with Queen Fastrada until his father's return. So he spent that winter with her while his father continued campaigning. But after Charles returned he ordered Louis to return to Aquitaine and then to proceed to Italy to help his brother ... invade Benevento ...«<sup>52</sup>.

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«<sup>53</sup>. 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 noster*<sup>54</sup>. 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<sup>55</sup>. 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 610).

53 *Annales Laureshamenses* 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 *Carolingians 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«<sup>56</sup>. Women belonged.

Secondly, then, the evidence for Fastrada's political activity has some implications for this conference. For the episode of Hortlaicus'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<sup>57</sup>. 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<sup>58</sup>. 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<sup>59</sup>. 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.

59 A. HAMPEL, *Der Kaiserdom zu Frankfurt am Main. Ausgrabungen 1991–1993 (Beiträge zum Denkmalschutz 8)*, Nußloch 1994.

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<sup>60</sup>. 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<sup>61</sup>. 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*<sup>62</sup>.

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

60 But now with a new wife, the Alaman Liutgard.

61 See J.L. NELSON, *Charles the Bald*, London 1992, 76.

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<sup>63</sup>. 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

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63 J. HERRIN, *The Formation of Christendom*, Princeton 1988, 434-444.

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<sup>64</sup>.

THE ITINERARY OF CHARLEMAGNE, 768-801

	Easter	Summer assembly	Christmas
768			Aachen
769	Rouen	Angoulême	Düren
770	Liège	Worms	Mainz
771	Herstal	Valenciennes	Attigny
772	Herstal	Worms	Herstal
773	Herstal		Rome
774	Rome	? Ingelheim	Quierzy
775	Quierzy	Düren	Sélestat
776	Treviso	Worms	Herstal
777	Nijmegen	Paderborn	Douzy
778	Chasseneuil		Herstal
779	Herstal	Düren	Worms
780	Worms	(near Paderborn)	Pavia
781	Rome		Quierzy
782	Quierzy	(near Paderborn)	Thionville
783	Thionville		Herstal

<sup>64</sup> 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.

	Easter	Summer assembly	Christmas
784	Herstal		Lügde
785	Eresburg	Paderborn	Attigny
786	Attigny	Worms	Florence
787	Rome	Worms	Ingelheim
788	Ingelheim	Ingelheim	Aachen
789	Aachen		Worms
790	Worms	(no campaign)	Worms
791	Worms	Regensburg	Regensburg
792	Regensburg	(no campaign)	Regensburg
793	Regensburg		Würzburg
794	Frankfort	Frankfort	Aachen
795	Aachen	Kostheim (Mainz)	Aachen
796	Aachen	? Aachen	
797	Aachen		(Saxony)
798	(Saxony)		Aachen
799	Aachen	? Paderborn	Aachen
800	St-Riquier	Mainz	Rome
801	Rome		Aachen